

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF RASHTRIYA SANSKRITI MAHOTSAV

New Delhi : 24.10.2016

1. I am very happy to be present amidst you this evening at the conclusion of the ten-day cultural festival, "*Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav*" organized by the Ministry of Culture and its constituent centres and akademies. This festival has a very noble objective, and that is to celebrate the spirit of tradition, culture, heritage and diversity of our great nation. I compliment Dr. Mahesh Sharma, Minister of Tourism and Culture, under whose dynamic leadership this festival has been conceptualized and organized.

2. The seven Zonal Cultural Centres, the Akademies and other institutions under Ministry of Culture are playing an important role in preserving and promoting our unique cultural heritage. These organizations are doing a commendable job in sustaining and encouraging cultural traditions at the grassroots beyond the confines of the auditoria and art galleries. I am happy to learn that this festival has provided opportunity to more than 2,500 artistes to demonstrate their art and craft. By encouraging artistes, artisans and craftsmen, this platform has helped in uplifting their livelihoods while inspiring many other such talented and skilled personalities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. India has a rich and unique heritage of art and culture comprising classical music, traditional and tribal music and dances, modern fusion music, and instrumental music. Music, fine arts, *ragas* and *drasas* have been an integral part of our cultural life. These elements have all played an important role in our spiritual rejuvenation. By showcasing the composite Indian traditional art and culture including different folk dances, this festival has achieved a very important objective from the nationalistic point of view: integration through diverse cultural tradition. On this occasion, I pay my tribute to our great artistes, musicians, classical singers, *shehnai vadaks* and flautists for their contribution to the national cultural heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

4. Culture defines people. Culture comprises the practices of people identifying their shared goals and values. A flourishing culture also propels creativity in the people leading to development on all fronts. India may be a young nation but it is an old civilization dating back a few thousand years. The accumulation of cultural wealth over the centuries is immense. At the same time, there has been assimilation of ideas and values. This has resulted in a nation which is diverse and represented by plurality in its culture.

5. India is a multi-faceted nation of 1.3 billion people, 122 languages, 1600 dialects and 7 religions and yet existing under one system, one flag, one Constitution and one type of

administration. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once observed and I quote: "*It is a country held together by strong but invisible threads*" (unquote). In a pluralistic society, the values of tolerance, respect for contrary views and patience are essential in our citizens particularly the youth. Pluralism and tolerance have been the hallmark of our civilization. This core philosophy must continue unabated. For, India's strength lies in her diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

6. Diversity is a double-edged sword. If all of us work together in harmony with unity of purpose, we can achieve tremendous heights as a nation. However, if different strands pull apart in different directions, it will only negate the good. India has always stood out as a beacon of harmonious co-existence in front of the world where in many parts people are fighting people to lunge further into darkness. Let our diversity continue to be our strength.

7. We can thrive on our plurality if there is greater understanding and appreciation among our countrymen about each others' cultures, tastes and habits. Physical distance should not be allowed to come in the way of our citizens engaging with one another in the field of culture. The more the exchanges and interactions between our people, the greater will be the knowledge and understanding of one another. Particularly, the youth of our country – the internet generation - who are also exposed to the world outside must know and learn to value their own roots. This is particularly relevant as there is growing inquisitiveness in the western world and outside about ancient Indian culture which is a rich source of spiritual inspiration. This cultural festival has boosted our efforts to reconnect our youth to their roots and India's rich cultural heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. Art and culture not only bind a nation together but also promote cultural harmony and national unity. This festival has also provided a forum for representing each and every dimension of our cultural tradition and showcasing it to the nation. The "*Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav*", to my mind, translates the ideal of 'unity in diversity' into action. I compliment everyone associated with this Mahotsav for its very successful organization.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.