



# Text of the maiden speech of Shri M.Venkaiah Naidu as Chairman of Rajya Sabha to the House after sworn in as the Vice-President of India on August 11, 2017.

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Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, Respected Leader of the House Shri ArunJaitely, Respected Leader of the Opposition Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman Sri PJ Kurien, Hon'ble Ministers and distinguished Members of the august House!

When I first entered this august house as a Member in 1998, I never had even the faintest of the idea that one day I would have the honour of presiding over as its Chairperson. This is the beauty and majesty of our Parliamentary democracy and its strength as well. It can lift a commoner like me to such an exalted position and offer opportunities to discharge onerous responsibilities that go with this position.

I am truly humbled by the honour bestowed on me by the Honourable Members of Parliament by electing me as the Vice-President of India, by the virtue of which I have been charged with the responsibility of Chairperson of Rajya Sabha.

I am grateful to all the concerned for reposing faith and confidence in me and entrusting such responsibility to me. At the outset, I would like to assure all of you that it shall be my endeavor to live up to your expectations.

Before I elaborate on my thoughts as the Chairperson of this august House, I would like to briefly reflect on the origin and the role of this federal chamber of Parliament of India. With its roots in the Montague-Chemsford Report of 1918, the Council of States first came into being in 1921 further to the Government of India Act, 1919, as a second chamber of the then legislature with a restricted franchise.

Subsequently, there were extensive debates on the need for this House in the Constituent Assembly. It was considered that a single directly elected House would be inadequate to meet the challenges before free India. Accordingly, 'Council of States' was created as a federal chamber i.e House elected by elected members. An element of dignity and prestige was accorded to this chamber by making the Vice-President of India the Ex-Officio Chairman of the House.

The learned members of the Constituent Assembly envisaged this chamber as a 'House of reflective and evaluative reasoning'. Late Shri N.GopalaswamyAyyangar termed it as a 'House which can rein in passions of the moment'. Late Shri Loknath Mishra described it as a 'sobering House, a reviewing House, a House standing for quality and the members will exercise their right to be heard on the merit of what they say, for their sobriety and knowledge of special problems."

This House of Elders is meant to ensure federal equilibrium and equanimity in legislation. A provision has also been made to nominate a good number of knowledgeable persons from different walks of life to further enrich the debates. This House is also expected to protect the interests of the States in the federal scheme of things.

This goes to prove that this august House has a clear mandate to perform provided the members do not desire, even if unintentionally, to reduce its role to that of a superfluous and irrelevant one, as is already being referred to in some quarters, in a muted manner. It's a choice in the hands of the honourble members.

Honourble Members!

As the world's largest democracy and fastest growing economy, our country needs efficient and effective legislation to administer its processes, mobilize resources, build partnerships, ensure socio-economic equality etc.

Hon'ble Members, time is not on our side. Even after seventy years of Independence, we are grappling with basic issues of poverty, illiteracy, inequality, agrarian and rural development challenges, abuse of power etc, even as some countries similarly placed at the time of our attaining freedom, are marching ahead with a lot more focus and a sense of urgency, marshalling their energies in a much better manner.

For the success of an individual, institution or a nation, time management is crucial. We don't have the luxury of time. We need to make up for the lost opportunities over the last seven decades, if our country were to realize its full potential, given its huge stock of human and natural resources and other advantages.

This august House meets for much less than a hundred days per year. Should the honourable members not make the best use of this available time in furtherance of the cause of our country and the people? The choice is to be made by the enlightened Members.

We take pride in our diversity and the unity that flows from it. If that be the case, can't we be united in the pursuit of common national goals and in enabling the Young India realize its aspirations? Our democratic polity allows flourishing of different ideas and thoughts on a range of socio-economic issues. But adversarial politics should not be allowed to adversely impact the functioning of Parliament which in turn impacts the progress of our nation.

Political democracy is a sacred instrument for pursuit of national interests. But a fractious polity, finding its echo in the legislatures impedes the forward march of our country and the people. No chamber of our Parliamentary democracy can be allowed to be an extension of such fractious polity.

Every election gives the winner a mandate and the opposition, the responsibility of ensuring accountability of the executive. Parliamentary democracy is all about numbers. But it does not necessarily mean that we reduce the functioning of our legislatures to a mere numbers game. The play of numbers should stop with the formation of governments and thereafter, it should be resorted to only in the rarest of the rare cases. An emerging economy like ours should be guided more by a shared destiny in the functioning of our legislatures.

