

# National Women's Day- Agendum for equality & progress



Sarojini Naidu, famously known as “Bulbul-e-Hind” was the national symbol of female empowerment. She was a fervent advocate for women’s rights in pre-independence India, believing that India’s salvation would remain a distant dream until the fallen condition of women in India was raised and their voices were heard. Her words reflect her rigour for an agendum parallel with the then India’s struggle for freedom. Undoubtedly, her spirit and dedication to bring quality for the women had inspired many and continues to do so as we celebrate the National Women’s Day today.

Her vision holds true even in the 21st century as our Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that it is essential to empower women for a nation to progress.

We must break the shackles of gender stereotypes in every field and professions. Thereby, I am glad that there has been an increase of 16 per cent in women police personnel across India. On the other hand, an all-female Indian pilot team has made history after completing the longest non-stop commercial flight. I congratulate flight lieutenant Bhawana Kanth, who has become the first woman fighter pilot to be a part of the Republic Day parade and flight lieutenant Swati Rathore has become the first woman pilot in the flypast over Rajpath. My heart was filled with utmost pride seeing them reach new heights.

The National Women’s Day is also a day to celebrate the achievement of 105-year-old Pappammal from Tamil Nadu who was awarded the Padma Shri on the eve of Republic Day for her contribution to organic farming. While we do so, it is also essential for us to commend Padma Shri awardee Indian physicist Rohini Godbole, who has been conferred with the ‘Ordre National du Merite’ for fostering partnerships between France and India along with encouraging the enrolment of women in science.

I am pleased to share that even the Ministry of Education has taken multiple steps to promote women’s enrolment in technical education through the

PRAGATI scholarship scheme. Further, we have also made provision to increase women's enrolment in B Tech programmes of IITs, NITs, and IEST from eight per cent in 2016 to 14 per cent in 2018-19, 17 per cent in 2019-20 and 20 per cent in 2020-21 by creating 3,503 supernumerary seats during the last two and current academic year. Additionally, women candidates are now allowed a relaxation of two years for pursuing PhD; the maximum duration of PhD for women can now be six years as per University Grants Commission, 2016.

Even at the school level, we have been able to ensure greater participation of girls in education through initiatives such as opening of more schools, provision of free text-books, development of gender segregated toilets in all schools, along with teachers' sensitisation programmes on girls' participation as well as provision for self-defence training for the girls from classes VI to XII. In addition to this, there will be an upgradation and opening of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) to increase girls' participation in quality schools (up to Grade 12) as per the National Education Policy recommendations. There is also provision for gender-inclusion fund to bridge the gap for providing equitable quality education to girls.

The provisions of the National Education Policy will be facilitated with our aim to attain the goal of education with excellence. Having said that, I would also like to thank my colleague, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the much-needed fiscal stimulus for the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. The Budget 2021-22 will lead India to become Vishwa Guru with sustained recovery

path, combined with structural reforms for the provision of quality education. There has been an overall increase of Rs. 2684.59 crore (5.14%) in the budget allocation of Department of School Education and Literacy in Budget Estimate 2021-22 from Revised Estimate 2020-21. The Department of Higher Education budget has been increased by 5450.65 crore from the current year Revised Estimate, making the budget Rs. 38350.65 crore. The substantial increase in public investment in education by the Central government will enable us to achieve high-quality and equitable public education system for women. Thus, in the 21st century, while we prepare ourselves for New India, like Sarojini Naidu, India's citizens must have an agendum for equality parallel with a rigour to become knowledge power. India's women must come forward to facilitate the nation's path to contribute to economic, social, cultural, intellectual and technological progress and growth.