

VERTICAL FILE

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119 JUL 1991

**DR. SMT. PREMLILA V. THACKERSEY  
SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY FELICITATION FUNCTION**

**SEPTEMBER 27, 1969**



राष्ट्रपति भवन, नई दिल्ली-4.  
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN,  
NEW DELHI-4.

September 6, 1969.

I am glad to learn that Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University and other organisations have joined together to hold a function on the 27th September, 1969, to felicitate Dr.(Smt) Premlila V. Thackersey on her attaining seventy-five years of age.

Dr. Premlila Thackersey's devotion and dedication to the cause of women's education will always remain an inspiration and an example. On this happy occasion, I send my best wishes to Dr.(Smt.) Premlila Thackersey for many years of health and happiness.



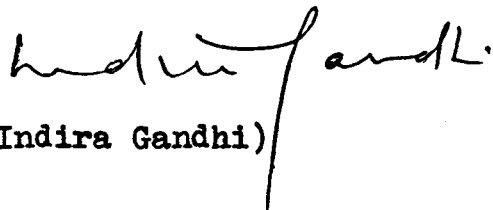
PRIME MINISTER

Calcutta,  
September 14, 1969.

Dear Shrimati Thackersey,

My felicitations and good wishes to you on your seventy-fifth birthday. We are indebted to you for your dedicated work for women. May you be with us for a long time to come.

Yours sincerely,

  
(Indira Gandhi)

Shrimati Premlila V. Thackersey,  
Vice-Chancellor,  
S.N.D.T. Women's University,  
1, Nathibai Thackersey Road,  
Bombay 20 B.R.

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‘‘Girija’’  
30, Edward Elliot Road,  
Mylapore, Madras-4.

September 9, 1969.

Smt. Premlila V. Thackersey has worked indefatigably  
for the promotion of women’s education in our country  
and I send my best wishes on this occasion.

S. RADHAKRISHNAN

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C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

NAOROJI ROAD  
CHETPUT  
MADRAS 31

September 4, 1969

My best wishes for the function  
on 27th September. I join in the tributes  
rightly paid on the occasion.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

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CHAIRMAN

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION  
BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG  
(MATHURA ROAD), NEW DELHI-1

September 6, 1969.

I feel honoured and happy to take this welcome opportunity to offer my most sincere felicitation to Smt. Thackersey on her completion of 75 years. She has rendered over several decades a most distinguished service to Women's education and to public life generally. She occupies a most honoured place amongst the pioneers and architects of women's education in our country. She has contributed to the development and progress of the S.N.D.T. University in numerous ways, but above all by her great and inspiring example of dedication, perseverance and unswerving faith in the cause of women's education. I wish her many years of fruitful and devoted work in the service of education and the country.

D. S. KOTHARI

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GOVERNOR OF  
MAHARASHTRA

Raj Bhavan,  
BOMBAY.  
September 5, 1969.

I am very glad to hear that the Shreemati Premlila V. Thackersey Seventy-fifth Birthday Felicitations Committee is organising a function on the 27th September 1969, to felicitate Shrimati Premlila Thackersey.

Shrimati Premlila Thackersey has done wonderful work in the field of education, particularly for women, and in various other activities. Her life has been one of great service right through and she deserves the admiration of the whole country.

I wish Shrimati Premlila Thackersey a long life of continued good health and prosperity. May God bless her.

P. V. CHERIAN

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GOVERNOR OF  
GUJARAT

Raj Bhavan,  
Ahmedabad.

September 13, 1969.

I am glad to know that Dr. (Smt.) Premlila V. Thackersey has completed 75 years of her fruitful life and 50 years of her valuable service to the Nation in the cause of women's education.

I send my good wishes on this happy occasion. May she live long to continue her great work in the sphere of education and social service.

SHRIMAN NARAYAN

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Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,  
Chowpatty Road,  
Bombay-7.

September 12, 1969.

It is with immense pleasure that I associate myself with the celebration of the completion of 75 years by Lady Premlila V. Thackersey. For decades I have watched the dedicated public service of Lady Thackersey and have been fascinated by the zeal and energy with which she has promoted the worthy cause of women's education. To her belongs in a large measure the credit for the progress and the preeminent position of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University. In the distinguished company of Mahatma Gandhi and Maharshi Karve, Lady Thackersey has made the cause of women's education and progress her life's mission. I join her numerous admirers in wishing her many more years of useful service to the women of India.

K. M. MUNSHI

**SPONSORS**  
**OF**  
**DR. SMT. PREMLILA V. THACKERSEY**  
**FELICITATION FUNCTION**

1. Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University
  2. United Women's Organisation
    1. Bharatiya Vanita Samaj, Bombay
    - II. Bhagini Samaj, Bombay
    - III. Bombay Young Women's Christian Association Bombay
    - IV. Indian Red Cross Society, Bombay
    - v. Time and Talent Club, Bombay
    - VI. Maharashtra State Women's Council, Bombay
    - VII. The League of Mercy, Bombay
    - VIII. Mahila Milan, Bombay
    - IX. The Bombay Pradesh Congress Mahila Vibhag, Bombay
    - x. Vanita Samaj, Bombay
    - XI. Pathare Kshatriya Vaktrutwottejak Samaj, Bombay
    - XII. Saraswati Bhagini Samaj, Bombay
    - XIII. Sneha Mandal, Bombay
  - xiv. Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Bombay
  - xv. Kote Hindu Stree Mandal, Bombay
  - xvi. Bhatiya Stree Mandal, Bombay
  3. Vanita Vishram, Bombay, and Surat
  4. Seva Sadan, Poona
  5. Hingne Stree Shikshan Samstha, Poona
  6. Karve Institute of Social Service, Poona
  7. Bombay Dakshin Vibhag Stree Sanstha Samiti, Poona
  8. The Ladies Wing of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, Bombay
  9. Stree Mandal, Bombay
  10. Bombay Women's Civic Corporation, Bombay
  11. Altrusa Club of Bombay
  12. National Council of Women in India (West Bengal)
  13. Women Graduates Union, Bombay
  14. Vile Parle Mahila Sangh, Bombay
  15. Bharatiya Stree Seva Samaj, Bombay
- Admirers and Friends





To  
**Dr. Shreemati Premlilaben V. Thackersey,**  
Vice-Chancellor,  
**Shreemati Nathibhai Damodar Thackersey Women's University,**  
**Bombay**

We, members of the Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council, staff and students of the conducted and affiliated colleges of Shreemati Nathibhai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, Bombay, Women's Organisations, friends and admirers consider it a great honour and privilege to greet you and felicitate you on the happy occasion of your completing seventy five years, which fell on January 8, 1969.

