

Sisters, brothers, children and fellow countrymen, today is the eleventh anniversary of our Independence and we are assembled here to celebrate it. Greetings to all of you on this auspicious occasion. But are we assembled here merely as a matter of routine or to witness a spectacle or with some other motive? Eleven years ago, when our National Flag was unfurled for the first time from the ramparts of the Red Fort, it was a red-letter day in the history of India and the world. It was a special day not only because India became free on that day but because the manner in which she won that freedom, with honour and peace, was unique, it set an example for the world. We held our heads high once more and respect for us grew in the world.

Eleven years have passed since then and this period has been full of tension and problems for us. Our hearts were full of joy on the day we unfurled the flag of freedom eleven years ago, joy at the thought of having reached our goal. But even before the first flush of joy had subsided, another kind of news began to reach us. We were full of pride that we had won freedom honourably peacefully and non-violently, but then reports reached us of the terrible carnage that presented a completely different picture before us. The communal riots spread to Delhi and elsewhere and we saw how close we were to defeat at the very moment of victory. At daybreak we were celebrating our victory and sunset we had a glimpse of defeat too. We had not lost the battle to an enemy; we had won it. The defeat lay in our weakness and folly, which are most dangerous. We faced the enemy boldly, tigerlike but a poisonous snake came from behind and bit us. Therefore, I would like to warn you that once again such poisonous snakes are rearing their heads and they can bite us, weaken us, lead to our downfall and destroy everything that we have built up patiently over the years.

We are assembled here today to celebrate this day and also to look back a little on the past. There is pressure of the present-day problems and also a glimpse of the future. We have embarked on a great journey. The journey towards freedom was over after a long and arduous march and

now an even more difficult journey lies ahead in which 36, 37 crores of Indians must march together. We are marching holding each others' hands toward prosperity and trying to alleviate the sufferings of the people and to ensure that the primary necessities of life are available to them. We are toiling so that the shadow of bondage may never fall on our pretty little children. They were born in free India and they must always remain free with heads held high and live in prosperity and always advance towards a better future.

We envisaged such a future and are marching towards it but there are a thousand pitfalls and difficulties in the way. Sometimes, there are floods or droughts or too much rain and yet the condition is much worse when there are no rains. You know the tremendous difficulties we have had to face in this country during the last few years. But we faced them with courage and in spite of difficulties and problems. India has always held her head high and never bowed down to adversity. This is a testing time for us, and a far more difficult challenge than the freedom struggle. It is a testing time for our ability to be united in adversity, our spirit of cooperation and the determination to cross hurdles and reach the goals that we have set before us. So, at a time like this, if there is disunity among us and people squabble with each other and become violent, what does it mean? Does it mean that we have forgotten the lessons taught by Mahatma Gandhi? Have we forgotten thousands of years of India's history? Are we not ignoring the entire future of the younger generation for whom we are toiling today? What do we think when we indulge in petty squabbles and raise our hands in hatred against our fellow men merely to gain some political ends? I do not know why we behave like this.

I stand before you as you are gathered here to celebrate this day. There is joy in my heart but there is also grief that even 11 years after Independence incidents of rioting and violence are taking place in some parts of the country and that too on this day. We must remain vigilant and see that people are not misled. I am standing here not to criticise anyone. It is not my job. Nor am I standing here as a representative of any group or

any party. I am standing here as a traveller, a fellow traveller travelling with millions of people living in this country I appeal to you to peep into your hearts, your real feelings and think about what is your duty at the moment and also tell others what is expected of them. It is obvious that, whatever be our policy, we can succeed only if we work peacefully and without any disturbance. This is a well-known fact. Otherwise our energy will be frittered away in useless wrangling with each other. We must talk to one another if there is a difference of opinion. There is no other alternative in this country.

We loudly advise the world and talk self-righteously. We have raised aloft the banner of Panchsheel and people's attention has been drawn to it. It has had an impact on other countries. But when our behaviour within the country is contrary to what we preach and is exposed to the whole world to see, we cannot but bow our heads in shame. How can we presume to give advice to others when we cannot control ourselves? Therefore, my appeal to you and everyone in the country is that, while we should certainly think of other problems and no matter what policy we follow, we must not forget that it is of fundamental importance to maintain equanimity and eschew violence and realise that if we continue to indulge in internal squabbles and petty feuds, there can be neither freedom nor socialism nor democracy. No matter what your views are, if you try to settle your differences by threats of violence, you will achieve nothing. This is the situation also in the world today when the Great Powers are sitting on big arsenals and hold atom bombs. Each one of these powers has the strength to destroy the world but no power has the means of stabilising the situation through war. The only hope for the world lies in maintaining peace.

