

Draft speech of Smt.D Purandeswari, MoS –(HRD) as chief guest on the occasion of Silver Jubilee celebration of Spastic Society of Tamilnadu in Chennai on Saturday the 7 October 2006.

I deem it a great privilege to be here having been invited as the Chief Guest on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Spastic Society of Tamil Nadu. It is indeed a matter of pride that the Society is devoting so much time and energy to attend to the children adversely affected by several mental and physical disabilities.

For centuries and ages, our saints, seers and religious preceptors have been preaching the universal message of love; and the highest manifestation of love is the service of mankind and to allay their sufferings, physical mental and spiritual. Who does not remember the soul inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India; (I quote)

“He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in he image, his worship is but preliminary” unquote

Or

“May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, that is, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races and all species,” unquote

The activities of your society and the efforts you are making to wipe out the tears from the eyes of thousands of disabled and marginalized children deserve the highest applause, appropriation and admiration which can not be expressed in words. I therefore convey my humble and silent ovation to you for your untiring efforts for such a noble cause.

The challenges ahead in any rehabilitation programme is keeping the persons with disabilities, their families and the community people motivated and participatory in all activities. Perhaps one of the most appropriate approaches in facilitating this process could be effectively done through community based rehabilitation programmes. Such programme is not just ensuring community participation or contribution but promoting all round community involvement at all levels all the time.

Community-based rehabilitation programmes are always need-based in nature with the expressed or felt needs of the community. Such Programme facilitates the ripple effect of the involvement in the community as the rehabilitation services are simplified and skills are transferred to the community people. By being a catalyst such programme brings a positive attitudinal change within the persons with disabilities and their families thus ensuring full participation and equal opportunities in and within their own community and society at large.

I understand that one of your flagship programme namely **Community Participatory Programme** is a convergent model working closely with the health, education, social welfare and rural sectors, primarily on prevention, early identification, intervention and referral services. It is carried out through a cascade model of training programmes to different level of personnel on disability issues; form sensitization and orientation through understanding the various aspects of disabilities. This convergent model should, I hope, to a great extent succeed in providing effective intervention services to the needy persons.

I learn that when S P A S T N was started in 1981, it was the first center for persons with cerebral palsy. Since then, it has evolved into an organization advocating for and empowering persons with disability and their families through need based intervention. In addition to a complete range of services including special education, the society has a comprehensive range of other programmes too. These include, a curriculum for the Vocational Training center (VTC) which is skill oriented. Students, along with their families, are taught skills to make them independent including functional academics.

The VTC I learn, provides three-year courses in various skill areas. They also involve the parents of the trainees in Self Help Groups (SHG). Towards the end of the two-year training period, a part-time practical placement is included for a period up to four months. This provides the trainee an on-the-job experience in a real work

environment. This is really a laudable training scheme. All these schemes are intended to enable young adults with disability to find employment and lead an independent life without being social or economic parasites.

As I have said earlier ultimate aim of these community based rehabilitation programmes should be to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities into the society at all levels. The young adolescents with disability should be given intensive training on vocational skills and Self-Help Groups should be encouraged to empower persons with disabilities and their families in the villages also as in the urban areas for their fullest participation, so as to become contributing person in their families. I emphasize that villages where about two thirds of our population reside should receive focused attention in such rehabilitation cum-training programmes.

I observe from your reports that, job oriented training programme 'Able Art' follows a system of evaluating, training, parent involvement and appropriate placement strategies, so that jobs in the open market can be made a reality for some young adults with disabilities, while others may be gainfully employed in sheltered workshops. The effect of this programme would, I hope, give a tremendous boost to these disabled children to faces the challenges of life with courage and fortitude and with full economic and psychological independence.

It is heartening to note that your Human Resource Development Center (HRDC) courses, recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India, have also seen quality output and that some of your student trainees have also been absorbed into appropriate jobs. It is also encouraging to know that some of trainees based on their training and exposures gained in the society have even got jobs in USA, UK and Malaysia etc. My special congratulations to all of you on this glorious achievement.

Friends the purpose of all relief and training programmes for the physically/mentally challenged should be to ensure that they are assisted and equipped to live a normal life as part and parcel of society and not forced to lead a secular life away from the social mainstream. All these programmes should, therefore, aim at creating a right awareness and provide for social mobilization of persons with disability and their ultimate merger into the main stream of the community. This of course can be done gradually through a phased programme such as disability awareness programmes, early detection, early intervention, rehabilitation, education, training and development. When this full process is completed only then it will be possible to realize fully the vision of an inclusive society which should be the be all and end all of your activities and programmes. Our objective should be that at the end of the day, these challenged children on the completion of programmes should evoke encouragement and not compassion or pity from the society.

We should ensure that all disable persons should on completion of training are capable of finding employment and lead an independent life with rest of his fellow citizen with equal dignity and honor. They should be allowed to stand erect on their feet in the society where, as the poet says, “ The mind is without fear and the head is held high” unquote with these words I have pleasure to inaugurate the silver jubilee celebrations of SPASTIC Society.

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