

RAJIV GANDHI AND MODERN INDIA: DREAMS AND VISION

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Mr. President, the organiser of the programme Dr. Sundar Ram, my friend and Rajya Sabha Member Shri Suresh Keshwani, the former Speaker of Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Dr. Eswar Reddy and former Minister of Andhra Pradesh Shri Satyanarayana Raju, distinguished Members of AGRASRI, residents of Tirupati town, invitees, the press, ladies and gentlemen. I congratulate our friends who have been responsible for establishing the Academy of Grassroots Studies and Research of India (AGRASRI) at Tirupati.

I feel greatly privileged and immensely delighted to deliver the Second Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture today. Rajiv Gandhi had taken the reins of the nation at a time when the entire nation was in turmoil and he made efforts to bring back the normalcy and gradually strengthen the country for overall development. If it was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who laid the foundation stone for building the modern India, it was Rajiv Gandhi, who initiated some bold policy changes brushing aside skepticism from some people which eventually made India transform into what it is today. He was for understanding the aspirations of the people. He was for understanding the ideologies and the concepts which were developing throughout the world. He was for protecting the environment. And he was for peace in the world. While he gave great importance to science and technology, yet he appreciated and understood the importance of art, culture and importance of spirituality. By recalling as to how he thought and acted, how he supervised and corrected the mistakes, how he planned for the future, how he thought about the entire country and the world, and how he thought about the universe itself, it would be possible for us to understand the essence of successful life, which one can lead in and outside this country.

In this context, I would like to recall how Rajiv Gandhi had provided his own vision for the development of Indian society in a meeting held in Delhi under his Chairmanship. During the deliberations, he had emphasised on the need to evolve a long term educational policy so that the masses could be provided opportunities to enhance their level of literacy. He wanted the new educational system to be employment oriented. He considered 'Health' as a major problem in the country. Minimum health facilities or institutions to prepare medical and paramedical staff continue to be inadequate for a large majority of our huge population. People from poverty groups, in particular, do not have access to minimum essential health services. He strongly favored provision of health facilities to one all and expansion of institutions to meet the growing requirement of medical staff. He vehemently advocated that the issue of providing 'Roti', 'Kapada' and 'Makan' which was a major plank during freedom movement need to be integrated with the development process so that all sections of our society, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections could have access to food, clothing and shelter.

■ *Text of the Second Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture delivered by Shri Shivraj V. Patil, Speaker of Tenth Lok Sabha, New Delhi, on 25th August 2003 at Hotel Bliss (Darbar Hall), under the aegis of Academy of Grassroots Studies and Research of India (AGRASRI), Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh).*

Another aspect of development which Rajiv Gandhi always emphasised is the use of electronics for accelerating the process of modernisation. He visualised it as the third revolution preceded by agricultural and industrial revolutions in the post-independent India. He therefore not only advocated use of electronics in all spheres of governance but also initiated a number of steps which has resulted in making India as the leading nation in the field of Information Technology.

Few will disagree that the vision of Rajiv Gandhi which has brought the country to this level of development and prosperity. The foundation he laid in this regard will be duly recognised by one and all in the history of development of India.

Sometimes scientific adventures like sending the Satellite into space also invites criticism from people. It is often argued that sending Satellites is a wasteful expenditure, particularly when a large number of people do not have access to basic facilities such as drinking water, healthcare and education etc. Therefore it is necessary to provide basic facilities, particularly in social sector. But these critics forget that it is only these experiments which will help the poor people in the backward areas. If the Satellite is in the sky, the wireless communication becomes possible. If the Satellite were not there it would not have been possible to provide communication facilities in the remote areas. These days, a Doctor sitting in Tirupati is able to consult his counterpart in New Delhi, Australia, America, Europe and carryout the operation successfully. This is possible because of the availability of faster communication facilities. The Satellites sends seven to eight imageries every day to indicate the frequency and nature of monsoons, helping the farmer in know in whether the rains are going to be good or bad and he may thereby choose he can use crops seeds / crops accordingly. This is the kind of vision Rajiv Gandhi had about the use of science and technology in all walks of life.

