

KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF SMT.D.PURANDESWARI,
MINISTER OF STATE (HRD-HE) AT THE 4TH CONFERENCE OF
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Hon'ble Distinguished Guest and Friends,

I am immensely delighted to deliver this Keynote address at this prestigious International Conference of the Asia Education Foundation at this historic city of Delhi. Actually Shri Rahul Gandhi, MP and an upcoming political leader of the Congress, who has recently taken over the General Secretary of the Party was to have addressed this conference but in view of some unavoidable compulsions, he could not make it and hence he requested me to take over this assignment. That is how I am here today and I am grateful for this opportunity. I would like to dwell basically on how education can impact growth in the present scenario.

Few global goals have as consistently and as universally been 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 in 2000 reaffirmed and extended this commitment. Universal primary education with complete gender equity in primary and secondary education was affirmed again in the same year as Millennium Development Goal.

As early as 1948, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had envisaged, “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. India stands committed to this declaration. India is also a party to the convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which *inter alia* recognizes the development of child’s personality, talents and mental and physical ability to their fullest potential. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the year 1992 which made it incumbent to protect and monitor the rights and privileges that our children had been guaranteed or enumerated in the convention. The initiative taken by India in this direction was to adopt the National Charter for Children in the year 2000.

These international initiatives make it amply clear that like any other country we are open to any measures which are designated to increase the well being of our children, which should be the starting point of our commitment to Education for All. We believe that it is only in the liberation of the children, and their freedom through education that the citizens in the country can enjoy real democracy. It is only education that can break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. It is only through education that the first step towards equity and bridging of disparities can be taken. It is only through education that possibilities for new opportunities and making choices begin to emerge for all cases of citizens.

In 1993, the Supreme Court of India, in its judgment in the Mohini Jain case, declared that right to education was a fundamental right. Earlier governments had taken shelter under the claim that their obligation to elementary education was restricted only to Article 45 of Directive Principles of State Policy which is not juridically enforceable. The 1993 judgment made it clear that right to education as a fundamental right emanated from the Right to Life in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The debate on the need for a separate provision in the Constitution making right to education a fundamental right started seriously thereafter and in 2002 the 86th Constitutional amendment was enacted to make education a fundamental right under Article 21-A which was added to our Constitution which declared: **“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such a way as the State may, by law determine.”** The contemplated legislative intervention in Article.21-A, when implemented, will bring about a metamorphosis in universalizing education on a mass scale. Serious dialogue is on between the Union and State Governments in regard to this matter. The other significant change was the addition to Article-51A making it a fundamental duty of the parents to provide opportunities to their children or wards to get education between the ages of six and fourteen years. This is aimed at supplementing the efforts of the State in extending the mass base to the goals of education.

May I, however, point out that long before Art.21-A was written into our Constitution in 2002, we could conceptualize and bring into operation a centrally sponsored scheme to boost the universal

primary education and to improve the nutritional status of the children of primary classes. This was started pursuant to the FM's Budget Speech in the Lok Sabha on 15-03-1995. A National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or the Mid Day Meal Scheme was launched on 15th August 1995 to give a boost to universal primary education. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and improve the nutritional status of children in primary classes in Government, local body and Government aided schools. From October 2002, the programme has been extended to children studying in the EGS/AIE centers. The Mid Day Meal Programme through which we have tried to boost the nutritional intake of our poor children and to increase the retention rate in school, is not like any other ordinary Government Scheme. Hailed by the World's renowned Economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen **“as the biggest pro-poor initiative since the land reforms of Seventies”** the Mid Day Meal Scheme in 9.52 lakh schools for 12 crore children is fast firming up complete with a well defined implementation and monitoring process. For us, therefore it is a mission, a matter of faith which we have to fulfill in any case at any cost. With our unflinching belief that **“feeding children is feeding development”** the scheme is sure to enter final phase of qualitative stabilization very soon.

The other main vehicle at present for providing universal education to all children is a comprehensive programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2001-02. This programme was built upon the experience of several primary education programmes that preceded it. It is a partnership

programme between the Central and State Governments, which seeks to improve the performance of the school system through a community-owned approach, with specific focus on the provision of quality education. SSA is a time-bound mission, with the objectives of ensuring Universalization of Elementary Education and bridging of gender and social gaps by 2010.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for girls' education in educationally backward blocks by way of girl-child friendly school, and supply of stationery and uniforms to under – privileged / disadvantaged girls. Another important component of SSA is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE), which is specially designed to provide to children in school-less habitations and out-of-school children, access to elementary education. The scheme supports flexible strategies for out-of-school children through bridge courses, residential camps, drop-in centers, summer camps, and remedial coaching.

Since the introduction of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, State Governments have reported a significant decline in the number of children not attending school. When the programme began, the number of out-of-school children in India was estimated to be about 39 million; since then, this figure has fallen steadily, and in November 2005 it was reported to be around 10 million. SSA was launched to ensure that all children between the ages of six and 14 would attend school and receive quality elementary education within a fixed time period. Central outlays for SSA were increased from Rs.1600 crore

in 2001 to Rs.7156 crore in 2005-06. A 2% education cess was levied from 2004 to provide additional finances for elementary education and the rate of cess has been increased to 3% during the current year's budget (2007-08).

