

Text of the Vice-President's address at the Award Presentation Ceremony of Malti Gyan Peeth Puraskar 2025 (excerpts)

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Hon'ble Governor of Punjab, Shri Gulab Chand Kataria. All my life, I have drawn inspiration from him, and when in difficulty, I knocked his door early morning. It is coincidence that where I am, but his role is tremendous in that. One of the very senior leaders of the country and for Punjab as Governor and Administrator for Chandigarh, the right man at the right place.

Every word spoken by Hon'ble Governor Gulab Chand Kataria was like a Gulab. Chosen words, he premises his presence, gives us details of Malti Devi Ji in a manner which is remarkable. He has lived life on principles. Meneka Ji, it is very difficult for a politician to live life by principles. I am personally beholden and privileged and honoured that he is present on this occasion.

Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi was my senior colleague in the Ministry in 1990. We were elected to Parliament in 1989 together. I lost my way after first victory. She continued winning and became at one time a Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, with the highest number of years. She is one of the toughest women on the planet and I tested her might while being Governor State of West Bengal. There were dogs in Raj Bhavan that had strayed. I directed my staff to clear the area. I do not know what kind of communication channel you have. I got a call from her and she said, who is so-and-so in your office, Mr. Dhankhar? I could sense danger coming. I said, no one but accept me takes the decisions. And ma'am, please do not intervene. I have taken the decision to nurture the dogs at Raj Bhavan, to take care of them exactly as you want.

Shri Abhay Singh Chautala has played a pivotal role in my political growth. Chaudhary Devi Lal Ji happens to be one of the tallest leaders of this country who gave back to the society in terms of human talent. And that talent which was nurtured by Chaudhary Devi Lal Ji became Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh, in Haryana, in Bihar, in Southern states and he was as tall as was his physical situation.

I was not related to him. I was surprised when, one fine day, a practicing lawyer, Jagdeep Dhankhar, what a message that, Chaudhary Devi Lal Ji will be in Rajasthan, Jaipur, and you please call on him. At 6 A.M., Chaudhary Saheb's day had started much earlier.

I said, "Sir, I am a pleader." , "Knock the 'P' become a leader." It was that election where I came to know Menka Ji and Kataria Ji both were elected to Parliament in that election. Subsequently, I faced Kataria Ji. He was Home Minister; I was an opposition MLA. He was a very tough Home Minister. So, Shri Abhay Singh Chautala was instrumental at that age to handhold me and charted my path remarkably. But I took him only as a hardcore politician till I went in March to Jan Nayak Choudhary Devi Lal Vidyapeeth in Sirsa and in village Odhan, Mata Harki Devi College.

I had gone there thinking something of a much smaller size. What I saw, ladies and gentlemen, it competes with one of the best institutions in the country in terms of infrastructure, professionalism and depth of faculty. So when Chaudhary Abhay Chautala spoke to me that I have to attend a function of Shri Manoj Singhal, I could know it must be education. That is a facet not much known. My office got in touch with Manoj Singh, a remarkable man, but difficult also. He lives by his principles, sets very high standards of discourse. I was really gladdened to interact with him and then I found that this is a befitting occasion. He extended the invite to me.

The decision was already taken by me, Maneka Ji, when Chaudhary Abhay Chautala Ji so indicated to me. But his address today, Manoj Ji, your address I am referring to, was remarkable. It was a tribute of sublimity to your mother. And this was complemented so remarkably by the input of the Hon'ble Governor of Punjab, Administrator Chandigarh.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, for me it is an occasion to take pride and ever remember this moment, because those who are involved with education, they are game changers. They believe in change that is good for society, because education alone is the most transformative mechanism to change the situation and to make brilliant minds exploit their talent and potential.

But it was soothing to note that Ms. Ruby Jain is there to take the baton from you. Sooner you give the baton to her, I am so glad. She is the Joint Managing Director, MM Auto Industries Limited and Managing Trustee, M3 Foundation. We have another distinguished industrialist and academician with us, Shri Nand Kishore Garg, Chancellor of Maharaja Agrasen University. I also know him through his institution. I attended their function, it was at Vigyan Bhawan, remarkable function.

