

Shrimati Sarojini Naidu (Bihar: General): Mr. President, the House knows that I had refused over and over again this morning to speak. I thought that the speech of Jawaharlal Nehru – so epic in its quality of beauty, dignity and appropriateness – was sufficient to express the aspirations, emotions and the ideals of this House. But I was happy when I saw the representatives of the various communities that constitute this House rise up and pledge their allegiance to this Flag. I was especially reminded by the people that sit behind me from the Province of Bihar that it was at the risk of my life and seat in their province, should I forget to mention that this Flag, so willingly and proudly accepted today by the House has for its symbol the *Dharma Chakra* of Asoka, whom they claim (I do not know with what historical veracity) to be a Bihari! But if I am speaking here today, it is not on behalf of any community, or any creed or any sex, though women members of this House are very insistent that a woman should speak. I think that the time has come in the onward march of the world-civilisation when there should be no longer any sex consciousness or sex separation in the service of the country. I therefore speak on behalf of that ancient reborn Mother with her undivided heart and indivisible spirit, whose love is equal for all her children, no matter what corner they come from in what temples or mosques they worship, what language they speak or what culture they profess.

Many many times in the course of my long life, in my travels abroad for I am vagabond by nature and by destiny—I have suffered the most terrible moments of anguish in free countries, because India possessed no flag. A few of those moment I would like to recall.

On the day when peace was signed at Versailles after the last war. I happened to be in Paris. There was great rejoicing everywhere and flags of all nations decorated the Opera House. There came on the platform a famous actress with a beautiful voice, for whom the proceedings were interrupted while she wrapped round herself the flag of France. The entire audience rose as one man and sang with her the National Anthem of France – the Marseillaise. An Indian near me with tears in his eyes turned to me and said, “When shall we have our own Flag?” “The time will soon come,” I answered, “When we shall have our own Flag and our own Anthem.”

I was asked to speak at a peace celebration in New York soon after the peace had been signed. Forty-four Nations and their Flags fluttering in the great hall in which the Assembly met. I looked at the Flags of all the Nations and when I spoke I cried that though I did not see in that great Assembly of Free Nations the Flag of Free India, it would become the most historic Flag of the world in the not distant future.

It was also a moment of anguish for me when a few months later forty-two Nations sent their women to an International Conference in Berlin. There they were planning to have, one morning, a Flag parade of the Nations. India had no official flag. But at my suggestion some of the women Indian delegates tore strips from their saris sitting up till the small hours of the morning to make the Tricolour Flag, so that our country should not be humiliated for the lack of a National Banner.

But the worst anguish of all was only a few months ago, when on the inspiration of Jawaharlal Nehru the Nations of Asia met in Delhi and affirmed the unity of Asia. On the wall behind the platform there was the flag of every nation of Asia. Iran was there, China was there, Afghanistan was there, as also Siam. Big countries and little countries were all represented but we had exercised a self-denying ordinance, so that we might scrupulously keep or pledge that no party politics would be permitted at the conference. Can you not understand and share with me the anguish of that decision which excluded the Tricolour the Congress Flag from the Asian Conference? But here today we retrieve that sorrow and that shame: we attain our own Flag, the Flag of Free India. Today we justify, we vindicate and we salute this Flag under which so many hundreds and thousands of us have fought and suffered. Men and women, old and young, princes and peasants, Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Zoroastrians, all of them have fought under this Flag. When my friend Khaliqzaman was speaking, I saw before me the great patriots, my friends and comrades of the Muslim community who had suffered under this Flag. I thought of Mahomed Ali, of Shaukat Ali, of Ansari and of Ajmal Khan. I could mention the smallest community in India, the Parsi community, the community of that grand old man Dadabhai Naoroji, whose granddaughters too fought side by side with the others, suffered imprisonment and made sacrifices for the freedom of India. I was asked by a man who was blind with prejudice: 'How can you speak of this flag as the flag of India? India is divided.' I told him that this is merely a temporary geographical separation. There is no spirit of separation in the heart of India. (Hear, hear). Today I ask one and all to honour this Flag. That wheel, what does it represent? It represents the Dharma Chakra of Asoka the Magnificent who sent his message of peace and brotherhood all over the world. Did he not anticipate the modern ideal of fellowship and brotherhood and cooperation? Does not that wheel stand as a symbol for every national interest and national activity? Does it not represent the Chakra of my illustrations and beloved leader, Mahatma Gandhi and the wheel of time that marches and marches and marches without hesitation and without halt? Does it not represent the rays of the Sun? Does it not represent eternity? Does it not represent the human mind? Who shall live under that Flag without thinking of the common India? Who shall limit its functions? Who shall limit its inheritance? To whom does it belong? It belongs to India. It belongs to an India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru told us, that India that has never been exclusive. I wish he had added 'India welcomes all knowledge from friend and foe alike. Did she not? Have not all the cultures of the world contributed to the ocean of her culture? Has Islam not brought to India the ideals of democratic brotherhood, the Zoroastrian his steadfast courage, who fled from Iran with a blazing log from their fire temple, whose flame has not perished these thousand years? Have not the Christians brought to us the lesson of service to the humblest of the land? Has not the immemorial Hindu creed taught us universal love of mankind and has it not taught us that we shall not judge merely by our own narrow standard but that we should judge by the universal standard of humanity?

Many of my friends have spoken of this Flag with the poetry of their own hearts. I as a poet and as a woman, I am speaking prose to you when I say that we women stand for the unity of India. Remember this Flag there is no prince and there is no peasant, there is no rich and there is no poor. There is no privilege there is only duty and resibility and sacrifice. Whether we be Hindus or Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or Zoroastrians and others, our Mother India has one undivided heart and one indivisible spirit. Men and women of reborn India rise and salute this Flag I bid you, rise and salute the Flag (*loud cheers*).