No less than fifty years of your life time, energy and inspiring leadership have gone into seeing this infant University grow into a full-fledged one. What was once a sapling has now grown into an expansive banyan tree, rooted firmly in its soil and with its branches spread out far and wide. Inadequate as the word "Vice-Chancellor" is in the context of what you have done and are doing for this University, we cannot but gratefully and proudly record the fact that during the last twelve years that you have functioned as the Vice-Chancellor of this University, you have invested the Chair with grace and dignity, brought new visions, opened new horizons, laid firm guide-lines and established healthy traditions which would remain the source of cheer, strength and inspiration to us in years to come. The finest gift a man can give to his age and time is the gift of a constructive and creative life. You have dedicated your life to those things which are enduring, and the words of William James that "the great use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it", describe your mission in life aptly.

Madam, we are not unaware of the fact that your fervour for education, especially women's education and social service, has not been confined only to this University, but has flown into a number of other bodies and institutions, such as, the Inter-University Board of India and Ceylon, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Vanita Vishram, Seva Sadan, Lady Northcote Orphanage, J. P. Trivedi and Dr. Koyaji Memorial Trusts — to name only

few — which have had the benefit of your sober and enlightened leadership.

Your illustrious husband, Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, was a prince among men, combining in himself the visions of a lofty idealist with the acumen of a successful businessman, whose career was too sadly and suddenly nipped before all his benevolent visions could materialise and fructify. In a significant way, Madam, you have not only followed the footsteps of your illustrious husband, not only used every ounce of your physical, mental and spiritual energy to translate his dreams and ideals into concrete realities, but have also explored several other avenues of selfless service on your own, which have earned you well-deserved tributes of admiration and respect from the highest to the lowest.

Your public life is in harmony with your private life, which is characterised by simplicity, sincerity, tolerance, courage, compassion and illumined by an unswerving faith in God. You are deeply religious and to you religion includes service to society as much as devotion to God. Sir Vithaldas Thackersey Charitable Trust and another in your own name bear eloquent testimony to the silent and selfless manner in which your hand and heart go out to alleviate poverty, suffering and sickness without any distinction of caste or creed.

We could see that the holy scriptures particularly the Bhagwadgita, which you are known to hold in the highest esteem, have indeed played a significant part in moulding your character and personality, enabling you to be immersed in activities with a supreme sense of sublime detachment. Yours is verily a Rajayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga rolled into one.

Though deeply rooted in the finest traditions of Indian philosophy and culture, which along with your progressive outlook establish you as one of the finest examples of Indian Womanhood, you are equally at home with con-



temporary trends of modern science, technology and civilization. Your keen and active interest in our faculties of Home Science and Nursing, as also in the proposed Technological Institute for women on our Juhu Campus are evidence of this fact.

Your stamina, alertness and memory and your capacity for hard work, efficiency, and punctuality at the age of seventyfive are of such order as to put even many a young woman and man to shame. Your vision and grasp of the whole, along with an eye for the minute detail in matters of day to day or long range planning, finance and administration have enriched our University as they have enriched other institutions having the benefit of your guidance and leadership. Your example, your words, your ideas, and your ideals will be projected into the future to live for ever in the lives of others. Your success has been the acceptance of the challenge of the difficult. The inspiring words of Phillips Bowls are true about you. He says: "Do not pray for tasks

equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle". Truly, you have been a miracle.

We voice our feelings in the words of Isavasya Upanishada:

कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतं समाः ।

एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्मि न कर्म लिप्यते नरेः ॥

and express our heartfelt wish and pray that you may live to be a hundred so that we may have the honour and privilege of honouring you on your centenary.

M. D. Chaudhari,  
Minister for Education,  
Government of Maharashtra and  
President, Smt. Premlila V.  
Thackersey Seventy fifth  
Birthday Felicitations Committee

Bombay,  
September 27, 1969.

परोपकाराय सतां विभूतयः ।

*The wealth of the good is for the welfare of others*

# Gleanings in the life of Dr. Smt. Premlila Vithaldas Thackersey



Dr. Premlilaben Thackersey who has just completed seventy five years of her eventful and fruitful life dedicated to the service of the nation and Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University in particular, is a remarkable instance of what courage and will-power of an enlightened individual can achieve against heavy odds. It also shows how an ordinary woman can rise to the pinnacle of glory by working hard with understanding and faith and that academic qualifications are not the only essentials to make a life successful.

Hailed at her birth on January 8, 1894 as a gift from God, by her father Sheth Dharsi Purshottam of a devout Bhatia family of Rajkot in an age when the birth of a daughter in a Hindu family did not usually call for any joy, she was fondly named Bachuben. Little did the fond parents dream that this daughter of theirs was later to become a mother to many women of India. She took her vernacular education in a local board primary school at Rajkot, but did not find further incentive to study further, in keeping with the prevalent social conditions of the time. At the age of twenty, she was married to Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, a leading industrialist of Bombay who renamed her Premlila.

After her marriage, her formal education, which had abruptly ended under social compulsion was resumed at the instance of her husband, who engaged an English lady, Miss Favell, as her tutor-companion, besides engaging first rate tutors to teach her Sanskrit and Music. Premlilaben, who had only lacked the opportunity but neither the aptitude nor mental equipment for higher studies, made rapid strides to equip herself as the avowed life partner of her illustrious husband, whose multifarious activities included contacts at all levels from the highest to the lowest in the industrial, social, political and economic fields in the country.

