

Essential to equip women with education and skills to make them financially independent and raise their status in society, say women parliamentarians

New Delhi, February 24, 2016: Education is the key to bring about a social and economic change in the status of Indian women. It is now essential to equip women with requisite education and skills to allow them to become financially independent which will go a long way in uplifting them at the grass root level. It is also time for the stakeholders including the government, industry and society to work in tandem to give women the status they truly deserve. This was the shared view of the Indian women Parliamentarians, **Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Ms. Arpita Ghosh, Ms. Geetha Kothapalli, Ms. Meenakshi Lekhi and Ms. Supriya Sule**. It was a rare occasion to witness the representatives of different political parties come together on the same platform to discuss and voice their consensus in favor of an agenda.

The feat was achieved on the first day of the Budget session, when **FICCI's Forum of Parliamentarians (FoP) and FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO)** co-organized an interaction with female and male Members of Parliament on the significant role that women MPs play in empowering women of the country, especially economically. *The theme of the programme was 'Changing Lives - Women for Women: Shifting the conversation - From Empowerment to Equality'.*

Ms. Meenakshi Lekhi said that women should be made technologically savvy. This will bring about equality for women. Besides skill training should be the baseline for women and these positive interventions at various levels would be effective in giving women a stronger economic background.

Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar said that women empowerment and equality go hand-in-hand and education and innovation can decide the fate of women. She added that there was no need for reservation for women if goodwill prevailed in the society to promote women in various spheres of life.

Ms. Geetha Kothapalli said that organizations like FICCI should come forward and take up projects for development of skills for women as there is no alternative to education. An enlightened mind, she added, could be empowered easily to work in all the fields.

Ms. Arpita Ghosh said that there was a need for change in the mindset of the people. She urged FICCI to take up skill development initiative in her far-flung constituency which misses out on the opportunity available to women in urban areas. She added that people in her constituency were highly cultured but needed support to shed their inhibitions.

Ms. Supriya Sule said that the industry could impart marketing and packaging skills to women entrepreneurs besides providing guidance and assisting them in their other endeavors. She added that domestic violence and dowry were realities in India and only financially independent women could overcome such evils of society.

Ms. Archana Garodia Gupta, President, FLO, said that women's representation in the Parliament is important on the grounds of social justice, legitimacy of the political system, as also improved representation of women's various interests. She added that it was a privilege for FLO to have eminent women parliamentarians in a single platform. The women belonged to different parties and different states but all focused on development and especially development of women.

In her welcome remarks, **Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Immediate Past President FICCI**, quoted a recent statement by a bench of Supreme Court judges that women are no longer passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help but are increasingly becoming active agents of change. She said that there is a close relationship between economic development and women's empowerment. Equality ensures empowerment, she pointed out.

Mr. Akshay BD, Founding Member, Uber India Team, said, "We are excited to partner with FICCI FLO to create economic opportunities for women on the Uber platform. Our women driver partners prefer Uber due to the flexibility of being able schedule their work around their family commitments and this often becomes a key to creating sustainable economic opportunities for them. With this partnership, drivers will make up to Rs. 40,000 per month."

It was also refreshing to note that the male counterparts of the women MPs like **Dr. Udit Raj; Mr. Harish Chandra Meena; Prof Rajeev Gowda and Mr. Vivek Gupta**, speak in favor of giving women their due. The MPs said that to give women equal rights, the country needed statesmen who had the ability to think long-term, keeping in mind the aspirations of the future generations. They agreed that education and skill development were critical for women empowerment and equality besides mentorship, internships and training programmes should be organized to teach women the nuances of running a business.

The vote of thanks was delivered by **Ms. Vinita Bimbhet, President Elect, FLO**.

*******FICCI FICCI MEDIA DIVISION**