

Speech at the Nina Foundation event on 25th June 2013

Dr. Shekhar Bhojraj, Ms. Ketna Mehta, Mr. Dhaval Mehta, Dr. Parinaz Humranwala, Ms. Vidya Shenoy, ladies and gentlemen.

This is one of the most, touching functions that I have ever been to. And I am happy, to be in your midst because, you are all God's greatest examples of, a life of courage and fortitude. When I met with Ketnaji and learnt much more about the Nina Foundation, I felt that, the foundation is a beacon, for the everyday journey of the differently abled human being.

From the interactions that I had with Ketnaji, I found her to be a symbol of positivity, service and acceptance. She very humbly attributes, everything that the Nina Foundation has been able to do, to the strength of the organisation, to the team of dedicated and committed doctors, counsellors and volunteers, along with the inner strength of the paraplegics and the quadriplegics.

Ketnaji said, that I should share with you, a snapshot of our work with the underprivileged. I am going to do so, very, very briefly because I want to focus on the lessons that we can learn from your lives. On our Group's work, the philosophy of caring and giving, courses through the veins of the Birla family and through it to our Group. This is right from the days of my Grand Father-in-Law, Shri G. D. Bilra. He was a close confidant of Mahatma Gandhi. He was deeply influenced by Gandhiji's philosophy of trusteeship. This entails, that wealth is to be held in a trust

for the benefit of the multiple stakeholders. Implicit in it, is the concept that, part of the profits be ploughed into, meaningful welfare driven activities, that make an impact on the lives of the underprivileged. This is a legacy that my husband, Adityaji carried forward, and has bequeathed it to my son, Kumar Mangalam.

We, work in 3,000 villages and we reach out to 7 million people across globally. Our focus areas are – healthcare, education, sustainable livelihood, infrastructure and social reform. I just want to say, a word or two, on healthcare and particularly on the differently abled. We do a lot of work with, physically challenged and the polio afflicted. Here we provide callipers, wheelchairs, artificial limbs, all of which help these recipients to become self-reliant. Every time I am at one of these medical camps, I am full of admiration, at the way these people conduct their lives.

Having said that, when I look at you, I marvel at your strength and your positive frame of mind. Ketnaji had left a number of publications of the Nina Foundation. I have gone through a few of them and I think the stories there offer some key lessons to humanity as a whole.

I would like to take a few minutes, to tell the distinguished audience here, on the learnings gleaned. The first point that, I want to make is – finding light in the darkness. You have all, gone through and perhaps continue to go through, the most trying circumstances physically and emotionally. What is truly inspiring, is that, after the initial phase, you have all faced the challenge with equanimity and fortitude. You have all found light, in what many would have construed as darkness, and you

have not let darkness cloud your spirit. The key lesson here is, that life affirming thoughts have the power to heal. Negative emotions can only be destructive.

As I gather from the stories that I have read, you have never despaired to the edge of extremity. The lesson is, being positive and life affirming, takes the fear out of life. At the end of the day, there are issues – fear, anxiety, the why me syndrome and finally acceptance – and this is the story of many, many human beings, though of those with disabilities it's much harsher. How we cope, is all in the mind. The power of the mind, that helps you climb mountains, and it's the mind that will help you conquer new peaks. You have shown it too, with your members participating regularly in the Mumbai Marathon, year in and year out.

The message that comes out strong and clear - is that, building a strong faith in oneself, and in God, can help surmount, seemingly un-surmountable situations. All of you must be familiar with the lives of Christopher Reeve, the actor or that of Stephen Hawking, both of whom rose above their physical limitations and soared to unimaginable heights. I do strongly believe that, God gives every human being an inner strength, a force, that help individuals deal with complexities and that God has a design for each of us. Prayer is incredibly important. It keeps you attuned to spiritualism. It teaches you to accept yourself unconditionally and go with the flow, each day at a time, and as your journal says "Where there is a wheel, there is a way".

I wish your journey of life becomes better, as more and more people engage with the cause of the differently abled. My wish is that, there are more spinal cord injury rehabilitation centres, greater Government and public support, better attitudes in society, more friendlier and better travel facilities, infrastructural facilities and over all a more friendly nation, that reaches out to the differently abled. And above all that some day, in the not so distant future, stem cell therapy would help cure spinal cord injuries.

I would like to salute all of you here with a few verses from Dr. Harivanshrai Bachchan's poem – कोशिश करने वालों की कभी हार नहीं होती - as to me it captures the spirit that all of you epitomise -

लहरों से डर कर नौका, पार नहीं होती,
कोशिश करने वालों की, कभी हार नहीं होती।

नन्हीं चींटी, जब दाना लेकर चलती है,
चढ़ती दीवारों पर, सौ बार फिसलती है।
मन का विश्वास, रगों में साहस भरता है,
चढ़कर गिरना, गिरकर चढ़ना, न अखरता है।
आखिर उसकी मेहनत बेकार नहीं होती,
कोशिश करने वालों की, कभी हार नहीं होती।

Thank you.