

Literacy gives greater freedom to participate in society more actively: Vice President

One third population of the world is illiterate, a glaring gap in development;

Schools must get transformed into active, vibrant places of learning;

Confers Nehru and Tagore Literacy Awards

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that Literacy gives greater freedom to participate in society more actively and access better learning and earning opportunities. He was addressing the gathering after conferring the Nehru and Tagore Literacy Awards instituted by the Indian Adult Education Association, here today.

The Vice President said that it is indeed a glaring gap in world development that one third population of the world is illiterate. He further said that India has made rapid progress over the last seven decades and the country has tried to ensure universal primary education and literacy. Quoting the 2011 census report, he said that the literacy rate of the country was 73%, with male literacy at 80.9% and female literacy at 64.6%.

Stressing on the need to remove gender gaps in literacy and education, the Vice President said the one must recognize that there is a persisting gender gap of 16.3 percent and analyze the outcome of the literacy programmes implemented in this country such as Saakshar Bharat so that all the stakeholders can take-up the remaining task in the days to come in a sustainable way, he said. He asked the government, the civil society, the private sector and the media to work together to create a literate society, a knowledge society & a learning society.

The Vice President said that he is saddened by reports that reflect the predominance of rote memorization, lack of learning materials and inadequate attention to different dimensions of learning. He highlighted on the need to rethink education system and schools to review what is taught and how it is taught. Schools and colleges must get transformed into active, vibrant places of learning where students experience the joy of learning, he added.

The Vice President said that the country must move on from universal functional literacy to skill development and lifelong learning. He further said that learning is a continual process and we need to develop an efficient programme involving all the stakeholders to achieve the goal of building a learning society.

The Vice President said that 65% of the country's population is 35 years of age or under and by 2020 and it is forecasted to become the youngest country in the world, with a median age of 29 years. He further said that this is a crucial moment in India's developmental journey. We must realize the demographic dividend. We must focus on the youth and ensure that they have the requisite skills to shape their futures in the knowledge economy of the 21st century, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am happy to be with you today on the occasion of the conferment of Nehru and Tagore Literacy Awards.

I congratulate the Indian Adult Education Association for instituting these awards in the name of two eminent persons whose writings and vision have inspired millions around the world.

I also congratulate all the awardees for their contribution to the development and spread of literacy.

You all know that literacy and education are important indicators of development in a society. Spread and diffusion of literacy is generally associated with essential dimensions of today's civilization such as – modernization, urbanization, industrialization, communication and commerce. They are important inputs in the overall development of individuals enabling them to comprehend their social, political and cultural environment better and respond to it appropriately.

Higher levels of education and literacy lead to a greater awareness and also contributes to improvement of economic conditions. They act as catalysts for social upliftment enhancing the results on investments made in almost every aspect of development effort, be it population control, health, hygiene, environmental degradation control, empowerment of women and weaker sections of the society.

Improved levels of literacy also are pre-requisites of acquiring various skills. It is an indispensable

component of human resource development. It is an essential tool for communication and learning, acquiring and sharing information, a pre-condition for individual growth and of national development.

We are living in a world where 'text' dominates in most of today's life contexts.

Writing and reading have become indispensable skills for making progress. In fact, literacy is inevitably the foundation for lifelong learning. It is a tool that gives dignity and self-confidence to individuals. It gives greater freedom to participate in society more actively and access better learning and earning opportunities.

It is indeed a glaring gap in world development that one third population of the world is illiterate. In developing countries, one half of the children is denied the opportunity of basic education and these children continue to add to the number of illiterates.

India has made rapid progress over the last seven decades. When India got independence, the literacy rate of the country was 14% with female literacy as low as 8%. With the expansion of education system, the country has tried to ensure universal primary education and literacy. Thanks to these efforts, as per 2011 census, the literacy rate of the country was 73%, with male literacy at 80.9% and female literacy at 64.6%. Today, we have one of the largest education systems in the world with 789 universities and 37,204 colleges and 11,443 stand-alone educational institutions. However, according to the *Human Development Report* (2017), India ranks 131 out of 193 countries and 282 million persons cannot still read and write.

