

Speech of Ambassador at the celebration of 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on 14th April, 2016

Dear friends,

I welcome you all this evening to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. As you saw in the documentary, Babasaheb was an outstanding leader of our freedom struggle and a staunch crusader for the rights of the oppressed sections of our society. He was a born genius, an outstanding scholar, visionary, educationalist, philosopher, legal luminary, social reformer, political leader and above all the chief architect of India's Constitution.

Dr. Ambedkar's life is an illustration of courage and conviction. He dedicated himself to the pursuit of knowledge overcoming all the obstacles posed by his oppressed caste and economic hardships. He outshone as a scholar. His PhD thesis of 1923 titled "*The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*" provided the academic basis for the Finance Commission of India which was subsequently established through Article 280 of the Constitution. Similarly, the Reserve Bank of India was conceptualized based on the guidelines presented by Dr. Ambedkar to the "*Royal Commission on Indian Currency & Finance*" in 1925. Dr. Ambedkar's book "*The Problem of the Rupee- Its Problems and Its Solution*" is an invaluable reference tool for a central banker. The Central Legislative Assembly eventually passed the guidelines contained in the book as the RBI Act 1934.

You might be surprised to know that it was Dr. Ambedkar, who successfully led the struggle for reduction of work from 12 hours a day to 8 hours in 1942. He contributed the idea of setting up of Employment Exchanges in India. He was almost single handedly responsible for establishing the Central Technical Power Board, the National Power Grid System and the Central Water Irrigation and Navigation Commission.

After his return to India, Dr. Ambedkar became the voice of the depressed classes and started many organisations to promote their cause. Himself a voracious reader, Dr. Ambedkar saw education as a tool for the liberation of the socially backward from illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. He founded the People's Education Society in 1945 with the aim of advancing the educational interests of weaker sections of society. He said, "Cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence".

Dr. Ambedkar was also a crusader for gender equality and fought for equal rights for women in inheritance and marriage. He said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved". He resigned from the Cabinet in 1951 when his draft Hindu Code Bill failed to receive the support of the Parliament.

However, Dr. Ambedkar's biggest and most important contribution to the whole nation was his role as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India. He was an obvious choice being one of the most learned Indians of that time. With his tremendous foresight and erudite scholarship, Dr. Ambedkar wisely piloted the draft through the Constituent Assembly expounding the philosophy and wisdom behind each of its provisions.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted to see a socio-economic and political transformation in India, not through bloodshed but through parliamentary democracy and rule of law. He wanted everybody to enjoy the freedom and equality of opportunities. He wanted to rid India of the curse of caste system and backwardness. He wanted India to emerge as a modern state where liberty, equality and fraternity flourished and education and development reached every corner of the country. He wished to end the scourge of untouchability and build an egalitarian society in India.

Dr. Ambedkar saw a great potential in using the Indian Constitution to achieve these objectives. He introduced into the draft Constitution provisions, which gave people fundamental rights, abolished untouchability, laid the foundation of Parliamentary & federal form of government, ensured protection of minorities, introduced checks and balances to ensure accountability of the Government, provided for independent judiciary, made right to Constitutional Remedies as a fundamental right and gave directive principles of state policy to establish a just society in the country and an honourable place for India in the global community. To safeguard the purity and fairness of elections, Dr. Ambedkar instituted an independent Election commission.

He was clear that no Constitution is perfect and ultimately its working will depend on the people and the political parties. He stated that the Constitution is workable, it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace and war. But if the things go wrong, the reason will not be that we have a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that man is vile.

Dr. Ambedkar's message, work and life are an inspiration to all of us. His multifaceted contribution to the country can never be forgotten. He is one of the greatest Indians who ever lived.

Dear friends, earlier in the day today, I was reading the last speech of Babasaheb in the constituent assembly on November 25, 1949. I would conclude by reading two paras of his speech: The first:

"In addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds, we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost forever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood."

And the second that was the last para of his speech:

"I do not wish to weary the House any further. Independence is no doubt a matter of joy. But let us not forget that this independence has thrown on us great responsibilities. By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame. Except ourselves. There is great danger of things going wrong. Times are fast changing. People including our own are being moved by new ideologies. They are getting tired of Government by the people. They are prepared to have Governments for the people and are indifferent whether it is Government of the people and by the people. If we wish to preserve the Constitution in which we have sought to enshrine the principle of Government of the people, for the people and by the people, let us

resolve not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path and which induce people to prefer Government for the people to Government by the people, nor to be weak in our initiative to remove them. That is the only way to serve the country. I know of no better,”

Thank you. Jai Bharat.