

Sisters, Brothers, Compatriots, yesterday you celebrated Janmashtami. Today we are gathered here to celebrate the anniversary of India's freedom. Thirteen years ago, this beloved flag of ours fluttered from the ramparts of the Red Fort for the first time, heralding to the world the birth of a new nation, of a new star in the firmament. We had celebrated the occasion with great pomp and show, but in reality it was a day not so much of rejoicing as of recalling old memories and a renewal of the pledges taken and promises made in the past. Many of those pledges had been fulfilled but many more remained, and we were confronted with new problems and challenges. Therefore it was essential to march forward once again with heads held high and a heart full of determination. We had reached one destination. But our voyage was by no means over, and we went on, facing all kinds of ups and downs, stumbling occasionally, falling, but gaining strength once again from the memory of our beloved leader, Gandhiji and the principles that he had taught us.

So, we are gathered here today, not to witness some spectacle but to recall the past, and to look to the future. We are here to reaffirm the old pledges. It is true that we got freedom through incessant toil, sacrifice and tears. But if you think that our work is over with the coming of freedom, you are mistaken. The fight for freedom is never ending. We have to toil incessantly and make sacrifices to hold on to it. The moment a nation begins to relax, or becomes complacent or weak and fritters away its energies in petty quarrels, its freedom begins to slip away. So as I told you just now, today is not a day of some grand spectacle. It is a day to reaffirm and renew our old pledges and promises, and to examine our hearts a little to see whether we have fulfilled our duties or not. What is the first and foremost duty before a nation or a people? Its first duty is to maintain its freedom, because if you give it a second place, everything else slips away too. Therefore everything must be measured by this yardstick. Anything we do must be judged from the point of view of whether it helps us to maintain our freedom and unity and contributes to the country's progress or not. If any of us forgets this and gives greater importance to one's province or community, caste or language, we will be ruined and take the country with

us on the path of ruin. All these things are good in their own place, the city, street, province, family, etc. But if we attach greater importance to any of them and place them above the country, we will undoubtedly fall. I am reminding you of this because the time has come to do so, and we often tend to forget these things. We tend to forget the hard work, sacrifice and toil of fifty years, during which we or rather the people of India, under Gandhiji's leadership, moulded the country into a strong nation and welded it into a peaceful weapon to win freedom. Freedom was a certainty once the country became strong and united and developed the capacity to work hard, because please remember that the enemy is within us. Nothing can harm us if our hearts are in the right place and we are capable of working in mutual cooperation and without fear. India has never had to fear anyone from outside. She has had to fear the internal weakness and disunity and the fissiparous tendencies, which have broken the country into a thousand little fragments in the past. We were conquered again and again by outside forces, not because they were stronger but because of our own weakness and stupidity. This weakness and stupidity rear their heads now and again when people quarrel among themselves in the name of language or something else, forgetting that the thing that matters is the unity of the country. The moment we forget it, we cause great harm to the country, no matter what we may profess. This is something that should be borne in mind and not merely that, but I would say that the time has come for every Indian to search his heart to find out if his loyalties are towards the country or some narrow parochial interest. The answer has to be found by every single man, woman and child. The time has now come where there is no longer any room for a mistake or misconception. If we indulge in petty squabbles and internal wranglings, without realising what is happening in the world today, the new lethal weapons that are being invented, the danger that threaten our borders and the fact that the world is divided into two armed camps, nobody knows when disaster may strike, we will invite certain ruin.

What will be the verdict of history if we forget our unity? The verdict will be that there came a great leader - Mahatma Gandhi to India, who

taught the downtrodden, hungry and naked population of the country the lessons of freedom, unity and the need to break down the barriers between human beings. He worked for the uplift of the downtrodden Harijans and taught the people the lesson of equality, irrespective of caste and religion. Then freedom came. Was it meant only for a handful of people? Was it for a Jawaharlal, who has been made the Prime Minister? Jawaharlal may come and go, and so will others, but India will remain forever. Therefore, every single human being in India, man and woman, child, is the heir to India's freedom and must enjoy the full benefits of that freedom. It is towards this that we continue to toil ceaselessly and do planning and what not. We want every one of India's forty crores of people to get an equal share in the country's freedom and so we have adopted a socialistic pattern of society as our goal.

It is a difficult task and cannot be done immediately. There are thousands of pitfalls, difficulties and problems in the way. You cannot change a human being or a nation of forty crores overnight. But ultimately the kind of society that we want will emerge if we keep our eyes constantly on our goal, on socialistic principles and equality of rights and opportunities to all, whether they live in towns or villages. We need to work hard to increase the wealth the country and then ensure the equitable distribution of that wealth, so that it does not remain in a few pockets. There is no magic in this that we can get it by counting beads. We will have to work hard and achieve our goal by blood, sweat and toil.

The historians will record that there came a time when the whole of India woke up to life suddenly and became vibrant from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, began to hold their heads high and shed the burden of hundreds of years of bondage. They marched fearlessly under the leadership of their beloved Gandhiji towards freedom. After hundreds of years, India shone once again and the world heard her voice, which had a profound impact, because it was the true inner voice of the nation. India began to be respected once again. But very soon, the same people of India who had shown such great courage seemed to revert to their old

weaknesses and began to fight among themselves in the name of religion or caste, language and province. The world began to wonder if it had made a mistake in judging this nation.

Today is a day of remembrance, of recalling the past, of introspection and renewing our pledges. If some people refuse to celebrate this day because they are grieved about something, they may be justified. But it shows that they are forgetting the larger issues in denying the importance of this day and are forgetting what India stands for. Everything else in the world loses its importance; language, province, personal grief and happiness, before it. This is how we must look at these things.

