

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF THE OUTSTANDING
PARLIAMENTARIAN AWARDS**

Parliament House, August 1, 2018

1. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to be associated with the parliamentary system as a member of the Upper House and now as President of India.
2. I was here, in the Parliament Annexe, on July 24, 2018, at an event to mark the completion of three years of the Speaker's Research Initiative. The Initiative is a valuable endeavour towards enhancing the contribution of parliamentarians. The "Outstanding Parliamentarian Award", being conferred today, also represents an important opportunity to honour the contribution of senior and impressive parliamentarians. I am very happy to be a part of this ceremony.
3. I understand that this award ceremony has been held in the month of August since 2008. The month of August has a special place in the history of India. Today, we mark the death of the great Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who gave the nation a clarion call: "Swaraj is my birthright!" His image adorns this Central Hall, along with those of other dignitaries. On August 8, 1942, the "Quit India" resolution was passed and what we remember as the "August Kranti" began the following morning, on August 9, 1942.
4. Our great dream of Independence was also fulfilled in this month, on August 15, 1947. After winning swaraj or freedom, we are pursuing the aspiration of suraaj or good governance. This is an ongoing process and MPs have a very important role to play in it.
5. I congratulate all those being conferred with the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award – Smt Najma Heptulla, Shri Hukmdev Narayan Yadav, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Shri Dinesh Trivedi and

Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab. We all heard their commendations being read out. We also had the opportunity to listen to their views. As parliamentarians, each of them has added value to the proceedings of the House. They have done so while maintaining the dignity of Parliament, using their knowledge and wisdom. They have conducted themselves in a manner that is a model for other members.

6. Dignity in discussion and debate, wit and repartee – these qualities in our MPs are inspirational for our young people. The tradition of rewarding MPs for their outstanding contribution is worthy of appreciation. I congratulate the Indian Parliamentary Group and all those associated with this process.
7. The soul of Indian democracy lies in Parliament. MPs are not just representatives of a particular party or constituency. They are the trustees of our constitutional ideals. The Preamble to the Constitution makes clear the sovereignty of the people of India. It says: “We the people of India ... do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution”. In a “loktantra”, the “lok”, the people, are the real power behind democracy.
8. The democratic tradition is not new to India. We find references to the “sabha” and the “samiti” in the Rig Veda. Rules akin to Parliament were adopted by Buddhist assemblies and terms like “prastav”, “sachetak” and “ninda prastav” were used in the proceedings. Our history has references to republics such as Vajji, Lichchhivi, Malla, Shakya and others. The hall in which the Lichchhivi held their sessions was called the “sansthaagar”. Some historians believe that decisions used to be taken in the name of the people. We find age-old instances of such governance in southern India as well as also among our tribal communities. As MPs in a country with such ancient democratic reference points, the responsibility on you is only greater.
9. Central Hall is the pivot of Parliament. It was witness to the drafting of our Constitution. Eleven sessions of the Constituent Assembly

were held in this Central Hall. Meetings continued for 165 days. At Midnight on August 14-15, 1947, the Constituent Assembly got complete sovereignty in this very Hall. And as you are aware, the Constitution of India was adopted in Central Hall on November 26, 1949. Great personalities, representing great ideals, drafted our Constitution. They assimilated the values of justice, equality, dignity and fraternity – all in this Hall. The MPs present here today carry forward this tradition.

10. On November 25, 1949, Babasaheb Ambedkar delivered a speech to the Constituent Assembly. The speech continues to guide us in discharging our parliamentary responsibilities. He had said that now that we have constitutional mechanisms to protest and make our point, we need to desist from a non-constitutional ways to lodge our protest and that we needed to avoid the “Grammar of Anarchy”. He also said that it would not suffice to be content with political democracy. Social democracy was also necessary. Dr Ambedkar was clear that government “for the people” was non-negotiable. He believed that liberty, equality and fraternity are interdependent and no one virtue could exist meaningfully without the other two.
11. Many wise thoughts have been engraved in the Parliament complex. For example, the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is inscribed at the entry of Central Hall. The entry to the inner lobby of the Lok Sabha has an interesting shloka: “Let all the Members of this Assembly brim with energy and vitality and abounding self-restraint.”
12. The first task you undertake after being elected to Parliament is to take the oath. This oath remains effective for the entire term of an MP. It is in our culture to remain true to our oath or our pledge, at any cost. The Constitution is our Gita, our Quran, our Bible and our Guru Granth Sahib. And all of us are committed to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and discharge our duties as per its wishes.

13. MPs are accountable for the hopes and aspirations of millions of our citizens. This is a very big responsibility. The people of India, especially the poor and the underprivileged, look upon their representatives with great expectations. They nurture the expectation that their representatives will make every effort to improve their lives and those of their children. And for this reason they want to see their representatives busy and relentlessly at work for the welfare of common citizens. In Parliament, people expect discussions on their problems and suggestions on the resolution of these problems. To meet the expectations of the people of India is the touchstone we must use to judge the efficacy of the parliamentary system.

14. Members who prepare for a subject or a discussion and are earnest in their efforts during proceedings of Parliament stand out. We should encourage such qualities and such preparation. I am happy that several steps have been taken to help the members. As I mentioned earlier, the Speaker's Research Initiative is a good move in this direction. I compliment the Speaker of the Lok Sabha for it.

15. I am told that some state assemblies have also set up similar awards for outstanding legislators. I suggest that legislative assemblies in all states constitute such awards. And of course I remain confident that the Outstanding Parliamentarian Awards being conferred today will motivate other members to excel in Parliament and serve our people, our democracy and our country.

Thank You.
Jai Hind!