

**Press Information Bureau  
Government of India  
Vice President's Secretariat**

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08-March-2020 19:39 IST

**Educational and economic empowerment is important for women empowerment – Vice President**

**Indian culture and traditions respect women; we need to go back to our roots – Vice President Women safety and smile on women's face are index of nation's progress It is a woman's world – Vice President Calls upon all mothers to promote mother tongue Inaugurates iWIN (International Women Network) conceived by Foundation of Futuristic Cities Participates in Women's Day celebrations organised by Durgabai Deshmukh Mahila Sabha (Andhra Mahila Sabha) - P. Obul Reddy Public School, Hyderabad**

The Vice President of India, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu today emphasised that educational and economic empowerment is important for women empowerment.

Speaking at the inaugural of iWIN (International Women Network) - on the occasion of Women's Day in Hyderabad today, the Vice President said that that no country could make progress if women were denied equal opportunities and were made to lag behind.

Describing education as the key to economic, political or social empowerment of women, Shri Naidu said that it was the duty of each one of us to see that no girl was left out of school. He opined that an educated woman would possess skills, self-confidence and could become a better parent. "She would also provide better nutrition and hence ensure that her children are healthy," he added.

In this aspect, the Vice President expressed happiness over tremendous impact made by 'Beti Bachao, Beti Pado' in increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio of girls across all levels.

Calling for a change in mindset, the Vice President said that there was an urgent need to make boys respect girls from a young age. He said that that women were always given a respectable place in Indian culture and traditions and we need to go back to our roots.

Stating that life always needs women, Shri Naidu in his trademark style, said-

"First it is Vidya (education), then Lakshmi (wealth) and finally it is Shakti and Shanti (peace)"

He further opined that the gentle most and life giving elements in nature are identified as women. "Rivers in our country are named after women. From Usha (dawn) to Sandhya (dusk) we are at work seeking Annapurna (food)", he added.

Describing spiritual symbols, the Vice President stated, whether we chant the Gayatri (mantra) or read the Gita (epic), or we do Vandana , Puja or Aarti with Shraddha towards God to pray, we are still with women.

Maintaining that the greatest human values are feminine, Shri Naidu said, "when we grow older we want Karuna (compassion) or Mamta (love). From those who are angry with us we want Kshama (forgiveness)."

"It is a woman's world", he said.

Observing that even after seven decades of Independence, there were still reports of gender discrimination, atrocities and violence against women, the Vice President stressed that there should be zero tolerance towards such social evils.

He called for meting out swift punishment to those who commit crimes against women and said that ‘political will’ was required to curb crimes against women rather than merely bringing ‘new bill’.

Stressing the need for a special emphasis on education and empowerment of rural women, the Vice President said that promoting literacy among rural women and nurturing the spirit of entrepreneurship among them would pave the way for their economic empowerment.

The Vice President also called for giving equal rights to women in ancestral property, including that of the agriculture land and said that there was an urgent need to bring in uniformity in laws across the country in this regard.

Right of agricultural land empowers rural women financially and also enhances their self-esteem. We should ensure equal representation to women in family inheritance, including agriculture land, he added.

Calling peace as prerequisite for progress, he called for isolating and defeating all those elements that incite violence.

He complemented Smt. Karuna Gopal, President, Foundation of Futuristic Cities for conceiving iWIN portal for innovators to connect, collaborate and co-create solutions for contemporary problems faced by our society. He expressed hopes that the portal will help to accelerate women led innovation.

The Governor of Telangana, Dr. Tamilsai Soundararajan, Smt. Karuna Gopal, President, Foundation of Futuristic Cities, Ms. Manisha Saboo, Center Head, Infosys were among the dignitaries who graced the occasion.

Earlier in the day, the Vice President attended the Women’s Day celebrations organised by Durgabai Deshmukh Mahila Sabha (Andhra Mahila Sabha) - P. Obul Reddy Public School, in Hyderabad.

Addressing the gathering at the event, he said called upon the youth to draw inspiration from the life of visionary leaders such as Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh who dedicated her life in the service of nation at a tender age of 12 years.

Lauding Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh for establishing the Andhra Mahila Sabha for women education, Shri Naidu said that she fought for country's freedom and worked tirelessly for the welfare of the underprivileged.

He called upon all mothers to promote mother tongue by talking to them in mother tongue at home.

The Women Day celebrations were attended by Shri SV Rao, Cahirman, Durgabai Deshmukh Mahila Sabha (Andhra Mahila Sabha) - P. Obul Reddy Public School and Usha Reddy, Chairman, Durgabai Deshmukh Mahila Sabha (Andhra Mahila Sabha).

**Following is the full text of the speech at inauguration of iWIN-**

“My greetings to all of you on the important occasion of International Women’s Day! Indeed this year’s theme “I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights” is most timely and appropriate as it marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the declaration has been hailed as the most visionary agenda for women’s rights and empowerment.

How is empowerment achieved? It can be achieved by ensuring education and providing equal opportunities to women in all spheres. Gender parity should be the new normal and gender gap has to be a thing of the past.

The need of the hour is to put declarations and resolutions on gender equality into action. A girl should not face any kind of discrimination-- be it at home, school, college or workplace. My heart was gladdened when the Supreme Court had recently ruled in favor of granting permanent commission to women officers in the Army's non-combat support units on par with their male counterparts.

Dear sisters,

We need to remember that women constitute about 50 percent of India's population. No country can make progress if women are denied equal opportunities and are made to lag behind. Time and again, women have proved that they are second to none when provided with the right opportunities from political leadership to sending spacecraft to Mars.

However, education is the key to economical, political or social empowerment. It is the duty of each one of us to see that no girl is left out of school. Only, the other day, Parliament was informed of the tremendous impact made by 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padoo' scheme with the Gross Enrolment Ratio of girls across all levels being higher than that of boys.

It is said that "if we educate a man, we educate an individual but if we educate a woman, we educate an entire family". Thus, an educated woman will not only contribute to the wellbeing and prosperity of the family but can contribute to the development of society.

An educated woman will possess skills, self-confidence and can become a better parent. She would also provide better nutrition and hence ensure that her children are healthy.

It gives me immense happiness to see that girls have been outscoring boys in academics and receiving the maximum number of gold medals in universities and other higher educational institutions.

The notable benefits of women's education include decreased fertility rates, lower Infant Mortality Rates and Maternal Mortality Rates. While helping in the promotion of gender equality, education will empower women to become better decision-makers. An educated woman values the importance of education and will encourage girls to go to school.

It is unfortunate that 72 years after the country attained Independence, we still come across reports of gender discrimination, atrocities and violence against women. There should be zero tolerance towards such social evils. No civilized society can accept any type of discrimination or atrocities against women.

Swift punishment should be meted out to those who commit crimes against women.

In fact, it would be apt to recall what the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had said many decades ago. He had said: "I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going."

Dear sisters and brothers, basically, there has to be a change of mindset among the people and the society at large.

There is a need to make boys respect girls from a young age. The parents and teachers have a huge role in inculcating the right values among boys and molding their characters.

As a matter of fact, our ancient India cultural moorings have gender equality as a core principle. During the Vedic Period, Women philosophers such as Gargi and Maitreyi used to participate in debates on Vedas and compete with their male contemporaries.

The respect accorded to women in ancient times is best exemplified by this sloka: *Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata*, which roughly means "Where Women Are Honored, Divinity Blossoms There".

Respecting women, recognizing their talent and contribution have been ingrained in Indian way of life. Many of our rivers are named after women.

Whenever given an opportunity, they have excelled in different fields from sports to flying combat aircraft.

India's long, rich history has multiple examples of women achievers. To name a few, Prabhavati, the daughter of Chandra Gupta II, who performed administrative duties in her kingdom; Razia Sultana, the only woman monarch to rule Delhi and Durgavati the Gond queen. We should recount the famous poetesses like Molla who wrote Ramayana in Telugu; Akka Mahadevi, a 12th century Kannada poetess as well as the Tamil poetesses, Andal and Avvaiyar.

In recent times, women have broken the glass ceiling in many fields, including heading multi-national firms and have fared better than men in some areas.

For Instance, Lakshmbai, the Rani of Jhansi, Legendary singer, Lata Mangeshkar, Astronaut, Kalpana Chawla, badminton sensation, P. V. Sindhu, boxing champion Mary Kom, cricketer Mithali Raj, Tennis star Sania Mirza and weightlifter Karnam Malleshwari, just to name a few, are among the many women who brought name and fame to India.

While we have such a long lineage of highly accomplished women, there has been unfortunately a parallel trend of gender discrimination. This has resulted in low literacy, low education and consequently, low representation in the workforce and politics.

As you all are aware, following 2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, equal rights were awarded to daughters in their father's ancestral property. The pioneer in this regard was the Former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Shri NT Rama Rao who gave equal rights to women in ancestral property through landmark legislation.

However, it appears that it is not the same with inheritance of agriculture land with some states including it as part of ancestral property and some not. I feel that there is a need for uniformity across the country in this regard.

It should be noted that the right of agricultural land empowers rural women financially and also enhances their self-esteem. We should ensure equal representation to women in family inheritance, including agriculture land.

At the same time supporting rural women through livelihood skills is also an important step towards providing them financial independence.

Promoting literacy among rural women wherever lacking and nurturing the spirit of entrepreneurship among them would pave the way for their economic empowerment.

Thank You!

Jai Hind!”

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VRRK/MS