

Text of the Vice-President's address at the Inaugural Session of the First Annual Academic Conference on Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Excerpts

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It is a facet of Indian knowledge system. Guru — -, -, -, ,

We have in the audience people who qualify to the status of Gurujan. My respectful reverence to all of you.

Friends, it is a delight to inaugurate First Annual Academic Conference on Indian Knowledge System. It has not come a day too soon. My warmest compliments to the JNU and Theiksha for pioneering this initiative. Much needed initiative and contemporaneously highly relevant.

At the heart of this conference lies a profound truth, undiluted, unqualified. India is not just a political construct, it is much beyond. It wasn't formed in the mid-20th century. It is a civilizational continuum—a flowing river of consciousness, inquiry, and learning that has endured as was reflected by Shri Sonowal Ji across millennia.

I have a small caveat, mine is not a keynote address. Sonowal Ji imparted a keynote address.

Friends, countries live in centuries. India thrives and lives in Yugas - yug. Bharat breathes through the recitation of Vedas and Upanishads, it speaks through the intricate sutras of Panini, it calculates with the precision of Aryabhata, and it governs with the prudence, patience, and sagacity of Kautilya.

India is unique in the world on the planet. India's story is an unbroken narrative of human aspiration. Aspiration towards knowledge, harmony, transcendence. Long before universities of Europe came into being, these universities began to stir. India had already established, much before, thriving centres of learning.

Our ancient land was home to luminous centres of intellectual life—Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Vallabhi, and Odantapuri — these were the towering citadels of knowledge.

Their libraries were vast oceans of wisdom, housing tens and thousands of manuscripts. These were global universities where seekers came from lands near and far, from Korea and China, Tibet and Persia. These were spaces where the intellect of the world embraced the spirit of Bharat. That inclusivity which some try to teach us, they should be learning from us.

India did not just teach, India welcomed, debated, exchanged and inspired. Let me read out a quote from Max Muller's lecture to incoming British ICS officers because it bears relevance "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most full development some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India."

Friends, it was nothing but articulation of eternal truth but then friends, came an interregnum—a very gory interregnum. Barbarism prevailed over civilization. An unlettered Turko-Afghan military

general, Bakhtiyar Khilji, ravaged the centers of learning and repositories of learning, wiping of the store of knowledge that was accumulated over centuries painstakingly.

Islamic invasion of India caused the first interlude in the glorious journey of Bharatiya Vidya Parampara. Instead of embrace and assimilation, there was contempt and destruction. The British colonization brought forth the second interlude, when Indian Knowledge System was stunted, stymied, and subverted. Centers of learning changed their motives. The compass was moderated. The North Star was changed. From bearing Sages and Savants, it started producing clerks and yeomen. The needs of the East India Company to have brown babus replaced the need of the nation to have thinkers.

Our glorious, inalienable facet over millennia. We stopped thinking, contemplating, writing, and philosophizing. We started cramming, regurgitating, and swallowing. Grades replaced critical thinking. The great Bharatiya Vidya Parampara and its allied institutions were systematically drained, destructed and decimated.

Resultantly, we became consumers of a knowledge system whose authors neither belonged to Bharat nor understood its spirit. Nor at their heart was our concern. A new layer of civilizational narrative seeped in colonial prejudices was imposed upon us recklessly, ruthlessly and unfortunately it permitted. Their purpose was not discovery, it was domination. Their scholarship was not born of reverence but of condescension. Through that distorted lens, India's profound philosophies were reduced to superstition. What a travesty! What unbearable pain.

Western constructs were paraded as universal truths. To put it more bluntly, untruth was camouflaged as truth. While indigenous insights were dismissed as relics of primitive past, this was not an error of interpretation. It was an architecture of erasure, destruction, decimation. And what is more tragic, this selective remembrance continued even after independence.

What should have been our fundamental priority was not even on the radar. How can you be not cognisant of your core values? Instead of healing, we inherited the very biases we fought to overthrow. Marxist perversion replaced colonial distortion!

Friends, even today, the shadows of those colonial misreadings continue to shape textbooks' curricular minds. They continue to demand respect. There are narratives in their favour, a matter of deep reflection and of worrisome concern but friends, today's gathering is far more than a sentimental gaze backward or a nostalgic remembrance of our golden age. It is game-changing.

The step taken here during three days will go a long way. This conference, I believe strongly, stands as a serious academic endeavour to correct a historical wrong, abrasions that are painful for us, abrasions that urge us to question, investigate, critique and rediscover. Now is the time to cast off the chains of borrowed narratives, inherit distortions. It is time to reclaim our intellectual sovereignty. This will be done, friends, through hard and patient scholarship. We would require an army of translators, researchers, PhDs, post-doctors, professors, analysts, linguists, modellers and the like.

