Special Lecture: Human Rights in the Present Context

It was a day of honour for ITM Law School, ITM University, Gurgaon, when Hon'ble Mr. Justice JS Verma, Former Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission and Former Chief Justice of India, visited the campus and delivered an inspiring lecture on 'Human Rights in the Present Context' as a part of the Human Rights Day Celebration. He was given a rousing welcome by Prof. Prem Vrat, Vice-Chancellor of ITM University and Prof. S. Shanthakumar, Director, ITM Law School on behalf of the University. Justice Verma is known for his numerous momentous judgments which decided the course of protection and enforcement of Human Rights in this country. His landmark judgment in Visakha v. State of Rajasthan has today enabled millions of women to work without fear of sexual harassment in workplaces. The judgment in Nilabati Behra v. State of Orissa has paved the way for compensation jurisprudence in India. He is also a man of high moral standing who has never showed any fear in openly criticizing about corruption among different government functionaries including the higher judiciary. His judgment in Vineet Narain case was the forerunner to the creation of Central Vigilance Commission. In his speech, Justice Verma opined that Human Rights are the quintessence of human dignity. In his own words: "It is a matter of heart and is the heart of the matter." He refused to compartmentalize Human Rights into different Generations of Rights as they are "universal, indivisible and inter-related". He emphasized on Fundamental Duties and the citizens ought to follow them even though they are not legally enforceable. In this connection, he referred to Gandhiji's ideologies and the importance he had emphasized on duties in enjoying the rights. Justice Verma stated enacting laws is not a panacea to the problem of protection and enforcement of Human Rights. He cited the example of Fundamental Right to Education. Even though it was a Directive Principle since the commencement of the Constitution and illiteracy was supposed to be eradicated within 10 years, we miserably failed in the process. Over 60, addition of the new Fundamental Right under Article 21A was mere rhetoric, while, the real goal remains elusive. No legislation would be sufficient unless the people of this country are willing to work towards the eradication of corruption. He gave instances from his life how many of above-mentioned judgments were an outcome of years of observation and thought process. He opined that technology has contributed immensely in the protection of Human Rights. It has obliterated gender discrimination by offering women greater opportunities to work, created sustainable development, fought critical diseases, so on and so forth. He concluded by stating that, today Human Rights remain at the core not only of good governance but humane governance which is essentially people centric and owned by the people.