Rajiv Gandhi did not consider that prosperity and material development alone for are responsible for leading a happy life. He felt that art and culture also contribute to happiness among the human beings that is why he knew where art there is beauty is. Beauty is not only in cement jungle of the cities, it is there in the greenery which is found in Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and the foot hills of Himalayas, and the sunset and sunrise in Kanyakumari and even in the deserts of Rajasthan. Likewise, the beauty of Western and Eastern Ghats is enchanting. Thus natural beauty is available in all parts of our country. We also come across use of art and artistic expressions in different parts of the country, particularly among the people living in villages. If you go to Maharashtra you find that people living in the tribal areas paint their walls with colors so artistically that these become an enchanting piece of art. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh a lady sings Mahabharata with the use of traditional musical instruments in an enchanting voice. Likewise, there are a large number of other expressions of art and culture in different parts of country.

It was Rajiv Gandhi who said that we will organise festivals of India in New Delhi, Nagpur, Mumbai, Kolkatta and in other places so that rural and urban artists may get an opportunity to exhibit their traditional art. This will make the artists to feel proud of what they have been doing

but could not display so far. Therefore it was not only science and technology but it was art and culture which was very dear to him.

Nobody has done so much for art and culture in India as Rajiv Gandhi did. The first thing he did was to provide opportunities to the artists living in the remote areas to revive their art and culture along with spirituality in an integrated manner. For him, spirituality is relevant to all human beings in and outside the country. It is something for which people often quarrel leading to inter-religious conflicts. Generally the people do not take measures for conflict resolution, keeping in view the great civilisation which we have cherished all over the periods of history.

He was keen to promote the understanding of the essence of all religions which is spirituality. Nobody really knows how spiritual Rajiv Gandhi was except those close to him. Had he not been spiritual, it would not have been possible for him to take up the responsibility as country's Prime Minister soon after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. His address on that occasion is supposed to be one of the most important speeches delivered by him on disarmament. He had stated that if you really want peace you can not have it by amassing nuclear weapons and adding their number every year. He therefore proposed a time frame of twenty years to dismantle the nuclear weapons. He also said that any technology that can produce the deadliest weapons of mass destruction should be banned within a specified period of time. He also stated that we should develop the psychology for promoting and protecting peace in the world.

He was pragmatist but he was ideologist in spirit. He understood the dangers of war and importance of peace in a global perspective. He was not for running away from anything inflicted on anybody but he was for facing it with full capability. Lord Krishna exactly did this in the battlefield. He asked Arjun to fight war to destroy the mechanism of Duryodhana and his people. At the end of Geeta he said that *Ahimsa parmoharmaha* does not mean running away from war but it only means facing it with a heart which is free from malice.

Rajiv Gandhi was responsible for developing friendly relations with Pakistan. When Benazir Bhutto became the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, as the Indian Prime Minister, went to Pakistan and told the people that both India and Pakistan should live in peace with each other. It was Rajiv Gandhi who went to China and initiated dialogue with the President. With the same vision, he visited United States of America and held extensive discussions on a number of issues of mutual interest. I was with him when he went to United States of America and spoke to the Members of Senate in the House of Representatives. One of the sentences, which has become immortal was, "*I am young and I too have my ambitions*". He told them that you are a young country you have your dreams. My country is old but I am young. I have my own dreams and I would like to see these dreams fulfilled. He also took a number of steps to develop friendship with our neighbours. He was responsible for creating an atmosphere in which SAARC came into existence. If European countries can unite why not the countries of South Asia should not the Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives unite.

Rajiv Gandhi's contribution towards and in protecting the environment is also noteworthy. As a Minister of Science and Technology, I was attending the meeting to discuss the first proposal to

clean Ganga. During this meeting, he said that though Ganga is the holiest river, yet it is getting polluted day by day. All the cities are dumping their dirt into Ganga as a result of which the river is loosing its natural ecology. The funds given to the State Government who was expected to give those funds to the Municipalities and to the Corporations to clean the Ganga are not being properly utilised. He therefore initiated an action plan for cleaning Ganga within a time frame and accorded it a high priority. In an International Conference he said that we are polluting the land, we are polluting the oceans, we are polluting the space. It should be stopped for protecting the environment. We need funds. So let there be an International Environment Protection Committee.

Rajiv Gandhi also took up a bold initiative for strengthening Panchayati Raj system, which was started by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In accordance with the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India the Village Panchayats were set up in all states. Subsequently, a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj was started in the country and Gram Panchayats, Taluka Panchayats, Zilla Panchayats were established in the early sixties. During the first 10 to 15 years, the panchayats did very well they were generally respected by the people.

