

Mahamaheem's Speech for National Seminar on Women Empowerment : A Catalyst for Growth of Indian Industry on 19th February, 2011 at Lucknow

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends from Media,

I deem it a great honour and a privilege to be invited to be the chief guest at the inaugural function of today's national seminar on Women Empowerment: A Catalyst for Growth of Indian Industry. I am grateful to the Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management and Technology for giving me this opportunity.

The Institute is named after a great leader, former Prime Minister of India-Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, an

icon of simplicity and integrity. The enduring call of "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" which Shashtriji gave to the country, continues to hold utmost relevance even today in transforming India into a global power. I had privilege to work with him. I pay my homage to this great son of India.

Throughout history, human has been engaged in a ceaseless struggle to realize the ideals of justice, liberty and equality for his fellowman. However, in the 21st century, we are still far from having fully achieved this goal - the ideals of justice, liberty and equality are still a remote dream for people in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the

fact that, through the ages, society has been able to reap many fruits from the toil, labour and sacrifices made by many men and women of vision.

The empowerment of women is one of the ideals which have been actively pursued in all countries of the world, with a sense of increasing urgency. In order to pursue this dream realistically, it is necessary to work for the removal of the obstacles posed by Gender Disparity. The socio-economic and political inequalities between women and men need to be understood and strategies need to be properly assessed and evolved to make the relationship equitable, just and fair to the fairer sex.

The U.N. Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination provides a framework for achieving women's rights. Gender Disparity is a highly complex issue and it inevitably involves a conflict between traditions and customs on the one hand, and the implementation of democratic values on the other.

There is no denying that women's empowerment is directly related to national development. The effective management and development of women's resources, their abilities, interests and skills are of paramount importance for the mobilization and development of human resources.

Since India's Independence, development planning for women has straddled theories as disparate as welfare, development, equity, efficiency and empowerment. The institutional structures have undergone changes in response to the evolving concepts. Women were first seen as 'handicapped' or 'backward'. Today, women are accepted as active, empowered agents, participating and guiding their own development. The old concept associated with womanhood has changed. They are no longer to be confined to the walls of a house. They have an equal right to work. The country offers them a vast field of activities to show their talents. In fact, they have been

very active in social fields. Role of a woman is such that empowering a woman affects not just her as an individual, but also the family unit, the community, the society and the Nation as a whole.

The trail which leads to women empowerment will have to start from making changes in provision for improved health and education of women. The Indian constitution already grants gender equality in its Preamble. By providing quality education, equal work opportunities and better health care to women, we can empower them to take on more responsibilities and contribute towards nation building in a more assertive way. Women are a part of workforce and

empowering them will be a major step in enhancing economic and industrial growth. Women empowerment can thus be a catalyst for the growth of the industry and be a key contributor, not only to the health, but also to the wealth of the Nation.

We have many examples today of women leaders, excelling in every walk of life, including business and industry. They are making an impact on the national as well as the international level and are the torch bearers for others to follow. They are educated and empowered and have proved their worth by creating business empires and are heading successful organizations. It has also been found that

when semi-urban and rural women have been empowered by the right support system they too have shown that they can lead and contribute positively to the well being of the society.

In 1993, through a constitutional amendment, the Panchayati Raj System was strengthened with the mandate that one-third of all panchayat seats and one-third of all panchayat presidencies be reserved for women. Despite its initial setbacks, this has revolutionized the social milieu and has slowly but surely pave the way for rural women to find a voice in the decision making process. At grass-root levels, social reform leads to industrial growth, as is evident

from women driven industries like Mahila Griha Udyog, tea plantation industries, poultry, fisheries, horticulture and industries related to milk and milk products.

It is hoped that new insights and perspectives will emerge through the papers to be presented by highly-experienced resource persons at the seminar.

Once again I thank for giving me this opportunity to be with you on this important seminar.

Thank You - Namaskar