Honourable Members!

All that the people of our country desire is that the Parliament should be the voice of sanity echoing their concerns and finding solutions to their problems as the best way forward. Over the years, both the Houses of Parliament have done a reasonably good job. But somehow there is a growing concern and resentment among the people over our functioning. We need to seriously introspect over this palpable discontent with the people saying we are not doing enough still. We need to set an example for state legislatures by making suitable amendments to the way we speak and act here.

Effective functioning of the House is all about time and space management. Both the treasury and the opposition benches have defined space and time slots. We need to adjust ourselves within these set limits of time and space in the interest of better results. All that is needed is an attitude of give and take on the part of both the sides. This is possible through strategizing for effective functioning of the House rather than for its disruption. This needs an enlightened approach on the part of all concerned.

Unfortunately, obstruction and disruption of the proceedings is increasingly being chosen as the first parliamentary option in our legislatures across the country. This has serious implications for our parliamentary democracy. This option needs to be immediately replaced by a quest for effective debates and discussion to resolve issues and finding solutions to the problems being faced by our people.

How do we do it? We don't have to do different things to make good use of the opportunity of being members of this august House. All that we need to do is to do things differently and that is by intensely and passionately debating and discussing the issue rather than resorting to obstruction and disruption. I firmly believe in opposition having its say and the Government of the day, its way. This essentially means both the sides respecting and accommodating each other in the process.

All that I can and would like to do is to try to make you all speak and act to enable effective functioning of the House. I certainly can't be like a headmaster herding the errant students on the path of discipline. I know for sure that it won't work that way. It shall be my endeavor to promote an atmosphere of cordiality and trust in each other. Our nation needs a new normal in the functioning of our legislatures. It shall be my endeavor to enable this august House reach such a new normal with the cooperation of all of you.

Nation building through all round and speedy socio-economic development is not the sole prerogative and responsibility of the Governments of the day. It is a national task requiring national effort. Opposition is an important stakeholder in this endeavor while legislatures are the effective enabling forums. The best way of enforcing accountability of the executive by the opposition is to engage the Government and corner them in an informed debate. I am of the view that executive is the gainer if Question Hour is abandoned or a discussion on a matter of immediate public concern is derailed. The executive also needs to acknowledge that it is in their interest to take opposition on board since any legislation with the constructive support of opposition enhances the public esteem and acceptability of the laws made. A new normal in the functioning of our legislatures is possible with this enlightened approach.

As a member of this august House for 19 years, and most of it as opposition member, I am aware of the sensitivities of both the sides of the House, the Rules of Business, the rights and privileges of the honourable members, the feelings and even frustrations on some occasions.

I am also conscious that eminent persons like Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Justice Hidayatullah, Shri R. Venkataraman, Dr. Shakar Dayal Sharma, Shri K.R. Narayanan, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekawat and others had presided over the proceedings of this august House with distinction. My immediate predecessor Shri Hamid Ansari did so for ten years. It shall be my endeavor to uphold the traditions and standards set by these worthy people.

All that I would like to appeal to the honourble members on this occasion is that keep in mind the poorest and the most deprived before you say or do anything in the House. Let us be guided by the shining principles of our Constitution, the ideals of freedom struggle, the noble thoughts of great souls like Mahatma, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

and all other leaders who gave their sweat and blood for bringing our country this far. Always be reminded of the distance our nation still needs to travel before it gets due place in the comity of nations and ensure smile on the face of every citizen. Let us be guided by the right of the people for a better future.

There is a certain new sense of purpose and urgency being demonstrated by the Union and State Governments in a spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism to quicken the pace of development to offer more opportunities to the people for bettering their lives. Let us play the role of a catalyst in fulfilling this national quest.

I would like to assure all of you that it shall be my earnest endeavor to uphold the dignity of the Office of Vice-President of India and Chairman of Rajya Sabha and live up to the trust you have reposed in me. I am at your service and always open to your suggestions for improving the functioning of this august House as per your collective wisdom.

In the end, I would like to remind the Hon'ble Members of the Resolution adopted by this august House at the Special Session on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of our Independence in 1997. The members resolved to preserve and enhance the prestige of the Parliament by conscious and dignified conformity to the entire regime of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the House and direction of the Presiding Officer. Let us abide by this solemn resolution.

Thank you all Honourable Members!

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