

Draft speech by Smt. D. Purandeswari MoS (HRD) on the occasion of inauguration of All India National Education Conference at Mumbai on 15th June, 2006.

I am glad to be here to-day to inaugurate the All India National Educational Conference at this historic city of Mumbai and to share with you some of my ideas on education and teachers' responsibilities in regard thereto.

Few global goals have been as consistently and as universally supported as the notion that every child in every corner of the world should have complete exposure to modern education. The World Conference on Education for all held in Jomtien in 1990 set this process in motion by adopting that the goal of Universal Primary Education be achieved by 2000 AD. The World Education Forum in Dakar (capital of Senegal) in 2000 reaffirmed and extended the Jomtien (Thailand) commitment. Universal primary completion and gender equity in primary and secondary education were affirmed again in the same year as Millennium Development Goal.

Education is not only a goal in itself but is also a powerful driver of social change. Combined with sound macroeconomic policies, education is fundamental for the construction of globally competitive economics and democratic societies. Education is key to creating, applying and spreading new ideas and technologies which in turn are critical for sustained growth. It augments cognitive and other skills and in the process leads to higher productivity and development. Education builds what the Noble Laureate Amartya Sen calls "human capabilities" the essential and individual power to reflect, make

choices, seek a voice in society, and enjoy a better life. In short, education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth, sound governance, and effective institutions. In order to ensure that a meaningful education is imparted to our children, it is essential that right type of teachers and instructors are put in place. Teacher education programme generally train our teachers to adjust to a system in which education is seen as a mere transmission of information and knowledge is treated as information 'given' by the teacher and taken by the taught with out question. In this system there is very little leeway for inquiry, initiative and innovation. This is because mostly the teachers training schemes do not give much scope for the teachers undergoing such training to have a critical examination of curriculum, syllabi or the course contents. Most of such programmes provide little or no opportunity for inquiry or investigation: In the process the teachers end up with a purely pedantic outlook and restrictive mind set which prevent them from serving as effective facilitators of social transformation. This mindset must change. Teachers must be encouraged to develop a spirit of inquiry and research and must be perennial learners and must update their knowledge continuously. It is some times complained that teaching profession always does not attract the best talent because of inadequate prospect of career advancement. This I think is not fully correct. Over the years we have taken fundamental steps to improve appreciably the teachers' lot in terms of monetary and other fringe benefits; and the process is still on.

However, a potential teacher must inculcate a sense of dedication and spirit of service. He must take up the challenging task with the enthusiasm of a zealot, only then he will be able to create a niche for him as the prime mover of social change. A successful teacher is he who can motivate his students to discover their latent talents, to realize their physical and intellectual potentialities to the fullest, to develop character and imbibe the desirable social and human values. A teacher who does not measure up to the standard will leave no indelible impression on the society at large.

We in India have had a rich record and long history of teaching and learning. “Guru – Shishya parampara” is so unique to Indian ethos. Be it learning of music or archery or techniques of warfare or for that matter worldly or spiritual wisdom, we have traditionally celebrated learning. If in yesteryears Taxila or Nalanda were acknowledged centers of excellence or learning it was merely an acknowledgement of collective effort and wisdom of our ancestors.

Times have of course changed. In the present era of internet, learning has become easy but in a way mechanical. Even then the element of human touch must be ever present if we really want the younger generation to come up. We should not forget that technology is merely an enabler or at least a facilitator of rapid transmission of learning. The key to learning will as always be the quality of trainers or “Gurus”. In this regard you owe a tremendous responsibility to the society.

The 21st Century is acknowledged by all as the “Knowledge Century” which means that Knowledge or brain power should be reflected in a country’s competitiveness, advancement and human capabilities. Human capabilities are a function of the well-being of a people and the investment we make in human capital formation. The ability of a nation to make best use of its knowledge or brain power will ultimately determine its place in the comity of nations in the present century. Recently the P.M has set up a National Knowledge Commission to come up with creative ideas to promote the knowledge base and to exploit our vast latent potential. The Commission is actively at work at present and is sure to discover fresh frontiers of knowledge in research, training and education.

Knowledge societies offer both significant opportunities and real risks. They require fundamental changes in learning habits, a new organization of content and structure of learning provision and a new appreciation of learners’ intellectual, emotional and social needs. The skill levels required in the labour market are high and all societies face the challenge of raising their educational performance. Individuals who develop and maintain high skill levels can achieve considerable social and economic success. Those who do not are at a more risk than even of marginalisation with little prospect of finding sustained development and growth.

In this context, lifelong learning is a high priority for all. Based on the four pillars of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together, it provides the enhanced opportunities that are essential for full citizenship in the knowledge society. It is

fundamental to the development of a nation. It builds the base for economic and social development, develops the capacity of individuals to contribute to and benefit from that development, sustains and enriches both individual and overall culture of a nation and builds mutual respect and understanding that transcends cultural differences.

Our common task in the area of education therefore deserves serious attention. In a post industrial information society, education becomes a prerequisite for success in the daily life and a major input into the economic development. It is one of the most important elements for a growing social identity, moral values and stronger democracy. Moreover, as technologies improve, labor market favours higher skilled specialists, and education requirements are constantly increasing as a result. Its goals and content are consequently changing. Today, possessing a certain amount of knowledge and skills is not enough; one has to be ready to constantly upgrade and adapt them to new requirements.

I have no doubt whatsoever that our teaching community would keep up its best tradition and rise to the occasion to act as effective facilitators of change for our younger generation so that it can be smoothly and swiftly switched on to the emerging Knowledge societies. This alone would help our country to rich soaring heights of perfection and become a power house of intellectual endeavour and knowledge engine of the world.

Jai Hind.