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SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**NATIONAL SEMINAR
ON
"IN SEARCH OF NATIONAL VALUES :
INDIA AT THE THRESHOLD OF
21ST CENTURY**

**(Under the Serial
"IN SEARCH OF INDIA'S RENAISSANCE)**

KEY-NOTE ADDRESS

by

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6th MARCH 1994

I deem it a great privilege to address the Fourth National Seminar on the subject "In Search of National Values : India at the Threshold of 21st Century". It is in the fitness of things that the Seminar is being held in Madras - a city hallowed by its association with one of the shrewdest persons on the nation's political scene who had the uncanny knack of piercing through the visage of time and foreseeing things still in the womb of the future and was also one of the ablest administrators. To describe Mr. Rajagopalachari - better known as 'Rajaji' - merely in those terms is not enough, for he suffused politics with highest standards of personal integrity, moral values and clean administration. The subsequent acceptance of the validity of his plea long before the birth of Pakistan to reconcile ourselves to the coming reality and his denunciation during the post independence period of licence-permit Raj and its stranglehold on national economy - though sounded like heresy at the time - easily puts him among the great political prophets of the country.

Coming to the subject of the Seminar, I feel that the search for and enumeration of national values does not involve much labour, even though they seem in the current scenario of the country a far-cry, almost the echo of voice from another planet. The inscription of 'SATYA MEVA JAYATE' in our national emblem about the supremacy of truth represents one of our cardinal values. This is also affirmed by the invocation "ASTO MAASADGAMAYA" i.e. 'lead me from untruth to truth' in our prayer and the title "Experiments with Truth" of the autobiography of the Father of the Nation. The gospel of 'Dharma' enunciated in our scriptures which contemplates righteous conduct and consciousness of our obligations highlights other vital feature of our national values.

Gandhi's words that "my dream of Swaraj would remain incomplete unless we can wipe out tears from every eye" enshrine the essence of national goal and values. The preamble to the Constitution, the Directive Principles and a number of its other provisions constitute, in my opinion, a repository of national values as conceived by our founding fathers. India was to be a Sovereign, Democratic Republic to secure to all its citizens : **JUSTICE** - social, economic and political; **LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; **EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity and to promote amongst them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the

Nation. The Directive Principles, though not enforceable by courts, are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it has to be the duty of the State to apply those principles in making laws.

The word 'SECULAR' was not expressly mentioned in the preamble or other provisions of the Constitution as originally framed, but there is no doubt that our founding fathers intended to usher in a secular polity. This was in consonance with the ideology of the Indian National Congress since its inception more than hundred years ago and formed the subject of a number of Resolutions passed in its various Sessions. Safeguards guaranteed to religious minorities enshrined a befitting pledge to the minorities in the Constitution of the country whose greatest son had laid down his life for their protection. There is no mysticism in the secular character of the State. Secularism is neither anti-God nor pro-God; it treats alike the devout, the agnostic and the atheist. It eliminates God from the matters of the State and ensures that no one shall be discriminated against on the ground of religion.

The spirit of India has been one of assimilation of the various elements that came into our country. When she failed to abide by that spirit, she herself declined. When Mahatma Gandhi asked us to open our doors to all the winds, but not get swept off our feet, he was essentially articulating and stressing the tradition in India. India, as pointed out by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, strove throughout her history for the freedom of spirit and the union of hearts. She did not destroy differences, but discovered their underlying affinities. The essence of Hinduism, which has been fount-head of our culture and religious heritage, has been the spirit of tolerance, catholicity of outlook and freedom of thought. Heresy hunting is something wholly alien to it. Some of the greatest sons of India have always laid stress on the fellowship of faiths. This was indeed the subject of a series of lectures delivered by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan at Harvard. This is also the concept enshrined in our Upanishads of 'VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM' i.e. humanity as a single expanded family. This too was the thrust of the speech of Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893 when he said "Help, not fight; assimilation, not destruction; harmony and peace and not dissension".

A bare glance at the national landscape would give one a jolt by the way we have desecrated each one of our national values. As regards adherence to truth, practically every member elected to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies has to commence his membership by making a false declaration with regard to the amount spent on his election. Truth is also the first casualty in exchange of political diatribes, levelling of charges and counter-charges and their refutation. The scant regard for truth in depositions in Courts of law is well-known feature of our judicial proceedings.