I am prepared to concede that 100% success in these Schemes is yet to be achieved but I can assure you that the shortcomings and deficiencies in the functioning of these schemes are continuously being monitored because we firmly believe that the children in school are our greatest wealth and as Prof. Amartya Sen says **“they are reliable indicators of nation's growth and development”**. Therefore, I will not shy away from declaring with all the emphasis that for us these child centric schemes are a matter of faith which we shall fulfill at any cost.

In my perception, an ideal educational system should be pyramidal in structure- a structure in which there are fewer people at each level as you proceed from base towards the top. The base at this structure should include all children and this should represent the stream of elementary education up to the age of 14 years. The middle of the pyramid should represent a secondary education for the students within 14-17 years with emphasis on vocational education. The top of the pyramid should include the highest echelon of students who should make it to the specialized education in universities in different streams.

What we have to ensure now is that there should be a vocational bias at the end of secondary education in the absence of which, students are presently proceeding to higher education

pursuing degree course in general education resulting in the creation of surplus manpower who do not fulfill the productive requirements of the country. Diversification of education at secondary level would reduce the pressure on higher education. Vocationalization and terminalization of education at the middle school level and secondary education level is essential to gear up educational development for economic growth.

We must realize that vocationalization alone will put our country finally on road for growth and generate huge employment opportunities for our youth. The developed countries like USA, England, Japan, France and Germany and more recently China have all attained a high growth rate and one important reason is adoption of vocational education on a universal scale. I have no doubt whatsoever that if we follow the same route, success will undoubtedly be ours and India will soon firmly be on its way to emerge as a global power.

India is emerging on the world stage as the largest economically powerful, culturally vibrant, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. With a population of over 1 billion people, an expanding middle-class of 300 million and GDP growth rate of nearly ten percent, India cannot be ignored. Together we are building a strong and resurgent nation whose confident march forward is being keenly watched by the whole world. What has expedited India's growth is our belief that a country's educational system is central to its competitiveness. Of the 9 parameters used by the World Economic Forum, Geneva to judge an economy's competitiveness, 5 are connected to the quality and quantity of its education system. On

the whole, higher education in India has done extremely well in training people. That we are the 11th largest exporter of services in the world, when we are the 29th largest exporter of goods, says it clearly enough. That there are concerns in the West about the threat from Indian service exports, speaks volume of the strength of our human resources. The IITs especially, have become a global brand. If any proof is needed that it is the quality of human capital that determines the economic performance of a country, then it is India. We have to leverage our young demographic profile to sustain and enhance this advantage. How our education system performs is therefore critical to this process.

It is well known that high growth is supported by high capital stock. But, an increasing share of that capital stock is in the form of human capital. In a country like the US, more than three-fourths of capital stock is accounted by human capital. This is an outcome of higher literacy, skills and training. In India, we are still short of attaining the targeted level of investment in education-around 6 percent of GDP. No child in India must have to skip school for the sake of pursuing a livelihood. And no student ought to be denied an opportunity for higher education for lack of funds. India is already a “knowledge economy” brand; yet, many IT companies are worried about ensuring adequate supply of trained manpower. Some companies have integrated backwards and started technical universities. I believe we need to facilitate the emergence of private vocational and technical training institutes in order to meet the huge demand emerging for trained manpower. The connection between human capital and GDP has been validated by the World Bank, which

examined per capita income data for 121 countries and linked this with its Knowledge Economy Index.

Half of the Indian population is below 24 years of age. There are around 120 million young persons in India in the age group of 17 to 22. Only 10% have access to higher education. On the other side, it has been estimated that the IT sector would face a shortfall of half a million skilled workers in the next three years. The system, if allowed to remain as it is, or, permitted to drift as per past practices, would be incapable of sustaining the growth rate and bring about the much sought after wider dissemination of the fruits of growth and development. It is encouraging to note that this aspect is receiving attention from the captains of industry. The corporate sector needs to come in a big way at the center stage of our educational system particularly in the sector of vocational education.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that while our educational system must equip our youth with abundant qualities to respond to the challenges of the present market scenario of globalization and growth, we must not forget that the main aim of our development should be to attain inclusive growth and not merely to attain higher percentage increase in our GDP. When we fought for our political freedom, we had taken a pledge to achieve growth with equity and distributive justice. We need development that eradicates illiteracy, development that provides the common man with access to basic education, healthcare and shelter so that the poorest of the poor can enjoy in full measure the fundamental right to live with dignity. We have, therefore, to ensure that our educational system throws up men of sacrifice and character who would ensure that the gains of

development percolates down to the socially and economically marginalized sections of our society. In this context we should remember the soul-stirring words of Swami Vivekananda (I quote):

“So long as the millions in India live in hunger, ignorance, and deprivation, I hold every man a traitor, who, having been educated at their expense pays not the least heed to them” (un quote)

The true spirit of educational reforms should therefore be to inculcate in our youth qualities of fellow-feeling and character-building and idealism of nation-building.

As Dr.Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observed (I quote):

“The function of our universities is not merely to send out technically skilled and professionally competent men, but it is equally their duty to produce in them the qualities of compassion, and fellow-feeling the quality which enables the individuals to treat one another equally in a truly democratic spirit.” (Un quote)

If we could follow this idealism in letter and spirit, we would, before long, make India a modern society democratic in spirit, socialist in content, scientific in temper and secular in outlook.