

# ADDRESS OF SHRI RAJIV GANDHI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, TO COMMEMORATE THE GOLDEN JUBILEE

Shanker Dayalji, Chavanji, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Arjun Singhji, Shri J. R. D. Tata, Shri Jamshed Bhabha, Dr. Desai, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to first congratulate the Tata Institute of Social Sciences on their 50th anniversary. For 50 years you have been a centre of excellence upholding very high standards—an example for others to follow—while elsewhere we have seen deteriorating educational and moral standards. I am delighted to be here with you today.

The Tata Institute has contributed to our development, to academic scholarship, and to qualities of the head and the heart. Notable contributions during these 50 years, just after the partition period, have been with the Bangladesh Problems, and most recently with Bhopal. These indicate a motivation for social service, a certain academic quality, scholarship and dedication to duty. Perhaps, these are the most critical needs of our young women and men today.

You have mentioned experts and what they did with the Aswan High Dam. Well, let me assure you that you did not have to give me the anecdote. I am surrounded by experts! There are two views to every definition. The expert likes to see himself as an expert; somebody who knows everything about a particular subject. But there is the other view which is, perhaps, sometimes much more visible than the positive, and that is being so specialised in a particular field, as to know very little about anything also. The expert's views and his perceptions, are limited to these very fields: and, invariably, we find that the net result is not what we started out looking for.

This really takes me to the point of education. Where have these experts come from? Most of the experts that I come into contact with are only experts because they have been dealing in a particular field for about 20 or 30 years. Very few have actually done any real academic work in those fields: and, perhaps this is just the reverse of what civilization is all about. We should have left behind learning only from experience and moved ahead to learning from experience with support from the experience of others, a process of education from which we gain by our working life and working experience. Somehow, in India, the second aspect seems to have been lost sight of somewhere along the way; and we have not been continuously upgrading our level of knowledge. We have relied too much on personal experience; and the result is sometimes very clear to see in the type of decisions taken in a bureaucratic set-up.

Panditji had said that we, too often and too easily, fall back on precedents. We fall back to see how it was done at an earlier time. But, in a developing country like India, which is giving the lead in many fields, there are no precedents to fall back on because we are giving the lead: if we, look all the time for precedents, we cannot give that lead. We must have the strength of our convictions to know when there is justifiably a precedent, when there is none, and when we have to divert from the traditional precedent. This is something that we must bring into our system, and perhaps, most of all to our experts.

Panditji visited the Tata Institute about 32 years ago. From then to now, the Institute has developed a tremendous background of social work, a great tradition, and you have looked at our society and at our economy as it is being transformed from the early days of independence to what it is today. There is rapid economic growth, the social change, the unprecedented geographic and social mobility, is taking place in our country; tens of millions have left their villages and have come to towns, leaving behind a traditional rural culture for a new urban culture, perhaps, in many ways foreign; transformation is taking place in our smaller towns, in our urban areas, in our slums, and in the metropolitan resettlement areas. In this transformation, one aspect seems to be common right through: these areas have almost become cultural deserts, that is, the old culture is left behind and a new culture does not replace it. That leads to a similar vacuum in the moral and in spiritual standards.

Panditji said 32 years ago that the long tradition of social service that India has had is in danger of disappearing with this transformation in our society. Our challenge today is to preserve that value system, to preserve the heritage, to preserve it through the unprecedented social change that is taking place in India today. This will involve thousands, perhaps, lakhs, of social workers and others in the field. You have set an example by training and developing these areas. But what we must reach out to is not just the limited concept of somebody doing social work which is good; but it must surely broaden beyond that to people who view doing some social work as part of their daily lives: not just those who have dedicated hundred per cent of their time to social work. It must come into everybody's daily life. That, perhaps, will be the first step in taking out the cynicism that has developed in our system.

We must also bring in once more the dignity of labour and, perhaps, this is another area in which trained social workers can really do something for our society. Our experts are very shy of using their hands and of getting down to it. I have found tremendous barriers between those who work, (I am not referring here only to the working class) but to those who work and to those who direct and give orders. It is such a tremendous barrier that the upper echelons do not even know what the others are doing. They have no concept of it. I see this at every level in the services and, perhaps, it is most obvious and most visible where it is most necessary that it should not exist. This attitude will only go if we accept the dignity of labour, and are not ashamed of getting down to doing work with our own hands. This is perhaps, an area where you could be at the cutting edge and bring the dignity of labour back into our society.

In our social work in India, we have the voluntary organisations and we have the Government. By and large, I would like to congratulate both for the work that they have done. I have seen some studies which show how well voluntary organisations

have worked. I have seen others where the cost-benefit result from what the Government has done, and the actual penetration and area covered, is much more for the same amount of money spent. Although the voluntary organisations sometimes go deeper and are more thorough, yet, they do not really go deep enough. They are isolated, mostly confined to the urban areas. Sometimes, in a few cases, they do go deep into the rural areas, but to a very great degree, they are limited in reach because they do not go just far enough. Unfortunately, the Government and also the bureaucracy, has viewed voluntary organisations as, perhaps, an interfering nuisance in their work, 'the busy bodies who were not really helping the Government's efforts'. But I think neither view is really totally correct. What we need, if development and Government programmes are to really reach out, is full co-ordination between the efforts of the government and those of the voluntary bodies. There must be complete mutual trust and confidence between the bureaucracy and the voluntary organisations.