There is a growing need to bridge what is often seen as a divide between tradition and modernity. This divide is artificial and intellectually lazy. The wisdom of the past does not obstruct innovation, rather it inspires it. The metaphysical can speak to the material, spiritual insight can coexist with scientific precision, but then you have to know what is spiritual insight. The Rig Veda hymns to the cosmos can find new relevance in the age of astrophysics.

The Charaka Samhita can be read alongside global debates on public health ethics. As we navigate a fractured world, we are stunned by global conflagrations so we are faced with a fractured world, knowledge systems that are long reflected on the interplay between mind and matter, the individual and the cosmos. Duty and consequence become relevant and vital to shaping thoughtful and enduring responses. This can emanate only from this land for the benefit of the global community.

India must not merely import global narratives. We do it thinking they are full of worth. It must contribute to shaping them and that can only happen when we build an ecosystem that values and

rigorously studies our own traditions.

For this, friends, we need universities like JNU to take the lead. You must be the laboratories of this great intellectual reinvigoration. You must create spaces where historians work alongside coders, Sanskritists alongside biologists, ethicists alongside engineers. This conference is a crucial step in building that ecosystem.

Let us, therefore, turn our attention to tangible action. The creation of digitized repositories of classical Indian texts is an urgent priority—covering all classical languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, and Prakrit. These repositories should be made widely accessible, enabling scholars in India and researchers around the world to engage meaningfully with these sources. Equally essential is the development of training programs that empower young scholars with robust methodological tools—blending philology, computational analysis, ethnography, and comparative inquiry to deepen their engagement with Indian Knowledge Systems.

Friends, be ever mindful, knowledge resides beyond manuscripts. It lives in communities, in embodied practices, in the intergenerational transmission of wisdom. A genuine Indian Knowledge Systems research ecosystem must honour both the written word and the lived experience—recognizing that insight emerges as much from context as it does from text.

Friends, this endeavour cannot remain confined to India. The time has come to globalize Indian knowledge without diluting its depth. Our knowledge traditions had reached the shores of the world centuries ago. From the pristine and towering spires of Angkor Wat to the unalloyed performance of Ramayanain Southeast Asia, Indian Knowledge Systems continue to radiate from hotspots around the world. We should reclaim that heritage. We should continue to connect to the roots of Bharat.

India's rise as a global power must be accompanied by the rise of its intellectual and cultural gravitas. This is very significant, rise without this is not lasting, rise without this is not in harmony with our traditions. The strength of a nation inhabits in the originality of its thought, the timelessness of its values, and the resilience of its intellectual traditions. That is the kind of soft power that endures and soft power is potent in the world we live.

The power that inheres in IKS is no less than nuclear one. IKS is a means to convert contemporaneous challenges, including those emanating from disruptive technologies technologies, into opportunities. Bharat today is no longer a nation with potential, Bharat today is bold, confident and continually on the rise in recent years. IKS can be enabler of soft diplomacy prowess if so exploited.

Bharat need neither be on the back foot. We are quickly on the back foot. Some narrative has emanated from somewhere on the planet. Some calibration has taken place elsewhere. Bharat need neither be on the back foot of narratives and calibrations from outside. Our polity must try and attain that status not to fall easy prey to such orchestrated sinister designs.

Our knowledge systems ordained uncompromising, unflinching commitment to nationalism. Nation always first, It is not optional. It is the only option.

In global context, with enviable development trajectory in last few years Bharat has emerged as most aspirational global nation. Indian knowledge systems need fullest unleashing and exploitation to satiate the ambitions of our youth dividend. In an age of climate anxiety, ethical AI, and mental health crises, Indian Knowledge Systems offer insights modern frameworks are only beginning to glimpse.

From Angkor Wat's silhouettes to Ramayana in Southeast Asia, from yoga in Europe to Ayurveda in Silicon Valley—Indian knowledge systems have been our longest-running backchannel diplomacy.

Friends, time to invest in digitising ancient manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali making these globally accessible. Our soft diplomacy will get cutting edge if the world comes to be exposed fully to our Indian knowledge resource.

Friends, the journey we are embarking upon today is not a short one. It requires decades of work. It

demands seriousness, commitment and imagination but let this conference mark the beginning of that journey. I am full of confidence and optimism.

The lamp of knowledge that once burned bright in the halls of Nalanda and Takshila must be rekindled through discourse here. It is in your hands, scholars and students, to ensure that the next generation of Indian thought is not buried under debris of neglect but blooms into global relevance.

I commend the organisers for this noble initiative, the Vice-Chancellor and those associated with your partner. This initiative I wish great success. I will say let's always remember: , . O Almighty, lead us from darkness to knowledge! Three-day ideation, three-day debate, discourse, discussion and dialogue will be foundational for re-emergence of Indian knowledge systems.

Friends, I conclude our Indian knowledge systems are as deep as the sea that is bottomless.

Thank you so much.

JK/RC/SM

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