

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK 'THE
LIGHT WITHIN' BY MS. SIPRA DAS

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1. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be present amidst you this evening when this unique publication, "The Light Within" brought out by Ms. Sipra Das has been released by two visually impaired persons and I had the privilege of receiving the first copy.
2. At the very outset, I congratulate Ms. Sipra Das for doing this wonderful and unique work and for her sensitive portrayal of some outstanding members of our society who, though sightless, have been able to achieve such amazing personal victories. They are standing examples of hope and perseverance. Their triumph over daunting disadvantages proves that any goals can be achieved against all odds - as long as we approach them with courage and determination and faith in ourselves.
3. Reading through this book, I was struck by the optimism of the small children, men and women - young and old, featured within this title. I found that so many of them talked about an ability to see beyond what is visible and apparent, to see with their hearts, rely upon an inner vision and make an emotional connect with those that they interact with in a way that is almost magical and miraculous.
4. I was amazed to read about Anand, the coconut picker, who confidently climbs coconut trees and harvests more coconuts than other 'normal' boys. Vishal Rao, congenitally blind, managed to graduate in Political Science. He plays the flute and the violin and can

weave a fisherman's net. Kanchan Pamnani, who has an independent law firm, and advises clients on diverse complicated legal matters - from litigation to IPR and consumer rights and Kanchanmala Pande who dreams of crossing the English Channel, these are just some of the achievers featured in this Coffee Table book.

5. I was sad to see that so many of those interviewed have faced exploitation at home and outside. Some had difficulty in getting bank loans only because they could not see; one young man in Orissa had his entire share of the family's agricultural land usurped by his own uncle and he was left in a state of destitution. Today, the same boy, Nemaï has reclaimed his rightful share of the property, is cultivating it and produces enough to support himself.
6. Way back in 1916, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, as he gave a lecture at the Keio Gijuku University in Japan, had talked about a "different kind of vision": he described it as *"The mental sense, by the help of which we feel the spirit of a people...Those who have not this vision, merely see events and facts, and not their inner association."*
7. In that sense, perhaps most of us , cannot "see", despite the blessing of sight in our eyes - a God given gift that we take for granted. It is often thought that perhaps the sightless can see beyond the obvious - and perceive things in a more profound way than others do.
8. Throughout the history of human civilisation, there has been a belief that the blind possess the vision of the inner eye. Greek mythology abounds with blind prophets who could see into the future. Egyptian

tombs have carvings of blind harpists who could communicate with the Gods. Ancient Israel had revered its learned blind men who had exceptional powers. "The Lord opens the eyes of the blind," say the Hebrew scriptures. In Aramaic, a branch of Semitic languages, the word for blind—*sagi nahor*—means "great light." This deeper vision, illuminated by the inner consciousness, is the theme of Sipra Das's book: *The Light Within*.

9. While generally, photographers deal with the real world, capturing images, it is the photographers' mind that actually portrays an object or a person in its fullness. And I am happy to see that Sipra has brought to us such remarkable frames in her deeply perceptive publication. Sipra Das has given us an insight into the world of the individuals that she has photographed and written about - the realities of their daily lives and routines, their triumphs and tribulations.
10. I also noted that the blind heroes featured in her book do not consider themselves to be extraordinary in any way, though they are, yet it is remarkable how they make their way through the world as they perceive it with creativity and a cheerful resilience. They are calm and philosophical and almost inured to their sightlessness. I was particularly struck by the simplicity of their approach and their intuitive understanding of the world around them.
11. This publication will definitely make the reader more conscious of the tremendous capabilities of the sightless. Their experiences will, no doubt, give inspiration to not only those with similar challenges, but also to those of us who would like to reach out to help people like

them. I call upon all sections of society - especially the young – in schools and technical and engineering institutions, to look at the experiences of the kind of brave people featured in this book and be motivated to also contribute innovative and technical solutions that can be applied to their daily lives. We can make the visually challenged even more comfortable and enhance their capacity to participate in the different sectors of our socio-economic development

12. I would also like to felicitate Shri Bikash Niyogi for his role in publishing this wonderfully conceived work.
13. To each of those who are featured in this book, I offer my congratulations for their commendable grit and perseverance. Theirs is an example of the power of the indomitable human spirit.
14. I once again congratulate Ms. Sipra Das and wish her success in her work and future projects.

Jai Hind !