Premlilaben recalled how Sir Vithaldas in one of his first letters to her on the eve of their marriage had defined his attitude towards life, which consisted of selfless service

to society and not just a self-centred enjoyment of affluence and creature comforts which they had in abundance. He had also held before her the ideal of Smt. Ramabai Ranade the wife of the great Indian, Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade, the founder of "Sevasadan" and suggested that in the changing context of reawakened India, the woman had also to contribute to the all-round progress of the country. Such a supposedly exacting prospect would have half frightened or damped a young girl; but far from being damped or deterred by such a prospect, Premlilaben resolved there and then to accept that ideal and stand by her husband's side in realising it. She knew that she had to go a long way, not only in reaching out for that high ideal but also to be worthy of being a helpmate in her husband's private life and public career. Social customs and barriers in those days were rather forbiddingly severe; women then did not breathe the open air as much as they do now, but Sir Vithaldas was determined to make a Lady of the young woman he had married — not hesitating even to take her out horse-riding with him every morning and took her out touring all over India with him to educate her in a much broader sense.

In 1917, Sir Vithaldas and Premlilaben, on their first visit to the Hindu Widows' Home at Higne in Poona met Dr. D. K. Karve who had just then planted the seedling of the Indian Women's University with only four students on its rolls. This was only a prologue to the happy association when, later, Sir Vithaldas and Dr. Karve, joined hands in raising up the only University for women in India and among the very few such institutions in the world.

In 1919 when the Thackerseys were planning a world tour, Premlilaben wanted a lady companion to accompany her. Sir Vithaldas wrote to Dr. Karve, who responded by sending one of his mature students, Smt. Sitabai Annigeri, for the purpose. All necessary preparations having been made, Sir Vithaldas, Premlilaben and a party consisting of Sir M. Viswesaraiya, Shri Mulraj Khatau, Shri and Smt. Mangaldas Mehta and Sitabai Annigeri set out on March 14,

1919 by the S. S. Dunera. On the first lap of their voyage they disembarked at Japan where they visited the Women's University in Tokyo. Premilaben's day to day diary of the journey reveals how the University with 1700 women on its rolls, of whom 800 lived on the campus itself impressed the visiting couple and inspired them to have something on the same lines for women in India. On the next lap of their journey to the United States of America via Honolulu, after a visit to China, they had ample time on the ship to follow up this idea. They asked Smt. Annigeri many a question about the University which, as coincidence would have it, was founded by Dr. Karve exactly on the model of the Women's University in Japan on the basis of a booklet sent to him by a friend in 1915.

After spending two months in America, the party left for Canada and subsequently to the United Kingdom, reaching Liverpool on 25th of September. Sir Vithaldas's sudden indisposition cut short the tour and the party returned to India on 23rd of November by the Scindia ship, S. S. Loyalty. On the pier among others waiting to receive them was Dr. Karve. Sir Vithaldas was a man of quick decisions and his mind seemed to have been made up on what he was going to do for the education of Indian Women. He asked Dr. Karve if he could see him in the evening; and the meeting which then took place left Dr. Karve completely overwhelmed, for Sir Vithaldas spontaneously and unprompted offered him a sum of no less than rupees fifteen lakhs for the Women's University, subject to the main conditions that the University was to be named after his revered mother Shreemati Nathibai and that the headquarters of the University should be shifted to Bombay.

In 1920, Sir Vithaldas, Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Shri Madhavji Damodar and Lady Thackersey were nominated by the Thackersey family to the Senate of the University. Twenty-six years old Lady Thackersey's initial hesitation and diffidence were persuasively overcome by her husband's insistence that one always learnt, not by evading but by accepting responsibilities. Since then, Lady Thackersey never looked back, but continued to be intimately associated with the working of the University till this day.

Sir Vithaldas and Premilaben who were then living in a rented house at Poona, decided to have their own house and purchased some acres of land on the Yervada Hill in Poona where there was a small temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. The construction of the house, which later came to be known as "Parnakuti", started under their direct supervision. The urge for "Parnakuti" has an interesting history behind it. Sir Vithaldas used to have religious and philosophical discourses with Shri Bapat, an eminent Shastri of Poona, with whom he also read the Bhagwadgeeta. This led to a desire to have a secluded spot of his own where he could retire and quietly meditate. Thus was born the idea

of "Parnakuti" which instead of a small cottage finally came to have the architectural beauty and proportions of a magnificent structure, still known all through the country by its unassuming nomenclature "Parnakuti". It became world famous when Gandhiji carried out his Harijan fast there in 1933 and newsmen called it the "Marble Palace".

On June 1, 1922 the Thackerseys took their residence in "Parnakuti" which was ready to receive them, though not altogether complete in several of its details and appendages. Hardly a little more than two months had elapsed when Sir Vithaldas, who was then with Premilaben on a visit to Bombay, suddenly took ill. His ulcer burst; the family physician and best surgical help were rushed; the operation was performed; but the fatal moment arrived on the morning of August 12, 1922 when Sir Vithaldas breathed his last. For Lady Thackersey, who was then only twenty-eight, it was a shattering blow and her agony could more easily be imagined than described.

Premilaben, on the threshold of her life, hopes and dreams was heart-broken. It was a stunning blow from which the prospects of recovery were dim. The ship all set for smooth sailing was wrecked in mid-stream. Few could have the strength to raise one's head after this prostration of dire calamity. She cut herself off from all activities, but even before the wound had healed, she showed exceptional resilience and her husband's ideals and teachings gave her courage and sustained her ever afterwards. The voice of the Bhagwadgeeta, her daily refuge and solace, came to her aid:

मुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।  
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

Premilaben hearkened the call of "battle"; and some four years later, emerged from the excruciating ordeal of her bereavement and plunged herself into one activity after another to transform her husband's visions into concrete realities. It was in 1926 that among other things, she picked up the old thread that had bound her to the Women's University. In fact, she completely identified herself with the infant University and has ever since played the mother's role in rearing it up.

In 1936, the headquarters of the University moved from Poona to Bombay. However, the University had no building of its own. The office and the Arts College were run in a rented premises. Within a few months Premilaben saw Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy and Lady Willingdon, both of whom she found extremely sympathetic towards the cause and then with the help of Lord Brabourne, the Governor of Bombay and Sir Jagdish Prasad, member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, plots on Queen's Road were acquired where the present buildings of the University are located.

