

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER
PRESIDENT OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF
SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF SUSHILA
BIRLA GIRLS' SCHOOL**

I am extremely happy to be present here amidst this warm and cheerful crowd of enthusiastic children and the teachers. At the outset, I would like to congratulate Chairman, Shri Sudarshan Kumar Birla, the Principal, the Management, the Administrative Staff, Teachers and most importantly, my dear students on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Sushila Birla Girls' School.

2. Established in the year 1994, The Sushila Birla Girls' School was started with an aim to transform the educational firmament of the city by focusing on quality education to the girl child. It was built in the memory of Late Smt. Sushila Devi Birla, wife of Shri L.N. Birla. It was her vision of truly empowering young women through not only a robust curriculum but also through activities that enhance the confidence and strengthen

the inner self of girls. To this end, I commend the efforts of the teachers and the entire management in working towards Smt. Sushila Birla's goal with unwavering commitment and dedication.

I would also take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of Smt. Sumangala Birla and Shri S.K. Birla for their commendable feat in the education sector, not only in Kolkata, but across different states.

Dear Students,

3. Our nation became independent after a very long struggle, involving many sacrifices by our forebearers. The kind of commitment, strength, patriotism and dedication that was shown by our entire nation during the Independence struggle with non violence and social reform at its core is unparalleled. Women played an equally important role in securing independence for our nation and bringing about social reforms in our society by focusing on education. In this regard, few names that come to my mind include **Durgabai Deshmukh**, member of the Constituent Assembly of India, the only women in the panel of Chairmen in the Constituent

Assembly and later a member of the Planning Commission.

4. At a very young age she realized that the major limiting factors in the progress of our nation were lack of education, superstitions and inferior treatment given to women. She exhibited her leadership skills by establishing *Andhra Mahila Sabha* in 1937 that played a remarkable role in empowering women through education, health facilities and vocational training. Till date, this organization is considered a pioneering institute in women's welfare and education in South India. As a dynamic activist for women's liberation, she succeeded in overstepping the hurdles of caste and creed and began helping those in distress.

5. **Ahilayabai Holkar**, one of India's great women rulers and the Queen of the kingdom of Malwa overcame the 18th-century disadvantage of gender, and stood out as a strong ruler spreading the message of not only education for females but promoting the relatively modern concept of small-scale industrialization.

6. When we talk about women empowerment and education, we cannot forget the immense contributions of **Savitribai Jyotirao Phule**. Savitribai is credited for founding the first girl's school in Pune in Bhide Wada with her husband Jyotirao Phule. She took great effort towards educating and emancipating child widows, campaigned against child marriage and *sati* pratha, and advocated for widow remarriage. She campaigned against untouchability and worked actively in abolishing caste and gender based discrimination.

7. **Matangini Hazra, Kanaklata Barua, Aruna Asaf Ali, Bhikaiji Cama, Ramabai Ranade** and many more leaders of our nation had the determination and courage in the face of adversity. Their love for their motherland and the people around them, made them strive for a better world for us.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. We all are aware that women form an essential half of our society. Sadly, a half that is often neglected. It goes without saying that we need to pay more attention to the development of our girl child who will one-day nurture

family, nation and humanity. Overall attention to their healthy and safe upbringing is the necessity for us as a society. **Nutrition and education** are of utmost importance for girls in our society today so that our tomorrow is empowered.

9. According to the World Economic Forum, Gender parity can boost India's GDP by 27%. To this end, parity has to start at an early age in our education system. I firmly believe that making a shift in our mindsets and providing girls with equal access to education will make a huge difference in their lives and in socio-economic conditions of our country. There is no doubt about the fact that **Education** is the most powerful tool for social transformation. We, as a society, need to foster an enriching environment where our girls are provided with education, equity and equality of opportunities.

10. The *Girls per hundred boys* Gross Enrolment Ratio in schools of India has increased to around 107 in the year 2011-12 for primary classes (3rd to 5th standard) but falls dramatically at the secondary and senior secondary level to as low as 69 and 43 respectively. We

need to make sure girls stay in school. Simultaneously skilling them for certain vocation would help them be more enterprising. We have to remember that girls are not just the future, they are **'the present'** and education can lead them to empowerment and emancipation

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. I believe that our educational institutions, beginning from schools, should also take the lead in meeting the moral challenges of our times. Our academic institutions can ensure that our civilizational values of love for motherland and fellow citizens; performance of duty; compassion for all; respect for pluralism; respect for women and elderly; truth and honesty in life; discipline and self-restraint in conduct, and responsibility in action are fully entrenched in the young minds.

Dear Friends,

12. Today, I address not only the students and teachers of Sushila Birla Girls' School, but through you, all my young friends and teachers across the country. I am convinced that the future of the country is extremely promising - a reality that many public professionals,

including myself, have devoted decades of work towards, to achieve. Today, however, I am here not as a representative of the executive or the administration. Instead, it gives me immense satisfaction to address you in my capacity as a **teacher** and as a **citizen**. Many of you may not be aware that my early profession itself was that of a lecturer, and hence I understand the role a teacher plays in a child's life. A guide, a mentor, a friend, we have to don different roles to understand children.

13. Mahatma Gandhi had said and I quote: "***A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes***" (Unquote). Our teachers are capable of shaping the thoughts of the young minds. They can make their students appreciate a subject from a wider perspective and encourage them to question their own knowledge. By their conduct and life example, they can inspire their students to imbibe correct values. I would like to exhort teachers to share their invaluable knowledge, wisdom, experiences and philosophy with larger number of students. I am firm believer of the fact that Rote learning, textbooks alone or various modern

smart phone applications of studies cannot teach our youth what teachers can.

14. For parents, I have to submit that children, of course, are the focal point of their lives. But it is said that if there is anything that you can give to your children, it is TIME. No amount of material compensations can replace your position or give that kind of happiness which your presence by their side will give. Your children need your presence more than your presents.

15. To the students I wish to say that you are the future of this country. In your gleaming eyes, I see the India of tomorrow. You need to be disciplined and hardworking. There are no short cuts in life. And let me tell you that hard work has never failed anyone. You should just focus on your aim in life and work towards it with full passion and dedication. The rewards will undoubtedly be worth the while. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, at the inauguration speech of Anuvrat Week in December 1956, had said and I quote, "***What is a country or society after all? It is a conglomeration of Human***

Beings. A society or a nation is what its people make of it. What will India be? She will be what her people are. She can neither be higher or lower than what they are.” (Unquote) Today, I wish to say the same to you. India will be what you, the girls, will be. India accomplishes what you accomplish. We will be what you will be.

16. I am happy to see the holistic development which your School is providing you. My compliments and best wishes to each and every student present here today. May you achieve success in all your endeavours.

Thank You

Jai Hind