

Women Leadership

Inauguration of the Seminar on Women Leadership in Orissa in the New Millennium at Mahanadi Auditorium, NALCO Nagar, Bhubaneswar on 7.11.2008

It is indeed a matter of great pleasure for me to be here with you all this morning for the inauguration of the Seminar on Women Leadership in Orissa in the new millennium. I understand, Orissa State Productivity Council is organizing the Seminar in association with School of Women Studies of Utkal University and Mission Shakti under Women & Child Development Department. At the outset, I extend my greetings and good wishes to all the participants in the Seminar who have come from both urban as well as rural areas. Their presence has reflected the wholehearted support for the cause of women leadership in Orissa. I take this opportunity to commend the initiative taken by State Productivity Council for organizing such an interactive Seminar that spreads across three very important sessions on Visualizing the Society through Women, Women in Governance and Women in Productivity & Sustainable Development. The purpose behind the Productivity Council organizing this Seminar is to make an assessment on how far the women of the state, especially in rural areas have taken leadership role. I am sure; the two-day Seminar will pass on a strong message to the women of Orissa to take active part in the developmental process in leadership mode.

When we are talking of leadership we mean to whom we look forward to lead from the front inspiring, influencing and motivating others with clear cut vision, goal and above all commitment. In this context, women leaders or leadership is not new to us as we have many great leaders both in the past and present who have guided their respective sphere with their sharp knowledge, ability and outlook. We had great leaders like late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, whose death anniversary we celebrated few days ago. She led the nation with her strong vision and leadership quality and she continues to inspire women of this country in every sphere of life. First citizen of country is a woman in Smt. Pratiba Devisingh Patil as our President. Similarly, the state of Orissa

also boasts of some outstanding women in Ramadevi, Malati Choudhury, Nandini Satpathy who became first and only woman Chief Minister of the State, Padmashree Tulasi Munda and Dr. Prativa Ray to name a few who were not only the symbol of women empowerment but raised the woman spirit in the state. They have shown their capability to be different from the stereotype role and did something remarkable for which the state is proud of.

With the changing environment the needs are also changing very fast. It provides new challenges before the women leadership to become successful in their respective roles. As a result of this the whole issue acquires fresh dimensions and demands the women to make them more well-equipped to lead from the front and meet the expectations of fellow human beings and society as well. In the present Gyan Yug or knowledge society brainpower has become superior to physical prowess, which has lost its edge and biological difference has no meaning. In terms of brainpower women have shown the world that they are equal and even superior to males. If we look at the last Higher Secondary and Secondary Board Examination results, we find girls outnumber boys in the Toppers' list. They have proved their superiority. Similarly, there are number of cases where women have successfully shown their potential occupying several highest important positions. We have woman as Vice-Chancellor of Fakir Mohan University. Today, we have two women, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, W & C.D. Department and Director, Mission Shakti in our midst who are known for their strong commitment to improve the status of women in the state. They all have scripted their success in their own way. The visible achievements in various fields of life have demolished the patriarchal notions of confining women's role to home and hearth. There is a saying – Give them light and they will make their own way. These glowing examples have justified the saying but these achievements have to be multiplied to thousand times to ensure women empowerment a reality.

Women are now playing key role in the development process by getting elected to local governance structures, I mean Panchayati Raj Institutions. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were the vision of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that ensured democratic decentralization of power and reservation of 1/3rd seats for women in local governance bodies. The step taken is now bearing fruit, as women are better represented in such bodies and they are battling corrupt forces at the grassroots to ensure better standard of living. It shows women's leadership has emerged and even won respect for its commitment to the development and welfare of the community. However, it is important that these elected women representatives in general are allowed to act independently and not back seat driven by men in family. The election in women in Panchayats and Municipalities have thrown up the challenges for women to emerge as leaders in their own rights and erode the dominance of men in the domain of politics.

I am happy that the women of Orissa are emerging with full of confidence and wearing an attitude to excel. They have taken long strides on the path of progress with a changing mindset. Women leaders have shown their grit and determination and taking up the causes of women and lead by example. But on the other hand I feel sad to find that the literacy rate among women continues to be a matter of serious concern. Though the general literacy rate has gone up to 63% with male being 73% and female 51%. Tribal literacy rate is far from encouraging as adivasi male have 51% and female only 23.47% literacy rate. We can not progress leaving behind such a sizeable section of our population. Similarly, the dire poverty with about 47% people living below poverty line becomes the major hurdle on the path of development and progress. I always believe and give emphasis that poverty leads to illiteracy but literacy drives away poverty. We have to show sense of urgency to enhance the rate of literacy particularly among women so that the state becomes a fully literate state and women become aware of their rights

and play meaningful role in family and society. It is well said – when we teach a man we teach an individual but when we teach a woman we teach a whole family. An educated mother not only makes herself aware of all rights but also takes care of education and health of children in better way. There are several legislations to protect the rights of women but it is the women who have to take care of themselves by not only feeling proud as a woman but also enabling them to take advantage of all opportunities available. No law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves to fight for their own cause.

I am sure, this Workshop will throw a new light on the women leadership in Orissa in the new millennium with the practical experienced gained from the participating women leaders in various spheres. With these words, I have great pleasure to inaugurate such an important workshop that will go a long way in empowering our women and particularly women leaders to lead from the front for the causes of women in particular and development in general.

Jai Hind.