

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF
DR. DURGABAI DESHMUKH AWARD FOR WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT**

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Swami Vivekananda had said, "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. A country and a nation which does not respect women has never become rich."

I am pleased to present the "Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Award for Women's Development" to the four organizations whose work is being recognized today.

It is also an occasion to reflect on the contribution made by Dr Durgabai Deshmukh to the cause of women and social development. She was a Parliamentarian, an institution builder and a pioneer in social development. She was the first Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. As a Member of the Planning Commission, she endeavored to integrate, consciously and systematically, the element of social development into the planning process. For this task, she set up the Council for Social Development as a platform for generating new ideas and for research, advocacy and field experiments in social development.

Dr. Durgabai believed that *"In the field of social welfare, the Government alone cannot initiate and carry out all the necessary measures for its citizens. Nor can it alone see to the preventive services that keep a society healthy. Only when spontaneous, dedicated work springs from the very soil it is linked with, can national efforts have real depth and meaning"*.

Distinguished Guests, the Directive Principles of State Policy provide that “*the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people*”. Government of India, through its programmes and policies has engineered a major directional change in public policy by its focus on inclusive development. Government is committed to the development of the weaker and vulnerable sections of our society. It aims at a process of rapid and inclusive growth based on empowering the citizens of the country through education and skill development. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the National Rural Livelihood Mission are important initiatives to provide employment opportunities. Similarly, the National Urban Livelihood Mission is shifting its focus from metropolitan cities to Class One and Medium Towns. The National Programme for the Urban Homeless is a new scheme which will bring shelter and relief to the destitute. Gender budgeting has been duly integrated into our planning process to ensure that each and every developmental sector gives due emphasis to the participation of women in our nation’s growth and progress.

However, achievement of the desired goals can become a reality only with the concerted effort of the Government, private and voluntary sectors. Voluntary efforts for social welfare has deep roots in the history and heritage of India. Whether it is empowerment at grassroots level or emergency assistance, the voluntary sector enjoys considerable advantage due to its innovative, multi-sectoral and motivated approach. Voluntary organizations have played an important role in the shaping of participatory democracy in India. They have reached into

remote and sometimes inhospitable terrain and approached weaker sections of our society with empathy and understanding. There has, therefore, been due attention, in our Five Year Plans, to galvanizing public cooperation through the deep and wide network of the voluntary organizations. Presently, the Planning Commission has initiated a Non Governmental Organisations Partnership System with the participation of about 11 Ministries and Organisations. These include the Ministry of Women and Child development, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Department of Higher Education and others. I am sure this initiative will impact positively on sections that it is intended for.

Distinguished guests, the organizations who have received awards today have distinguished themselves through their outstanding contribution to society. The Mizoram Widows Association, the Peoples Forum Association, the Sumangali Sewa Ashram in Bangalore and the Snehalaya of Ahmednagar, Maharashtra have brought hope and dignity to women and children who need the support of Government and society. They have given a new direction to the lives of disadvantaged sections of our society including widows, destitute women and abandoned and underprivileged children. They have worked in difficult and remote parts of the country rescuing and rehabilitating the exploited. They have given the gift of education to the deprived and underprivileged among them - and helped them to be self-reliant through vocational training, micro-credit and other assistance. I have no doubt that they will inspire the

hundreds of other organizations like themselves, located all over India - in rural as well as urban centres.

With these few words, I once again congratulate the Central Social Welfare Board for instituting this prestigious award. I offer my felicitations to the four awardees of the prestigious Dr Durgabai Deshmukh awards for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 and wish them success in their future endeavours.