

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON THE
OCCASION OF DR POULOS MAR GREGORIOS
AWARD 2019**

It is a privilege and pleasure to be here today amidst this large get-together of the Sixth Dr Poulos Mar Gregorios Award to honour the redoubtable Ms Aruna Roy and the organisation that she founded, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS).

2) The soul of India resides in its pluralism and multiple streams not only tolerating each other but respecting the flow and course of the other and often intermingling. India is not just a geographical entity. It carries a history of ideas, philosophy, intellect, service, science, culture, innovation and experience. Plurality of our society has come about through assimilation of ideas over centuries. The multiplicity in culture, faith and language is what makes India so special.

3) Stemming from an arduous process of civilisational interplay and co-existence, accepting, accommodative, adaptive, adoptive and ever evolving, the Indian nationhood did not need an anti thesis to synthesize.

4. Rabindranath Tagore said and I quote, “**No one knows at whose beckoning call how many streams, of humanity came in indomitable waves from all over the world, over the millennia and mingled like rivers, into this vast ocean and created an individual soul that is called Bharat**”. These values have been a part of our collective consciousness for millennia. At this juncture, I cannot but remember Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru’s words from the *Discovery of India* where he vividly described ‘India’. He said and I quote, “**India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible**

threads. Overwhelmed again and again, her spirit was never conquered and she remains unsubdued and unconquered. About her illusive quality of a legend of long ago some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet real and present and pervasive.” (Unquote)

5) This gathering of the Indian Orthodox Church is a reflection of that plurality and indeed, the very idea of India, because I understand that the Orthodox Church community of India is not only an ancient one that dates back 2000 years but also an indigenous one that assimilated the local customs and traditions and became part of the mosaic of Bharat. The ‘**Niti Shanti Kendra**’ for promoting peace and justice and the ‘**Sarv Dharma Nilaya**’ for inter faith dialogue and

cooperation established by the Church are a testimony to its efforts.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

6. Known as '***daughter of the dust***', Ramon Magsaysay award winner, Ms. Aruna Roy, needs no introduction. Idealism is her catalyst and commitment her driver. She, along with her colleagues, especially Shri Nikhil Dey and Shri Shankar Singh, has tirelessly worked for accessing constitutional rights for the poor by vigorously advocating for Right to Information, Employment, Food Security and much more. She worked as a member of India's National Advisory Council from 2004-06 and 2010-13. As member of the Council she played a crucial role in shaping of the national legislations for the Right to Information and the Right to Employment law (MGNREGA) in 2005.

7. During my tenure as a Minister, I had many opportunities to interact with Ms Aruna Roy. We may have disagreed and may have had divergent opinions on many issues but agreed on one thing that **accountability and transparency in governance** are articles of faith. Her commitment towards the most marginalised sections of society and her conviction that a citizen has the right to know what its government is doing, tells the story of how ordinary people can come together and prevail against great odds, to make democracy more meaningful.

Dear Friends,

8. Gandhiji saw India as an inclusive nation where every section of our population lived in dignity and equality. I recall that he once said and I quote, ***“India’s soul lives in her villages.”*** It is therefore so

appropriate that the Sophia Society of the Orthodox Church has decided to confer the Sixth Dr Poulos Mar Gregorios Award to Ms. Aruna Roy and the MKSS in celebration and recognition of the work that they have done for the upliftment of the poorest of the poor, especially in the villages and communities of north India.

9) In three years from now, India will celebrate its 75th year of Independence in 2022. The country stands on the threshold of being a global economic and geo-political power. We have even made great strides in outer space.

10) But, despite all the above achievements, it is a paradox of our nation that a significant population lives in poverty. Let us, together, here and now, pledge

to do our best towards lifting them up from that position. That should be our vision for India@75.

11) This vision of India and even a new global order in that realm was also the dream of Dr Poulos Mar Gregorios. The institution of this Award and the work of the past five eminent Awardees, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dr. Verghese Kurien, Dr. P.K. Warriar, Dr Baba Amte and Dr. Karan Singh, is a commemoration of that vision and aspiration.

12) I hope the ideals of the great Dr Poulos Mar Gregorios will be carried forward with greater vigour in the years to come.

Thank you

Jai Hind!