



Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind on the occasion of inauguration of the golden jubilee celebrations of Jesus and Mary college

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It is a matter of honour and happiness for me to be here today at the inauguration of the golden jubilee celebrations of Jesus and Mary College. This institution has contributed enormously to the cause of education in New Delhi and in our country. For five decades, it has taught and prepared young girls – young women, I should say – to break glass ceilings, to achieve their potential, contribute to society and to the economy, and become part of the process of nation building.

The enterprise of nation building involves all of us. It is not limited to just the government. It requires participation by private and public institutions, religious and lay people, and each of us as individuals, irrespective of what we do. After all in a country of such immense and rich diversity, the very nature of nation building calls for diverse actions as well.

Here I must note that the Christian community – whose history in India goes back 2,000 years and which has contributed so much to our shared culture – has carved a special role for itself in education. Missionary institutions such as this one have become symbols of scholarship, dedicated teaching and academic excellence.

This is so appropriate. For all religions in their essence urge us to constantly learn and evolve and grow, to acquire knowledge and gain wisdom. And so become better human beings.

In the Gospel According to John, chapter eight, verse 12, Jesus is quoted as saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.”

In an echo of this sentiment, there is a memorable verse in the Upanishads:

असतो मा सद्गमय

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

Lead me from falseness to truth

Lead me from darkness to light

This invoking of “light” as a metaphor for wisdom and for the awakening of our minds can be linked to the sacred task of education. Irrespective of our faith and identity, the work of education is truly the work of God. And I commend the community here at the Jesus and Mary College for carrying on this good work.

The goal of education is not just to acquire knowledge. That is only a starting point. It is much more critical to use the knowledge one gets from education to enhance the welfare of the less-privileged among us. The truly educated are not those who collect degrees, but those who use those degrees and the underlying scholarship to become nation builders in our society.

I would further emphasise that the real goal of education has to be to produce the best human being. This could be a great service not only to the nation but to entire humanity. If you are the best human being, you will always be a believer in the best in your life, wherever you are positioned. For example, if you happen to be a teacher, you are bound to be the best teacher. If you happen to be an administrator, you are bound to be the best administrator. If you happen to be a doctor, you are bound to be the best doctor, and so on.

Education of girls is much more important than we realise. An educated girl contributes to the economy and at work. She also ensures that other children in her family, as well as the family she may be married into, are educated. The next generation is made responsible and educated through the education of the girl. In this way, the larger social impact of girls’ education is significant.

In turn, this is dependent on the values and the culture that a college or educational institution holds dear and imparts to its students. Here Jesus and Mary College is a role model for others. It is a matter of great happiness that the college has chosen its golden jubilee to partner with a nearby NDMC school and facilitate the development of the school and its children. This is a praiseworthy example of giving back to society. It can be adopted by other colleges too.

I am also told that Jesus and Mary College regularly organises blood donation camps, in which staff members and students participate with enthusiasm. The most recent blood donation camp was organised on September 14. I just saw the photographs of this blood donation camp in the exhibition outside. On the previous day, September 13, the college had organised an organ donation camp in which many students registered. I am deeply moved by this sense of compassion and of social responsibility. Such actions reinforce our faith in our young people.

India is in the midst of multiple transformations. We are an old civilisation but a young people. In the first half of the 21st century, we will have the largest young population in any country of the world. It is crucial to harness the energy of our young people and use it to make our country a developed society. Education is fundamental to this effort – calling for both access to education and quality of education.

The nature of our economy and of the very concept of a workplace is also changing. The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the advances in digitisation and robotics will together make certain types of jobs obsolete and also create many new opportunities. How our society copes with these dramatic changes will be dependent on how our leading institutions of higher learning – institutions such as Jesus and Mary College – will respond.

We need to upgrade our higher educational system and, to the extent possible, make it future proof. Our education infrastructure, curricula and modes of teaching have to become 21st century compatible and be nimble and dynamic enough to constantly embrace change. As visitor of the University of Delhi and of over a hundred other universities, these are issues that concern me. In the days ahead, I look forward to meaningful discussions on such subjects with our academic community.

Friends

I understand this is a moment of double celebration and commemoration for Jesus and Mary College. While the college marks its golden jubilee, the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, the holy order that has founded and runs this institution and so many others in our country and elsewhere, is entering the year of its bicentenary.

I am also told that Sister Monica Joseph, the Superior General of this global order of nuns, is not only from India but is a graduate from this very college. It must make this a special anniversary for all of you, and I congratulate you again. I would also like to wish Jesus and Mary College another 50 years – and longer – of teaching and learning, of academic excellence and scholarly fulfilment.

God bless you all

Jai Hind!

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