

Honourable Raksha Rajya Mantri, Shri Subhash Bhamre Sir,

Guest of Honour, Honourable Minister for IT, Industries, Municipal Administration, K. T. Rama Rao Garu,

Distinguished Guests:

Lieutenant General Satish Dua, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff,

Dr. Christopher, Secretary, Chairman DRDO,

Dr. G. Satheesh Reddy, Scientific Adviser to Raksha Mantri,

Alka Madam,

Tessy Thomas Madam,

And, all the Distinguished Guests and everybody who has gathered together to celebrate this wonderful occasion.

My warm greetings to all of you on this occasion of International Women's Day.

It's a proud privilege to be in DRDO today. This is the institution which is the backbone of India's strategic military research; an institution that allows us to boast of a place in select nations with ICBM capabilities; an institution that helps us to stay non-aligned in an extremely geopolitically sensitive world that we live in today, and, of course, the institution that has always helped us to maintain operational dominance and battle worthiness every time this nation has gone to war. I salute all of you, the scientists, the technical advisers, the non-technical staff who make up this great organisation.

So, when Tessy madam asked me to join all of you today, I was wondering what I should talk to you about, thought to myself these are scientists, highly qualified people who have dedicated their life to a very serious task, science and technology, R&D, I am sure a task which means that every other priority in their life takes a back seat. Men and Women, irrespective of their caste, their religion, their upbringing, their gender, come together, work in tandem, and achieve something which is bigger than their individual name and fame. They contribute to the nation-building cause, to its security concerns, and for this, to my mind, is what makes great organisations.

As we move towards a more equal and humanist world, I repeat, not a feminist one, but an equal and humanist world, we must begin to realise and recognise that leadership and competence has no gender. I am sure all the women out here will agree with me that our mothers and grandmoms have put us on a very strong platform; they during their time would have fought very pitched battles for issues that we take for granted today, the right to want to study, the right to want to work, the right to want to marry someone of their choice, and sometimes even the right to want to take decisions on behalf of their children who they brought into the world.

So, they have given us a strong legacy and I think it's up to us to internalise the revolution and take it in the right way forward. I truly believe that the world is ready for us. The question is, are we ready? Do we have the skills? Do we have the competencies to truly deserve our rightful place in the workforce.

When young administrators join the service, I say young because in spite of all the kind observations made, I am not so young anymore, I am almost 40, and young administrators do ask me nowadays as to what I think are the attributes of a good officer. So, I often try to tell them in simple words that one must begin by trying to lead the self; that's a very difficult task. It means having commitment to your goal, to what you want to contribute to your chosen field of work, to have a long-term vision of where you want to see yourself, and that involves consistency of thought. We may be flexible in the modalities, we may be flexible in the way we would like to achieve those goals, but consistency of thought is extremely important to leading the self. Good communication skills. Everytime a leader speaks, he or she should hit target. That should be the impact of the communication skills and, of course, there has to be core integrity and courage to take a stand, to stand up for others who you think deserve that. And once, when you think that you have a grip on the self, then we may try an attempt to lead others. It means setting a direction. One can never forget that people come from different backgrounds, different prejudices, and getting them to commit to the common conscious is extremely important in order to achieve the objective that the team has set out to achieve. It means aligning your forces.

I am sure all the managers out here, the senior directors out here will agree with me that there are different skills in different people; some people are good at strategising, some people are good at supports and logistics, and some people are good at executing. So, we must choose and align the forces in the right way. And, sometimes, there are people that you keep thinking hard what are they capable of, do they really belong to the organisation? But, that's where our skills as a leader come to the forefront. Every human being has something to offer. It's up to us how to extract and how to make him or her a productive asset in the organisation, and I think beyond this I will not try to decode leadership for you, especially in the presence of K. T. Rama Rao garu who is a very visionary and young leader and who will, I am sure, enlighten us more on leadership when he speaks.