Truth and 'Dharma' also postulate a high code of conduct and adherence to moral norms. It is here that we come across the most dismal picture. Joining politics which at one time meant a life of suffering and sacrifice has now come to be looked upon as the quickest means of amassing wealth. The need for money for elections has provided a cover for many a Minister and other politicians to extract colossal amounts from industrialists, businessmen and others. Demand of money has been given a new respectability by camouflaging it as payment of money for party funds and for fighting elections. It is common knowledge that such amounts are received in cash, no receipts are issued therefor and the payments thereof are not reflected in the account books. Further, there is nothing to ensure that the amount, and in any case the whole of it, would be passed on to the party. The demand of money for party funds from industrialists and businessmen and the receipt of such money from them is a major cause of political corruption in our country and is responsible for polluting the entire atmosphere in public life and the administration of the country. Once a person gets a taste of receiving money, even though it be under the garb of election funds, he cannot subsequently resist the temptation of making other demands of money from those who have to deal with him. Demand of money for election or party funds thus initiates such persons in the game, now reduced to a fine art, of extracting illicit money for themselves. Demand of such money also acts as a starting point of life of political corruption. It is just like the first act of a woman losing her chastity when it is the initial act which is crucial for it constitutes a point of no return. It is also plain that if those at the top start receiving illicit money, the vicious habit is bound to be imbibed by others below. Corruption in the very nature of things

percolates. If it is there at the top it is bound to spread below and thus become endemic and ubiquitous. Political corruption, experience tells us, always proves to be the foster-mother of administrative corruption. Formerly, the malady was known to have afflicted only those at the lower rung, to-day it has spread its tentacles to the higher strata of the institutions. In recent times the malady of corruption has acquired manifold dimensions and it has spread into almost all spheres of life. To-day we hear reports of not merely of political corruption but also of administrative corruption, judicial corruption and academic corruption. This is so despite the fact that we have a number of people of high integrity in all spheres. What, however, causes concern is that as the years roll by, their number is going down and they are becoming almost a vanishing tribe.

Scandals during the last decade have revealed another avenue for receipt of huge amounts of illegal gratification from foreign parties with whom orders are placed for supply of various items in the fields of Defence, Aviation, Petroleum etc. The figure of those amounts are astronomical.

The speech of Dr. Rajendra Prasad at the concluding session of the Constituent Assembly shows that he had foreboding of such degeneration in the political life of the country in the days to come, for what he said on that occasion was:

"In India today I feel that the work that confronts us is even more difficult than the work which we had when we were engaged in the struggle. We did not then have any conflicting claims to reconcile, no loaves and fishes to distribute, no powers to share. We have all those now and the temptations are really great. Would to God that we shall have the wisdom and the strength to rise above them and to serve the country which we have succeeded in liberating".

So deep has been the erosion and decline in our allegiance to values in different spheres during the post-independence era that to-day we face crisis of character. Things have come to such a pass that blatant charlatanism, unabashed chicanery and manifest a moral conduct struts about as political acumen and has come to be accepted as a part of our national

life. This has also resulted in the gradual coarsening of public conscience and sensitivities.

Coming to the consciousness of our obligations, I may mention that Parliament and State Legislatures constitute the acme of our national institutions. The way the entire proceedings of those august Houses are held up by groups of members walking into the well of the House and not allowing any further proceeding is a sad commentary on our allegiance to democratic norms and parliamentary discipline. The nation has to spend lakhs of rupees for every minute of the Parliament Session. If one were to count the number of days and hours gone waste by the holding up of parliamentary proceedings and the financial burden thrown thereby on the national exchequer, a sordid picture would reveal itself. Recently, inside the House of the Legislature of the most populous State of the country, there was display of worst type of holliganism and physical fighting involving many members of the House. Incidents of indecent and vulgar behaviour on the part of some members are also not unknown in certain Legislatures. Disobedience and defiance of the orders of the Speakers of the Houses is another disquieting feature. This apart, the general experience has been that the number of members present in each House at the time when serious business of legislation takes place in the barest minimum required for the quorum. Some times it is even less than that, unless some members bring this matter to the notice of the Presiding Officer. It is common experience that the way the apex institutions function and abide by the norms of discipline, that sets the tone for the working of the other institutions. If the apex institutions falter in this respect, it would be naive to expect anything better from other institutions. In this context, it is necessary to emphasise that democracy postulates not merely the ritual of periodic elections but also adherence to its basic norms of functioning. True, politics is not a game of saints nor an exercise in ethics, but still if it has to operate well, it must abide by the rules of the game.

