

## **By and large women are the great 'vacation-less' Class**

*"If you want something said-ask man, if you want something done, ask woman!"*

I would like to present my opinion through the above statement of *Margaret Thatcher*, a female politician who has rarely impressed me. The Conferences, in ritual term, are the continuation of the previous one. However, with the perspective of period, it is a remarkable step after the fourth National Women Workers' Conference. We did have a sort of enthusiasm and hope of getting 'new constitution' during the Fourth National Conference whereas at present, we are in doubt about the role of the political parties in the days to come. On the Fourth National Congress, we had proposed 11-point agenda regarding the rights of women.

- Right of inheritance citizen identity
- Equal rights on citizenship
- Participation (33% to 50%): Inclusive and equal
- Equality between son and daughter on inheritance and parental properties
- Affirmative action for women empowerment
- Reproductive rights
- Violence against women
- Women workers representation in National Women Commission
- Recognition of the informal works of women
- Social security
- Welfare state and social justice

We believe that the main message of the above points reflect essence of the conference.

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There is a saying- *"By and large, mothers and housewives are the only workers who do not have regular time off. They are the great vacation-less class!"*

Therefore, self-evaluation is the main aspect of the Conference. We should evaluate our progress in the period. The progress GEFONT made on its mission towards 'equality' should also be evaluated. We also should ponder over the ways we should take forward for being 'smarter' than ever before. We also should be ready to review the woman/gender policy, which we had adopted, if needed. The drawbacks will be corrected by realizing the necessity of the changed context.

*"Given the fact that many thousands of female workers are active in history, it is vital for the trade unions to incorporate them into their movement."*

We still have to focus us to evaluate the success of our world of work for materializing Clara Zetkin's statement of many years ago. However, we the GEFONT have been keeping an account of the success and failure of our works on the International Working Women's Day each year. This year, we have conducted GEFONT's Participatory Gender Audit. The Conference shall express its commitment to further incorporate the achievements of the audit and practically implement the suggestions.

The second aspect is about the 'Violence Against Women'. Let me put a simple question why is this 'Occupy Baluwataar' movement in our country and why the 'One Billion Rising' campaign globally?

*"It is the 'story' of 1984 when I was only 22. Realizing the zeal of a youth, I decided to adieu my parents to visit abroad. "Could you visit abroad on your own?" It is still reverberates in my ears that my mom was making doubt on my decision! "I was not going to do the job that nobody had ever done," I responded her. This way, I embarked to India for months-long visit.*

*Those days, e-mail /internet facilities were the day dream- out of context unlike today. In other word, the communication was not easily accessible. I travelled various places in India with my friends in local bus and train. India is large and diversified from where I acquired so many experiences, some of which are pungent, that deeply rooted in my life. A youth woman like me was an 'English Ma'am' for the Indians. In each and every travel by the local bus or the train, the male appeared to fondle over my body intentionally in an uncivilised manner. Though I could realise of being abused, there was no situation to counter it. Despite my knowledge of maltreatment, such incidents continued till months, throughout my stay. In the beginning, I behaved as if I were unknown and unaware of it. But, gradually I adopted a habit that either I bowed down or turned my head towards other direction when I see male, regardless of age. The situation grew such worse that even after I returned Australia, I started turning my head down or other direction whenever I happened to see a man of India origin. Even today if I suddenly meet any Indian man, my head either bows down or turns other direction unknowingly."*

This is the story of one of our friends, Alison Tate, who is also present in the Conference now. She is not a mere ordinary Australian citizen but also has served for years as the foreign secretary of Australian Council of Trade Unions and currently, she is the Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Secretary General of ITUC, which has over 175 million members from 315 trade union centres of 156 countries & territories in the world. Academically Alison is an economist; but has spent a long time for the contribution of the trade union movements to establish democracy in countries like Myanmar, Thailand and others. The anecdote depicts that 'system' makes one slave systematically without caring of his/her strength and efficiency.

The heinous incidents of violence against women that took place in India in 2012 reflect the deeply rooted unequal gender behaviour of the society. The 'largest democracy' is mocked with the fact that a woman is raped within every 14 minutes in India. A brave medical student who was gang-raped & thrown-out by six culprits in a plying bus in Delhi is the latest inhumane and barbaric soot that smeared in the forehead of the largest democracy.

But, is our country more civilized in this matter? The news and reports loudly expose that the image of Nepal is tainted with the crimes and atrocities. In the beginning of 2012, a crazy fanatic of Western Nepal hurled his two innocent daughters deep down the cold Himalayan River at night and spread the rumour of his daughters getting abducted. In Central Region, a silly guy slaughtered his three offspring mercilessly. November of the year appeared as a curse. 12 women were brutally killed in the course of 16-day campaign of Violence Against Women. One of the daughters who was forced to go abroad at her own for

work as the country did not serve her any work and food, was looted, raped and insulted by the state itself when she was returning homeland.

There is long list of the barbaric incidents further: "The father continually raped his own daughter, the lover butchered his own beloved, the husband sold his own better-half, the son cruelly tortured and killed his own mom, the bride was brutally killed by the members of her own family, and the parents immolated their daughter alive...." and so on.

This is the reason that the Conference expects to stress on—how to curb the Violence against Women in our society?!

Worldwide today, according to global body, the UN;

- *Up to 50% of sexual assaults are committed against girls under the age of 16*
- *Globally, 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime*
- *Up to 70% of women in the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime*
- *Over 60 million girls worldwide are child brides, married before the age of 18..."*

Even the statistics of Nepal is quite alarming. The latest report published by the Office of the Prime minister and the Council of Minister shows that about 35% Nepali women have become the victim of any sort of violence. Yet, another report reveals that out of the total victims, 68% women are of the working class. Information published in the media shows that women were raped within each 20 minutes in the last five months of 2012.

All these data reach us into a conclusion "Violence does not have its caste, class, race, religion and nationality, but it does have gender."

So, we shall formulate new action plan in the favour of gender equality through this Conference and we shall develop a Code of Conducts in order to protect the working women from the potential violence within the world of work and our working families.

Gandhi Ji says,

*"Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity; if by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior...if non violence is the law of our being, the future is with women.."*

Let me mention the theme of UN-Women of this year once again- "A promise is a Promise: Time for Action to End Violence Against Women."

Wishing you the best on the International Working Women's' Day 2013!

Thank you!