Between 1937 and 1947 there are a number of historic occasions for the University, which was looked after by Premlilaben as her own offspring and which was guided by the founder Maharshi Karve and veteran workers like Sir Sitaram Patkar, Shri H. L. Kaji, Shri Divetia, and Shri K. M. Zaveri and others. In 1939, as desired by the Senate of the University, Premlilaben went all the way to Rajkot, where Mahatma Gandhi was resting after his historic fast, to request him to deliver the convocation address. Though Bapu could not be persuaded to do it, he yielded to Premlilaben's pressure to remain present on the occasion on two conditions: one that he would not speak at all, and the other, that Premlilaben should approach Shri B. G. Kher, Chief Minister of Bombay State to deliver the convocation address in Gujarati. Back went Premlilaben to Bombay and approached Shri B. G. Kher who readily obliged.

The convocation was duly held in Sunderbai Hall. It was a most unique and memorable occasion. On the dias sat, by the side of Premlilaben, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sir M. Viswesaraiya, Meeraben and a whole galaxy of national leaders and prominent persons. Though Gandhiji did not utter a single word, his very presence, occasionally lit by flashes of that child-like smile so characteristic of him, sanctified the occasion and raised it to historic significance and an unforgettable experience.

Then in 1942, the University celebrated its Silver Jubilee under the Presidentship of Dr. Radhakrishnan, who delivered one of the most illuminating and inspiring addresses in the annals of the University. On this occasion, Premlilaben was able to collect a good amount. This collection prompted Dr. M. R. Jaykar in his Silver Jubilee speech at the Poona College to describe her as India's third "royal beggar"—next in this respect only to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Malaviya.

Though the University degrees were accorded equivalence and recognition in 1937 by the Government of Bombay for employment purposes, it was over a decade later in 1949, after India's Independence, that the University was granted the charter by the Government. Most appreciative words were said by all those who spoke on the occasion when the Bill for granting the charter to the University was introduced in the Legislative Assembly under the leadership of Shri B. G. Kher, as this University had brought new hope and cheer to thousands of women who would have otherwise remained the "un-lighted lamps".

In 1949, when the University received statutory recognition, Shri Morarji Desai, the then Home Minister of the Bombay State telephoned Premlilaben at Poona, conveying the Government's desire to nominate her as the first Vice-Chancellor. Premlilaben begged to be excused, but she could not but accept the honour when Sir Maharaj

Singh, the Governor of Bombay pressed her to do so.

In 1953, the University conferred the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature on her as well as on Dr. Karve, the two main pillars of the University for their dedicated services to the institution. The Banares Hindu University with which she was associated since its foundation, also conferred the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature on her in 1956.

The University celebrated Bharat Ratna D. K. Karve's centenary in the Brabourne Stadium under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1958 when he came all the way from Delhi to felicitate the grand old Maharshi in person. Premlilaben utilised this occasion too, to play the role of a "royal beggar" and collected a substantial amount for the University, but not before offering her own contribution of two lakhs of rupees.

When the bilingual State of Bombay was bifurcated into the separate States of Maharashtra and Gujarat, Premlilaben met Shri Govind Vallabh Pant, the then Home Minister of the Government of India, who assured her that the special features of the University would be retained and that it would continue to enjoy its unrestricted jurisdiction.

Eight years later, in 1966, the University celebrated its Golden Jubilee and Premlilaben succeeded in persuading Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and Dr. Zakir Husain, President of India, to inaugurate the Golden Jubilee and preside over the concluding function. Premlilaben with her amazing insight into the intricacies of finance, decided to take advantage of this occasion also for replenishing the exchequer of the University. She made a beginning by donating six lakhs of rupees herself. It was mainly due to her personal efforts and guidance that the University was able to collect a considerable amount.

After 1951, when the University was put on the Statute Book, it has made rapid strides, expanding in all directions. During Premlilaben's three consecutive terms as Vice-Chancellor, enrolment has increased from 1,150 to 12,500; the number of conducted and affiliated colleges rose to from 4 to 20; and new faculties of Home Science, Nursing and Education were added. The spacious campus of the University was found to be too small and a plot of land at Juhu was acquired to meet the requirements of the new faculties with their growing numbers. Premlilaben soon hopes to add the Faculty of Technology to the existing ones to meet the changing needs of Society.

Premlilaben has served this University for half a century which also happens to be almost the age of the University itself. Now at seventy-five, when she is retiring as Vice-Chancellor, one is almost tempted to say that the history of the University is the biography of Premlilaben, were it not for the fear that she would be the first to deny this, adding with her characteristic humility, that it is others who have worked and she is given the credit for it.

Though the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University is Premlilaben's pet child, it is not the only one to monopolise her attention. There are in fact several other institutions such as the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, the Vanita Vishram at Bombay and Surat and the Seva Sadan at Poona, to name only a few, which have no less benefitted from her ability for organisation and service. All work is for her of the nature of "Yagna" which she performs solely for the satisfaction of having done her duty without expectations of return. Through her untiring efforts as the Chairman of the Kasturba Trust for over a decade, constructive work and relief for women in distress have reached even the remotest villages in the farflung corners of the country. It must have been no small satisfaction to her to see Kasturba's and Mahadeobhai Desai's Smruti Mandir formally inaugurated by Shri Morarji Desai on 22nd February 1969 at the Aga Khan Palace which was turned over to the nation as a historical monument by H.H. the Aga Khan on the same day.

