

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE CONVOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR**

Srinagar, July 27, 2021

I am delighted to be among you all today in this land of great historical and cultural significance. It has been called 'Rishi Vaer', or the land of saints, and has always attracted spiritual seekers from far and wide. I feel blessed in standing on this land, which is not only reservoir of wisdom but also endowed with unparalleled natural beauty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate the young students of the University of Kashmir who are being conferred with their respective degrees in this convocation. Poshte Mubarak.

I have been told that close to 3 lakh students are receiving degrees today. I am impressed by the numbers. With more than 2.5 lakh bachelors and more than 1,000 doctorates over the past eight years, the University has made remarkable progress. I would like to tell each of you that your quest for learning and your faith in knowledge as an agent of change are really inspiring. The credit for this also goes to the teachers and administrators of the University of Kashmir. These achievements are not surprising, because Kashmir has always been known as 'Sharda Desh', after the illustrious Sharda Peeth, which was a famous centre of learning in ancient times.

Equally inspiring is the success of female students. Just about half of the students receiving degrees today are women. Not only that, when it comes to gold medals, 70 percent of the winners are women. It is not just a matter of satisfaction but also pride for us that our daughters are ready to perform at the same level as our sons and sometimes even better. It is this belief in equality and capabilities that needs to be

nurtured among all women so that we can successfully build a New India – an India which is at the forefront of the comity of nations. Building our human resources and infrastructure are the stepping stones to this higher ideal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The cornerstone, as you know, is the first stone set while building the foundation. Education, in that sense, is the cornerstone in the foundation of our nation-building. India has always prided itself in placing knowledge above all. We had great traditions in learning, and Kashmir too has been home to some of them. A need was felt to align modern education with our rich heritage in such a way that it would help us respond better to the challenges of the twenty-first century. With that vision, a new National Education Policy was announced last year.

I had the opportunity to discuss the subject with the Governors of all states, Lt. Governors of Union Territories and Vice Chancellors of Central Universities in virtual mode. I also addressed a conference on 'Implementation of National Education Policy in Jammu and Kashmir' in virtual mode last September.

I am pleased to note that some of the features of the new policy have already been initiated at the University of Kashmir. Besides constituting a committee to devise a roadmap for the timely implementation of the policy, several academic courses have been realigned to meet the objectives of this policy. Under the Choice-Based Credit System as outlined in the policy, a credit transfer policy has been adopted to help students complete their requisite credits from the department or institution of their choice.

Another significant feat of this University is the emphasis it has placed on research, which is an important component of the new policy. I am told that the University of Kashmir has the distinction of being one of few in India with a dedicated Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and

Innovations. That will encourage young scientists through various fellowships across varied disciplines.

The University of Kashmir has added another feather in its cap with the setting up of two centres that are of high importance. One is devoted to glaciology, and the other to Himalayan Biodiversity Documentation, Bio-prospection and Conservation. Then there is also the National Himalayan Ice-core Laboratory. Climate change, as you are aware, is the most critical challenge before humanity in this century. Global warming is making its impact everywhere, but nowhere is it more felt than in the fragile eco-system of the Himalayas. I am confident that these two Centres of Excellence and the laboratory will help Kashmir and also show the way to the world in combating climate challenges and nurturing nature. I would like to encourage youngsters to take the opportunity provided by these platforms. They can look forward to a happy combination of a great cause and a great career.

One of the key aims of the new Education Policy is to place more emphasis on vocational education. In this area too, the University of Kashmir has been successful in offering skill development certificates and degree-level courses. Through its Directorate of Lifelong Learning and Deendayal Upadhyay – Kaushal Kendra, learning is provided in diversified sectors such as automobile, textile, agriculture and horticulture.

Above all, I am glad to know that your University has responded to the pandemic in a most praiseworthy manner. The entire world has been facing a difficult time. The coronavirus has impacted all walks of life, and education is no exception. Fortunately, technology provided a solution. Schools, colleges and universities across India have continued to provide education in the online mode. After the outbreak last year, the University of Kashmir immediately shifted to online modules and made e-resources available to its students. Moreover, it also supported the administration by providing quarantine facilities at its main, north and south campuses. It shows how a university's contribution to society can go far beyond imparting education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kashmir is a place that defies descriptions. Many poets have tried to capture its beauty, calling it paradise on earth, but it is ultimately beyond words. It must be this bounty of nature that has also made this place a hub of ideas. This valley surrounded by snow-clad mountains provided an ideal setting for sages and seers a couple of millennia ago. It is impossible to write a history of Indian philosophy without referring to Kashmir's contributions to it. One of the oldest manuscripts of the Rigveda was written in Kashmir. This is the most conducive region for the philosophies to prosper. This is where great philosopher Abhinavagupta wrote his expositions on aesthetics and methods for realisation of God. Hinduism and Buddhism flourished here, as did Islam and Sikhism after it arrived here in later centuries.

Kashmir is also the meeting point of various cultures. In medieval times, it was, of course, Lal Ded who showed the way to bring together various spiritual traditions. In the works of Lalleshwari, you can see how Kashmir provides the very template itself of communal harmony and peaceful coexistence. This is also reflected in all aspects of life here, in folk arts and festivals, in food and dress. The core nature of the place has always been inclusive. Almost all religions that came to this land embraced a unique feature of Kashmiriyat that shunned orthodoxy and encouraged tolerance and mutual acceptance among communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to urge upon the younger generation of Kashmir to learn from their rich legacy. They have every reason to know that Kashmir has always been a beacon of hope for the rest of India. It's spiritual and cultural influence has its imprint all across India.

It was most unfortunate that this outstanding tradition of peaceful coexistence was broken. Violence, which was never part of 'Kashmiriyat', became the daily reality. It is alien to Kashmiri culture,

and it can only be termed as an aberration – a temporary one, much like a virus that attacks the body and needs to be purged. Now there is a new beginning and determined efforts to regain this land's lost glory.

Democracy, I firmly believe, has within it a capacity to reconcile all differences and also a capacity to bring out the best of citizens' potential. Kashmir, happily, is already realizing this vision. Democracy lets you build your own future, a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow. The youth and women especially have high stakes in it, and I am sure they will not let go of this opportunity to rebuild lives and rebuild Kashmir.

As Kashmir has turned a new leaf, exciting new possibilities are opening up. The whole of India is watching you with admiration and pride. Kashmiri youth are scaling new heights in a variety of sectors, from civil service exams to sports and entrepreneurial ventures.

In September last year, during a consultation on the new National Education Policy, I had spoken of my dream. I wish to see Kashmir as paradise on earth. I am squarely banking on the younger generation of Jammu and Kashmir to realise this dream which I am sure will come true sooner than later. Kashmir is bound to acquire its rightful place as the crowning glory of India.

Once again, I congratulate all students and also their teachers, and wish all of you a successful journey ahead.

Thank you.
Jai Hind!