We have amongst us a distinguished Judge, Mrs. Deepa Sharma. A lawyer can never ignore a judge. She is a former judge of Delhi High Court. Let me congratulate the trustees and members of the faculty, because an educational institution is defined by infrastructure, but more importantly, by human resource involvement. I seek to congratulate at the outset the awardees, Mr. Ranveer Singh, Ms. Sunita Bajaj, Mr. Jagdish Pal, Ms. Jyoti Jindal and Ms. Bindu Anand. Congratulations to you. Continue exemplifying excellence of duty and commitment to education.

For me, it's a delightful occasion to be here at the 8th Malti Gyan Peeth Puraskar Ceremony, because those who have been before have been taller leaders. I will never be able to come up to that level. Chaudhary Om Prakash Chautala, Shri Prakash Singh Badal, Shri L.K. Advani Ji, former presidents, Pranab Mukherjee, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, and my immediate predecessor and a very distinguished person, a tall politician, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu. I couldn't agree more with Mr Manoj Singhal, when he said, this is an evening more than a celebration. I agree with him.

Mother is nature's most transformational platform, a natural one, irrespective of growth of artificial intelligence, internet of things, machine learning, blockchain, or what we call in an expression, disruptive technologies. They shall never ever be substituted to mother. Motherhood is that platform which gives us life and strength all our lives but if this is intermixed, subsequently by imparting education, it gets geometrical and incremental.

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I am at the right place as Vice-President. Every second I'm spending here is a call of public duty and a national interest. This sacred occasion is much beyond just conferring awards. It is about recognising soul of our society.

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We are here today to pay tribute to these 5 exceptional educators, who have gone beyond the call of their duty, shaping not just their minds, but future of bharat. Respecting and celebrating our Gurus is a time-honoured tradition in Bharat. We equate Gurus with divinity. —

How inspirational, motivational, full of depth. and reflecting our civilisational ethos. — , , : It says all, but one particular feature of these awards is boundless love of a son for his mother. I wish to recognise forward thinking, deep thinking of Mr. Manoj Singhal for instituting this award in the loving memory of revered Smt. Malti Mahendra Singh Singhal.

As reflected by the Hon'ble Governor of Punjab, the commitment of Malti Ji to girl-child education, to rural upliftment and academic excellence was not confined to her times. It echoes today in the very spirit of this award. It was very touching when Hon'ble Governor Kataria Ji said her education in pre-independent India, to that level. And she practised what she is preaching during her life.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are living in times where an environment of hope and possibility is dominating our national mindset. Bharat is no longer a nation with potential, it is a nation on the rise, rise is unstoppable, it is incremental in last decade, like no other large economy. In such a situation, Viksit Bharat is not our dream, it is our certain destination. This cannot be achieved unless we seek highest level of participation of every girl-child by educating her and strengthening every rural school. Our economic rise is fine, 5 , 8

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One third reservation for women.

Students of today are leaders of tomorrow, but they must have a fair share of women. Therefore it is fundamental for growth to be sustainable, that women empowerment is organic, sustaining. I can share it with you, and Menka Ji will bear me out. Still, we have to come a long way.

Awkward discrimination has ended, but subtle discrimination still remains. We have therefore to overcome it, and change our mind. A legacy that tells us that education is not transmission of information. It is not just imparting knowledge. It is one which results in transformation of lives.

Society can progress only on two counts. One, there must be authentic equality. And inequality, iniquitous conduct of others, must be curtailed. To achieve any ambition for Bharat, we will have to seek complete, wholehearted participation of our women and girls. The great monumental change that is taking place will gallop only by that.

Therefore we must invest in teachers. Investment in teachers will help one and all. I am happy to note that National Education Policy 2020 has made major changes. We need to adopt it a little more vigorously but I must caution one thing. A distinguished audience and very senior people in the dais will bear me out.

Commercialisation of education, commodification of education is on the rise. This should not happen. Education is like giving back to the society. It is service. I call upon the corporates to set up clean field institutions by liberally utilising their corporate social responsibility fund and ensure that the institutions become sustainable and they are not fleeced economically.

In conclusion, and there is always a big relief, friends' awards like this are just not recognition. It is not on account of what financial benefit they get. It is soothing to them. A powerful message is sent that teaching matters and therefore teachers matter and, the nation stands by those who shape the future with compassion.

To the five educators being honoured today, I offer my heartfelt congratulations. May your journey continue to illuminate the lives of countless others and inspire your colleagues. And to the memory of late Smt. Malti Singhal, I offer my deepest reverence. Through this award, her soul continues to teach quietly, powerfully, and eternally.

Thank you so much for your patience.

JK/RC/SM

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