

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
AT CEREMONY FOR CONFERMENT OF HONORIS CAUSA
DOCTORATE DEGREE
AT UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS**

University of Mauritius: 12 March, 2024

I am delighted to begin this auspicious day that marks the National Day of Mauritius at the esteemed University of Mauritius. On this momentous day, I convey the best wishes of more than 1.4 billion Indians to all my Mauritian brothers and sisters, and eagerly look forward to joining the joyous celebrations at Champs de Mars later today.

I feel overwhelmed by the heart-touching affection and warm welcome I have been receiving since my arrival in Mauritius. It shows the enduring strength of India-Mauritius relations, and the close people-to-people ties that nurture them.

Standing among you all at the University of Mauritius today, I am reminded that education has been a key instrument in shaping this special relationship between our two countries, as well as the destiny of Mauritius. In 1901, Mahatma Gandhi inspired Indian indentured workers to educate themselves, resulting in their political and social empowerment, that led to the transformation of Mauritius. The subsequent visionary leadership of Mauritian leaders like Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and Sir Anerood Jugnauth have built on this rich foundation, to create a vibrant, pluralistic and prosperous Mauritius, that inspires Africa and the world.

This power of education resonates strongly with me at a personal level too, as education has been the single most important tool that has had a transformative impact in my own life journey. As the first woman from my village to receive college education, empowering the vulnerable through education is a cause that has been close to my

heart throughout my administrative and political career, and one that I remain devoted to.

During my time spent teaching children at the Sri Aurobindo Integral Education Centre in my home district of Mayurbhanj in the state of Odisha, I saw for myself, the spark that the right kind of education can ignite in young minds, and the far-reaching impact it can have. The transformation is visible not only on their own lives, but that of their families, their village and wider society as a whole. Education is what takes us from vulnerability and deprivation, to opportunities and hope.

I also realized during my time as a teacher, that engagement with education is in many ways, an immersive experience. In educating a child, I was myself also continuously learning and evolving. I think all the educators present with us here would agree, that giving and receiving learning often go hand in hand.

I believe that Universities like this are not just ladders to the dreams of aspirational youth; they are sites where the future of mankind is forged. This is why I feel especially honoured to receive the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Civil Law from this prestigious University today. I hope that it will inspire all young people, particularly young women, to discover their unique passion and pursue their dreams. I thank the Chancellor of the University of Mauritius, Dr. Autrey for this honour. I am privileged to receive it from the University of Mauritius which has since its establishment in 1965, evolved into a leading University, offering high-quality education that responds to the needs of Mauritius.

Excellencies, Chancellor Autrey, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognizing the transformative power of education and given that half of Indian population is below the age of 25, the Government of India has made it a priority to educate and empower youth to lead India into 'knowledge economy' of tomorrow.

I am confident that India's forward-looking new National Education Policy will tap into India's demographic dividend to become a powerhouse of innovation that enhances the well being of humanity. In less than a decade, India has set up nearly 400 new Universities, 5300 new colleges, 75 new Institutes of National Importance, 14 new AIIMS, 7 new IITs and 7 new IIMs, with half of the new Universities and a majority of the new colleges located in rural areas.

In this exciting journey into the future, India looks forward to partnering its special friends, like Mauritius. Each year, 400 Mauritians are trained in India under our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme and about 60 Mauritian students receive scholarships to pursue higher education in India. It is a matter of pride for us that many among them occupy high positions in the Mauritian bureaucracy and public life today. Since 2020, more than 500 Mauritian students have also benefited from India's *e-Vidya Bharati* and *e-Arogya Bharati* distance learning programmes. Hundreds of Mauritian youth have also been reconnecting with their Indian roots by visiting India under the *Know India Programme*, and several other exchange programmes. I am confident that these bonds of friendship between our youth will keep our relationship moving upwards, as India embarks on its 'Amrit Kaal' journey to become a developed nation by 2047. I urge my Mauritians friends to take advantage of their special proximity to India, and tap into the vast economic opportunities it offers.

India sees Mauritius as a close maritime neighbor, a cherished partner in the Indian Ocean Region, and a key player in our Africa outreach. Our aspiration is that Mauritius continues to progress as a leading economy and as a voice for peace, stability and prosperity in the strategically-important Indian Ocean Region. Considering that robust people-to-people linkages have been the very foundation of the special friendship between India and Mauritius, I truly believe the future of our bilateral relationship lies in the hands of our youth. I am optimistic that the youth of Mauritius and India will continue to deepen this special partnership.

I once again thank the University of Mauritius for receiving me and honouring me today. I extend my best wishes to the Chancellor, to all the esteemed faculty members, researchers, and students for success in their academic endeavours. To my young friends - may you bring glory to your *alma mater* and your country. May you be a force for a better world.

Thank you!