

## 60<sup>th</sup> Convocation Address by Smt. Meira Kumar



**Smt. Meira Kumar- Honourable Speaker, Lok Sabha**

Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra and the Chancellor of SNDT Women's University Shri. K. Sankarnarayanan ji; the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Chandra Krishnamurthy; the Learned Faculty; Dear Students and the Staff; and Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me immense pleasure to be here today on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the SNDT Women's University of Mumbai. I feel extremely honoured and privileged to receive the honorary Doctorate Degree being conferred upon me on this memorable day. I would like to express my profound gratitude to the chancellor of the University Hon'ble Shri. K. Sankarnarayanan, the Governor of Maharashtra and the University Senate for selecting me for this honour which I accept with utmost humility.

I am very happy that the renowned Carnatic maestro Vidushi Bombay Jayshri Ramnath is being awarded the honorary Doctorate Degree on this occasion. I extend my heartiest congratulations to all the students on their achievements in academic life. I applaud the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra- the Chancellor of the University Shri. K. Sankarnarayananji, the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Chandra Krishnamurthy; the Learned Faculty and the staff members for their dedicated efforts towards successfully realizing the mission of 'Sanskrita Stree Parashakti' this year. The SNDT Women's University in India has over the years emerged as a premier Knowledge Centre. Its role in educating women in multi-disciplinary formal and non-formal streams is, indeed, commendable.

Women constitute nearly half of the world population. Growth, development and progress in any society are intimately linked with the development and empowerment of women. No nation can afford to neglect such a precious segment of human resource. Our great poet and the Noble Laureate, Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore once said and I quote: "Women is the builder and moulder of Nations Destiny. Though delicate and soft as a lily, she

has a heart, far stronger and bolder than of a man..."

Ladies and Gentlemen we are amongst the fastest growing economies of the world. Be it trade and commerce or financial matters or climate change and sustainable development or the issue of peace and security, we are a crucial player in any global attempt towards creating a just and equitable world order which is reflective of today's multi-polar realities.

In India, women account for about 48 per cent of the total population. They have played a critical role in our freedom struggle and in laying the foundations of our society. We believe that they are an integral part of our planning and implementation process. Our constitution envisages a social order that is just and equitable; where all citizens have equal opportunities and there is no discrimination on the basis of sex. Gender equality is the underlying principal of our Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt positive discriminations and make special provisions in favour of Women. Article 51 A (e) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to renounce practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women. We are one of the first democratic countries to give equal rights to vote to both men and women.

In consonance with the spirit of our Constitution, the planning strategy has also evolved from 'welfare' to 'development' and to 'empowerment'. Our Constitution provides for 33 per cent reservation in local bodies for women. Today, we have over a million elected representatives in local bodies. The 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha has the largest number of women representatives so far.

We were amongst the first countries in the world to have a woman Prime Minister and today we have a women President. The chairperson of the ruling coalition is a woman and so is the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha. It is a matter of great satisfaction that around 49 per cent of the women electorate voted in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections in 2009. Today, India is one of the world leaders in having professionally qualified women; From Sports to Literature to Corporate Sector to Arts and Entertainment, Indian women are excelling and making their mark in every field. I am proud to say that we have now a very long list of women achievers who have brought fame to the nation.

There is no denying the fact that we have made considerable progress, yet social evils like gender discriminations, female foeticide, dowry system and democratic violence still exists. The Female literacy rates have grown from 8.9 per cent in 1951 to 57 per cent in 2004, yet there is a gap of 20 per cent between the male and the female literacy rates. Approximately 87 per cent

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of rural women workforce is employed as labourers and cultivators, while in urban areas about 80 per cent of women are employed in informal or unorganised sectors at low-grade, unskilled or labour-intensive works. Primary production, activities like manufacturing and construction and trade, business and services continue to lag behind in terms of level and quality of entrepreneurship and employment due to lack of skill/ capacity building, education and training opportunities and technological and financial support.

I strongly believe that education is an instrument of social change. It enhances knowledge, wisdom as well as skill. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to cohesion, scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit. Education holds the key to the all-round development of one's personality. A good educational system produces and nurtures socially sensitive progressive, responsible and forward looking citizens. Hence it is critical for us as a nation, to ensure access to education for all children and augment our educational institutions.

The Parliament of India has enacted the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, to ensure access to education to all children including girls of the age of 6 to 14 years. Our national Policy on Education emphasizes on the removal of disparities and on equalizing educational opportunities by attending the specific needs of those who have denied equality so far. However, mere enactment of socially progressive legislations is not enough. Social transformation is the need of the hour. I perceive educated women like you as agents of change. You have to disseminate knowledge and act as catalyst for changing mind-sets and addressing gender stereotypes. You have to take the lead in creating classless, casteless inclusive society founded on the principles of tolerance, discipline, commitment and compassion where all individuals have the opportunity to grow and realize their full potential.

It is incumbent upon educational institutions to impart value based learning to their students. I am sure the teaching faculty which is engaged in one of the noblest professions known to mankind, will rise to the challenge of developing strength of character in their students. They will in addition to generating a thirst for knowledge stimulate an environment for nurturing enlightened individuals who will strive to create a just and equitable social order.

I would like to express my appreciation for the commendable work being done by the SNDT Women's University in the field of women's education. I am happy to learn that with a wide range of 12 Faculties with 4 campuses and 213 Colleges, the university is spread

across six states of India. I appeal to such Universities as the SNDT to utilize their potential in promoting greater educational opportunities for the women of the weaker section of the society.

I, once again congratulate the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra- the Chancellor of the University, the Vice-Chancellor and others who are associated with the University for their Achievements. My Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to the youngsters on completing their formal education and entering a new phase of life! For them, I would like to add the real achievement lies not only in obtaining degrees, not only in becoming doctors, teachers, scientist or engineers, but in for social transformation, economic development and national reconstruction. I am confident that the successful young women sitting in front of me will excel in their careers in the forthcoming years and contribute positively to the progress and prosperity of their family, the society and the nation.

At the end, I recall the words of my Babuji...if we claim to be civilized; we will have to rouse the conscience of the nation that at all costs, the honour of the ladies has to be protected. I believe, education of women is a powerful tool in realizing this goal.