

Acceptance speech by Ela R. Bhatt¹ at the Simon Fraser University for The Thakore Visiting Scholar Award on 2nd October, in Vancouver.

President of Simon Fraser University Smt. Deviben Thakore, Prof. Jezlov, Respected Consulate General Shri Das, Respected Mayor of Burnbay, Vancouver and distinguished ladies and gentlemen. It is my privilege and great honour to accept humbly, on behalf of my SEWA sisters the Gandhi Peace Award and Thakore visiting scholar Award at the Gandhi Commemorative Programme, today. On the Gandhi Jayanti Day I do recognize the fact of history that this is the land of explorers. I thank Simon Frazer University, the Thakore Foundation and the India Club for appreciating SEWA's lifelong struggles and constructive work. I express our gratitude again, for the Prize that is associated with the name of that great man who walked on this earth. We have hardly done anything to serve his ideals, however the Prize gives reassurance of our work.

I grew up in those years when India was fighting for freedom and becoming an independent nation. As young people, we had pledged to rebuild the nation, to reconstruct our lives so that every Indian is able to enjoy freedom. As youths, we had no confusion in our minds about our career path. Mahatma Gandhi had shown us the way. His life itself was a clear message to us. He had thought and practised every small detail of building a nation and its people. He would think of individual cleanliness on the same level as political freedom. To him, cleanliness in lavatories and the village ponds, was as vital as spiritual salvation. His thoughts have been the source of guidance for me and for SEWA.

We, as youths, had realized that the people of India had lost their political freedom and their economic freedom as well. We had learnt to see the economy from the perspective of the masses.

We had since then learnt that Economics is simplicity', that adding complexity is not progress. Then, non-violence. Violence fundamentally is inconsistent with freedom. Then, dignity of labour, sanctity of labour. Labour is the law of Nature and its violation has been the central cause of the present economic muddle. And, then, human values- nothing that compromises a person's humanity is acceptable. We were guided to build India's economy in this way.

We also gradually understood that human being is central in all our thinkings, that the worldview in that respect is holistic and integrated.

However, closest to my heart, always has been, WORK. I would put WORK as central to one's life: '*karma*'. As the Bhagavad Gita says, "*If one eats fruits of the earth rendering no gift of toil,*

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