

**Speech of Hon'ble Mrs. D.Purandeswari, Minister of
State Human Resource Development, Government of
India, on the occasion of Joint Declaration on
Multilingualism' between India and European
Commission
Brussels, 6th March 2009.**

Your Excellency Mr. Leonard Orban Commissioner of the European Union, and distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. At the outset I must express my thanks to His Excellency Mr. Leonard Orban, for inviting me for talks on multi-lingualism followed by an important Joint declaration on 'Multilingualism' between India and the European Union.

The Joint Declaration we are about to sign shortly between our two great geo-spaces should be viewed not merely as an instrument of communication nor an indicator of social identity but more appropriately as a repository of knowledge and human values.

Language is not merely a vehicle of interaction. More than a subtle and complex instrument to communicate our ideas, language has another significant role, viz the **language is a great binding force**. The true purpose of a language, therefore, like that of education is to unite and **not** to divide. Its purpose is positive and its method cognitive. Therefore in India all languages are treated potentially equal and considered indispensable to meet the emerging needs of the community. This is where our deliberations become relevant and acquire significant importance. Since different languages are in different stages of development, and are embedded in different social contexts it would necessitate different strategies to ensure equitable growth. We need to

send a clear message that all our languages are equally important and we are bound to support all of them irrespective of their official status.

India is essentially a multilingual country where linguistic diversity is a part of the historical cultural heritage and an integral feature of its nation building philosophy. This provides a challenge and an opportunity for the education planner who wants to treat societal multilingualism as a dynamic resource shared across numerous interacting communities.

In this context I would like to emphasize that we treat not only all our indigenous languages equally and are committed to their uniform development but even with regard to English language our attitude is the same. In fact, with regard to other foreign languages also, we have no mental reservation, whatsoever.

I am happy to note that some of our national languages included in the VIIIth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, are taught and researched in some prominent universities of the EU countries. Our culture has always understood the importance of language studies.

While the constitutional vision of an egalitarian society makes it imperative for the language planner to pursue the path of inclusive education and provide room and support for all languages-regardless of their status as official/non-official, scheduled/non-scheduled, majority/minority, tribal and endangered, we are also trying to improve upon our record of implementation of multilingual policies. There had been a consensus among Indian educationists around the need to sustain linguistic and cultural diversity and bridge the gap between the oral societies and the literate ones. The case for promotion of multilingualism

has thus gained momentum in recent times because of the stand taken by more informed specialists in pedagogy.

I am sure the Joint Declaration will go a long way in mutual cooperation in promoting multilingualism between both the sides. Promotion of multilingualism must be seen by us as an essential part of a development processes that will maximize democratic participation of our people and prove to be key to our survival and growth. With these words, I on my own behalf and on behalf of the Indian delegation and the Government of India once again thank His Excellency Mr. Leonard Orban, Commissioner of the European Union and all the members of the European Union for this excellent opportunity in international cooperation and understanding.

Thank you,