



Speech by the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the presentation of the Nari Shakti Puruskar on the occasion of International Women's Day

Posted On: 08 MAR 2017 2:27PM by PIB Delhi

1. I am indeed very happy to be amidst you on the occasion of International Women's Day. We, in India acknowledge, remember and celebrate our women in many ways in our everyday life. Today, on International Women's Day, we join the world in paying tribute to women - the world over - for their selfless gifts to society.

2. I congratulate the individual ladies and organizations of India who have received the national award, the Nari Shakti Puruskar today. They have distinguished themselves in taking up challenges and realizing high aspirations that they represent. Behind each success is a story of tremendous commitment and perseverance. Each accomplishment represents the sincere efforts of thousands of other women and these are to be equally respected.

3. The discourse in our country on women's empowerment started even before India became a Republic. Our Constitution and the Directive Principles enshrined therein have given our Governments clear guidelines for policy and planning. Our successes have helped our society to evolve in its unique way. Women are no longer seen as mere recipients of welfare benefits but are recognized as holders of equal rights, equal partners and agents of change in the social, economic, cultural and political processes of the country.

4. In the political arena, women have made great strides, contributing effectively to lowering of social and economic inequities and selflessly working for the goals of development and nation building. In the realm of local self governance, more than a million women in rural India - far beyond the stipulated 33%, have efficiently taken up positions of authority and are discharging their responsibilities efficiently and with commendable outcomes.

5. In challenging domains like the defence services, police and security forces, in sports, academics, space research and innovation, in taking up the cause of the vulnerable and the exploited, in community outreach and mass healthcare initiatives, women are indispensable for good team work and success. It is often not easy - we must admit that they are frequently subjected to unfounded biases and discrimination. Yet, the fact that they are able to overcome these and inspire esteem and respect is commendable indeed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. On International Women's Day, it is important to reiterate that every girl child and woman in our country should be assured that Government of India is fully committed to providing her an enabling environment that affords equal opportunity. She should feel confident that she can achieve her highest aspirations in whichever field she chooses. Prime Minister's *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* campaign has been launched in response to the falling Child Sex Ratio in many parts of our country. It is designed to also motivate girl children in every part of our country to enroll in primary education. The programme entails selective intervention - 100 districts across India have been targeted in 2015 and expanded to 61 additional districts in 2016.

7. Government is equally concerned at the rising rate of violent crimes against women. It is inexcusable that women in India do not feel as secure and safe as they should. Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective. A greater emphasis on early sensitization of children and youth

in schools and institutions of higher learning would help inculcate due respect for the female gender. This should be taken up through appropriate measures in our rural and urban populations and through well-conceived and coherent Government programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. There is no doubt that women have a tremendous capacity for multi-tasking. From their families and homes to farms and fields and in their businesses and professions, women are second to none in applying themselves with a commitment that comes from the heart and soul. I recall reading a remark in the masterpiece, *Ghare Baire*, of Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore which I would like to share: “*We women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.*” Let us keep these words in our minds and hearts as we accord women the respect and deference that is their due. It should not be too difficult - as these basic values are a part of our grand heritage and deeply ingrained in our consciousness. On International Women’s Day, let us rededicate ourselves to revive, uphold and propagate these basic values.

9. With these words, I once again congratulate the recipients of the Nari Shakti Puruskar and wish them the all success as they continue their efforts for the all round advancement of women in our society.

10. I sincerely thank the Ministry of Women and Child Development under the dynamic leadership of its Minister Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi for instituting these awards. They will undoubtedly inspire more individuals, institutions and organizations to make a contribution - big or small, for the further empowerment of women and the progress of our nation.

Thank You.
Jai Hind.

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