

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION
OF NARI SHAKTI PURUSKAR FOR 2015 ON THE
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: March 08, 2016

At the very outset, I would like to convey my sincere greetings to the women of our country and the world on the occasion of International Women's Day.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that we, in India, celebrate this day by acknowledging the achievements of exceptional women and men, the spirit and fortitude exhibited by them in challenging circumstances and the outstanding effort of individual women and institutions for the cause of women. The Nari Shakti Puraskar is, therefore, a token of the nation's appreciation of these women and institutions for their effort to make a difference and improve the condition of lives of women in our country.

The awards are intended to also inspire others to contribute and give hope and succor to women – particularly the vulnerable or marginalized. To my mind, any effort, big or small, is equally valuable– it is the spirit and attitude that these initiatives inculcate within us – which I consider most important.

I congratulate the proud recipients of this national honour and thank them for their contribution.

I am filled with pride and happiness at seeing how the women of India are taking great strides forward, assuming leadership roles and challenging responsibilities in all spheres of life. But I am equally

distressed and concerned that a converse dimension of our society has, of late, been revealing its grotesque nature - every now and then.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must remind ourselves most emphatically – and as often as we can, that every member of our society – male or female has, equally, the right to live in security, peace and dignity. It is intolerable that in this day and age, women are still being exposed to barbaric brutality and violence because they are women. Violence or fear of violence reduces the freedom and development of every one particularly, our women and children. But more than that, it diminishes our *society* when it allows such inhuman treatment of its women rather than guarantee their safety, security and equal rights. On this day, let us all, Government, civil society and public at large, pledge to work together for developing relevant legal, administrative and other measures to ensure the safety and security of our mothers and sisters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I often hear of women not being given the opportunity or permission to do something. I would say, why wait for others to ‘*give*’ you what is your right? The *minds* of our women should be empowered. The *mind sets* of our people must evolve. They must realise that it is in society’s own interest to create the conditions for their women to freely exercise choices at home and in the workplace without restrictions or fear.

As we know, gender equality is a key driver for inclusive economic growth and social progression. A greater focus on women’s access to resources - and control over these resources – and more emphasis on

improving the health and nutrition of girls and women is a vital necessity. Improving women's health raises productivity within families and communities and sets the standards for future generations.

Community programmes for efficient implementation of Government policy have proven to be among the best instruments for the broadest outreach. I am glad to know that the Ministry of Women and Child Development has conceived a Village Convergence and Facilitation Services programme at Gram Panchayat level. Women – regardless of their social environment, religion or economic standing, have a unique capacity to change attitudes for achieving development and change. I am confident that the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme will be successful in addressing malnutrition, maternal mortality and bridging gaps to improve the status of women in our society.

In a diverse and burgeoning population like ours, selecting the right approach and implementing it is always an enormous and daunting task. However, Government can certainly partner with the private sector and widespread network of civil society organizations to do this better. Best practices for the development of women - that have worked well at the grassroots in States and Union Territories should be adopted and up-scaled in Government of India schemes. The key - and urgent - priority is to develop a comprehensive approach to the holistic empowerment of women. An effective convergence of all elements – social, economic or political – could serve to facilitate this. I recall the words of Swami Vivekananda and I quote, *“The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.”* Unquote. He strongly believed, and I quote again, *“All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor ever will be in future.”* Unquote.

With these words, I once again congratulate the recipients of the Nari Shakti Puraskar and the Ministry of Women and Child Development for organizing this event. I thank the distinguished awardees for their effort and commitment and wish them success in their future endeavours.

Thank You !!

Jai Hind !!