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Inaugurates International Conference on 'The Journey of Indian Languages: Perspectives on Culture and Society'

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that the mother language should be made mandatory for school education in all States. He was addressing the inaugural session of a 2-day International Conference on 'The Journey of Indian Languages: Perspectives on Culture and Society' jointly organized by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), in Ahmedabad today. The Education Minister of Gujarat, Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasmaji, the Principal Secretary, Higher & Technical Education, Government of Gujarat, Smt. Anju Sharma, the Vice Chancellor of BAOU, Dr. Pankaj Vani, the Vice Chancellor of IGNOU, Dr. Ravindra Kumar and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that the language is the soul of a society, the binding thread of human existence and it has been a vehicle, from time immemorial, for communication of thoughts, feelings and ideas. He further said that our societies have been built on the recognition of the fact that language is the lifeblood of a culture and building block of civilization. The richness of a culture is evident from the vocabulary, the syntax, he added.

The Vice President said that not enough attention is being paid to ensure that children master at least one language well during their schooling stage and this weakens the foundations for further learning. We need good researches that would aim to cement and enhance our tradition of excellent critical, historical, theoretical and creative scholarship across a full range of periods, genres and linguistic research areas, he added.

The Vice President said that the Open Universities are making higher education opportunities available to a much larger number of students because they offer flexible schedules enabling learners like women and working population to study anywhere, anytime. He further said that the universities constantly innovate and see how best they can further serve the learners across the state and outside in a language they wish to study. He congratulated BAOU and IGNOU for their commendable service in offering higher education and fulfilling the educational aspirations of millions of people across the country.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"Dear Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasmaji, Education Minister, Gujarat State, Vice Chancellor, Dr.

Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU, Registrar, Principal Secretary, Higher Education, invited Keynote Speakers, Academicians, Members of the University authorities, teachers, staff, Delegates, invited Guests and dear students.

It is my great pleasure to be with you all, especially the academicians and students at the inaugural session of the two days' International Conference jointly organized by two of India's prominent Open Universities. First of all, I would like to congratulate the organisers for selecting such a theme of this conference which is very close to my heart. I am glad that more than one thousand delegates have registered for this International Conference.

The aim of this conference is to highlight the long journey of the Indian Languages and their usage for communication, documentation and creative expression.

Language, in my view, is the soul of a society, the binding thread of human existence. It has been a vehicle, from time immemorial, for communication of thoughts, feelings and ideas. Words have determined humanity's world view. We cannot separate the words from the meaning, the idea we wish to communicate to others. That's why famous Indian poet Kalidasa begins his epic poem "Raghuvamsham" with a request to the divine parents Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi to teach him speech and its meaning.

"Vaagarthaviva Sampruktau, Vaagartha Prathipathaye,

Jagathah Pitharau Vande, Paarvathi Parameswarau"

Here, the poet refers to "Vaak" (speech) and "Artha" (meaning) as an inseparable combination. Indeed, the Indian tradition refers to speech or "vaak" with great reverence symbolized by the goddess Vaagdevi or Saraswati. One of the thousand names of Goddess Lalitha is "Bhasha Rupa". Clearly, our societies have been built on the recognition of the fact that language is the lifeblood of a culture and building block of civilization. The richness of a culture is evident from the vocabulary, the syntax and the way words are strung together to not only convey information but also the whole range of human thoughts and emotions. Languages get enriched as more and more words are added to the vocabulary. This becomes necessary when speakers have to convey new experiences. Language therefore is intertwined with life and its journey is as fascinating as the humankind's history. It reflects our journey through life as we try to define, categorize and describe things, places, people, emotions, events in our daily life. It helps us to make sense of what is happening around us and communicate that sense to others around us. New experiences create new expressions. As our world view changes, language tries to convey those changes. Who would have thought that we will have words like "start up", "entrepreneurship", "surfing the internet" or "twitter" a few decades ago? Language therefore reflects the reality of lives around us, the cultural context. This is why some words in certain languages are so unique to that language that it is hard to translate them accurately into other languages. For instance, it is hard to capture the depth and range of meanings that some Sanskrit words have. Like "dharma", for instance. Language, therefore, is the window to the collective consciousness and culture of a people.

