

SPEECH OF THE HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR, DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, AS CHIEF GUEST, ON THE OCCASION OF RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSIDDH SAMMAN AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY ON 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2016 AT PROGRESSIVE ARTIST LABORATORY COMPLEX, LAMBOIKHONGNANGKHONG, IMPHAL WEST

Smt. Aruna Oswal ji,
Chairperson of Oswal Group of Industries,
Smt. Shallu Jindal ji,
President, JSPL Foundation,
Friends from Print and Electronic Media,
Distinguished Invitees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a great privilege to be in your midst today on this occasion of the Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman Award Presentation Ceremony. I am indeed very happy that Jindal Steel and Power Limited Foundation has chosen this benevolent initiative to focus attention on the richness of art and culture of this State. This year, JSPL Foundation led by its President, Smt. Shallu Jindal has specially organised at Imphal to confer the Swayamsiddh Samman to 25 traditional artistes of Manipur who have dedicated their full life to Manipuri art form such as Thangta, Manipuri dance, Pena and other ethnic performing arts.

Providing social security support to select grassroot level senior artisans or contributors to art, culture and ethnic art performers is one of the significant initiatives of the JSPL Foundation. It is a matter of great pleasure and satisfaction that JSPL Foundation is able to touch the lives in the hinterland of the country and build social security support system for the senior artistes at the grassroot level who have been constantly contributing to the rich tradition of art and culture of Manipur and our country. This will enrich further the bond of cultural integration of this region in particular and of our country in general.

Manipur is today best introduced to the world through her rich performing arts and culture and not through its geographical position or size. Manipur can rightly be called mini-India as there are a number of communities, each having its own culture and traditions making the culture of the state on the whole rich and vibrant. It is largely through the Manipuri Dance that the whole world would know of the existence of such a tiny state in this far-flung north eastern part of the country. The grace and power of attracting the viewer's mind is superb in the elegant Manipuri dance. There

are subtle differences even between the dances of the various tribal communities while among the meiteis also, the pre-vaishnava traditions and the post-vaishnava traditions make for a unique blend of culture. It is, therefore, our bounden duty to preserve, nurture and enrich the pluralistic culture in the state and I would say the initiative taken by JSPL is one such step in this direction. I have also come to know that the Foundation has also instituted a unique initiative called Swayam Shilp. Under this initiative, a series of workshops are being conducted across India thereby providing artistes from the tribal inhabited areas of the country with a national platform. I am hopeful that Manipur will continue to figure on the JSPL radar.

I grew up in culturally rich environment under the great influence of my grandfather, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. He founded the country's cultural institutions of international fame such as ICCR, the Sangeet Natak Akademi. I am an ardent admirer of Manipuri culture – the rich cultural heritage of both the valley and the hills in the state. We all know that Manipur is passing through a phase of law and order issues and social turmoil. However, its rich art and culture and natural beauty always remain a bright positive for the state. Manipur has a huge potential for developing into a tourism hotspot for its rich art and culture and natural beauty. Poor connectivity is, however, a major deterrent for the tourists. I have already taken up the issue of improving the air connectivity of Imphal with other bigger cities with the Civil Aviation Ministry and to begin with, I have suggested for direct flights once a week from Delhi to Imphal and Mumbai to Imphal (via Kolkata) for making the travel easier.

One other important field where the Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman aims to identify, recognise and reward the grassroot leaders and social innovators is women empowerment. This is an issue very close to my heart and my commitment level to this issue of contemporary relevance is very high. My association with the women's cause has been from my student days and became more intense when I was nominated to the National Committee for Women constituted on the occasion of the First World Women's Conference in 1975 by the Prime Minister Late Mrs. Indira Gandhi. During those days, the focus of the issues on women was social marginalisation and welfare. However, since then we have travelled a long way and I have raised important issues concerning women on different platforms, both national and international. Women have remained marginalised sections in our country. They have been facing multiple deficits. The traditions and customs are often interpreted against the women. Over the ages, they have lost their identity as an independent social actor. It is difficult to breach this social milieu unless state or non-state actors make an affirmative intervention. This is where an

intervention as that of JSPL initiative assumes significance. There is an emergence of social awareness on gender issues. The society is recognising the sources of gender injustice and there is growing demand to correct them.

I congratulate all the Award Winners who are exponents in different cultural fields, such as Nata Sangeet of Manipur “Cholom”, Acting in Traditional Theatre, Singing of Manipuri folk song, Manipuri Martial Art, Khol Player, Pena Musician and so on. I also believe that there would be lot of unsung talented artistes in the far-flung areas of the state. We must endeavour to identify and encourage them.

Organisation of such a lively and meaningful Award Presentation Ceremony by JSPL Foundation to provide social security support and encourage the art lovers of Manipur deserves special mention for praise. The local artistes and their forum who have supported the JSPL Foundation in this initiative and also those artistes who have come from far-flung villages to participate in this function deserve appreciation.

I thank the organizers and all the participants for such a wonderful Award Presentation Ceremony. I am happy that JSPL is attaching due importance to its social obligations and taking such initiatives forward. Once again, I thank Smt. Aruna Oswal, Chairperson of Oswal Group of Industries and Smt. Shallu Jindal, President, JSPL Foundation for taking keen interest in organizing this excellent Award Presentation Ceremony successfully and for inviting me to this Ceremony.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.