Premililaben's association with Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba was both intimate and long. She first met Gandhiji in 1915 at the residence of Smt. Jaijibai Petit when Gandhiji returned from Africa. She met him again in 1924 at the Sassoon Hospital although she was in touch with his activities during the intervening period. In 1928, she visited the Sabarmati Ashram and in 1930 Gandhiji stayed at "Parnakuti" for few hours. Since then Parnakuti gradually assumed the eminence of a national guest house where, besides Ba and Bapu, Rabindranath Tagore, C. Rajagopalachari, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sir Jagdish Prasad and a host of National luminaries enjoyed Premlilaben's impeccable hospitality. No wonder that C. Rajagopalachari, the then Governor General of India, after enjoying her hospitality wrote back "It was most remarkable the way in which you discharged the duties of hostess as correctly as any of the Governors of Provinces with whom I stayed". Subhas Chandra Bose, the then President of the Indian National Congress, made a penetrating remark in his letter to her when he said, "you have that unique quality whereby you can draw even a stranger towards you"—the truth of which is shared by thousands of men and women, high and low, who have found themselves absolutely at home with her. Premlilaben is an aristocrat, but not an autocrat and considering how often wealth is accompanied by snobbishness and intolerance one is amazed at Premlilaben's modesty, sympathy, tolerance and compassion. In the "Parnakuti" itself she has been running for years a hostel for girls in less fortunate circumstances where boarding, lodging and tuition are free. Sir Vithaldas Damodar Thackersey Charitable Trust and another in her own name offer financial help to innumerable students, widows, the old and the disabled without any distinction of caste or creed. Sir Vithaldas Nagar

at Santacruz, Bombay, aims at providing decent residential blocks on moderate rent. Premlilaben is a deeply religious person and the beautiful temple at Sir Vithaldas Nagar is not only suggestive of her religious fervour but also of her aesthetic taste.

Premililaben's public life is of a piece with her private life—both remarkable for purity, integrity, humility and simplicity. Living a disciplined, almost austere life, her daily routine comprises getting up at four in the morning, with silent prayer and a regular walk and then attending to the daily routine. After a little rest after lunch she attends University office and her business engagements, office work and trust work, at which she is equally at home. She holds a prominent place in the working of the Thackersey Group of Mills and she is keenly interested in the progress of Sirdar Carbonic Gas Co., Ltd. which was started by her husband. She manages her own finances independently. In spite of her multifarious activities, she always finds time for her social calls to visit an ailing friend or a sick relative. She draws her inspiration for what she is and what she does from the traditions of Indian philosophy, religion and culture. She maintains her health and physical stamina, largely it seems, on the strength of her faith, her humanism, her moral outlook, simplicity of nature and utter selflessness in her dealings with others. She is still fond of travelling and uses every official occasion to visit religious and historical places.

Among the influences which moulded Premlilaben's life and personality were those of her devout and cultured, parents in childhood, that of Sir Vithaldas, her husband, who shaped her into a person sharing his ideals and visions, that of Mahatma Gandhi who inspired her to dedicate herself to the service of the underprivileged, that of the Bhagwadgita from which she imbibed the cardinal principles of righteous living.

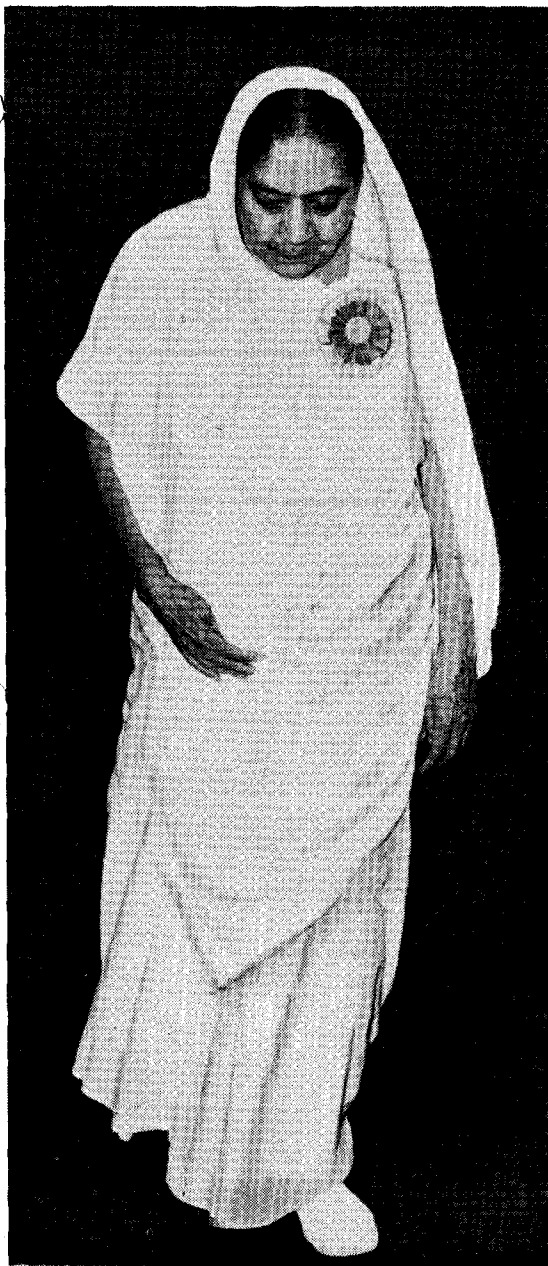
In conclusion, we can only pay our humble tribute to Premlilaben, the daughter of the age of social reformers like Phule, Ranade, Gokhale, Karve, Gandhiji and Nehru, who have influenced her directly or indirectly. True to the spirit of the age, she has contributed considerably to the cause through her selfless service, generous munificence and sincerity of work. She has made the most of herself by fanning the tiny spark of personality within her into the flame of achievement. Her name together with that of other social reformers in the cause of women's education is bound to go down in letters of gold in the women's archives and will be remembered by future generations as that of a person who combined in her the Rajayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga, and one who has chosen the path of "Shreya" to "Preya".

