

**Empowering women will enable them lead a life of dignity, respect and make informed decisions:  
Vice President**

Vice President's Secretariat

## **Empowering women will enable them lead a life of dignity, respect and make informed decisions: Vice President**

**True gender equity can be achieved when women are empowered;**

**The better half of humanity must get a better deal;**

## **Addresses the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Mahila Dakshata Samiti**

Posted On: 30 MAR 2018 3:45PM by PIB Delhi

The Vice President of India, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu has said that empowering women will enable them lead a life of dignity, respect and make informed decisions. He was addressing the gathering at the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Mahila Dakshata Samiti, in Hyderabad on March 30, 2018. The Governor of Goa, Smt. Mridula Sinha, the Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana, Shri Mohammad Mahmood Ali and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that there is enough evidence to show that women during the early Vedic period were seen as equal to men in all walks of life. He further said that our cultural moorings have gender equality as a core principle. We are proud inheritors of a culture and a world view in which women were not only treated equally but were revered, he added.

The Vice President said that India's long, rich history is dotted with numerous achievements of extraordinary women. Quoting examples of great women like Prabhavati, the daughter of Chandra Gupta II, Razia Sultana, the only woman monarch to rule Delhi; Durgavati the Gond queen and Rajmata Jijabai, famous poetesses like Molla who wrote Ramayana in Telugu; Akka Mahadevi, Andal and Avvaiyar and others, he said that India has a long lineage of highly accomplished women.

The Vice President said that despite our rich heritage, 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, he added.

The Vice President said that unequal access to education, gainful employment and growth opportunities are widening the gender gap and atrocities on women and domestic abuse are unfortunately tarnishing our image as a nation.

The Vice President said:

'We can hardly wait and watch.

We can't allow these social evils to continue.

We need to think and act.'

We need to build coalitions against gender discrimination. Government and the civil society must be active collaborators to achieve tangible results.

'The better half of humanity must get a better deal.

The bitter legacy of inequity must end'

The Vice President said that empowering educationally, socially and politically is the fundamental requirement for the country to unleash the forces of growth and achieve rapid progress. Without the active participation of women, establishment of a new social order may not be successful one because women constitute half the population, he said recalling Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, he added.

The Vice President expressed anguish over the incidents of girls committing suicide and said they are not unable to withstand pressure of studies. He suggested all those working in the field of education to counsel both the girls and their parents.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am extremely pleased to attend the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Mahila Dakshata Samithi, which is rendering invaluable services for the empowerment of women, particularly those belonging to the vulnerable sections through education.

Sisters and brothers,

We are proud inheritors of a culture and a world view in which women were not only treated equally but were revered.

As the sage Manu had said: "Yatra Naaryastu Poojyante Ramante Tatra Devathaa." (The land where women are revered becomes a divine place where gods dwell)

Ours is a land of Aapastamba, the author of Dharma sutras forming a part of Yajur Veda, who declared that women are as learned as men and that many "aspects of dharma not taught in Dharmasastras can be learned from women and people of all classes".

There is enough evidence to show that women during the early Vedic period were seen as equal to men in all walks of life.

For example, the philosophical debates of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, in which two outstanding women, Gargi and Maitreyi, actively participated, are ample testimonies of the status of women in ancient India. They were called "brahmavadinis" or learned exponents of the Vedas.

Our cultural moorings have gender equality as a core principle.

Adi Shankaracharya opens his beautiful hymn called "Saundarya Lahari" (The wave of beauty) with a clear statement on how Lord Shiva is totally powerless without his wife Shakthi. One complements the other.

Our long, rich history is dotted with numerous achievements of extraordinary women. 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; Durgavati the Gond queen and Rajmata Jijabai. 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.

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.

Gandhiji had lamented: "Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading , so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity; the female sex."

Dubbed by men as the "weaker sex", women, in general, have been progressively marginalized over the last century. Gandhiji's strong condemnation of this attitude comes to our mind as we reflect upon this injustice. He had said: "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel. It is man's injustice to woman."

Organizations like Mahila Dakshata Samiti have been striving hard to undo this injustice by focusing on education and economic empowerment.

There are formidable challenges and social evils in our society today. Unequal access to education, gainful employment and growth opportunities are widening the gender gap. Atrocities on women and domestic abuse are unfortunately tarnishing our image as a nation.

We can hardly wait and watch.

We can't allow these social evils to continue.

We need to think and act.

We need to build coalitions against gender discrimination. Government and the civil society must be active collaborators to achieve tangible results.

The better half of humanity must get a better deal.

The bitter legacy of inequity must end.

I am happy to note that Mahila Dakshata Samithi embodies the selfless nature of women and is truly a shining example of how a group of dedicated people can bring about change in the lives of the needy and downtrodden sections.

Apart from imparting quality education, the NGO has set up a family counseling centre, short stay home for women in need of immediate help and is also providing health care, pre-marital counseling and legal aid.

With women constituting almost half of India's population, their empowerment educationally, socially and politically is the fundamental requirement for the country to unleash the forces of growth and achieve rapid progress. Here I would like to recall what the father of the nation had said: "Without the active participation of women, establishment of a new social order may not be successful one because women constitute half the population".

Unfortunately, the literacy rate among women is lagging behind men even 70 years after Independence. The literacy rate among women has to be improved drastically to enable them get gainful employment or take up skilled vocations. Needless to say that education forms the foundation for empowering women. As had been most aptly said educating a woman means educating an entire family.

In fact, the IMF Chief Christine Lagarde was recently quoted as saying that India's economy could grow by 27 per cent by increasing women's participation in the workforce to the level of men.

According to India Skills reports-2018, the global gender gap report from World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests that India has slipped to 108th place i.e. 21 places down as compared to last year due to less women participation in economy and low wages.

The drop in women workforce is a matter of concern and this trend has to be reversed. While the government has initiated several pro-women measures to promote education and employment among women, a lot more needs to be done by other stakeholders, particularly the private sector.

A 2015 study by the McKinsey Global Institute said that India could increase GDP by up to 60%, or \$2.9 trillion, by 2025 if women participated in the economy at par with men.

It is calculated that women could increase their income globally by up to 76 per cent if the employment participation gap and the wage gap between women and men were closed. This is calculated to have a global value of USD 17 trillion, according to UN Women.

I have always been underscoring the need to improve female literacy rate and ensure greater participation of women in the work force. At the same time, it should be ensured that women are not discriminated in the payment of wages.

Ending gender disparity, ensuring safety at work places, providing access to healthcare, imparting job skills and creating more job opportunities are all aimed at empowering women. Empowering women will enable them lead a life of dignity, respect and make informed decisions—be it matters financial, social or even political.

On the advantages of educating women, a UN report based on data from 219 countries, said that for every one additional year of education for women in reproductive age, child mortality is reduced by a huge 9.50 per cent.

Dear Sisters and brothers,

In the modern times, certain aberrations have crept into our social life and we are witnessing barbaric incidents like rapes, female feticides and dowry killings. No civilized society can tolerate such inhuman acts and the most stringent punishments have to be meted out to criminals who perpetrate those crimes. In order to prevent discrimination and atrocities against women, concerted efforts are needed at all levels. Gender equality must begin at home and girls must not be made to feel inferior to boys or ill-treated. Families play a big role in shaping the attitude of children and boys must be made to treat girls with respect.

Of late, we are witnessing a disturbing trend of young girls committing suicide unable to withstand pressure of studies. While commending your organization for offering pre-marital counseling, I would like you to take up special counseling sessions for young girls. If necessary, your team of counselors must visit various educational institutes in phases to provide counseling to de-stress students. The parents of girls from poor families also need to be counseled on the need to send their wards to schools to ensure a better future for them.

Dear sisters and brothers, Indian women have demonstrated the possible heights they can reach when provided with opportunities. From astronaut Kalpana Chawla to Badminton star, P V Sindhu, Indian women have brought laurels to the country in different fields, be it politics, corporate sector, business, defence or sports.

Women have proven time and again that they are better than men at multi-tasking. In fact, many working women take care of the house-hold activities too and hardly get any recognition for their efforts.

True gender equity can be achieved when women are empowered in all fields—educational, social, economic and political.

Over the years, I have been consistently arguing that women must get a fair share in all tiers of governance, from gram panchayat to Parliament.

I once again express my happiness that Mahila Dakshata Samithi is celebrating its Silver Jubilee marking a long innings of outstanding service.

This is a moment of celebration and of rededication as well because the task you have set out is still incomplete.

I do hope you will continue your tireless efforts for many more years to come. I compliment Dr. Saroj Bajaj and her associates on the wonderful work being done here and wish them all success in their future endeavors.

**JAI HIND!"**

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