

Republic Day speech:

“We are Indians, firstly and Lastly.”

Good Morning everyone, tomorrow is the day we mark the 73rd Republic Day. This day is significant because it was the day our constitution was formally implemented, and India got her freedom in a more real sense; now completely free of the British-Raj.

While the constitution lays out the way the nation should be governed and how organizations must work, the governing document also relays a set of rights and duties for us as citizens of India. This day is a collective reminder for all of us to act with civility and follow the constitution above all else; that we should respect the nation and not forget the sacrifices our ancestors made in order to achieve the Bharat that we know today: world's sixth largest economy.

We celebrate this day with an esteemed military parade from Vijay Chowk to Red Fort, our defence forces reflect on their prowess; each state and union territory of India present their tableau, and children from all across the country perform. This is followed by an address by the President honouring the brave warriors and civilians from all over the country.

There are numerous tales from throughout the country that highlight the struggle that our ancestors overcame to accomplish the big feat of independence of India. Thousands of people were martyred, even more were imprisoned and tortured for demanding our birth right.

The earliest battles against the British colonization date back to the late 1700s and the early 1800s; from Princess Velu Nachiyar of Tamil Nadu to King Jayee Rajguru of Odisha to Chief Syiemlieh of Meghalaya. Many movements like this had sprung up in the then kingdoms that now constitute modern India.

The first famous revolt against the British that gained popularity throughout the world was the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, started by Mangal Pandey and gaining momentum across ranks of Indian soldiers in the British Army. Though it was unsuccessful, this movement laid the embankment of the modern colonial history and the struggle for freedom. Other leaders eventually joined the protests: some demanded basic human rights, some demanded purna swaraj. This was also the time when radical social reforms had started to take place all throughout the country, from women's education to rights and banishing of the Sati-Pratha.

Later during the early 1900s, prominent figures who are now celebrated across the world rose to power. Some of the famous names who took a non-violent approach include Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Gopabandhu, Rani Gaidinliu and many more. The more radical of the leaders who fought for independence in a more aggressive approach include renowned martyrs like Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekar Azad, Veer Savarkar, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and many, many more. It their combined effort due to which we gained Independence on 15th August 1947.

This hard struggle for independence then the two years following which led to the making of the constitution under the guidance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is what instils a sense of pride in our hearts for the country. It is this patriotism that brings belonging, that brings out the instinct to fight for what's right; be it a soldier fighting enemies at the border or a normal civilian trying to make the society a better place to live.

It is this diversity in the freedom struggle and the collective effort of all of our ancestors that make the Indian Subcontinent unique in so many ways. We have existed with peaceful diversity since time immemorial. Unfortunately we lost a lot of our own folklore, tales of the old times to the period of colonisation, where the tribal people were treated brutally, and their lives were forced to a stop. We should work on restoring the balance between humans and nature, which the native tribes had so amazingly maintained with their skillset, all the while promoting education and literacy among them. There are still so many people who are underprivileged and cannot access basic means of education. We need to work on preserving our native identities and local skillset while learning new things and make a safe and secure environment for all Indians to live in peacefully.

As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, “We are Indians, firstly and lastly.”

Thank you.