We have adopted a Constitution that has equality and inclusion as key principles. Our government has adopted 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas' as an overarching goal. We are envisioning an inclusive new India. To achieve this, we cannot afford to ignore this huge challenge. We have to recognize that there is a persisting gender gap of 16.3 percent. Clearly, we have to focus much more sharply on women's literacy and gender gaps in literacy and education.

The flagship programme of literacy intended to narrow down this gap and address the challenge of female illiteracy was "Saakshar Bharat Programme" which has concluded in March 2018.

The country should analyze the outcome of the literacy programmes implemented in this country including Saakshar Bharat vis-à-vis the target set at the very beginning in a candid and holistic manner so that all the stakeholders can take-up the remaining task in the days to come in a sustainable way.

We have a set of targets to be achieved under Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs).

Goal 4 of SDG clearly states that we need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

While the Government is taking the necessary steps to achieve these goals, we must certainly act together, act faster and act with conviction, competence and commitment.

The government, the civil society, the private sector and the media must work together to create a literate society, a knowledge society and a learning society.

I am happy to know that Indian Adult Education Association has always worked shoulder to shoulder with the government to implement the policies and programmes of adult education and hope it will continue to do so.

Sisters and Brothers,

We need to rethink education. We need to review what is taught and how it is taught. The schools and colleges must get transformed into active, vibrant places of learning where students experience the joy of learning. I am saddened by reports that reflect the predominance of rote memorization, lack of learning materials and inadequate attention to different dimensions of learning. There is much more to be done in terms of improving the quality of education.

We must move on from universal functional literacy to skill development and lifelong learning. Learning is a continual process.

Government of India has launched many useful schemes like 'Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan', Skilling India programme, Mudra Yojana and Startup India to facilitate this learning continuum so that adults not only become literate but also engage themselves in gainful employment to improve their quality of life. We need to develop an efficient programme involving all the stakeholders to achieve the goal of building a learning society.

I have been briefed about a recent study report entitled 'State of Youth Volunteering in India- 2017' published jointly by the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It says "India has an unrivalled youth demographic: 65% of its population is 35 years of age or under and by 2020, it is forecasted to become the youngest country in the world, with a median age of 29 years. As 250 million people prepare to join India's workforce by 2030, this group stands to be either India's biggest asset or its biggest vulnerability".

This is a crucial moment in India's developmental journey. We must realize the demographic dividend.

We must focus on the youth and ensure that they have the requisite skills to shape their futures in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Functional literacy and other skill sets as well as an ability to learn from resources around the world hold the key to making rapid progress.

We need institutions like Indian Adult Education Association to take this movement forward.

Your organization has travelled a long way over many decades and has kept the focus of the country on a vital aspect of national development. I would like you to continue your excellent work with the same grit and determination.

I congratulate the winners of the Nehru and Tagore Literacy Awards and hope they will continue to contribute to the fulfillment of the dreams of the two illustrious sons of modern India in whose names these awards have been instituted.

Pandit Nehru had reminded us all about the labour and the hard work required to "give reality to our dreams" and "to build the noble mansion of free India". His emphasis on science and technology in the early years of independent India and the establishment of national science laboratories in core areas of science all over India and the IITs have helped take India to great heights in technical development. However, he also recognized that education should be holistic and reminded us that "we should accept technology without leaving basic values which are the essence of civilized man". For Pandit ji, the object of education was to "produce a desire to serve the community as a whole and to apply the Knowledge gained not only for personal but for public welfare". Science and education, for him, was tied closely to social development. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had also dreamt of a heaven of freedom into which he wanted our country to awake. That heaven of freedom is characterized, by Gurudev, as a place where "the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free". Both these iconic personalities have had similar views on the centrality of human resource development in the architecture of national development. They believed that we should absorb the best from the world but blend it with the best in the Indian tradition as well.

Literacy and education emancipate people. They transform lives. We must ensure that this transformation occurs in every Indian home and that our children, youth and adults emerge into a learning world. All of us must create this New India where all citizens have the basic skills and are given equal opportunities to grow into lifelong learners.

I wish you all, especially the Indian Adult Education Association, all the best in future endeavours.

Jai Hind!"

AKT/BK/RK

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