

Convocation Address, SNTD Women's University



*Convocation Address, SNTD Women's University,
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Transcript

Dr Vasudha Kamat, Vice Chancellor of SNTD Women's University, Members of the Senate and Management Council, Graduates, Colleagues, Eminent Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a privilege to speak at the Convocation of the SNTD Women's University. A Convocation ceremony is a very important milestone in the journey of those of you who have now completed a critical stage of your lives, and are stepping onto the next stage of further education, or the world of work. To the institution, it marks an occasion to see many of its students whose talents it has nurtured, and whose faculties it has helped develop, move on successfully to the next stage of their lives. I am delighted to be a part of this happy occasion, and I thank the Vice Chancellor, Dr Vasudha Kamat, herself a powerful role model for women, for giving me this opportunity to be with you today.

SNTD Women's University has been a visionary institution, well ahead of its time, pioneering the 'empowerment of women through education'. Why a separate institution for women, one might ask? In India, a separate institution for women was a welcome opportunity for women who would otherwise never be allowed to attend co-educational institutions. My mother was not allowed to go beyond Class IV, for that very reason. But women's institutions have gone beyond providing access, to carve a unique role in society. Even in the United States which has a different cultural context, women's institutions have brought great benefits. In a study of women who attended women's colleges between 1920 to 1973, it was found that women who graduated from women's colleges were twice as likely to obtain doctorates as were women from co-educational institutions. Why is this so? Research suggests that at least a part of the higher achievement of women's institutions can be attributed to the explicit commitment of the institutional leadership to the advancement of women (M Elizabeth Tidball et al, 1999).

My own organization, the Commonwealth of Learning, established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government and located in Vancouver, Canada, recognizes gender as a cross-cutting theme that underpins all its programmes. Maharishi Karve's vision of *Sanskrita Stree Parashakti* (an enlightened woman is a source of infinite strength) is now being echoed in various ways by the development community. The World Bank says '*Gender equality is an issue of development effectiveness, not just a matter of political correctness or kindness to women. New evidence demonstrates that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and*

the well-being of men, women, and children is enhanced.”(2002). We have evidence of this right here in India--reserving one third of the panchayat seats for women has led to improvements in the provision of water, sanitation in schools, a reduction in corruption, teenage girls marrying later, having few children and aspiring to higher education. (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). In India and Nepal, after women had a bigger say in forest management, there has been a significant improvement in conservation outcomes. (Aggarwal, 2009).

So we can see a clear link between women's empowerment and development effectiveness. Yet we need to do more. Women represent more than 40% of the global labour force, 43 % of the agricultural workforce and more than half the world's university students, yet we find fewer women at higher levels. For instance, today women hold only 19% of parliamentary seats worldwide, only 7 of the 150 elected heads of state are women. (Franklin, 2011). What of the 54 Member States of the Commonwealth? You will be interested to note that the only three women prime ministers in the Commonwealth, Julia Gillard of Australia, Sheikh Haseena of Bangladesh and Kamla Persaud-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago organised a special session on 'Empowering Women to Lead' just before the Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Perth this October. They spoke of how they had been empowered by education. It is worth noting that there is a significant shift taking place here--from women's equality to women's empowerment. That is not to suggest that women's equality has been achieved. In fact, many of the Commonwealth member states in Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia face great challenges of severe discrimination against women. And appropriately, the theme for the Commonwealth Day observed in March this year was 'Women as agents of change: invest in women and transform the world'. An increasing number of governments are realizing the value of investing in women's empowerment and accelerating national development.

You have come a long way and still have many more Everests to climb. So let me now share with you three secrets of success as you embark on your adventure. When our generation graduated many years ago, we were sure that we would never have to study again. Today the world has changed and knowledge is multiplying at a rapid pace. What we learnt two or three decades ago is just not enough even for survival, let alone for success in a highly competitive global market. Research indicates that you could have two to four careers in a lifetime, something that North American women are already doing. So even if you enter the world of work, you will still need to continue to learn, unlearn and re-learn many different things during the course of your life. In short you will need to be **lifelong learners** if you wish to succeed. You are young and may face multiple career choices in the ever-changing global economy.

The second secret is **ambition**. Scholars have spotted a female 'ambition gap', which means that women are less ambitious than men. Be ambitious and reach for the stars. When we were in school, ambition was a word considered with suspicion and meant only for the pushy and power-hungry, not for regular folk. Now that has changed. In the past decade women have shown that you can be ambitious, confident and compassionate while maintaining a balance between work and life. As Susan Pinker author of *The Sexual Paradox* says, 'Not long ago, being at the top of the managerial chain was the highest rung on the ladder for women. They were expected to want what men had always wanted. At last, women are moving beyond that, and we are seeing a new generation discovering their own ways of having it all'. So its all right to have Big Hairy Ambitious Goals and carve your own unique path. But having ambitious goals is not enough.

And this brings me to the third secret, which is **hard work**. Usually people say that talent determines success in life. While talent may contribute to success, it is actually hard work that makes the difference between success and failure. You all know that the Beatles are legends, whose music will stand the test of time. Very few know that in 1960 when they were still struggling, they were invited to play in Hamburg, Germany. They had to play seven days a week, eight hours a day. And it was here that they found their form and gained the confidence of their craft. When they experienced their first success in 1964, they had already performed 1200 times! This is what set them apart and on the road to success.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* gives an interesting recipe for how to become a world class expert in any field of activity—it is the 10,000 hour practice rule. He looks at a study done by Berlin’s Academy of Music. They divided the violinists into 3 groups—the first group were the stars, the second group were good while the third were amateurs who would never play professionally. All three groups were asked how many hours they practised the violin. In the beginning, at about the age of 5 everyone practised for about 2-3 hours a week. But after the age of 8, those who practised more than others were the best in their classes. They were practising 8 hours a week by the age of 12, and by the time they reached age 20, they were practising 30 hours a week. In short the star performers had practised for 10,000 hours. Those who were good students, had practised for about 8000 hours. The difference between being good and great is 2000 hours of practice or hard work. I’m sure that those of you who have received gold medals today were to do a quick calculation, you would come to a similar conclusion. So the moral of this story is that if you want to excel and reach the top, you have to work not just hard but much harder than everyone else. Bill Gates got the opportunity to do computer programming when still in Grade 8. He spent about 20-30 hours on the computer every week during the night and on weekends and he was way past the 10,000 hour mark in about seven years. As Henry Ford put it ‘Genius is seldom recognized for what it is: a great capacity for hard work.’

On that profound note let me extend my warm greetings and congratulations to all of you who graduate today. As you set out on the next steps of your journey, and as you cross many more milestones that mark your achievements, I am sure you will proudly recall the value of the opportunities that SNTD gave you, and how it empowered you for success.

May this Christmas and New Year bring you peace, prosperity and progress. Thank you for your attention.

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