

## A date with extraordinary women

Madhur Tankha



*The Hindu Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar releasing senior Congress leader Karan Singh's book, 'Meetings with remarkable women', along with veteran actor Sharmila Tagore in New Delhi on Saturday. Photo: Shiv Kumar Pushpakar*

Deploping the condition of Indian women, Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar on Saturday said incidents of female foeticide, bride burning and discrimination are a cause for worry and need to be redressed.

Launching senior Congress leader Karan Singh's book *Meetings with Remarkable Women* here, Ms. Kumar said: "If Helen Keller, who could neither see nor hear, could overcome her disabilities then why cannot Indian women triumph?"

An American political activist, Ms. Keller worked tirelessly for persons with disabilities.

Noting that the book was dedicated to women from all walks of life, Ms. Kumar revealed to a packed audience that Dr. Singh's mother is the first to be featured in the book, which offers a glimpse into lives of 27 women.

"I am unabashed partial to women. I think you (Dr. Singh) are also unabashed partial to women. I think all right thinking men are partial to women. Can any man stand up here and say he is not? ... Of the 27 remarkable women in the book, I have met 12 or 13 of them. They come from diverse cultures."

Dedicating his book to the country's women, Dr. Singh reiterated Lok Sabha Speaker's concern for female foeticide and bride burning. He said emancipation of women was the need of the hour.

He complimented Ms. Kumar for controlling Lok Sabha which had hordes of men. "She never loses her cool and has never raises her voice."

In his short but articulate and insightful speech, Dr. Singh said the book was not for those who were expecting to read about “hidden romance and secret meetings”.

“The only person I romanced with was my wife. At the time of our marriage, I was 19, while she was 13 years old. We travelled the world together and were virtually inseparable... The book is about women from different backgrounds like philosophy and religion. In religion, the book has featured Anandmayi Ma Then we have Rukmini Devi Arundale, who singlehandedly crusaded for Bharatanatyam, the greatest solo dance in the world. Then there is M. S. Subbulakshmi.”

On the occasion, Bollywood actor Shamila Tagore read excerpts of the book dealing with Dr. Karan Singh’s mother. He was extremely attached to his mother and missed her because he was studying at a boarding school.

Earlier, Ms. Tagore praised the author for his brevity and said the book was a valuable addition to anyone’s library.

With rare pictures of featured personalities, the book offers a glimpse into the lives of extraordinary women including late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, United Progressive Alliance Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Edwina Mountbatten.