So, is it that easy? Is it that easy, ladies out here? We learn to lead ourselves, lead others and, are we, you know, assured a sure-shot success in our careers? It's not easy. [A barely audible voice among the audience]. Very true. But, I would also like to say here that the obstacles in the obstacle course is something that you need to be conscious about, you need to negotiate, and largely it has to do with our own conditioning. I say this with whatever little experience I have seen of different women in different organisations that women sometimes hesitate to take on new responsibilities. We often underestimate our own abilities. We often think, when a new responsibility is assigned, that we don't know how to do a particular job, but let me tell you that that might be an advantage. Learning to do it your way, going away from the beaten track may actually yield better results. So, never be afraid to take on new responsibilities.

Also, in a study involving certain HR organisations, a very interesting bit of trivia was shared, and it says that, with due respect to all the men here, that men tend to overestimate their potential whereas women try to underplay their abilities, and that's the reason why women are often promoted based on their past achievements and men on perceived potential. So, this is where we need to think straight. Not only must you achieve, but you must also not hesitate to demand your rightful place in organisations because recognition is an extremely important cornerstone of personal growth and career advancement. You must learn to keep yourselves motivated.

And, the third obstacle which across the world is the most challenging one, I am sure all the ladies out here would agree with me that the biological clock and the career clock are in absolute conflict with each other, that is the age when a woman is expected to have a family, to look after young children, and sometimes take on the responsibility of aging parents. It's also the time when organisations decide to either have you in or write you off. So, that is something which we need to challenge ourselves with, and the only thing that I can say here is that by all means when you need to take those decisions of raising the family, of taking a break, please do so, but don't leave mentally till you actually leave on that particular day. Be in your job, be consciously focused till the day that you are actually working, and when you are done with those responsibilities, don't forget to come back and join the workforce.

We often complain that there are not enough women at the top, not enough leaders, not enough CEO's, not enough policy makers. The fact of the matter is that not enough women stay in the workforce to be able to reach those positions. So, you must motivate yourselves to come back and let the job be interesting enough to hold your attention. So, therefore you must look at sectors which actually challenge you, which actually have the potential to get the best out of you. And here I think the role of policy makers, leaders is extremely important. We must create the ethos and the ecosystem where women feel motivated to come back and contribute and grow.

Again, a small snippet I am sharing. I am told in the Scandinavian countries when an HR team looks at the promotion eligibilities of men and women they often look at whether a man has availed his paternity leave, and if he hasn't, then eyebrows are raised. Well I hope the day is not far when in India too we have similar ecosystems in place where it is recognised and accepted that men and women have to share life's responsibilities equally and that it should be a given. Here in fact I would like to share with you proudly an initiative of the Telangana government where it intends to support the livelihood loss caused to extremely poor woman, maybe an agricultural labour, a coolie who goes to the fields and works, and the event of the time in her life when she is carrying a child, it is going to be compensated in the form of incentive which will be offered to her as, you know you can say like a livelihood loss to support her to allow her family to look after her and also the entire family to treat the childbirth as a happy event.

It is going to be launched from April, and it will also cover critical events like immunisation of the child, safe delivery for the mother, and other certain social indexes which are extremely of concern to the world in general.

So, similarly we must have better caregiving infrastructure in place in order to really create and encourage this kind of, you know, ethos in place.

Well I think I have already overshot my time, but I would just like to conclude saying that I am sure I am extremely optimistic that the future is going to be a very exciting place and in specific it's going to be a very exciting workplace where caregiving and breadwinning will have equal respect, where a man will have the right to choose which role he wants to play without anybody questioning his manhood and women will be represented at 50% at every level in every workforce. I hope the day is not far when we have 7,000 women scientists in DRDO as against your 4,000. I hope the day is not far when young women would want to fly the Sukhois and the Tejas just like those bravehearts who got commissioned last year, Avani, Bhawana, Mohana who proved to the nation that they are officers first and last and that women have the emotional and physical stamina to lead men at war. I hope the day is not far when we have many more Tessy Thomases, a woman who doesn't believe in just breaking glass ceilings but she blasts through them right into space.

So, wish you a great year ahead, and I hope that every day is a celebration of you as a woman, as a mother, as a wife, as a friend, as a professional, and most importantly, as an individual.

Wish you a very happy Women's Day and thank you for this privilege.