In other countries, the party in power with a majority of even one never feels threatened regarding the survival of the Government, while here reduced to a saleable commodity, the price being ministerial or other

office, and if the rumours are to be believed large sums of money. The members also seem to be more concerned with raising their emoluments and privileges rather than with the loss caused to national exchequer by the holding up of the proceedings of the House. It needs to be emphasised in this context that unless we develop a democratic temper, we shall have democracy only in the name, but without its soul and essence. Democracy is a fragile plant and can be nurished and kept alive only by obeying its norms and abiding by rules of discipline.

Another reason for decline in the parliamentary standards and behaviour has been the criminalisation of politics. Experience shows that initially politicians took help of anti-social elements at the time of elections and those elements when in difficulty at the hands of law enforcement agencies took aid of politicians; and politicians were none too unwilling to come to their rescue as **quid pro quo** for the help received from them at the time of election. Indeed the feeling was that greater the person was a 'goonda', higher was his rating for being useful at the time of election. As time passed on, the anti-social elements felt that if they could get others elected, why should they not themselves seek elections? Many of them accordingly contested the elections and quite a number of them were actually elected. Indeed, according to newspaper reports, about half the members of one State Legislature were those who were history-sheeters on the police records. Some of them were even appointed as Ministers which had the effect of stultifying all criminal proceedings against them.

Another effect of the criminalisation of politics has been the havoc it has wrought on the administration of criminal justice. The political interference in the investigation of serious crimes has led to the situation that it is most difficult to secure conviction of major culprits guilty of serious offences like murder, because of non-procurement of incrimination evidence against them by investigating agencies.

So far as our constitutional morality is concerned, although we have been guilty of many lapses, I want to refer to only one of them, namely, misuse of Article 356 for imposition of President's Rule in the States. At the time, the aforesaid Article was incorporated in the Constitution,

To-day we find secessionist forces raising their ugly heads in certain regions of the country. If a study were to be undertaken of the initial causes for generating secessionist tendencies, one shall find that it was the direct consequence of the manoeuvring by the petty minds at the Centre inousting the existing State Governments by imposition of President's Rule. Article 47 of our Constitution ordains that the State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties, while article 45 provides that the State shall endeavour to provide, within

apprehensions were voiced by members of the Constituent Assembly about the misuse of the article. Assurance was then given that occasion for invoking the power under that Article would be very rare. Experience since then shows that the power under the Article has been used generally for partisan ends to further the interests of the party in power at the Centre and not for reasons contemplated by the framers of the Constitution. Most often, the dismissed State Governments have been those which were formed by the parties other than the one in power at the Centre. The number of occasions on which the President's Rule has been imposed has also varied with the degree of our allegiance to the fundamentals of constitutional morality and the general tone of our public life. The more firm and binding has been our commitment to those fundamentals and more vigorous and healthy has been the tone of our public life, the lesser have been the occasions on which the President's Rule has been clamped in the States. From January 26, 1950 when the Constitution came into force till the end of 1966 covering a period of 17 years, the President's Rule was imposed in the States on 10 occasions. During the next period of 8 years from 1967 till the end of 1974, such rule was imposed on 26 occasions. During the next period of nearly 18 years from 1975 till March 1993, President's Rule has been imposed on as many as 52 occasions. It would thus appear that compared to the first 17 years after the coming into forces of the Constitution there has, during the last two decades, been five-fold increase in the propensity to invoke the power under Article 356. Full use has also been made by the Centre of the subservience of the Governors with pliable conscience to obtain the desired reports from them to this end.

