

Dear sisters and brothers,

It gives me immense pleasure to be amongst you today at the investiture of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi Fellowships and Awards for 2018 and 2021 respectively. It was a great privilege to have given away these honours to such an assembly of accomplished musicians, dancers, theatre and visual artists.

Initially the awards, only four in number, were awarded for excellence in the fields of Hindustani and Carnatic music. Today the number of award categories has been increased to recognize and reward new developments in the artistic and cultural arena of the country. This is also reflective of the rich cultural diversity of our ancient land.

I am told, in view of the rise in the number of talented artists, the General Council of the Lalit Kala Akademi has decided to increase the number of awardees from 15 to 20 this year. In addition, three eminent artists have been honoured for their invaluable contribution to the field of fine arts as Fellows of Lalit Kala Akademi.

Friends,

Artists devote their entire life to perfecting their craft, and therefore, it is important to recognize and honour their artistic endeavours. Awarding excellence helps set a benchmark for other upcoming artists and helps in the promotion and restoration of those art forms. Earning recognition of such eminence like the Sangeet Natak Akademi awards and Lalit Kala Akademi awards not only lends a big boost to these outstanding practitioners of various art forms, but encourages them, as also others, to excel in their respective fields.

I am told that in addition to the awards, there will be four fellowships this year that will cover a wide spectrum of activities in the sphere of music, dance and theatre including classical and folk traditions from all over the country.

While the majority of awards have gone to the performing arts, we have a fair number of scholars here who have contributed to our understanding of arts through their research and writing. There are also teachers and institution-builders who have served as stepping stones in enabling the transmission of these arts to a new generation. I would like to congratulate all of you for your splendid efforts in promoting various art forms. Our artists have strengthened the thread of continuity connecting our rich past in all its glory, to the present and future. It is the duty of each one of us to preserve and promote our grand cultural traditions and various art forms.

India's rich tradition of Folklore is one area that needs our immediate attention and calls for urgent action. With the passage of time various forms of folk traditions have been on a decline. The onus is upon us to make every effort to preserve our great folk traditions.

Dear sisters and brothers,

As you all are aware, we are celebrating Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to commemorate 75 glorious years of India's independence. The Mahotsav celebrates India's rich culture, its people and their achievements and contribution to the growth of the nation. There are a series of festivals that are being organized across the country to celebrate India's remarkable evolutionary journey.

The festival is also honouring our freedom fighters without whose efforts and sacrifices we would not have achieved independence. Friends, as we celebrate our national icons, there is a need to recognize the contribution of the many unsung heroes who were very popular in their respective regions and whose countless acts of courage made the British tremble. Many stalwarts used their creative energies in visual and performing arts in the cause of freedom of their motherland. Art, considered as a source of entertainment, became a powerful political weapon in their hands. Through the medium of art, stories of British oppression were conveyed in a powerful manner.

Music too had a significant role to play in India's fight for independence. Fiery patriotic songs and poems of Rabindranath Tagore, Subramania Bharati, Kazi Nazrul Islam and several others inspired the masses and aroused strong feelings of nationalism. 'Vande Mataram' from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's political novel *Anandamath* became the battle cry of freedom fighters as they willingly laid down their lives for their country.

Swadeshi movement also impacted the world of art and galvanized our writers, thinkers, performers and artists against the British. Kala Bhavan, the art school at Shantiniketan played a remarkable role in reviving the crafts of India and inspiring socially relevant public art. The contribution of our freedom fighters and organizations through powerful artistic expression is integral to our freedom struggle and must not be forgotten.

Art enriches life, widens our intellectual frontiers and is truly the backbone of a cultured society. We in India have a grand tradition of highly refined art, backed by theories and forms mentioned in our ancient texts. Encyclopedic treatise like the second century *Natyashastra* continue to influence the performing arts in contemporary India. References to instrumental and vocal music abound in Vedic literature while the *Shilpashastras* point to a long unbroken tradition of visual and plastic arts. Practitioners of these arts find themselves going back to these texts even today. Visual and performing arts are intertwined with the intangible cultural heritage of our nation. They must be preserved as they shape our national identity.

Friends, the language of art is universal. It unites people across cultures, influences and inspires them, thus becoming a powerful agent of change in the process. One important lesson we take back today is that a journey back to the roots of India's past could be useful in redefining the present and future.

In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Art contains in itself the deepest principles of life, the truest guide to the greatest art, the Art of Living. The true life, the idea of Indian culture, is itself a unity and an art, because of its inspiration, by one ruling passion, the desire to realize a spiritual inheritance. All things in India have been valued in the light of this desire."

Let us enrich our lives by learning, appreciating and promoting various art forms around us. I would like to appeal to educational institutions to give equal importance to art subjects in their curriculum. I also urge parents to encourage their children to learn any of the art form they are inclined towards. Exposure to creativity and art at an early age will help children become more aware of their surroundings and help them lead a more meaningful life.

Jai Hind!"

