

We can make a beginning by asking ourselves

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The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind said that the effective strengthening of the human rights at the ground level is a collective task of the whole society. In this regard, the National Human Rights Commission has done well in spreading awareness and joining hands with civil society to further the cause. The President was speaking at the Human Rights Day Function organised by the National Human Rights Commission in New Delhi today (December 10, 2019).

Pointing out the contribution of Hansaben Mehta in the field of human rights and gender equality, the President said that we can make a beginning by asking ourselves if we, as a society, have lived up to her vision of equal rights and equal dignity of women. Unfortunately, a series of events in the recent past force us to think again. Incidents of heinous crime against women are reported from many parts of the country. This is not limited to one place or one nation. In many parts of the world, human rights of those who are vulnerable are flagrantly violated. Thus, the ideal way to commemorate the World Human Rights Day is for the whole world to introspect what more we need to do to live up to the letter and spirit of the sacred text of the Declaration.

The President said that along with such introspection, we should also undertake the task of reinterpreting the document and expanding the notion of human rights. All we need are empathy and imagination. For example, children and forced labourers or consider the plight of those put in jails, while they await trial for a petty crime they might not have even committed. These issues deserve urgent attention to make a harmonious society compliant of the Human Rights Charter.

The President said that this introspection is indeed essential. But our understanding of the situation would be incomplete if we ignore the other side of the issue, which are duties. Gandhiji saw the rights and duties

as two sides of the same coin. Our failings in human rights, as in the cases of violence against women, often stem from our failings in the other. Our national discourse has rightly focused on the all-important question of human rights. It can also make more space for consideration of our Fundamental Duties too.

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