

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF CONFERRING OF THE 52ND JNANPITH AWARD ON PROF. SANKHA GHOSH

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It gives me immense pleasure to be presenting the 52nd Jnanpith Award to Prof. Sankha Ghosh, the 6th recipient in the Bengali language.

2. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction that the Jnanpith Award, in the institution of which the Presidency, under the first President Dr Rajendra Prasad was closely involved, has reached its 52nd edition. In the process it has encouraged and enhanced Indian literature, like never before.

3. After Dr. Chandrasekhra Kambar for Kannada, Dr. Pratibha Ray for Odia, Dr Kedarnath Singh for Hindi and Dr Raghuvveer Chaudhary for Gujarati, it is my pleasure and honour to be conferring the 52nd Jnanpith Award for Bengali, my own mother tongue, on Sankha Ghosh.

4. A poet and critique par excellence, a teacher of reputation, a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award, way back in 1977, Padma Bhushan Prof. Sankha Ghosh is indeed the most deserving recipient of this award.

5. A professor of Bengali and an authority in his own right on the works of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Sankha Ghosh represents the fluid brilliance that characterizes India's multifarious literary genius. It is indeed an example of his brilliant fluidity that an author who strove to master Bengali academically, expressed himself in perhaps the most difficult literary genre of poetry.

6. In conferring the award on Prof. Sankha Ghosh the selection board noted that his poetic idiom and experiments with various poetic forms mark his greatness as a creative talent. They also observed that Ghosh's poetry, while conveying messages, have remained free from polemics. One look at his works, be it *Adim Lata- Gulmomay*, *Murkho Baro Samajik Noy* or *Baborer Prarthana*, to name a few, and one would be left in no doubt about every word of the observations mentioned by the selection board to be to the point and correct.

7. An ardent writer of Bengali poetry, his literary works reflect a rare poetic style that encompasses not only a lyrical style but also a deep reflection of the social milieu. His poetry often takes on superficiality in our society and are indeed

a candid commentary on contemporary issues. I am sure that as a teacher, he would have positively influenced the impressionable minds of his students, as much as enriching the readers of his literary works.

8. As a writer, who has explored existentialism in his works, analysed the functional aspect of human life and profoundly expressed his thoughts in his poetry through images and symbols, Prof. Sankha Ghosh has rightfully joined the stellar constellation of his predecessor awardees.

9. One look at the stars in this constellation, gives us a shining view of the linguistic diversity inherent in the ancient artistic and linguistic unitary heritage of India. The authors in this list have each, excelled in celebrating this diversity and at the same time strengthened the essential cultural unity.

10. This occasion also gives us an opportunity to recall the contributions of Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain and Late Smt Rama Jain, whose efforts in promoting Indian languages and literature and establishing the Bhartiya Jnanpith remain exemplary. I have said in the past and I repeat that, efforts merely on part of governments 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 and the Corporate Sector takes the leadership role in doing so. Such efforts are indeed a part of Corporate Social Responsibility and I exhort the Captains of Industry to take a keen interest in this aspect of literary advocacy.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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 only natural for us to respond to their urge.

14. I remain hopeful that we will leave no stone unturned and the Bhartiya Jnanpith will play a leading role in achieving that.

15. I once again take this opportunity to congratulate Prof. Sankha Ghosh and wish him many more years of good health and literary expressions. I hope that the replica of Vag Devi that he has received today will ensure that Devi Saraswati forever guides his thoughts and pen.
