

Speech by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the valedictory function of the World Telugu Conference

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Sodara Sodareemanulaaraa, Namaskaram! [Brothers and Sisters, Namaskar]

As it has been said

Desa bhasha landu Telugu lessa [Of our land's languages, Telugu is the best]

1. I am happy to be here for the closing event of the World Telugu Conference. This is the fifth such Conference and the first to be held in the state of Telangana, which I am visiting for the first time after being elected as the President of India. I congratulate all the delegates and particularly those who have come from abroad – from I understand about 42 countries. I am happy to learn that my colleague and the Vice-President of our country, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu – who is a proud Telugu – inaugurated this Conference.
2. The past five days have been a tribute to the richness and heritage of the Telugu language. Telugu is the second-most spoken language in our country. It is the mother tongue of the people of two states, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Since 2008, it has been recognised as a classical language for its long literary tradition – a tradition of which even the Chief Minister, Shri K. Chandrashekhara Rao, is an important part. I am told he has a keen understanding of Telugu literature.
3. The history of Telugu culture and literature has given so much to our country and to human civilisation. The greatest emperor of the Vijayanagara Empire, Krishna Deva Raya, was both a remarkable ruler as well as an exponent and patron of Telugu literature. There are so many others who contributed to the ethos of this soil. In recent times, three of India's Presidents and my distinguished predecessors have been Telugu speakers – Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Shri V.V. Giri and Shri Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy. And Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, a scholar and Prime Minister, knowledgeable in many languages but truly an authority in Telugu, too was from this region.
4. A thousand years ago, Nannaya Bhattaraka wrote rules of grammar and also rendered the Mahabharat into Telugu. Soon after him came the illustrious poet Tikkana. In the 19th century, the writings and plays of Gurazada Apparao inspired the nation building process. The poet Sri Sri wrote of the struggles of common people. Vattikota Alwar Swamy was a poet, novelist and activist – respected even by those who disagreed with him. The poems and songs of Daasarathi are still sung.
5. Telugu has been a language of learning and wisdom, of protest and liberty, of national pride and universal values. To this day, the compositions of Tyagaraja remain central to Carnatic classical music. And bhakti songs of Annamacharya continue to be the bedrock of faith and tradition.
6. We cannot forget that this is the land of Komaram Bheem who inspired tribal communities to become conscious of their rights to forests and natural resources. Or Chityala Ailamma, a brave woman, from an underprivileged community, who stood up to feudalism.
7. A hundred years ago Bhagya Reddy Varma was a political leader and social reformer at the forefront of the battle against untouchability. Pingali Venkayya designed what eventually became our national flag. Alluri Sitarama Raju was a revolutionary leader in the struggle against the British. And Swami Ramanand Tirtha not only led a mass movement against an oppressive social and political system but was also integral to Hyderabad's integration into the newly independent India.
8. Of course, I have mentioned only a few names. There are many more.
9. Today Telugu is a global language. It can be heard and read and cherished across continents. It is the language of enterprise and technology, of Indian soft power and of a vibrant Telugu-speaking diaspora that has made a name for itself and for our country. From South Africa to Southeast Asia, Telugu speakers and the Telugu community are acknowledged as achievers.
10. In the United States, Telugus have even been elected to public office, and are well known as entrepreneurs, doctors and technologists. It is a matter of pride that the CEO of the technology giant Microsoft is a Telugu – Satya Nadella. He follows a fine heritage, going back to among others Yellapragada Subbarao, the celebrated biochemist who worked at Harvard University in the 1920s and 1930s.
11. Though it has spread far and wide, the commitment of the Telugu diaspora to its mother tongue and to the

culture of its ancestral land remains strong. I am heartened to learn of programmes such as Mana Badi, which are used to make children of Telugu families conversant with the language of their parents and grandparents.

Ladies and Gentlemen

12. Telugu has often been called a bridge language between the south and the north of our country. Like the Telugu people, it has been assimilative and has accepted and embraced words, thoughts and ideas from other cultures. Telugu has incorporated words from Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu and English, among other languages.
13. This is fitting. The city we are in – Hyderabad – too is a bridge between many cultures and regions of our country. It is a pan-Indian city as well as a global metropolis. Its technology industry, pharmaceutical companies and vaccine innovators have contributed significantly to the nation. It has thriving educational institutions and health-care centres, cinema and special effects production houses, and sports facilities. These are a matter of pride for every Indian.
14. And Hyderabad is simply majestic as the city of **biryani**, **badminton** and **Bahubali** – giving the country delicious food, a string of badminton champions and films that are an expression of Indian soft power. I must add here that Telugu cuisine is very popular in Delhi, particularly the pickles.
15. I am sure that everybody here draws happiness from the fact that the **Ease of Doing Business** state rankings for 2016 were jointly topped by Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. For a new state such as Telangana to make rapid strides and show such potential as a business and industrial location is creditable. My congratulations to the people and government of Telangana. I would especially like to appreciate the success in hosting the recent Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which saw participation from all over the world.
16. Indeed, the continued success of both Telugu-speaking states is a subject of enormous satisfaction.
17. In conclusion, I would like to wish everybody here the very best for the coming New Year. I look forward to the sixth World Telugu Conference. And I congratulate the Telangana state government on having successfully hosted this Conference and earned another feather in its cap.
18. As I finish, let me repeat the message of Rayaprolu Subba Rao:

Ay desa maygina endu kalidina

Pogadra nee talli bhoomi Bharatini

Nilu para nee jaati nindu gauravamu

[Whichever country you go to, wherever you tread

Praise your Motherland Bharati

Preserve your nation's pride]

Thank you

Jai Hind!

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