

Address by Ms. Anu Aga, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and Chief Guest at the ILC-I Awards function on the 17th of November, 2012 in Pune.



I want to compliment the organizers for starting the programme right on time and ending exactly on time. This is something extremely rare in India and once again I want to appreciate it.

I am honoured and privileged to be invited here today on the occasion of the Anjani Mashelkar Inclusive Innovation Award for two reasons.

First of all, this is not like the typical awards given to high performers or superstars in the corporate sector. These recipients are certainly achievers, but more important, their work promises to create a positive impact on the lives of old people.

There was a time when our joint family system used to take care of our old and needy. However, with economic pressures, very often the husband and wife both have to go out and work, including move to foreign countries. Taking care of the old, under such circumstances, becomes difficult. There is also a shift in values and increasingly, the young do not consider it their duty to look after their aged. Large number of aged are neglected in urban India and yet we as a society have not adequately accepted this reality and assume that the family will take care. Many suffer from multiple deprivations e.g. an old person who happens to be poor and a woman and who is mentally sick. We all must have witnessed such women wandering the streets of our cities in a pathetic state. Hence, this award is a wonderful and thoughtful initiative as it sensitises all of us to the needs of the old and vulnerable. It also makes us pause and realise that today's old were once young and energetic and were hopeful of days to come.

The second reason why I readily agreed to be here today – this award has been instituted by a person whom I admire and look up to, my good friend Raghunath Mashelkar. Dr. Mashelkar has been an illustrious example of how with a supporting mother, hard work and positive energy, a person can overcome his limiting circumstances and become a distinguished citizen of India.

For those of you who may not be aware of his early childhood, let me share some essential details. Raghunath's father died when he was only six years old, and his mother migrated to Mumbai from their native Goa village. Though almost illiterate, with great difficulty, his mother Anjani Mashelkar supported his education by doing a variety of jobs. There were times when they could not afford even two meals a day. She endured with dignity, the difficulties of being a poor widow to bring up her only child with great courage and determination.

During exams, Raghunath would wake up at 4 or 5 am and the mother would just sit besides him to ensure that he did not doze off. If ever her son did not get 100% marks in mathematics his mother who had never been to school would quiz him as to where he lost 2 or 3 marks. To excel was a strong message his mother gave. She went through all these efforts because she realized the positive value of education.

Due to their difficult financial situation Raghunath wanted to quit studying and start working so that he could augment the family income but his mother insisted that he pursue further studies and acquire a Ph.D and then do his postdoctoral research in the UK because she had made up her mind that her son should get the highest qualification!!

There is a line that "the future destiny of a child is always the work of the mother." The truth of that statement is amply demonstrated in this case of Anjani Mashelkar and her son. The boy, studying in a

municipal school and topping his exams, would eventually grow to be the eminent scientist and visionary-administrator whom we all respect today. Among his many honours, Raghunath Mashelkar was the Director General of CSIR, India's premier agency to spearhead scientific and industrial Research and is the recipient of over 30 honorary doctorates.

Apart from his several achievements what amazes me about Dr. Mashelkar is his ever positive attitude. He is one of the few persons who will always see the glass as half full and never focus on the empty part. Dr. Mashelkar reminds me of an experiment I heard about demonstrating the importance of the right attitude. There were two young boys, one was a spoilt pessimist and he was kept in a room full of lovely, interesting toys. In half an hour he came out saying he was bored. The second boy was placed in a room full of horse shit. He did not come out for over two hours and the experimenters got a little worried and went in and to their surprise the young lad was totally immersed in looking for something. When asked, the optimist responded "with so much horse shit there has to be a pony and I am searching for it". The second boy reminds me of our friend Raghunath and his incorrigible positive spirit. His positivity is infectious and I wish that he would continue to share it with our fellow countrymen.

I want to acknowledge Raghunath's wife, Vaishali who stood by him and has been a great source of support.

Today's award is in memory of Anjani Mashelkar, the inspiring mother who played a central role in shaping the life of Raghunath Mashelkar. This determined lady learnt to read and write a little and when she passed away, Ramesh found a note kept next to her savings kept next to the note which said "I would like you to do something for those helpless old people who suffer the additional tough burden of poverty." This Award was instituted by the son to fulfill the wish of his mother. Today is his mother's 6th death anniversary. Let us all bow our heads for a minute in remembering Anjani Mashelkar, poor in material resources but immensely endowed with the power of dreams.

The award is administered by the Indian Longevity Centre India. An eminent national jury selected the winners. This is the second year since the Award has been instituted. I am sure these innovations will go a long way to inspire others to come up with creative ideas and cost effective solutions to improve the lives of elderly poor people in this country.

In order to innovate, we need to have compassion and empathy in order to anticipate the difficulties of the old and the poor would have. It could be a safe kitchen or a non-slippery bathroom, raised toilet seats, simple and inexpensive support for walking, big buttoned telephones and the list can go on and on...

As a society we like to pay our homage to the elderly. We touch the feet of the revered old, remember the wisdom of old masters e.g. we have glorified Mahatma Gandhi but do not follow his philosophy.

Anjani Mashelkar in her lifetime created a gem of a son and in her passing away demonstrated great sensitivity towards the old and the poor. Learning from her life can we all find ways and means to reach out to this section of society? Remember most of us will be old and will want some sort of support – physical or psychological.

My congratulations to all the winners of the International Longevity Centre – India Awards. My special compliments to Myshkin Ingawale of Biosense and his team of friends. Myshkin has received the prestigious Anjani Mashelkar Inclusive Innovation Award and he has given up his job with McKinsey and has become a social entrepreneur. I wish him all success.

Let me once again thank Raghunath Mashelkar for inviting me here today to be with all of you. My heartfelt wishes for the continued relevance and usefulness of this Award for the old and vulnerable of our country, as wished by Anjani Mashelkar.

Thank you
