

Women's Empowerment

By Deepa Padhi

For three years now the TOS has been placing emphasis on Women's Empowerment. The effort has been led by members in two countries, India and Africa, where the need for increased human rights and safety for women is greatly felt. In the following article, Deepa Padhi, President of the TOS in Odisha, India, writes in honour of all women, and especially Smt. Droupadi Murmu, Governor of Jharkhand, who was recently awarded the 'Empowered Woman of Odisha Award'.

The President speaks:

The Theosophical Order of Service, Odisha, India is celebrating International Women's Day as it has all the grounds to do so. We had great women leaders like Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Dr Annie Besant and Dr Radha Burnier, who proved themselves as truly empowered women and tried to empower other women of their time. We pay sincere homage to them on this great occasion.

International Women's Day is observed world-wide on March 8. Its roots can be traced to 1908, when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding voting rights, better salary and shorter working hours. The day was recognised by the United Nations in 1975. This day symbolises the struggles that women all around the world have undergone for equal opportunities and rights. This day also celebrates the achievements of women in their various fields. In fact, this day reminds us where we stand and how far we need to go. This is also the time when we should evaluate ourselves by identifying our strengths and weaknesses. For women everywhere, we have to continue our struggle for equality and rights keeping in view this year's theme of "Press for Progress." But as far as individual empowerment is concerned, self-awareness is necessary. As the *Gita* says, "Uddharet atmanam atmana," meaning 'raise yourself by yourself.' In today's world women have become financially and professionally empowered. Yet the most important need, the inner (spiritual) empowerment, has been totally ignored. In fact, women are born with unique attributes, but unfortunately they are losing

this understanding. As Jalaluddin Rumi has said, “You were born with wings. Why prefer to crawl through life?”

Women’s power lies within. Education, political and professional careers, and equal opportunities will make them more efficient, affluent, competent, independent, daring and accomplished no doubt, but these cannot empower them unless their hidden qualities are unfolded. Qualities like self-confidence, courage, determination, tolerance, patience, commitment, creativity, sensitivity and empathy are necessary for a woman to be truly empowered.

Today we are facing a paradox. On one hand, we are speaking of Women’s Empowerment and on the other, we find the female species dying out as a result of foeticide, infanticide, rape, murder, honour killing and bride burning.

We are in a time of transition and it is going to get more difficult ahead. If our girls are to be alive, if our world is to survive, then the truly (spiritually) empowered women, the change makers, must step in to help. First of all, it is the mind-set of both men and women that needs to be changed, and the empowered leaders should help with this change.

Empowering women should start from within our own families. As it is aptly said, “Don’t you know yet? It is your Light that lights the world.”

Today, the Theosophical Order of Service, Odisha Region, is felicitating the Governor of Jharkhand, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, with the ‘Empowered Woman of Odisha’ award. We feel proud of her as she belongs to the State of Odisha.

This honour is being given to her, not just because she holds the highest position in Jharkhand, but because of the way she has handled her life with courage, confidence, tolerance, commitment and determination when it was almost shattered by repeated personal tragedies. Despite the challenges, she was able to gather herself together and again stood up to serve the people. She is an icon, not only for the women of Odisha or Jharkhand, but for the whole populace of women for many upcoming generations. On behalf of TOS Odisha, I salute her.