

Light a Lamp and Remove the Darkness

Biju Patnaik

(Addressing a packed audience of girl students and ladies) All of you are studying history : British history, Indian history, this history, that history , etc. But many of you do not know your own history. How sad it is ? You were all born here. What is the history of this land ? What about our heritage ? What was our land 200 years back, 500 years back, 1000 years back, 2000 years back ? Do you know Ramanujan ? What was he ? Ramanujan was a very poor man. He was merely a Clerk under the British Government. He turned out to be the greatest mathematician the world has ever seen. The top mathematicians of the world are still working to decipher his formulae. He belongs to our land.

Have you heard of Pathani Samanta? What was he ? When was he born ? What was his contribution ? By using some simple device he could precisely study the movement of the galaxy. His scope of mathematics or of astronomy was so fantastic that what he wrote about is the subject of research today for the world mathematicians. He was our man, a member of our family.

In the world history, two or three women stand out as great personages. One is Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, another is Elizabeth-I, the Queen of England and the third one is Helen of

Troy... They created empires where sun never set. They were the Queens" that men surrendered to them and carried out their behests. Until and unless you go to the 21st Century with that kind of power, authority and magnetism, the men who have so far ruled this world are not going to surrender to you. In every sphere you should raise yourselves to that status, so that men would willingly serve you.

There are various facets of modern life. One can be a lawyer, a doctor, an administrator or a Member of the Legislature, or .a Member of the Parliament or a minister here and a minister there. But how do you raise yourself to the status which is superior to men ? This is really the heart of the problem where men must willingly respect you, regard you and take second place when you have the first place. This is really the problem of 21st Century. I am a little worried. You children, who are here; you are going to standard schools and colleges and getting standardised education. Now ask yourselves, when you graduate, even if you get a first class or whatever it is, are you equipped, mentally equipped, socially equipped to do something for your own State or are you going to look for a job ? To look for a job presents a servile mind, to step into the open world

presents a challenging mind. I want not all of you, all of you cannot, but some of you to present to yourself, a mind which can assume great ascents and great challenges. Why this girl Nivedita whom I sent across to Bali, some 9000 kms. fighting the high seas ! She is only one of the kids. She was in some College. She was at the beginning of her younger days and she was full of adventures. She wanted to do adventurous things. So I sent her to Cochin, to the Navy to get three weeks' training and I requested the Chief of Naval Command, "Well, if this girl can pass out rigid tests, I shall send her to Bali", and she did pass the test. But she was afraid. Her mother was afraid, her sister was afraid, her brother was afraid, her father was afraid that she might be drowned, etc. etc. Only I had to tell her, "If you do not do this I am going to cut your head" and that gave her the strength. I transferred some of my strength of adventure to her and she did it. This I want you to do whether through Karate or Judo or Wushu or games or sports or whatever, at all levels. You should be able to pick up challenges and meet them. Only then your mind will be free. We have some Oriya girls who have done very well, as entrepreneurs in the field of Electronic or some other things like that. I want more of you to come more of you dare to pick up the" challenges that would lead - you to the 21st century. Nothing else. All your bouffant hair-do or lipsticks will not lead you to the 21st century. "What would lead you to the 21st century - your guts, your courage, your determination. So, even if I do not see through the 21st century, in the coming years when you kids will have to live for next 30-40 years or more in the 21st century, all I can tell you is this, 'Do not betray your history'. Try to study your own history of 2000 years, of 3000 years, when you were a part the great empire-

the Kalinga. The Kalingans created an empire and pushed the Greek dynasty beyond Hindukush. They had spread a maritime power through whole of the South-east Asia. Your forefathers did it. Do not forget that. Never forget you *buniadi*, your heritage. Suppose, by some magic I squeeze these 2000 years and throw it to the Bay of Bengal, then you will be that women who fought with swords, with bows and arrows and conquered nations. Imagine yourselves. You will be a thousand Rani Jhansis, and a thousand Elizabeths. You have created history in this world.

Well, this is a symposium for training your minds for the 21st century. Our education is wanting. I know it. There was an English man called Lord Macaulay. Two hundred fifty years back when the East India Company came here and founded the empire, he thought that he must teach some English to some clerks who can convey the Englishman's message to the natives. So that was the beginning of learning English language. But the English people are so clever that they built the empire, not for nothing, they spread it among the intelligentsia of the country who used the language in law, in literature, in history, in everything which they themselves pursued. Everything goes in the British way of thinking-British Jurisprudence, British Law. When you talk of 21st century, remember, you are only a few girls in schools and colleges who have the advantage of getting education, however, deficient the education is. In my opinion you still have some education. You have a responsibility. Each of you have a responsibility to those millions of women, children who did not have the privilege or advantage of education like yours. Twenty first century means more responsibility, more responsiveness, more determination and greater strength of mind to meet challenges (Reacting

painfully to the large scale dropouts, i.e., 5: 1 from Class I to Class X) Why ? Because the mother of the little child says, "Go to the forest and fetch me some fuel for cooking. Tend the cows of that headman, earn two rupees so that I will feed you". The child is thus unable to study. Similarly, we have to find out ways of uplifting their economic status, Your parents can afford it. They are the Government servants or contractors or in business or whatever. They can afford the cost of your study, cost of your clothes, cost of your eating, cost of everything, hostel expenses, whatever. Millions, hundreds of millions of my countrymen cannot afford it, Have you any responsibility for them ? Do you feel responsible ? Apart from your fun and frolic what you must have of the young life, You must also think of your responsibility to the people, to the poor, to the girls, to the children who do not have your facilities. That would also present to you a challenge in your mind. You are educated. You are intelligent. Can I be defeated that my children next door must remain poor and uneducated ? Can I not raise them ? If my father can earn so much,

why cannot their parents earn much ? How to do it ? All these, my children must present before you a great challenge of life time. Only then you will grow. Do not waste yourselves away into the 21st century. Make the 21st century a standard-bearer for your strength of mind to meet all kinds of challenges, especially the challenges of your own society. It's a very hard task, a very difficult task, but you my daughters, my daughters' daughters, cultivate great confidence in you. "Wherever you may be, light a lamp as I have lighted here and remove the darkness from the society where you live. If you have done this, you have done a great service to yourself, to the society and to the nation.

Excerpts from an extempore speech presented by Biju Patnaik, the then Chief Minister of Orissa, while inaugurating the State level symposium on "Indian Women towards 21st century : Orissa, a step ahead" held at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar on August 8, 1993. The symposium was organised by Ramadevi Women's College Students' Union in collaboration with Vyatikrama, a voluntary organisation.



Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik receiving the donation of Rs.38,218/- from Pokhariput D.A.V. School for Tsunami Victims at Secretariat on 2.2.2005.