Gradually, it is beginning to dawn upon the world that war spells ruin, and yet preparations for war are going on all the time and everyone lives in fear. As you know, recently a dangerous situation arose in the countries of West Asia. Even now military forces are arrayed in that region, in constant readiness to fight. It is hoped that there will be no war and the mutual fear and tension will subside and that the problem will be solved soon and our friends will be able to live in complete peace. The Arab countries have

fought for several years for freedom and are succeeding slowly. We hope that there will be no threat to their liberty and that they will be able to enjoy the right of self-determination and will live in friendship and amity with one another.

This is the situation in the world today. Please remember that India is held in great respect in the world and its opinion carries weight. It is regarded as a sensible nation which does not get carried away easily or lift a hand in anger against anyone. This is how the world sees us. How far this is right or wrong is left to you to decide, for it is both right and wrong to some extent. It is right in so far as it was proved by our non-violence and self-restraint during the lifetime of Mahatma Gandhi. But now our own actions prove it wrong. So I appeal to you to think about these matters.

Look at what is happening in the cities of Gujarat, which is the State of Gandhiji's birth and where he taught his lessons assiduously to the hard-working people who have made tremendous sacrifices and are counted among the most enlightened people in India. In Gujarat today there is a strange atmosphere of madness. People are defaming themselves and the country. Gujarat is a good State. We must remain vigilant and think where such madness will lead us. It has no connection with any policy or decision. In an independent country everyone has the right to have his own views and express them before others. But nobody has the right to coerce anyone at the point of a gun or a lathi to change his view. Such behaviour will only spell ruin and lead to unnecessary conflicts. Have we toiled for so long for India's freedom only to fall into this abysmal pit of internal weakness? You should think about this.

The youth in India have a bright future before them. It is in their hands that the future responsibility of India lies and so they must prepare themselves for it wherever they may be, in schools or colleges or elsewhere. But many of them get carried away and forget the main issues due to their petty preoccupations and wranglings. They make themselves useless in the process and do not serve the country in any way. So we must think seriously about where we are heading. It is obvious that after

having reached where we are today, after facing thousands of difficulties and problems, we are not going to yield before any threat or give up because of any weakness. Our work will go on and we must move forward with courage, no matter what obstacles come in our way. We must overcome our weaknesses and keep moving with our heads held high.

Eleven years have passed since Independence. It is a long time, though not perhaps in the life of a nation. You know what was India's condition was 11 years ago or even earlier and compare it with India's position in the world today or even at home. All of us have thousands of grievances, many of which are genuine and some are not genuine. However, we have had to face several disasters, like floods, drought and crop failures and as a consequence, rise in prices. People are facing great difficulties and their complaints are justified. I do not deny this. Traders and businessmen, instead of helping the nation in the time of crisis, are resorting to black marketeering and other wrong activities. Your complaints are fully justified because such activities are harmful to the nation, are unpatriotic. People who indulge in unlawful activities should realise the consequences of their actions.

Well, we are facing problems of great magnitude in India and the world. We are part of the world and so we have to participate in its affairs. But our real problems are within the country. Whether we live in Kanyakumari or Rameshwaram in the South or in Kashmir in the North or in the East or in the West, we are one nation and we will not allow anyone to break it up. You and I and all of us are citizens of India and not merely residents of our own narrow streets or cities or States, and do not belong only to the North, South, East or West. This must be understood quite clearly because those who are against this and weaken India's unity will have to contend with us. We must fight against these tendencies whether they arise in the country or outside. India's unity and freedom are most important without which there can be no firm basis for India's prosperity. I agree that we have made mistakes and slipped up many times, as nobody is infallible. But what we need is to keep the fire of determination and zeal

burning in our hearts and minds, which will lead us towards our goal. If we stumble and fall, we must have the strength and ability to stand up immediately and march on.

Some people seem to think that the days are gone when it was necessary to show bravery and courage as we did when we were fighting against the might of imperialism. Let no one be under any illusion about this. India has tremendous life in her, more than earlier though sometimes we commit mistakes and lose sight of larger issues in the heat of the moment. Perhaps occasional jolts and shocks are good as they remind us about what we are and where our duty lies and keep us on the right path.

So, we are once again assembled at this historic Red Fort, which had been a symbol of bondage for centuries and now is a symbol of our freedom. We assemble here not merely as a matter of duty, but to remind ourselves about the pledges and promises that we have made, and about the path that we must follow to fulfil those pledges and promises. We assemble here to remember our great leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi, who brought us here. Many of you who are young may not have seen him and to you he is only a legend. In fact, the entire history of our freedom struggle has become a legend and it will always be an unforgettable legend. It is not a story but a lesson which we shall always remember. We must remember that lesson today when we are deviating from the right path. Let us pay homage to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi who enabled this country to rise and attain freedom and who ultimately laid down his life for the sake of the nation.

Jai Hind! Please say Jai Hind with me thrice.

Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind!