



## **64<sup>th</sup> Convocation Address delivered by Shri Suresh Prabhu, Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Government of India, during the Convocation on January 9, 2015**

Hon'ble Chancellor, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Hon'ble Minister of Higher and Technical Education, Govt. of Maharashtra and my good friend Mr. Vinod Tawde, Gaan Saraswati Dr. Kishori Amonkarji, one who has regaled us for years with her music, all the members of the faculties, all those lucky students who got degrees today - I won't say lucky, you worked hard for it – and all my distinguished friends.

Let me congratulate one of the icons of India the SNDT Women's University. Last ninety nine years they have been tirelessly working on the singular objective of providing quality education to the women of India. We as a society must be proud of this institution because this one singular intervention which has been made in terms of providing education to women will go a long way in making our society much stronger, healthier and better in the years to come.

Today is the day of convocation. But I would also consider it as the day of invocation. This is a day when we should remember very fondly with gratitude and pray to the soul who founded this institution almost ninety nine years ago, almost hundred years ago from now. This one man, Dhondo Keshav Karve, has laid foundation for a modern India many years ago when nobody realized the importance of education and particularly women's education. He had to fight his peers, his surroundings; he had to fight society to do something extraordinary at that particular point of time. I cannot remember any person who could have done much more for the society as much as he did in terms of founding this institution and taking path breaking initiatives for providing quality education to women. I fondly remember him and offer my best wishes to his memory.

We are facing a number of challenges. How do we understand the same and make one single intervention that will really solve many of our problems? Is there really a magic bullet? Is there one single thing which would have huge cascading

effect on many things? Everybody is waiting for that magic solution. I think there is nothing like a magic wand. But if there is one single solution to many problems, which will have spin-off benefits on many other sectors, that's, women's education. This is an education for you which will make sure that you can go through the turbulence of life with this one single achievement which nobody can steal from you. No one can steal from you the education that you have received today and that is something which will remain with you all your life.

Today you are entering the real world. So far you were in a protected environment at home and the university. Home was taken care of by your family members and at the university campus all your professors and teachers were protecting you. But now you will be on your own. You'll be fighting a real battle of life - and life unfortunately has become a battle. But then when you do that, you should be proud of the fact that you are well armed in terms of this high level of education. In fact I remember when I was young I obtained quite a few degrees. So every time I thought about why I should take one more degree, it was my father and my mother particularly who used to always tell me that this (degree) is something which will help you in your life and this is something which nobody can say that I've given to you. Probably parents can say that we gave you wealth. But you can always say that education has been earned by me. This is my own right. I'm sure in the next few years the degrees you've earned with such hard work will continue to help you to go ahead. Therefore I'm saying the convocation is an invocation.

This is a 'Deekshant Samarambh'. But I don't think this is a 'Shikshant Samarambh'. 'Deeksha' is over but 'shiksha' can never get over. Dr. Radhakrishnan had once remarked that everybody is a student for life. I believe you must continue to learn all your life, there is nothing like ending your education. In fact sometimes people taunt me while I am trying to do

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multiple Ph.D.s.

They say that's because I've nothing else to do. Maybe. But I have realized that the more you learn the more you realize your ignorance. Knowledge is infinite. The more you say you've acquired knowledge you've not really acquired everything except an awareness that you don't know much more than what you thought you knew. Therefore education is something which is so important that you will continue to work on it for the rest of your life. This is only one degree. You've to go a long way. So please go ahead and keep learning all the time. Education is something that you acquire even by just looking around. You should continue to learn and to acquire more knowledge and that's the only way you'll achieve something in life. I will request you to do just that. Thank you for inviting me to give so many degrees to so many people.

We are always wondering how to solve several problems that we face in the country. You remember a very great debate of our pre-independence era when Gandhiji was strongly advocating that political freedom was important. He thought once we become independent politically we can change our society. There was an equally strong school of thought led by Gokhale who said social reforms are important. If we reform ourselves socially we become independent of so many taboos that really bind us and do not allow us to go as much as we would like to. So let us free ourselves of these bondages. Political freedom will come automatically. That time Gandhiji's thought prevailed and we got independence. We should be proud of him. At the time it was not an issue of choice. It was not an issue of whether we wanted political freedom or social emancipation. We wanted both. Only the debate was what should come first. So it was a sequence issue.

Today in this whole milieu of discussion and debate, we have forgotten this important aspect of social development of making our society enlightened more than what it is today, identifying our own needs and finding our own solutions. If you do not have adequate social development then it will forever be at

odds with the nation's aspirations for a well rounded society. Societies also must progress as much as the political freedom is given to them. We really need to reform our society. How do we do this? One way is through education. But the second important aspect is, and I'm not making a political point here, women need to be trained and empowered in the true sense of the term and be uplifted. Therefore, we must make sure our strongest intervention is in that direction.

Let us consider South Asia which is one of the poorest regions. In UNDP's development programmes this region is at a very low level of development. At GDP level or at HDI i.e. in terms of Human Development Index level, we are at a very low level. Also look at another interesting feature of this region. This is the region which has produced most of the women heads of states. The largest economy i.e., USA, doesn't have a woman president yet. But Sri Lanka had Bandaranayke, Pakistan had Benazir Bhutto, India had Indira Gandhi as heads of states. In Bangladesh there are two women – one a contender and the other an incumbent. Both are women. What is the state of affairs in our region? Only political power given to a woman is not going to serve the purpose. We need to do more. So when we talk of upliftment of society we can't just confine ourselves by saying that we have given them political rights. We've given reservation to women in local self governments. But that's not enough. We need to empower a woman adequately. Women being half of society, it's like a paralysis if half of the body doesn't function adequately. How do we change this situation?

That's why we need to look at economic empowerment. To give them economic power is the only way to help them come up in life. I've seen this in my own limited area of operations in the Konkan region, where I was a member of parliament for four terms. I tried this experiment of empowering women. Nearly one lakh women of the region, some of them also from Mumbai region were given training. Some of these programmes were also in association with the SNDT Women's University. The result was very

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visible. One woman who was not even able to speak has started not only speaking from the stage but she is like a lioness now. Why was it possible? This was so because women know that no husband's hand can be raised against an educated and employed woman. When they realize that women have money in their hands they realize that women are now empowered. The importance of economic empowerment has been proved empirically by another woman called Ms. Smita Purushottam. She used to work for Goldman Sachs. She has prepared a report on BRIC nations i.e. Brazil, Russia, India and China. She said many years ago that these countries are going to come to the forefront. Nobody believed her then. She has said that even if you give minimum wages to all the women of India there would be a 1-2% increase in the GDP of the country. Economic rights are as important as political rights. Forgetting however to empowering women economically will not help us to do what we want to achieve. The dream of our freedom fighting era was that we wanted political freedom but we also wanted social emancipation. Both will happen in a parallel manner. To make that happen, education is a very important mean. And I know SNDT Women's University is offering a number of courses and programmes in that direction. So you are not just getting a degree. You all are getting means of livelihood. You are on your own and that's what really makes it special that you are the graduates of SNDT Women's University.

So let me offer you my congratulations. I offer you all my best wishes. I really look forward to ours becoming a great society that it deserves to be. The only way we can do that is to remove the aberration that for a few years, decades we forgot the importance of women which was always enshrined in our scriptures. A woman has always been worshipped and a woman has always been held at the apex of our thinking. Unless we now bring it to the mainstream of our economic and social activities we won't achieve what we want to achieve.

I think SNDT Women's University is a very important institution which will really make it happen. We need many more such universities to make sure that this type of a huge social movement may be launched through women's education. It will really herald into a new society, a new India that we all really look forward to.

Once again congratulations to all my young friends. As I said at the beginning don't forget that today you've got only one degree, not the last one. You must get into such an educative mode, learn more, earn more and do well.

Thank you very much.

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**Shri Suresh Prabhu, Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Government of India, delivering Convocation Address**



**Gan Saraswati Kishoritai Amonkar was warded Honoris Causa (Honorary D.Litt.) by Hon'ble Chancellor**



**Hon'ble Chancellor and Members of Senate and Management Council**

