



**SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**BY**

**HER EXCELLENCY SMT. MARGARET ALVA  
GOVERNOR of RAJASTHAN  
REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

**ON**

**08 June 2013**

**(Venue: IMA Auditorium, Bhubaneshwar, Odisha; 1830 Hrs)**

Shri. Suparno Satpathy Ji,

Chairman,

Smt. Nandini Satpathy Memorial Trust,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nandini Satpathy – smiling there -- has brought us all here today. For Congress persons of my generation, she was an enigmatic leader, a source of inspiration, and – to me personally– a dear friend. I am glad to be here – with friends, relatives and admirers of Nandini ji – on the eve of her 82<sup>nd</sup> birth anniversary, to pay my tribute to her memory.

Nandini means daughter. But Nandini Satpathy was more than just her parents' daughter. She was a great daughter of Odisha, indeed of India. Befittingly, you celebrate her birth anniversary on June 9, as *Nandini Divas* or Daughters' Day.

The Trust, which honours outstanding daughters this day, every year, selected Smt. Jagi Mangat Panda, Entrepreneur and Activist and Smt. Nayana Patra, a noted Social Activist, for the Nandini Puruskar-2013, which I have just presented. I congratulate you and commend your dedication in the service of your sisters. May you serve as role models for others.

I feel humbled as I recall Nandini Ji's persona and politics. A close aide of late Indira Gandhi, a Union Minister and twice Chief Minister of Odisha, she has left an indelible mark on Odisha's and India's polity. Left of the centre in her ideological moorings, she was among those Congress persons who had a vision and a strategy for the inclusive economic growth of India. She was an acknowledged national leader by the time I came to the Rajya Sabha in 1974. It would be no exaggeration to say that Nandini ji - a raw diamond as it were – was picked, chiselled and groomed by Indira ji, like many of us were, in the Seventies. Rooted in Odisha, Nandini ji spoke out against regional imbalances in economic development and the neglect of tribal areas, as much as she lent her voice to the quest for gender equity.

Educated in Cuttack where, as an activist and member of the Students Federation of India, she acquired her left wing perspective, she married Devendra Satpathy, a fellow student leader whom she first met in jail. The late Devendra Satpathy went on to become a Member of the Lok Sabha for two terms. The Satpathys -- like my parents-in-law Joachim and Violet Alva – are among the few couples who've made it to Parliament.

As I talk of Nandini ji, her images from yester years – particularly her strong presence in the Congress and national politics – flash by. Petite yet spirited, she stood her ground against those who sought to isolate her. Sidelined and humiliated by the Youth Congress leadership during the emergency, she walked out of the Congress with late Jagjiwan Ram in 1977 to form the Congress for Democracy. She later returned to the Party on the invitation of Rajiv Gandhi.

What stands out most in her multi-faceted and tumultuous political career spanning four decades, is her courage. She registered seven electoral victories in the state Assembly elections. These included one as an independent candidate and another as the lone successful candidate of Jagrata Orissa, a regional party she had founded. In her last days, she translated Tasleema Nasreen's much debated work, *Lajja*, into Oriya. She remained bold, fearless and undaunted as she engaged in public issues, till her last. I salute you, my friend.

As a tribute to Nandini Satpathy's life and commitment, I will today speak on '**Women and Development**'. I shall flag three issues. First: India – with a continuing, living tradition of women as leaders – paradoxically, practices widespread discrimination against women. Second: Development – accompanied by technological advance – that has often impacted adversely the situation of women. And third: How can we, as a Society, achieve inclusive development, anchored in, among other things, gender equity?

Our sub-continent – historically, as also in modern times -- has had more women leaders than other regions. It has had as Prime Ministers: Srimavo Bendaranaike, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Begum Khaleeda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed. India – with the strongest tradition of women leaders – has also had a woman, Smt. Pratibha Patil, as President. We have had, and still have, women in top political positions, as Chief Ministers, in several states, which are far bigger than many countries. Their list is long and impressive.

Our oldest political party, the Indian National Congress has had a rich tradition of women as party President: Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi and now Sonia Gandhi. Four major regional parties – AIADMK, PDP, BSP and Trinamool Congress – too are led by women.

