

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
ON THE OCCASION OF SPECIAL CONVOCATION IN THE BANARAS
HINDU UNIVERSITY**

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I am delighted to be present here in this famous seat of learning founded by the great patriot, Mahamana Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya Ji on the occasion of the closing ceremony of the year long celebrations of his 150th birth anniversary.

2. It is a happy moment for all of us that we are commemorating this event by conferring the highest degree of the University on the Hon'ble President of Nepal, a country with which India has deep cultural affinity and historical ties. In fact, Kashi or Varanasi - has age old linkages with the people of Nepal. The Banaras Hindu University since its inception has carried forward this tradition with students from Nepal almost always on its rolls. Among its alumni are scores of leaders, ministers, parliamentarians, judges, academicians, public figures and citizens from Nepal. It is indeed most befitting that we are honouring the First Citizen of this great country and close neighbour of ours.

3. It is also a matter of great pleasure that the University has established two very important interdisciplinary centres – namely Malaviya Centre for Human Values and Ethics and Inter-Cultural Studies Centre - to promote the vision and ideas of the Mahamana. These are endeavours to keep the noble mission of the Mahamana alive. I am therefore pleased to

lay the foundation stone today for the building of these two centres proposed to be located in the Malaviya Heritage Complex.

4. A true son of the soil, Malaviyaji dedicated his whole life in the service of the nation. A statesman, scholar, educationist, journalist, social reformer and legislator, his contribution to the making of Modern India has been immense and varied. He was one of the foremost architects of Modern India and also one of the important leaders of the Indian National Movement. I recall the glowing words with which Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru paid tribute to Malaviyaji: "A giant among men, one of those who laid the foundation of modern Indian nationalism and, year by year, built up, brick by brick and stone by stone, the noble edifice of Indian freedom."

5. An intellectual and practical champion of global peace and intercultural harmony, Mahamana sought to draw the best from the eastern learning and western scientific knowledge. He strived to create a holistic template of education and actualize the same through the Banaras Hindu University which he established in the year 1916.

6. Banaras Hindu University was the first unitary and residential teaching university of India built through public donations collected by Mahamana. It is also the first example of community participation in higher education in India. This university was established to bring about a synergy in ancient traditions and modern understandings as also to align Indian wisdom with western knowledge. Thus this great seat of learning not only embodied the assertion of Indian genius but also became a site for nourishing the holistic vision of nationalism and universal values. The noble

work of this great patriot was acknowledged by Mahatma Gandhi on behalf of the nation in following words: "Great as are Malaviyaji's services to the country, I have no doubt that the Banaras Hindu University constitutes his greatest service and achievement, and he has worn himself out for the work that is dear to him as life itself."

7. I am happy to see that Malaviyaji's dream-child, the Banaras Hindu University, has moved from strength to strength and is soon going to complete its centenary. It is now one of the largest universities in India with maximum number of academic disciplines and departments. Its illustrious alumni are spread far and wide bringing laurels to the country and society.

8. Universities are the fountainhead of knowledge and its dissemination. They have to discover fresh perspectives and assume new responsibilities to meet the imperatives of holistic human and social development. In this sense, higher education should offer a bridge between scientific knowledge and societal needs. Mahamana believed that human values and societal commitment must be inculcated in the students. In his words, "A teaching university would but half perform its function if it does not seek to develop the heart power of its scholar with the same solicitude with which it would develop their brain power." Much later, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru also expressed similar views about role and responsibilities of universities. He said, "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people."

9. Malaviyaji accorded great importance to the universal spread of learning and scholarship. He felt that education was the only way to revive the national pride and considered it a vehicle of social and cultural transformation. His vaulting ambition and bold vision could be seen in his words “Let us have charge of the education of the country with sufficient funds at our disposal, and on behalf of all my fellow-educationists in India, I promise that in course of a few short years we shall banish illiteracy from the land, and spread education and ideas of citizenship among our people to such an extent that the fog of communalism will vanish before the sun of nationalism, which it will be our earnest and proud endeavour to install in the hearts of our people.” The fact that illiteracy still remains to be banished and the fog of communalism is yet to vanish, reminds us of the unfinished task ahead of us.

10. In a Convocation speech, Malaviyaji said two ancient injunctions that lay down a complete code of conduct for all humankind and all religion are “one should not do unto others that which he would dislike if it were done to him”; and “whatever one desires for himself, that he should desire for others also”.

11. Mahamana was a great votary of women’s education. He said “education of our women is a matter of even greater importance than the education of our men. They are the mothers of the future generations of India”. With this vision, he established a Women’s College in this university. Mahamana’s emphasis on women’s education and empowerment should inspire us to redouble efforts in this regard. Permit me to use this occasion

to express deep anguish and dismay over the recent incident of a brutal attack on a 23 year old girl in our capital city of Delhi. My heart goes out to this young girl and her family who have demonstrated extraordinary courage amidst the worst adversity and I request all of you to join me in praying for her speedy recovery.

12. The nation has been witness to the anger and rage of our youth who have gathered in the streets of Delhi and other cities to demand stronger measures to ensure the safety of women and more stringent laws to provide deterrent penalty to criminals who endanger our women. I am certain that, the Government will take all necessary steps to ensure that such incidents do not occur in future. The Prime Minister has assured that all possible efforts to ensure security and safety of women will be made. Let me also remind our young friends that their anger is justified. I understand agony of your mind but please remember nothing is achieved through violence. Please take hold of your emotions and act with reason. The society as a whole has to work to eradicate this menace.

13. We as a society must work towards changing negative perceptions about women. Women must be treated with respect and should be provided a safe, secure and congenial environment in which their talents can flower and they can contribute their full share in the building of our nation. Our history, traditions, religions and cultural values as well as the Constitution demands nothing less. I hope the faculty and students of an august institution like BHU will take the lead in spreading awareness and sensitizing society at large on gender issues.

14. The proposed Centres on Human Values and Ethics and Inter-cultural Studies are timely and innovative. The integration of human values and ethics as well as the inculcation of tolerance and respect for pluralistic ethos in the mainstream education are an absolute imperative today. I congratulate the University for taking up this most important task with the help of the Ministry of Culture and the National Implementation Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Karan Singh. It is appropriate that along with these centres, an archive of Mahamana's works and a special website to disseminate his thoughts and vision would be developed to create awareness and commitment to values, ethics and rights particularly among the youth for enrichment of social and human well being.

15. The dream of Mahamana of cultural integration of India with the rest of Asia, especially with its South and South East Asian neighbours and promotion of dialogue among them as a means of mutual enrichment and nourishment has been taken up as an important agenda of the University. Such a dialogue will go a long way in renewing and strengthening the common cultural bond which has existed for centuries together. We could proceed to build the 21st century as the Asian Century only if we develop relations on the basis of knowledge and understanding of each other. I am happy that on the occasion of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahamana, the university is proposing to expand that vision to the other regions.

16. The 150th Birth Anniversary is an opportunity to remember, cherish and act on ideas, vision, and activities of Mahamana Malaviyaji. That would be the best homage to a powerful visionary and nationalist leader of his times.

17. I call upon Banaras Hindu University, which is a permanent monument to the vision of Mahamana, to continue to undertake efforts to build strong national character in our youth, through education based on Indian culture and moral values.

Thank you.

Jai Hind