As the Kathopanishada says:—

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेत स्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।

श्रेयी हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते ॥

*Dr. Smt. Premlila V. Thackersey*



## SPAN OF EVENTS

- 1894: 8th January: Birth at Rajkot in Saurashtra in a middle class Bhatia family.
- 1913: 9th February: Marriage with Sir Vithaldas Damodar Thackersey, a leading industrialist and philanthropist of Bombay.
- Association with Vanita Vishram through Late Smt. Naniben Gajjar and Seva Sadan through Smt. Ramabai Ranade.
- 1915: Met Gandhiji for the first time after his return from Africa.
- 1916: Attended the laying of foundation stone ceremony of the Banares Hindu University with Sir Vithaldas Thackersey.
- 1917: Visited Hindu Widows' Home with Sir Vithaldas at Hingne, Poona. First meeting with Shri Dhondo Keshav Karve who had founded the Indian Women's University there in 1916.
- 1919: 14th March: Left for world tour with Sir Vithaldas. While at Tokyo, visited the Japan Women's University.
- 1920: Sir Vithaldas donated fifteen lakhs of rupees in Trust to the Indian Women's University, founded by Dr. D. K. Karve. The University was then named after her mother-in-law, Smt. Nathibai Damodar Thackersey.
- Nomination to the Senate of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Indian Women's University with four other members from the Donor's Constituency.
- 1922: 1st June: Shifted to Parnakuti — her palatial residence at Poona.
- 12th August: Death of Sir Vithaldas Thackersey.
- 1924: Met Gandhiji again at Sassoon Hospital, Poona.
- 1926: Nomination to the Syndicate of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Indian Women's University.

- 1928: Visited Sabarmati Ashram.
- 1930: Gandhiji's first visit to Parnakuti.
- 1932: Gurudev who had come to meet Gandhiji at Poona, at the time of his Epic Fast stayed with her at Parnakuti.
- 1933: Gandhiji's historic Harijan Fast for 21 days at Parnakuti.
- 1936: Transference of University headquarters to Bombay.
- 1938: Shri Subhas Bose, the Congress President, stayed at Parnakuti.
- 1939: Went to Rajkot to request Mahatmaji to attend the Convocation of the University. Gandhiji accepted the invitation.
- 1942: Collected substantial donations for the Celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of the University.
- 1944: Nomination as the Trustee of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust by Gandhiji.  
Gandhiji drove straight to Parnakuti when released from Aga Khan Palace and stayed with her for four days.
- 1944: Gandhiji stayed at Mahabaleshwar as her guest for a month and a half.
- 1945: Creation of Sir Vithaldas D. Thackersey Charitable Trust.  
Nomination as a member of the Central Advisory Board of Education.
- 1949: Rajaji as Governor General of India visited Parnakuti.
- 1950: Elected as the Vice-Chairman of the Kasturba National Memorial Trust.
- 1951: Nomination by the Government of Bombay as the first Vice-Chancellor of the University after it received statutory recognition.
- 1953: Received D. Litt. from the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University.  
Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India stayed at Parnakuti for a day.
- 1955: Construction of Sir Vithaldas Nagar at Santacruz.
- 1956: Received D. Litt. from the Banaras Hindu University.  
Elected Chairman of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust.
- 1957: Election as the Vice-Chancellor of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University.
- 1958: Took leading part in celebrating Centenary of the Founder of the University, Maharshi Karve.  
Nomination as the Chairman of the Vanita Vishram Managing Committee.
- 1960: Elected Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Conference of Moral and Social Hygiene.
- 1962: Creation of Lady Premlila V. Thackersey Charitable Trust.
- 1966: Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India inaugurated the Golden Jubilee of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University at her special request.  
Collected good donations for the Golden Jubilee of Vanita Vishram which was celebrated under the Presidentship of Dr. Radhakrishnan.  
Nomination as a member of the National Council of Women's Education.
- 1967: Nomination as the President of the Inter University Board of India and Ceylon.
- 1968: At her request Dr. Zakir Husain, President of India presided over the concluding function of the Golden Jubilee of the University.
- 1969: Inauguration of the Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadeobhai Desai Smruti Mandir at the Aga Khan Palace at Poona by Shri Morarjibhai Desai. H.H. the Aga Khan visited Parnakuti after handing over the Aga Khan Palace to the Gandhi Nidhi.  
Completion of 75 years of a fruitful life devoted to the cause of women and an unbroken association of almost five decades with the University.







*Premilaben with her husband, Sir Vithaldas*

GLIMPSES  
IN  
RETROSPECT



*Premilaben Thackersey*

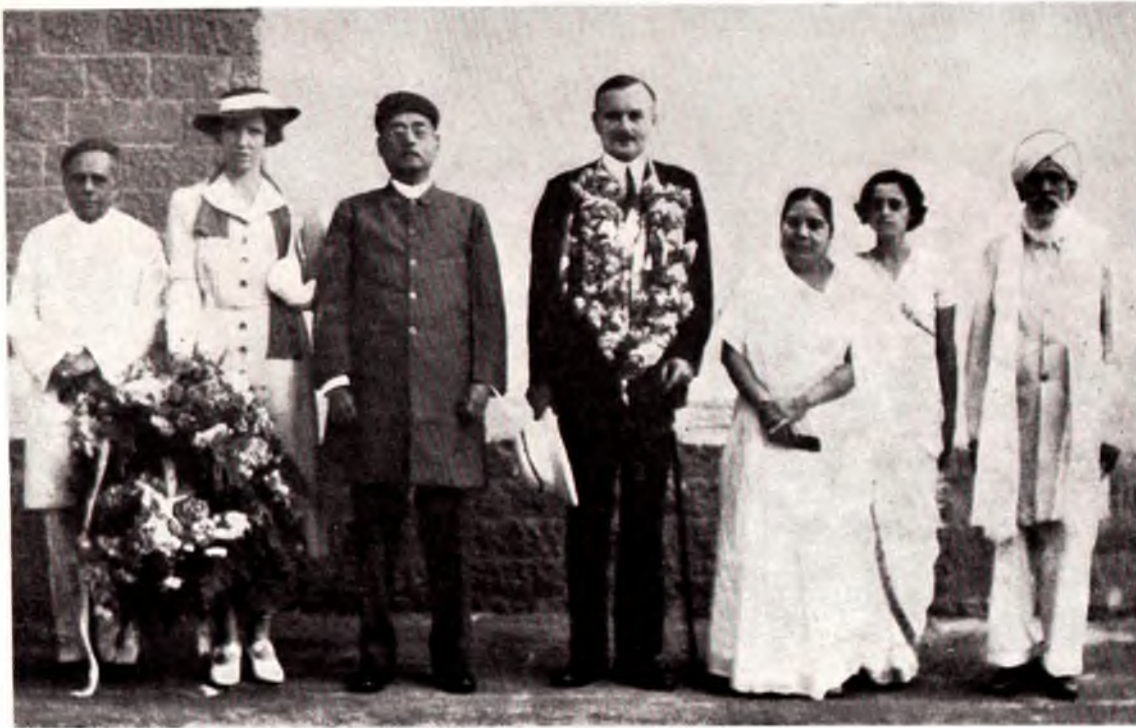




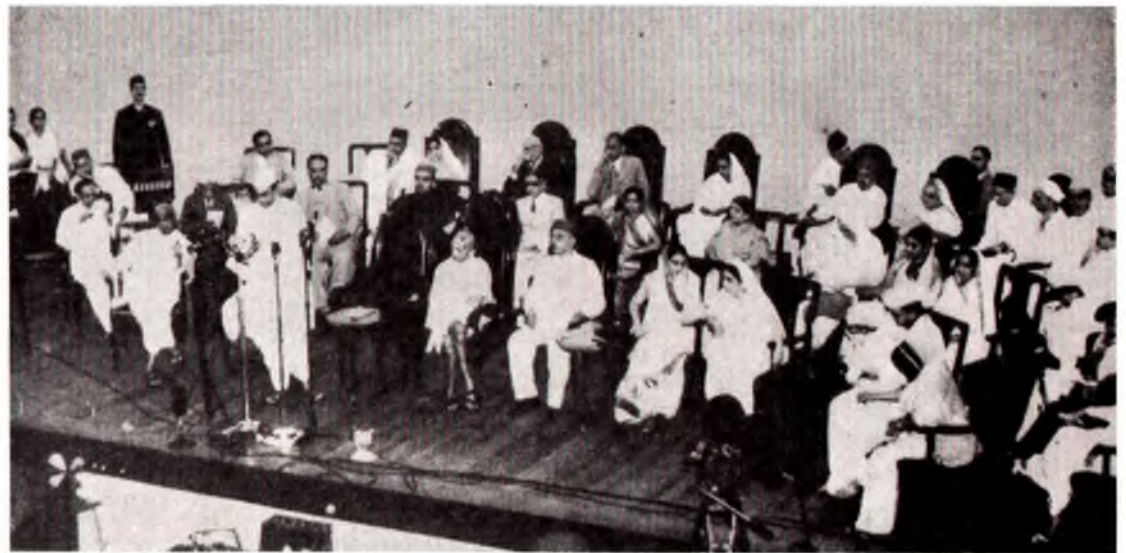
*Premilaben with Gandhiji at Mahabaleshwar during prayers*



*Parnakuti, made famous by foreign reporters, as "Marble Palace" during Bapu's historic fast in 1933*



*Premilaben and Karve with Sir and Lady Roger Lumley—1937*



*Memorable Convocation of the S.N.D.T. Indian Women's University—1939.  
At Premilaben's personal request Bapu attended the Convocation and Shri B. G. Kher, the Chief Minister of the Bombay Province, delivered the Convocation Address. Present on the occasion were veteran leaders—Shri Subhash Chandra Bose, Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Smt. Meerabai, Shri Visweswaraiya and a galaxy of National leaders*





*Premlilaben with Smt. Sarojini Naidu and others during the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the University—1942*

*Premlilaben in the midst of the Congress Working Committee at Parnakuti, which met immediately after the release of Mahatma Gandhi in 1944 from the Aga Khan Palace*







*Premilaben receiving  
Pandit Nehru at the air-  
port, when he specially  
came down to Bombay to  
felicitate Maharshi Karve  
—1958*



*Premilaben with Pandit  
Nehru and Maharshi  
Karve*



*Premlilaben presenting Dr. Karve, his biography during his Centenary Celebrations*

*Premlilaben and Shardaben, close associates, at Colombo, during one of the Inter-University Board meetings. This occasion was made use of by Premlilaben to collect funds for Karve Centenary Fund*







*Premilaben delivering the welcome address during the inauguration of the Eighth All India Conference of Moral and Social Hygiene*



*Premilaben with Vice-Chancellors—members of the Inter-University Board during Thirty-eighth Meeting of the Inter-University Board at the S.N.D.T. Women's University Bombay, 1963*



*Premilaben with Shri Kannamwar, Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Shri Y. B. Chavan, Union Defence Minister*



*Premilaben with some members of the Inter-University Board*





*Mrs. Leubke, wife of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, presenting a gift to Premlilaben during her visit to the University—1963*



*Premilaben presenting a memento to Pandit Nehru during the opening of the New Building of the University—1963*





*Premilaben with Pandit Nehru during the function*



*Premilaben and Sharda Divan with Pandit Nehru at the end of the function*



*Premlilaben listening to the Convocation Address, delivered by Dr. Radhakrishnan*



*Premlilaben welcoming Dr. Zakir Husain, President of the Indian Union, who attended the Convocation as the Chief Guest*





*Premilaben leading Dr. P. V. Cherian, Chancellor of the University and Shri M. C. Chagla, Union Minister for Education, as the Chief Guest, at the Convocation procession*



*Premilaben passing the grace as President at one of the Convocation functions*



*Premilaben welcoming Dr. Radhakrishnan, President of the Indian Union, who presided over Golden Jubilee function of the Vanita Vishram—1966*



*Premilaben with Dr. Radhakrishnan*





*Premilaben welcoming Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, who inaugurated the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the University— June, 1966*



*Premilaben in a rare mood with Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, during the inaugural function*



*Premilaben bidding farewell to Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, after the function of the Golden Jubilee*



*Premilaben welcoming Dr. D. S. Kothari, Chairman, U.G.C. at the inauguration of the Library Week during the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the University*





*Premlilaben with Dr. Zakir Hussain, President, Indian Union, and Dr. P. V. Cherian, Chancellor of the University, at the concluding function of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the University, 1968*