In the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition as also the Speaker are women. In Administration, Diplomacy, Business, Banking and Management, as also in Law, Education Literature and the Media, women have reached the top. The acceptance of women as leaders, in the region as an ancient, and now living tradition, may be attributed to religious and cultural factors: viz the tradition of goddesses and celebration of ‘Shakti’, the feminine energy, which we worship. Sadly, we also have our metaphoric ‘Hall of Shame’. Here, daily offerings, across the country, include: foeticide, infanticide, child marriages, domestic violence, rape, and outright murder called ‘Dowry Death’.

I am deeply anguished – and exasperated – that our Society, even as it places women on a religious pedestal



to be worshipped, can maintain a stoic, deafening silence in the face of extreme violence against women. Aged mothers – yes, just the mothers – are abandoned by ungrateful children because these women do not have property titles to pass on to them; or even because, as widows they have inherited property from their husbands, which their children wish to grab.

A Society that respects ‘Shakti’, thinks nothing of consigning Nandinis – the living embodiments of Shakti – to a life of discrimination and violence, from “the Womb to the Tomb”. There is something deeply wrong somewhere.

Placing women in the context of Development is – as is taught in undergraduate economics – a conceptual problem of National Income accounting! A nurse,

working in a hospital, earns a certain monthly income which is part of Gross Domestic Product or National Income. What of the wife who cares for and nurses her ailing husband or children? The work is the same, perhaps even heavier. Yet, the woman's income vanishes, and, her work in the home is termed unpaid labour of love not accounted for in GDP or National Income. This is true also of women who work on family farms and enterprises and perform the difficult tasks of human survival for the family -- fetching fuel, fodder and water. While economists can continue to debate this as a "conceptual problem", we, as women, see this as our 'invisibilisation' and virtual de-recognition of our contribution to family, society and economy.

**The United Nations well summed up the burden of this inequality – which I see as 'invisibilisation' and**

**‘marginalisation’ of women – in 1980. It said:  
Quote – “Women, who comprise half the world's  
population, do two thirds of the world's work, earn  
one tenth of the world's income and own one  
hundredth of the world's property.” – Unquote.**

Laws have been passed, amendments made, plans and programmes adopted, structures put in place and campaigns launched to enlighten and empower our women. The current slogan is “Complete Empowerment”.

Yet, statistics present a sad picture – the falling female sex ratio, rising crimes against women and

children, and the negative impact of a competitive globalised economy on their lives. What is worse – as the latest 2011 Census data reveals – in several districts, where literacy and education have improved, and per capita incomes increased, sex ratio of the girl has fallen. Science seems to have joined hands with tradition to destroy the female foetus which is termed as “the missing child”. Women perform difficult back-breaking jobs in agriculture, industry and the informal sector. They work long hours and are generally paid less than men. But the moment the machine or labour saving devices come, the women are eased out and the men take over.

One person who showed the way to right this wrong was Mahatma Gandhi. In his own quiet way, and keeping with Indian ethos and values, he helped lay the

foundation for a transformation in social attitudes towards women. He drew Indian women from their homes and hearths to the frontlines of the freedom struggle, bringing them the right to vote with the Constitution. Rich or poor, illiterate or educated, urban or rural, they became equals in democratic India.

Over the years, thanks to reservations for women in local elected bodies, participation of women in the political, social and economic arena has increased considerably. They have become visible in the decision making processes and have changed the development agenda at the grass roots -- giving it a human face. Self-Help Groups and MNREGA are bringing economic empowerment.

But there is also evidence of education and employment of women causing tensions in social – and family -- relationships between men and women. This is

bound to happen when a society is in transition. The challenge is to manage the change smoothly, as we move forward to build a more equal and equitable society.

There are still many battles to be fought and -- to paraphrase American poet Robert Frost's expression -- "miles to go before we sleep". The most crucial challenge is changing the mind set of our people -- both men and women, especially the young. The media and the education system can -- and must -- help make this happen.

The Nandini Satpathy Memorial Trust, through 'Project Nandini', seeks to help our daughters in all four

stages of their lives: as a new born child, as an adolescent, as a young woman and as a senior citizen.

I wish SNSMT and its many members, supporters and workers – ably guided by its Chairman, Shri Suparno Satpathy Ji -- success in perpetuating Nandini ji's memory by serving the daughters of our motherland.

**Jai Hind.**