

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA  
SMT DROUPADI MURMU  
AT THE SECOND INDIAN RICE CONGRESS AT ICAR-NATIONAL  
RICE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**Cuttack, February 11, 2023**

I am happy to be here with you today. I am glad to see young scientists, especially women, among you. You have gathered here to participate in the Second Indian Rice Congress, which will, over these four days, discuss a variety of topics related to this important grain. It is heartening to see a gathering of talented scientists who invest their time and energy for rice research and also for India's food security and livelihood.

There is no need to underline the importance of rice before this audience. You know very well how rice is the cornerstone of food security in India and also a key factor for our economy. Rice also figures very prominently in our heritage and culture. Right from the Vedas, our ancient literature in Sanskrit and other languages have rich references to this grain and many varieties of rice. Many rituals and ceremonies of various religious traditions are considered incomplete without 'akshat', the unbroken rice, which is a symbol of prosperity and even the wholeness of life. In many parts of India, the first solid food given to a child is usually something made of rice. It also features in famous legends and myths. I am sure you remember many tales such as the one about Sudama's Rice, which underlines the bonds of love between old friends.

Rice is rightly called the 'grain of life'. It arguably feeds more people than any other comparable food grain, especially in Asia. India, of course, has been the biggest exporter of the grain, helping people in other parts of the world ensure basic food security – and also letting them savour different rice varieties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Though India is the leading consumer and exporter of rice today, the situation was different when the nation became free. The National Rice Research Institute was established in 1946, soon after the Great Bengal Famine and just before we won independence. In those days, we were dependent on imports to meet our food requirements, and often the nation lived what was called a ship-to-mouth existence.

If the nation could overcome that dependency and has become the largest exporter, a lot of credit goes to the NRRI. The institute has contributed immensely to India's food security and also to enhancing farmers' lives. For more than 75 years now, the NRRI has been working in the areas of basic, applied and adaptive research related to paddy while also imparting training to the various stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India is proud of its rich biodiversity and that includes varieties of rice too. Every region of this country boasts of a unique rice grain of its own, with a distinct taste. In the last century, as irrigation facilities expanded, rice came to be grown in new places and found new consumers. Such a shift is not always good for the water usage in some regions. The paddy crop requires high amounts of water but many parts of the world are facing severe water shortages due to climate change. Droughts, floods and cyclones are now more frequent, making rice cultivation more vulnerable.

Even as rice has broken new ground, there are places where traditional varieties are facing challenges. I am glad to know that traditional rice growers from the tribal communities of Odisha have helped conserve the unique genetic resources of rice for ages. I must mention here the exemplary work of Smt. Kamala Pujari from Koraput, who has been collecting and preserving hundreds of rare and endangered crop varieties, including rice. She was honoured with the Padma Shri award for her inspiring initiative.

Thus, the task before us today is to find the middle path: preserving and conserving traditional varieties on one hand, and maintaining ecological balance on the other. I am, therefore, happy to learn that NRRI scientists are actively seeking solutions, by collecting, identifying and characterising unique rice germplasm that can survive these cultivation challenges. I am told that this Rice Congress has dedicated sessions to discuss those issues.

Another challenge is to save the soil from excessive use of chemical fertilizers, which are considered necessary for modern rice cultivation. We need to reduce our dependence on such fertilizers in order to keep our soil healthy. I am confident our scientists are at work to devise eco-friendly rice production systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As rice forms the bedrock of our food security, we must consider its nutritional aspects too. Large sections of low-income groups depend on rice, which is often the only source of daily nutrition for them. Therefore, delivering protein, vitamins and essential micronutrients through rice can help combat malnutrition. I am told ICAR-NRRI has developed India's first high protein rice, called CR Dhan 310, which will help us in improving the country's overall nutrition profile. I am glad to learn that NRRI has also released a high-zinc rice variety, called CR Dhan 315.

The development of such bio-fortified varieties is an ideal example of science in the service of society. More and more of such efforts will be needed to support the increasing population amid a changing climate. I am confident that India's scientific community, including those present here today, will rise to the challenge.

Fruits of science and technology must reach those who need it the most, that is, the underprivileged sections of the society. Science and technology should help in removing any division and inequality in society. I hope this process will speed up with more and more young women taking up science and technology as a career.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the National Rice Research Institute, the Association of Rice Research Workers and other co-organisers for organising the Second Indian Rice Congress. I am confident that after four days of extensive deliberations among rice researchers from India and other countries, the organisers will summarise key suggestions for future consideration. A document presenting the gist of deliberations will be helpful to the policymakers of this country.

I wish the Second Indian Rice Congress a grand success.

Thank you.  
Jai Hind!