I have seen my friend working in Zilla Parishad and commanding a great deal of respect. In due course the panchayat system became polluted due to irregular elections in a number of states. Rajiv Gandhi said that we are providing funds to the states for implementing a number of schemes but these funds are not reaching to the people. The institutions which are responsible for helping the people at the grassroots level are the Gram Panchayats, the Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads. Therefore the elections to the bodies should be held regularly and they should be provided with adequate funds and powers to carry out developmental activities in their respective area. In order to involve the youth in the developmental process, he got the Constitution amended to make the voter's age 18 instead of 21 years.

Another important thing, which he did, was empowerment of women. Although the women constitute 50 per cent of the population of the country they are discriminated in many ways. Traditionally, they have not been given responsibilities and are not allowed participation in public institutions. When the policy decisions are taken and implemented they are not considered. That is why Rajiv Gandhi said that at least 33 per cent not 50 per cent of the elected seats should be reserved for women at the district, taluk, municipality and gram panchayat level. He proposed amendment in the Constitution providing regular election of the panchayati raj bodies at regular intervals. There is a Provision for the appointment of an independent Finance Commission appointed by the State Government to make recommendations about financial allocations to the Panchayats and Municipal bodies. Further 33 per cent of seats shall be reserved for women. Today, the elections are taking place on time and there are funds available to these bodies.

We have nearly three million 13 lakh members elected by the people to these bodies – Zilla Parishads, Panchayati Samities, Gram Panchayats, Municipalities and the Corporations in the Panchayats. Out of 30 million representatives, 10 million are women. This is a revolution. This has happened nowhere in the world. I remember, during the discussion of a Committee, one of the women members got up and said if you are reserving seats for women in the Panchayats why are not reserve for the State Legislature and the Parliament. Rajiv Gandhi he did not take a single

minute to say and respond that we are experimenting with it and you can rest assure that this shall be done at the level of the State and the Lok Sabha. We have a Bill pending with the Lok Sabha in this regard. Most of the men are fighting against this Bill as they think that if 33 per cent of seats are given to the women they will loose 33 per cent of seats in the State Legislature and the Parliament. We have suggested to them that don't worry we will protect. If you agree to give 33 per cent reservation for ladies, we will increase the level of seats in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in such a fashion so that the number of seats available to men is not reduced.

Law has established the Zilla Parishad, Panchayati Samiti and the local bodies and authority along with funds have also been given the women. But there is something more than this which is required to be given to make these institutions successful. And that something is not going to come only from the law. It understands of the management of these institutions which is more important. My grand father used to tell me that if you are working alright yourself working is not much important than getting the corporation of others and getting others also work. This is the essence of administration. If you are the head of Zilla Parishad you can work but if the others members of the Zilla Parishad, the Chairman of the Committees are not working if officers are not working and you are not able to ensure that they co-operate and work with you all your efforts will go in vain.

The quantum of the result produced is not going to be produced how to do it unless you understand the problem unless you understand the solution of the problem, understand the psychology of the people, psychology of the elected representatives, the legal provisions relating to them and skill which is required to have holistic approach to this. If we go to the government then we will talk about the problem and not about the solution. This approach is not going to be helpful. A leader is one who know the pulse of the people and understand can get this co-operation. A leader is one who is not working for today only but he is working for tomorrow and for the future. If this kind of quality is not developed in leaders working in the villages level, at taluka level and district level also it would be difficult to make the local bodies functional in true sense of the word.

All this is not going to result from the constitutional and the statutory provisions; it has to develop from the experience which people's representatives would have from within by understanding local needs through observations, through analysis and gathering facts, synchronising the thing having a holistic approach. There would be thesis, there will be an anti-thesis. There has to be a synthesis there has to be a balance there has to be vision. Our President, Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam is talking about Vision 2020 is a good initiation. That vision has to be there but that vision should not only be limited to science and technology. It should extend to administration and the psychology of the people also. It should be a holistic vision which covers science, technology, culture, spirituality, man and society, administration and the government and planning and the future perspective of only that vision could achieve all these within a short period of six years of Rajiv Gandhi.

In six years period, if a very correct analysis is made what Rajiv Gandhi and what Rajiv Gandhi would have done, if he were there for some more time it would be most important thing for the

country and the world. I think, I need not say anything more than this. I have taken more time than it was available to me. I thank you very much for inviting me, asking me to deliver the Second Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture at Tirupati. Finally, thank you very much for the attention you have paid.



Shri Shivraj V. Patil, Speaker of the Tenth Lok Sabha, delivering the *Second Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture* on 25 August, 2003 at Hotel Bliss (Darbar Hall), Tirupati, under the aegis of AGRASRI.