

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF
INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF ‘AMAR UJALA SHABD SAMMAN’**

I am happy to be here today on the occasion of *Amar Ujala Shabd Samman*. At the outset I would like to congratulate all the award winners of today for their noteworthy contributions in the field of literature.

2. It is heartening that a print media house has come forward to go beyond its incumbent duty of being the “Watchdog of Democracy” and is institutionalizing a galaxy of awards to promote literature. The *Amar Ujala* Group through the *Amar Ujala* Foundation, today, has taken a commendable step in the direction of promotion and strengthening of the plethora of Indian languages that we are all proud of. “*Amar Ujala Shabd Samman*” is a novel initiative to acknowledge the contributions of literary scholars.

Dear Friends, Ladies & Gentlemen,

3. Literature is the lifeblood of any society, mirroring its triumphs and challenges, its anxieties and its possibilities. And we, in our great country, have been blessed with a strong literary lineage of writers, poets, intellectuals and thinkers who have chronicled the times, enriched the intellectual traditions and earned India the well-deserved title of **Vishwaguru**. Swami Vivekananda has rightly said and I quote, “*Every idea that you have in the mind has a counterpart in a word; the word and the thought are inseparable. The external part of one and the same thing is what we call word, and the internal part is what we call thought. No man can, by analysis, separate thought from word.*” It is the thoughts of the authors who represented and mirrored their contemporary ethos which has translated into the great body of literary treasure we get to read today.

Dear Friends,

4. I have said in the past and I repeat that efforts merely on part of government alone can never be sufficient in preserving, promoting and propagating art and literature. Society, as a whole, will have to rise up to this task and it is only logical that philanthropists take the leadership role in doing so. It is against this backdrop that I find *Amar Ujala Shabd Samman* a very timely, well thought and sincere effort to acknowledge and honour the best coming up in and between Indian languages' literature.

5. The French, the Russian, the Chinese, the Japanese or the Spanish establish beyond doubt that Societies over-whelmed by non-indigenous languages seldom achieve greatness. Our nation is many notches above in this aspect since it has, over the centuries, had the capacity of not only surviving but assimilating the foreign into the indigenous. It is, therefore, necessary that while we keep our minds open to all linguistic influences, we continuously strive to promote and perpetuate our indigenous linguistic and literary heritage. Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Geetanjali* enthralled the world. There is a need to take the creative genius of Indian languages to the world audience. There is a vast international audience that awaits exposure to our vernacular literature and it will be the only natural for us to respond to their urge.

6. The collective Indian wisdom is doing wonders the world over. We can comfortably claim to have one of the richest repositories of knowledge preserved in dozens of our languages. India boasts of 121 languages (22 scheduled) and 270 mother tongues. Majority of Indian masses deliberate in native languages/dialects and the most intimate cosmos of experiences of our masses are communicated and understood in our own native languages. But it is also a grim fact that languages have become an issue of deep socio-political ramifications. Bangla, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil, Hindi and many more languages, apart from Sanskrit which is the mother of many Languages, have collectively enriched Indian wisdom. The need of the hour is to create and strengthen a multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder process of continuous dialogue between various Indian languages.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

7. I would like to congratulate the team behind the selection of Mr Girish Karnad and Mr Namvar Singh for their Life Time Contribution to the enrichment of Kannada and Hindi literature respectively. Both of them have surpassed the boundaries of their mother tongues to embrace, evaluate, and synthesize the creative genius of other languages, thereby enriching their own languages, their mother tongues. I also extend my heartiest congratulations to the recipients in different categories.

8. I had the opportunity to go through the comments made by different Jury members and the awarded litterateurs. They spoke about the freshness of thought, style and rhythm that is emerging in Indian prose and poetry. I find in this collective creative wisdom an immense potential for the time to come. I would like to quote from two comments of the Jury, just to remind you of the intellectual alertness and depth of their assessment. Commenting on why he chose Fugati Ka Joota as the best novel, Shri Gyan Ranjan, says, “ये कहानियाँ नूतन, कल्पनाशील, व्यंग और भाषाशिल्प के साथ एक तरह का मास्टरस्ट्रोक हैं” Shri Manglesh Dabral commented on R. Chetankranti’s poetry title *VEERTA PAR VICHLIT*, aptly summarizing the cosmos of Chetankranti’s vision saying, “ये कविताएँ ताकतवर के बरक्स कमज़ोर, मर्दों के बरक्स औरतों, बड़ी चीज़ों के बरक्स मामूली चीज़ों, महानगरों के बरक्स कस्बों की मासूम संवेदनाओं की कविताएँ हैं”

9. I would also like to mention my special appreciation for the Award on translation between two Indian languages, the *Bhasha Bandhu Award*. The wealth of wisdom of various Indian languages can become Collective-Common wisdom of the nation only through smooth exchange and vibrant, timely and accurate translation is the most important facilitator of this process. I am quite hopeful that Gorakh Thorat’s translation would really prove to be a “दूर तक सार्थक अनुवाद”

10. In India, regional languages are the vehicles of Indian thought and culture. They are also a link between our traditional knowledge, ancient civilization and modern progress. Our efforts should be to motivate translations between Indian languages, so that participation of all, including the rural population, can be ensured in the progress of the country. For this, it is essential that simple translation of literature,

including technical books is made available in Hindi and other Indian languages.

11. Towards the end, even as we glorify the literary “words”, through the “***Shabd Samman***” today, I would like to underline the power of the written and spoken ‘words’. For millennia this word has expressed the musings of millions and has been on many occasions sought to be put down by the powers that be. Indeed, for civilizations to survive, the sanctity of the ‘word’ will have to be upheld and attempts to suppress it, thwarted.

12. I would once again like to congratulate Amar Ujala and Amar Ujala Foundation for the values, ethos and the contribution to society and bringing cultures together in this time of transition when local languages seemed to have taken a back seat.

It is indeed a very commendable effort and I am happy to be a part of this.

Thank You

Jai Hind