

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF FORMAL OPENING OF SADHU VASWANI
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

Pune, May 30, 2018

1. I am happy to be here for the formal opening of the Sadhu Vaswani International School in Pradhikaran, Pune. I have been told that the school has been functional since 2012 but the entire building and structure has only recently been completed. As such the dedication is taking place today.
2. The school draws from a great legacy. Sadhu Vaswani, the iconic spiritual figure it is named after, was one among our most remarkable nation builders. He taught us to combine the values of our ancient civilisation with the techniques of the modern age.
3. Sadhu Vaswani's mission has been carried forward by his disciple, the much respected Dada J.P. Vaswani. I first had the pleasure of meeting him at an event in Mumbai in 2016, when I was Governor of Bihar. It was immediately clear to me that he is a very impressive personality and a deep thinker. The year 2018 is a special year. In a few months, Dada J.P. Vaswani will be celebrating his 100th birthday. For 79 of these 100 years, since he renounced worldly attachments at the young age of 21, Dada J.P. Vaswani has dedicated every moment to the cause of humanity. He has been an ambassador of Indian tradition and culture on countless platforms, within the country and abroad, including at the United Nations.
4. I understand that in his younger days Dada J.P. Vaswani was a brilliant student. He was a university topper in physics and his thesis on the Scattering of X-rays by Solids was assessed by none other than Sir C.V. Raman, the first Indian scientist to win the Nobel Prize. Yet, Dada J.P. Vaswani thought nothing of sacrificing a promising academic career to immerse himself in

spiritual learning, in welfare, in caring for the underprivileged and even for defenceless animals. One of the methods he has chosen is to light the lamp of education. The setting up of Sadhu Vaswani Schools in different locations of the country is a part of his journey.

5. This is a commendable achievement. And this is the rich and purposeful legacy that strengthens the very foundations of the school.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Children

6. Your school is doubly blessed. It draws motivation from not just Sadhu Vaswani and Dada J.P. Vaswani – but also from the inspiring history of Pune. The city of Pune has been a centre of education for Maharashtra and for the country. The story of modern India owes much to the educational, reformist and progressive ideas that have flowed from this city, and for which our nation is truly appreciative.
7. It was in this city that in 1848 Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule opened what is believed to have been the first modern school in India exclusively for girls. In their determined efforts to fight caste and gender discrimination and work for the weaker sections, Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule made education their chief weapon.
8. They were not alone. It was in Pune that Justice M.G. Ranade and others set up the Maharashtra Girls Education Society in the 19th century. In 1860, the heroic freedom fighter Vasudev Balwant Phadke was among those who founded the Maharashtra Education Society. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his colleagues established the Deccan Education Society. And later Gopal Krishna Gokhale was instrumental in the creation of the Servants of India Society.
9. Many of these initiatives and educational institutions are still with us and are still going strong. In Maharashtra and in other states, they are responsible for schools and colleges that prepare our

children and our younger generation for service to the nation and for service to society.

10. The Chief Architect of our Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, had a long relationship with Pune. He too stressed the importance of education as an instrument for social change and for building a just and egalitarian society. I am happy to learn that the government of Maharashtra has begun to celebrate November 7 as “Students’ Day”. This was the day, way back in the year 1900, when Babasaheb Ambedkar enrolled in a school in Satara, and began his lifelong pursuit of academic excellence.
11. Values-based education helps promote ethics in society. And I can think of no better example as an upholder of values in our public life than Shri Lal Krishna Advani, who we are honoured to have here with us today.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Children

12. The names and examples I cited earlier represent a gamut of our country’s achievers and the spirit of our nation building project. These were people who struggled for our freedom from colonial rule, and for an India free of caste, gender and other forms of discrimination – for an India that could put right and redress both historical wrongs and contemporary inequities. Each one of them placed emphasis on education – and on discourse that was informed by knowledge, wisdom and learning. Each one of them placed emphasis on a culture of discussion rather than of dispute – and of addressing disagreements while being mindful of the other person’s dignity.
13. This is the true attribute of an educated society. And this is the benchmark by which we measure Pune’s intellectual vibrancy and reputation as a centre of scholarship. Above all, this is the context in which the Sadhu Vaswani International School is carving out its space in this city.
14. Education also has another aspect – of moulding young minds. After birth, a child is nurtured by those around him or her.

Early learning takes place from family members, who provide love and affection, and shape instinct. Thereafter begins the child's longest journey in learning – for about 15 years in school. Teachers don't just impart knowledge of individual subjects. They sculpt the child's very identity. A child's habits, values, thoughts, strengths, resilience, determination, dreams and actions are all influenced by the school environment.

15. In school, a child is taught history and geography, language and literature, mathematics and science. In class X and in class XII, children are examined in these and other subjects. They are given marks and grades. While not discounting the importance of such subjects, I would draw your attention to lessons that a child imbibes in school that may not be formally tested in a board examination. These are the lessons of culture, character, compassion and courage. And of coping with change in a society and a world evolving more rapidly than perhaps ever before.
16. A child who imbibes these lessons and internalises these values will always be sensitive to the world outside, and to those who may be less privileged. Such a child will never forget to contribute to society, in whichever way he or she can. Such a child can only be reared in a school that is marked by open windows, and not by closed doors. Blessed by the presence of Dada J.P. Vaswani, I am confident that the Sadhu Vaswani International School will be just such a school. I am confident that it will serve the community here in Pune as well as our country in nurturing ideal citizens of tomorrow.
17. With those words I wish the school, I wish the children studying there and I wish teachers and others associated with the school the very best.

Thank you
Jai Hind!