You have chosen to deliberate on this fascinating theme over the next two days.

I would like to say that modern Indian languages have had a rich journey starting primarily from its roots in classical languages. According to one study, India, with 780 languages, has the world's second highest number of languages, after Papua New Guinea where people use 839 languages. We have a rich cultural heritage where all languages have been used by poets, novelists, musicians and other creative artists with great ingenuity and finesse. We have also been absorbing many words from different languages making our languages so much richer. We must continuously strive to promote the use of all languages and encourage literary figures to produce new works.

However, the current scenario in the country is a little disturbing. Not enough attention is being paid to ensure that children master at least one language well during their schooling stage. The recent surveys showed that children were completing the cycle of education but have very poor, unsustainable literacy skills. This weakens the foundations for further learning. We must remedy this situation. Many children are dropping out, especially in tribal areas, because they are taught in a different language from what they speak at home. Language can be a barrier as well. We should have a pragmatic policy to encourage mother tongue at the early stages of schooling and gradually move on to other languages.

It will be much more challenging to build a knowledge based economy with such poor foundational literacy skills. The open Universities like yours may have to seriously consider a special focus on developing courses for imparting good literacy and language skills at all levels of education.

Today the world has become a small village and thus, language, literature and translations along with the cultural studies as disciplines have become indispensable in the exchange of thoughts, ideas and interaction. We need good researches that would aim to cement and enhance our tradition of excellent critical, historical, theoretical and creative scholarship across a full range of periods, genres and linguistic research areas. We have to acquire an understanding of the fundamental concepts and basic research methodologies involved in language and literature. At the same time we have to learn to establish connections between research and the social challenges associated with language teaching and learning.

Dr. Ambedkar ji firmly believed that we can mould the destiny of our nation by giving them good quality education. I am quite happy to note the rapid strides taken by Gujarat to spread education and particularly the key role being played by the Open Universities like BAOU and IGNOU. Everyone is not in a position to study in higher education institutions. Today, the Open Universities are making higher education opportunities available to a much larger number of students because they offer flexible schedules enabling learners like women and working population to study anywhere, anytime. You, in the open universities, are using technology to make this education mission possible. You must however try to constantly innovate and see how best you can further serve the learners across the state and outside in a language they wish to study.

I have been informed that this University has reached to very remote places of Gujarat today; more than six lakhs of students have studies in this university since its inception.

I am glad that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University offers many courses particularly useful for women. Probably for this reason, the government of Gujarat has very rightly allotted grant for the Anganvadi workers and Supervisors under ICDS scheme to join CFN (Certificate Course for Food and Nutrition) and CCCD (Certificate course for Child Care and Development) courses of BAOU.

I am very glad that the university has taken certain digital Initiatives. Admission process from this session has been made online. The payment process has been made cash less by introducing online payment of all kinds of fees through payment gateway and BHIM app. Study material is sent to students' homes immediately after admission is confirmed and also self-learning material e-content is made available through website. University broadcasts live/ recorded content on Government of Gujarat's educational channel number 16 VANDE (Video Audio Network for Development and Education) Gujarat. BAOU produces high quality audio-visual content at state of the art full HD 'Chaitanya' Studio with facilities for post-production storage of content and archival of content.

It is a matter of great pleasure that at the national level IGNOU serves the educational aspirations of over three million students in India and other countries through 21 schools of studies and network of 67 regional centres. Presently Ahmedabad Regional centre caters to the educational needs of Gujarat state including two union territories- Daman and Nagar with around forty learner

support centres.

At this juncture, I would like to thank Shri Vijay Rupani, Honorable Chief Minister of Gujarat State and Education Minister Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasamaji for inviting me to this conference.

It's a matter of great pride for us that in this International Conference, scholars have contributed their articles in Sanskrit Language- the Mother of most Indian Languages- as well as in Hindi, Gujarati and English. I am very happy to learn that separate two days deliberations will take place on Vedic Mathematics. I congratulate Vice Chancellor, Dr. Pankaj Jani and Prof. Ravindra Kumarji for jointly organizing this International Conference.

I wish you all the very best in spreading the light of knowledge. I hope each of you will light up the homes of every family in this state and elsewhere with words that open up the minds to a new world .

Jai Hind!"

KSD/BK

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