You must be aware of the great tragedy that has befallen Assam and Bengal. Two of our great provinces are facing great problems. We will certainly solve them. There is no doubt about it. But what I cannot tolerate is that the people, in their bitterness and fear, do not allow things to cool down. There is constant criticism. Please remember that of all the weaknesses in the world, fear is the worst. There is nothing worse than fear, because all other weaknesses and evils in this world spring from it. Once an individual or a nation gives in to fear, gradually all other evils will overtake them. Telling lies, deceit, are all the offspring of fear. India became strong because Gandhiji rooted out fear from our hearts. He taught us to be fearless in the face of great imperial might, and the lesson of unity. Why is it then that the people of Assam and Bengal, who have always lived there, should suddenly be afraid of one another? Why is it that they are forgetting India, which is larger than both Bengal and Assam and those who do so, can serve neither Bengal nor Assam? Those who can forget, even on this day, where their loyalty lies and what their duty is, are being traitors to their country. All of you must understand this and determine firmly to get rid of such weaknesses from the country.

Take the Punjab, which lies close to Delhi. A few days ago a strange uproar took place there, in the name of language and province, etc. This is not the occasion to go into the merits of the case. But I know that the events that took place in the Punjab, and the way things were done were

absolutely wrong, bad and completely against the spirit of India's freedom. Punjabi is a grand tongue, a strong and powerful language, and I feel that every Punjabi has the right and a duty to learn it. If he fails to do so, he will lose a great heritage of his. It is part of the national heritage. I cannot understand why there should be any arguments about Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali or Assamese. All of them are valuable treasures and part of India's culture. It is only small, narrow-minded, illiterate, useless minds that set up one language against the other. Sensible human beings learn as many as they can.

Where are we going? What are these pettiness and misconceptions we are falling into? India is a great country with a long and glorious past and a history going back thousands of years. There is good as well as bad in our country. A new era has started in the history of India and the people are once again strong and vibrant as a nation. How can we serve the country by indulging once again in petty feuds and by fighting in the name of caste, language, religion and province? Language and religion are things which uplift a human being. How can we use them to inflict such deep wounds on our body politic? Please think about all this.

India has become free and we have no desire to commit aggression against any other country. Those days are gone. But at the same time, we shall not tolerate any enemy to come into our country. There has to be certain reciprocity in these things, of mutual respect between nations. If any country behaves in a way injurious to our dignity, we will combat it in every possible way. If danger threatens our borders, we will face it. We do not want even an inch of anyone's territory, nor do we wish to interfere in the rights of others, because our principle is that the freedom and territorial integrity of all nations is inviolate. It is our principle that every single village should have autonomy and govern itself through its panchayat.

There is one small gap in India's freedom. People may think that we do not remember. But it is something that always rankles in our minds and will continue to do so until a small part of India, called Goa, becomes free. Let the world not forget that this is always in the minds and hearts, and it is

only by great willpower and courage, not weakness, that we have prevented ourselves from solving the problem by armed intervention. But India cannot forget Goa and the problem will be solved. I want the world to take note of this, as also the power which has Goa in its clutches. Let there be no mistake about this.

I would like you to look at the world of today. Just when we were hoping that the atmosphere was improving, things have taken a turn for the worse and once again there is poison and bitterness among the nations. The big powers are once again indulging in sabre-rattling. All sorts of lethal, terrible weapons have been invented. In such a dangerous, terrible world, those who make the slightest error of judgement or become disunited are bound to fall and become weak. We must remember this, especially on this day and pay homage to the memory of that great man, Gandhiji, who has contributed the most to making India strong and united and led her to freedom. It is not enough to pay homage. We must remember and act upon his principles. India is no small country which can veer this way or that. The only two courses open are India's destiny and either to hold our heads high and march forward in the world, or downfall, if we are weak. There can be no middling status for us. It is obvious that we cannot allow our country to fall, for gone are those days. We simply cannot tolerate it. Therefore the only course open to us is to hold our heads high and march in step, in unity and cooperation. There is no other alternative before us and if anything comes in the way of this, it will have to be removed because we cannot allow petty things to stand in the way of India's destiny.

However, this is not in my hands. You have made me the Prime Minister for a few days, so I am here. There are innumerable defects in me. The real strength of India lies in her people, in you, and you, and the millions of others who live in India. It is you who must understand what India's destiny is, especially on this day, and decide where your duty lies. How are we to utilize this invaluable freedom of ours to uplift India's millions? How are we to prevent freedom from slipping away due to our weakness? What I am saying is not limited to a handful of officials or

ministers or even prime ministers. This is up to the millions of people in India, in every single village and town in the country. We want panchayati raj in the country. Every single panch and sarpanch must be strong and independent and capable of protecting the interests of his village. This has to be done all over the country. I want to remind you of this because it is your duty towards the country. We have served the nation for a few years and sometimes made mistakes, but we did our best with honesty and integrity. But the tasks that we have taken up cannot be completed by the list of men without the help of the people. Take the five year plans, for instance. It is not something which has been laid down. It is the picture of the future of India, which can be realized only by hard work and by bearing tremendous hardships. India will then undoubtedly progress, but your understanding and effort are absolutely essential. At a time like this, how can we not indict those who foment trouble and incite the people, as wrongdoers and the guilty party? Please think about it.

Finally, I shall once again repeat what the foremost duty of every Indian is. His first and foremost duty is to maintain and strengthen India's freedom and her unity. This is the lesson that we have to learn on this day. My greetings to all of you on the anniversary of India's freedom and congratulations for this day, thirteen years ago, when the flag of freedom was unfurled for the first time. I hope there will be hundreds and thousands of such anniversaries. Jai Hind.

Please say Jai Hind with me thrice before we sing the national anthem. Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Say it aloud Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind!