**Honorable VC Sir Podcast Transcript**

Dear All,

Brothers and Sisters,

Warm greetings from Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, a Deemed-to-be University.

I am happy to welcome you for this next episode of ‘Dear All’. Today, I will be sharing my thoughts on the topic of **"Progressing towards gender inclusivity and gender sensitive community ".**

The Indian constitution strongly advocates for equality and states that all the citizens should have an equal number of opportunities for enjoyment of life and growth as human beings regardless of their race, caste, religion, community, social status and gender. From the gender perspective, the constitution essentially gives recognition to the ‘right of choice and self-determination’, wherein a person has the right to decide and determine their own gender and lead a dignified life. Keeping this in mind, the Honorable Supreme Court of India gave a historical decision on 15 April 2014, and recognized the ‘Third Gender’ under the Indian constitution. Subsequently, a Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 has also been passed by the Indian Parliament.

Even though, safeguarding the interests of people from the third gender has become a law, it is quite alarming that not many of us are aware about the same and we are not sure about our responsibilities. There is an immense need to increase the awareness about gender issue among all the sections of the community and we all should act together to promote gender inclusivity. As a citizen of the nation, it is our responsibility to prohibit all forms of discrimination against transgender individuals and ensure that equal opportunities are given to them in educational establishments, employment, health care, etc. At the same time, we have to ensure that all the available welfare measures are equally accessible to them, including social security and various health schemes launched by the government.

Acknowledging the need to make significant progress towards gender inclusivity, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council has given significant weightage in their scoring to gender equity and the efforts taken by the institution to promote gender inclusion. It is the need of the hour that students from all streams should be sensitized about gender, gender disparities, the problems faced by people from the third gender, and the kind of approach that needs to be adopted by different stakeholders to eventually create a gender sensitive community.

Dear colleagues, it is high time that all the institutions, including health science institutions should adopt an inclusive approach towards transgender individuals and make them a part of the workforce in different settings. This could be in the form of reviewing of the existing policies for human resource, recruitment of staff, promotion and the nature of benefits rendered to the staff regardless of the gender. It will be an encouraging move to solicit and incorporate suggestions from a person from the transgender community, to ensure that the policies correctly reflect the ways in which an institution approach the Third Gender.

Further, the institution should take active efforts to formulate a gender sensitization action plan and thereby periodically organize gender equity promotion programs targeting all the employees working in the institution. In addition, the institutions can develop a comprehensive grievance redressal mechanism for their transgender employees to promptly address the potential harassment complaints. Further, institutions should also provide facilities, including access to washrooms, that are appropriate for transgender employees' identity.

Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Deemed-to-be-University, Puducherry has been leading from the front and has given vocational opportunities to people from the third gender and has ensured their smooth inclusion in the SBV family. In order to promote easy access to health care, a transgender clinic has been started in Mahatma Gandhi College and Research Institute with an aim to overcome all barriers and ensure positive health seeking behavior. In addition, multiple other initiatives have been taken to promote gender inclusion within the workplace settings.

My dear students, preparing the Indian workspace for a gender-inclusive approach is a challenging task and it will surely take some time for accommodating societal change of this extent. However, I have no doubts that in the vision to improve the status of the transgender community, we will be needing a collective effort. Moreover, it is necessary to empower the general population and the different stakeholders in the institution, including students, as it will be an important step to minimize the social stigma and prepare the future generation of youth.

We have to act together to ensure improvement in the quality of life of transgender sections of the community and progress forward towards gender inclusion and gender-sensitive community.

We wish you all the best in each of your endeavors. At this time, I also wish you the best of health. I eagerly look forward to staying in touch. Till then...

Namaste, Jai Hind.