During the past two years, we have been trying to build this up. We have involved voluntary organisations in many of our Governmental initiatives. We have taken their views, sometimes we have adopted their papers almost in total. We would like to do social work carrying all the social organisations with us, because we feel that this is such a crucial area and it is such an area where, as you mentioned to me, there is a tremendous lack of funding. It is because of that that it is very necessary for every effort being made to be positive so that the maximum benefit flows from that effort. In the new educational policy, girls' education, involving mothers and daughters in the family planning programmes, in the Ganga Cleaning programme, in the Waste Land Development, and in many others, we have involved the voluntary agencies, not just in the development of the programmes, and in the building of the programme, but also in its implementation as well.

We need to work out common programmes in this manner so that large gaps that have grown between the voluntary organisations and the bureaucracy can be closed and we work together. Sometimes, voluntary organisations are too walled in or hermetically sealed. A voluntary organisation which is dealing with one particular subject feels very reluctant to cover another area, whereas, in the sphere of social work, there are no hard divisions. For example, a voluntary organisation that is looking at adult literacy, and adult education, could very easily be going into family planning without causing any problems in their own programme. So, in this manner, we can see how the programme can be broadened without disturbing the basic targets of the programme.

One of the most important aspects is to retain excellence in our work. Again, experts, with their vast knowledge, have created what I describe as a vested interest in mediocrity. There is no effort to allow excellence to grow. Again, I feel this stems from a lack of self-confidence. One is afraid of the person who, perhaps, knows more than what one knows oneself. This will only go if we allow excellence to thrive, if we are constantly aware of the problems that we are facing, and of the solutions that are coming up through the system.

Today, India is in a tremendous flux. Very rapid changes are taking place at many levels: technological change, environmental change, galloping urbanisation, all parameters seem to be changing very rapidly. We have a welter of new problems

facing us. The work at the Institute must remain relevant, must remain germane to these evolving conditions as they come.

Most recently, perhaps, the most dangerous problem that has come up in many years, is that of narcotics and drug-taking by the younger generation. This is one area into which, I feel, many more social organisations and voluntary organisations should be moving. It is a new area and it is going to be difficult but, it is, perhaps, much more important than many of the traditional areas of social work, and I look forward to your lead in pushing people into this direction. We are all fully aware of the dangers. The menace is very much in the air. It is spreading. But today it is still controllable; it is not out of hand. If we move soon enough, I have no doubt that we will be able to get it under control long before it becomes a really serious problem, but it does need priority for the attention of all of us.

Similarly, an area of social discrimination in which we have not been able to make enough head-way is women. Women still bear the brunt of all sorts of discrimination and suppression. The centuries of discrimination cannot be removed immediately, but perhaps, we have not made adequate efforts in this area. A great deal has to be done, again, not by just pious words but by getting out into the field, fighting for women's rights, by education, by really an involvement of the people at the grass-roots level.

A third area which is very important today is that of environmental degradation. It is causing us tremendous problems. Perhaps, the best way to express the problem is in terms of the two problems that we have been facing during these past two years—drought and flood. These should be contradictory but, unfortunately, they are not. During the past one and a half years, for which statistics are available with us, we have spent on drought relief and flood relief what we spent during the whole of the sixth plan period, and yet we have not been giving more for the damage that was done, as *pro rata* it is the same. So the rate of damage is very much higher, perhaps three times higher; and in the future it will multiply many-fold. We have no doubt that both droughts and floods are caused by environmental damage in the area; and we need a lot of work to prevent further damage and to renew the environment. This cannot be done by Government alone; the task is much too big. It will need complete involvement of Government agencies, of voluntary agencies, and of the people right down to the village. We will request you, and all voluntary organisations, to work with us in trying to protect and develop the environment.

You have mentioned Bhopal. I will follow that up and see that proper steps are taken. But I am informed that a lot of work has gone in, even over and above the study that you had done jointly. The case studies have gone up from about 24,000 that had been done together with the Institute to about one hundred and six thousand now, and all the data are being used. It is also part of the current Court case. But we will take up this matter and we will try and get a solution which could be good for both.

Perhaps, one of the most important areas in our development is economic development—the removal of poverty. And we have given this the number one position in our development strategy. But I feel that equally important is the development of the human being. Poverty of the body cannot be replaced by poverty of the soul.

If we are to strengthen India, and if we are to truly develop, we cannot become materialistic. India's traditional strength has been its cultural identity which has remained Indian, irrespective of the travails and the troubles that it has gone through, the ups and downs. India has remained India because of its cultural unity and its cultural identity.

Today, we are in a situation where this is being put under severe pressure. If we allow our cultural identity to disappear, there will be no India. It will just become another rubber stamp country and we do not want India to become such a country. India has always stood for what it feels and what it thinks is right, and India will always stand for that. But if we are to have that strength then we must be strong within; we must be culturally strong.

Liberal ideas from the West? Yes, but let us first look at ourselves and see how we want to develop, let us measure that with ideas from the West, from the East, from everywhere. But first let us give our own direction. Let us not ape and copy other countries. This is not the road India has taken, and it will not give us more strength. It will not take us to the unique destination that India is looking towards. We have always inculcated, absorbed, synthesised the best from every society and every culture. That tradition must continue. We have always remained Indians first. Let us not change that.

To try and maintain this, we have tried to bring a number of departments together in the Human Resource Development Ministry. We hope that this will give a new thrust. We are trying to increase the finances that are available for the Human Resource Development Ministry by very real amounts. It is causing us tremendous problems and constraints because we are doing this half way through a plan. But I feel that we have no choice today. If we do not concentrate in this area it may be just too late. So we just have to tighten our belt and take these steps. Government will not be found lacking. We look forward to working and co-operating with voluntary agencies, with everyone who is involved in this exercise.

I thank you once again for giving me this opportunity to be with you and talk with you on your 50th anniversary. I wish you all the best once again for the next 50 years.

Thank you.