

Address by Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS-HRD (HE) as Chief Guest at the National Bal Bhavan, New Delhi on 14th November, 2007 at 6.00 pm To mark the birth anniversary of Late Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, The first Prime Minister.

My small friends,

It is indeed, a great pleasure for me to be present here in the National Bal Bhavan amongst you this evening on the occasion of the International Children's Assembly and Integration camp for the children from all over India and abroad.

As you may be aware, Bal Bhavan, a creativity resource center for children of age group of 5-16 years was founded by India's First Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1956 and has been catering to the creative needs of children since then. The objectives of the Bal Bhavan are to enhance the creative potential of children within the age group of 5-16 years and to inculcate in them a scientific temper and a spirit to challenge to experiment to innovative and to create.

For millions of children in India Bal Bhavan is the threshold of creativity where they can lay aside the rigorous examination-oriented curriculum to work in an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity. It is a

children's heaven that recognizes the individuality of each child and his innate need and capacity to express freely. It believes that every child is gifted with a creative mind and given the opportunity and encouragement, his creative instincts would blossom. Learning the Bal Bhavan way is not with chalk and blackboard but with experiences in life having a direct relevance to the child's life and environment. Thus Bal Bhavan philosophy believes in activity oriented and non-formal way of education in a play way method of learning by doing. This philosophy attracts thousand of children who, I understand, enroll themselves as members every year in Bal Bhavan.

Opportunities of self expression which are the basis of the Bal Bhavan methodology help in an overall development of child's personality. Apart from this the free environment provided to the child is so conducive that he/she is motivated to choose the activity of his/her liking according to his age ability and aptitude. The other important aspect of Bal Bhavan philosophy is to let the child perform. Performance may be in any form i.e. in the form of music, dance, drama, scientific innovations, physical activities, painting handicraft, cooking poetry writing book publishing, making video programmes or any innovative activity of similar kind. Co-ordination of head, heart and hands is emphasized so that the child is able to comprehend and learn in an indirect way. The non-formal activities of Bal Bhavan not only fulfill the educational needs of the children but also their social aesthetic and psychological needs.

Universally Children's Day is celebrated on 20th November, every year. This date was chosen as a day to celebrate childhood. As it marks the anniversary of the day in 1959, when the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. However, while 20th November is universally celebrated as Children's Day, in India this day has been preponed to 14th November, the date which marks the birth anniversary of independent India's first Prime Minister – Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

The reason why his birthday has been chosen for the celebration of children is because of his love and affection for children.

The theme for to-day's discussion is 'Education for sustainable Development' in the context of child development and the need for integration of his academic excellence with his personality development. Education is not just the amount of information that is put into a child's brain undigested, unrelated and unassimilated. The very essence of education is the concentration of mind and not mere collection, or collation of facts. The concept of education is that it should help the formation of character expansion of intellect and development of a positive view of life. It is this man-making character which is the basic object of all education.

One of the basic drawbacks of to-day's schooling is that tens of thousands of school-going children in India are penalized by an educational system that has largely failed to take into account their special learning needs. It is time we better understood the profile of students with learning difficulties. Sustained application of sound scientific knowledge in the classroom can make a difference. Such application can occur only if our schools had more teachers anchored in the knowledge of neurological functions that impact learning. Teachers can then assess their students' strengths and weaknesses in order to modify suitably the contents and methodology of instruction, so that all students could benefit. Failure in school often portends low self-esteem in them, and most certainly contributes to poor productivity in professional life. With its escalating needs for economic development, India cannot afford a future citizenry that has not been given the scholastic consideration and opportunities it deserves in childhood. The reluctance of school administrators to train teachers in these areas is puzzling. What is worse is that students, failure permeates into the home. School authorities and teachers are seldom able to reassure distraught parents. Educators and psychologists occasionally offer diagnoses of dyslexia, or other learning disability, but seldom is a learning plan offered to the child or the parent that could meet the child's specific requirements. This is because teachers often do not know how a child learns, and are over focused on what a child learns. Given the pressure on children to be all rounded, it is perhaps a matter of time before most students experience a breakdown in learning. To be

successful in school, students need to be good at many things at the same time regardless of their strengths or weaknesses. This causes undue pressure and ultimately leads to frustration, humiliation, and failure among many of them. An undue pressure on the child can adversely affect his capacity to learn, as well as his ability to take pleasure in academic work. We must not forget that education must be joyous, not onerous.

To make education more attractive, the students of lower classes should be imparted education through play-way methods. They should be taught to identify various colours, sounds, shapes and objects. Exercises like clay-modeling, building sand castles, the playpen and other interactive methods should be adopted to make learning more interesting and attractive.

In this context I would like to bring to your notice that this is how Tagore conceptualized and brought up his famous Santiniketan (Abode of Peace) where the entire educational system was integrated from pre-nursery to the stage of Master's Degree and where the teaching was imparted in open air classrooms in natural surroundings. Poet himself used to take some nursery and pre-nursery classes and imparted education through music dance and drama composed by him. In some cases Tagore used to take part in the dramas and plays along with other children: at times he also used to personally supervise the works of painting and craft made by the children and put in a few

words of encouragement for them. This instilled life in teaching as well as learning and served as a big booster uplifting the spirit of the children. Indeed Tagore made education joyful and playful for all his children.

Under Tagore's watchful supervision, a friendly atmosphere was created for students to interact with their teachers and share a relation of mutual trust and affection. This led to a congenial environment conducive for teaching and learning. Coaching was provided through interactive teaching methods. The curiosity of the students was not suppressed but encouraged and students had the freedom to express their opinions and to seek their own answers subject of course to the correction by teachers wherever necessary. No wonder, this unconventional methodology gained quick recognition and due to Poet's untiring efforts and zeal, Shantiniketan won international reputation and ere long it became the hub of foreign scholars interested in various facets of our heritage and culture. The organizers of the Bal Bhavan would do well take a leaf out of Tagore's book in shaping the future of our children's education in school.

We have all along considered children as greatest assets of our country and we must remain committed to support the efforts by the international community to create a world for children divested of all exploitation, abuse and deprivation. The famous Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral, wrote:

I quote:

“We are guilty of many errors and many faults but our worst crime is abandoning our children and neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. To him, we cannot answer, ‘Tomorrow. His name is ‘Today’.” Unquote

To the children who have gathered here to-day in the International Children’s Assembly and the Integration Camp as a token of solidarity for the cause of children’s education, I convey my best wishes and blessings with the following inspiring words of the Poet:

***“May there always be work for your hands to do:
May your purse always hold a coin or two:
May the sun always shine on your windowpane:
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain:
May the hand of a friend always be near you:
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you,”***

Jai Hind