a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. A period of four and half decades has passed since then. Undoubtedly during this period we have made strides in the field of technology, industry and particularly food production. Yet with all that the situation to-day is that far from complying with that mandate of Directive Principles we are among the poorest nations of the world in terms of living standards. The United Nations Development Report published in 1990 ranks the nations of the world in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). In assessing a nation's position in the list, the HDI takes into account the expenditure incurred by the State on human priority sectors - health, water, sanitation, daily calorific intake, literacy and education at primary and secondary levels. Having regard to HDI, India is placed pretty close to the bottom, being 123rd out of 160 countries. This is despite the fact that we have immense human resources in the large population, a great part of which remains without employment during major part of the year, we have had the blessing of bountiful nature with large tracts of land, mineral wealth, chain of rivers, high mountains, forests, vast sea coast and a huge reservoir of engineers, technicians and educated youth. It is almost a classic example of man's ingratitude to nature and fellow-beings. At individual level an Indian is possessed of good IQ, he has developed faculties of superior entrepreneurship, his work output is equally of high order, and his capacity and potential to acquire technical know-how compares favourably with others, even those from developed countries. This is apparent from the mark made by the Indians and their performance in Universities and other institutions when they go abroad. It is distressing to know that despite all these endowments and advantages, India's share of world trade is less than that of Hong Kong which is just One City State. Less than fifty years ago, Japan and South Korea were economically and industrially at almost the same level as India. To-day they have become economic giants while we are amongst the poorest nations of the world. China which too, like India, has a very large population is in the process of making great economic strides with its GNP going up every year by 12 or 13 per cent, while India's percentage is even less than one-half of that.

Another matter of concern is that during the period of about half a century since India became free and despite the proclamation of our faith

We have, as mentioned earlier, immense reservoir of human resources, natural wealth and talent. We have qualified Engineers, technicians, scientists and Doctors. Our entrepreneurs and innovators, given the right opportunities, can hold their own against the best in the world. In the domain of politics and more so outside that domain we have a number of persons of high calibre, vision, perspicacity, moral values and

It has been our boast that India represents a synthesis and mosaic of cultures, religious beliefs, language and dialects, races and ethnic groups. They constitute its strength and glory projecting as they are the image of broad-mindedness, tolerance and assimilation. At the same time we have to guard against the above points of strength and glory degenerating into those of weakness and ignominy by pushing down the nation into a conglomeration of disparate elements lacking in cohesion and engaged in internecine strife and conflicts.

Despite all these depressing features, I feel that India at the threshold of the 21st Century has a bright future and we should not despair on that account. Despite the aberration of communal and other types of violence, springs of goodness in my opinion have not altogether dried up and the heart of India is still strong. There still pulsates inside an average Indian, a kindly heart, compassionate and God-fearing. What is needed is to rescue the people from the venom being injected and poison being spread by some individuals, seeking to build their leadership on the debris and ruins of our rich heritage bequeathed to us by the great sons of the motherland.

in secular polity, we have not been able to bring about lasting fusion and integration between the major communities and a minor incident can sometimes result in communal holocaust. One tragic aspect of our public life has been the rousing of sectional, parochial or communal feelings by some political parties and individuals and use it as a prop to gain popularity and create vote banks. Pandering to fanaticism and championing of sectional interests is looked upon by many as a convenient short-cut to popularity and easy method of building and expanding their leadership. To divide is easy, but to unite is difficult in the same way as to destroy is easy but to build and construct is difficult.

personal integrity. We have to harness all these potentials to create greater India. India has been compared to a sleeping giant. It has to be awakened so that we can occupy our rightful place in the comity of nations.

Another matter that calls for attention is the need to ensure population control. It is plain that unless we take effective measures in this respect, all our schemes of raising our living standards would go awry. Likewise we must rectify our lapse in not spending enough in the field of education looked at the light of national expenditure. We must not forget that the amount spent on education is the best investment for the future. Some other items of agenda for the 21st Century, which I need not dilate upon for want of time, are -

- (1) Re-awaken the conscience of the Nation;
- (2) Build up character and foster sense of discipline;
- (3) Create strong and vigilant public opinion so that none may dare to deviate from the established norms of behaviour;
- (4) Reform the electoral system which may embrace also feasibility of the audit of party funds; and
- (5) Create a climate of work-culture.

Every generation leaves a mark on the pages of history and the onward march of time. Let it not be said at the bar of history that while an earlier generation under the leadership of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel heralded the dawn of independence, brought about the integration of the States and bequathed in legacy a strong well-knit country, projecting an image of moral toughness, a later generation of nineteen-eighties and nineties allowed the seeds of disintegration to sprout, secessionist and fissiparous forces to raise their ugly heads and be a witness to the process of moral decay. Let us not forget that it takes decades of sustained sacrifice and heroic effort, of supreme dedication and devotion, to found and build the edifice of a Republic, but the same can be destroyed overnight by the banishment of principles or the folly, shortsightedness or wickedness of men.

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