*Premlilaben garlanding Dr. Zakir Hussain, President of the Indian Union at the concluding function—1968*



*Premlilaben at one of the functions of Seva Sadan, Poona*



*Premlilaben receiving Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Prime Minister, at Kasturba Gram, Indore, 1962*





*Premilaben felicitating Mrs. Coretta Martin Luther King, when she visited India to receive the Nehru Peace Award, awarded to her husband*

*Premilaben with Shri Morarjee Desai, Deputy Prime Minister, and others at the inauguration of the Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai Smruti Mandir, Poona—1969*





*Premilaben garlanding H.H. The Aga Khan at the inauguration of the Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai Smruti Mandir—1969*



*Premilaben at her daily morning prayers at Parnakuti*





*Premlilaben at her daily work at Parnakuti*



*Premlilaben at Parnakuti*



*Premilaben being felicitated by the members of the Staff of the University Administrative Office on her 76th birthday on January 8, 1969*



*Premilaben in meditation after the felicitation function on January 8, 1969*

‘‘To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man’s injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man’s superior. Has she not got greater intuition, is she not self-sacrificing, has she not got greater power of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman’’.

MAHATMA GANDHI

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‘‘One of the truest measures of a nation’s advancement is the state of its women. For out of the women forms the new generation and it is from their lips and from their laps that it begins to learn’’.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

VICE-PRESIDENT  
INDIA  
NEW DELHI  
September 17, 1969.

I am glad to hear that it is proposed to felicitate Dr. (Smt.) Premlila V. Thackersey on the occasion of her Seventy-fifth Birthday.

Shrimati Thackersey has spent half a century in serving the cause of women's education and has earned public admiration and praise for her valuable work. I congratulate the President and Members of the Felicitation Committee on their decision to celebrate her seventy-fifth birthday in a fitting manner on the 27th September, 1969, and wish the Function success.

G. S. PATHAK

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HOME MINISTER  
NEW DELHI  
September 6, 1969.

Dr. (Smt.) Premlila Thackersey has devoted the best part of her life to the cause of women's education and to the growth of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University. Those who are acquainted with the history of the movement of women's education in India, know the high place that Dr. Thackersey occupies in the roll of honour in that field. Hers has been a distinct contribution towards our effort to modernise the society.

I am glad to know that a Felicitation Committee of citizens propose to honour her on the completion of 75 years of fruitful life. I join them in wishing her many more years of active service.

Y. B. CHAVAN

Chief Minister,  
Sachivalaya,  
BOMBAY 32 BR.

September 19, 1969.

I am happy that a Felicitation Committee has been set up to commemorate the seventy fifth birth-anniversary of Dr. (Smt.) Premlila V. Thackersey. Dr. (Smt.) Thackersey has earned acclaim for her useful service in the field of education. Her contribution towards the creation and expansion of a separate Women's University is indeed praiseworthy.

I send my good wishes and wish success to the publication of the souvenir which is being brought out at the time of the said function.

V. P. NAIK

Chief Minister,  
Government of Gujarat,  
Sachivalaya,  
AHMEDABAD 15.

September 11, 1969.

It gives me great pleasure to extend my warm felicitations to Smt. Premlilaben Thackersey on the happy occasion of her completing 75 years.

During the last 50 years of her munificent life, she has sought to transform society by regeneration of Indian womanhood through education and generous donations towards deserving causes.

May God bestow many more years on her in the service of people.

HITENDRA DESAI

Education Minister  
India  
NEW DELHI

September 13, 1969

I was very happy to learn that the friends and admirers of Dr. (Smt.) Premlila V. Thackersey, Vice-Chancellor, S. N. D. T. Women's University, Bombay, have decided to felicitate her on her seventy-fifth birthday. Dr. Thackersey has devoted nearly fifty years of her life to the cause of women's education and particularly to the service of the S. N. D. T. Women's University. The present status of the University is largely due to her sustained, untiring, competent and selfless efforts.

I take this opportunity to pay my humble tribute to the great qualities of head and heart for which Dr. Thackersey is well-known amongst educationists and to her memorable services to the cause of the education of women in India. I wish her good health and long life to serve the country still further for many, many years.

V. K. R. V. RAO

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Chairman  
Khadi & Gram Udyog Commission  
3, Ferozshah Road,  
NEW DELHI

September 18, 1969

Dr. Premlila Bahen is one of the strongest pillars in the social reform movement. Every one of us will wish that she is spared to give strength to the movement for a very very long time.

U. N. DHEBAR



Mayor of Bombay  
Corporation Hall  
BOMBAY

September 13, 1969.

I am indeed happy to know that a Felicitation Committee has been formed to honour Dr. (Smt.) Premlila V. Thackersey, Vice-Chancellor, S. N. D. T. University.

Dr. (Smt.) Thackersey has devoted nearly 50 years of her useful career to the Nation for the promotion of the cause of education, particularly in the matter of the progress of the Women's University. She has been the moving spirit of the S. N. D. T. University and as its Vice-Chancellor has introduced different courses of studies which have proved immensely useful in shaping the life of women in India.

On this happy occasion of honouring Dr. (Smt.) Thackersey, as the Mayor of Bombay; and, on behalf of 5½ million of the citizens of this premier city of India, I extend my heartiest greetings and good wishes and pray that God may grant her a long life to continue her useful services to the Nation in the years ahead.

JAMIATRAM K. JOSHI

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Raj Bhavan  
BOMBAY 35.

September 20, 1969

On the auspicious occasion of the completion of 75 years of Dr. (Shrimati) Premlila V. Thackersey's extremely fruitful life, I have great pleasure in sending her my sincere good wishes for happiness and a long long life of continued good service.

My husband and I consider ourselves privileged to know this remarkable good lady at close quarters. She is a true personification of the great ideal of plain living and high thinking. Our country owes her an irredeemable debt of gratitude for the invaluable services she has rendered to women's education with conspicuous success. The S. N. D. T. Women's University will always stand out as a worthy memorial to the worthy achievements of an illustrious daughter of Mother India. May the University ever fulfil the high ideals with which she has established and nurtured it.

TARA CHERIAN

