



On Patriotism

An excerpt from a speech by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

"It is not always realized how much effort is required to defend our national ideals. We cannot assume that just because the Constitution describes India as a socialist, secular, democratic republic, everybody accepts or follows secularism and socialism or democracy for that matter.

We all know of the continuing threat to our secular ideals from communal and fundamentalist elements. They tried unceasingly to weaken the secular base of our society by sowing suspicion between communities.

Strengthened by our national ideology, the overwhelming majority of the people refuse to be misled. Our basic philosophy has deep roots in our past and in the profound thinking and leadership of people like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. There can be no dilution of this philosophy; there will be no dilution of this philosophy.

Let me declare, here and now, that we shall not deviate. Let us make no mistake. The challenges that the country faces are no ordinary challenges. There are forces in the world who want to see India falter and be mired in internal squabbles. There are forces that actively encourage terrorism. There are forces that aim to deflect us from our chosen path. These forces must be met squarely. The only way to do so is to place national interest above the interest of group, class or party.

That is what patriotism means."

Ceremony of Remembrance at Vir Bhumi - 21st May 2009

Every year, on a hot summer's morning, the nation gathers at Vir Bhumi, the Samadhi of Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi, to remember the sacrifice of an inspiring leader.

This year the ceremony acquires a special significance and poignancy. After the results of the general election, a new government is scheduled to be sworn in on Friday 22nd May. But before the new team takes on its onerous task of governance, today is a day of remembrance and dedication to a fallen leader. It is a day when the nation salutes Rajiv Gandhi in gratitude, a party remembers him in loss and a family grieves in sorrow.

The early morning ceremonial, touching in its austere simplicity, takes place in the verdant green of Vir Bhumi which has as its centre a square plinth on which rests a granite lotus (Rajiv means lotus). The platform is decorated with hundreds of white lotuses contained in earthen gharas covered with white khadi. The air is fragrant with the scent of summer jasmine.

The nation's homage is led by the President, Shrimati Pratibha Patil, the Vice-President Dr Hamid Ansari and the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Shrimati Sonia Gandhi and the children of the late Prime Minister, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, are the first to pay their respects, at dawn.

As a lonely flute plays, the ceremonial begins with the entry of 18 children signifying the 18th year of the martyrdom. One of them offers a length of the finest red khadi in remembrance of the sacrifice of the late Prime Minister, another places a diya on the Samadhi and another some incense to cleanse the air.

The sombre voice of Pt Madhup Mudgal rises in plaintive melody singing in three classical ragas - Bilaskhani Todi, Desi and Bhairavi - with the bandish of each evoking the mood of loss and recollection.

As the music fades away, the familiar voice of Rajiv Gandhi rises clearly in the morning air. He speaks of patriotism, of the profound thinking of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and of the dedication to secular ideals by the people of India who refuse to be misled. His words have an almost uncanny resonance today.

Then, as if to evoke the forceful energy of a new generation of young Indians, the morning ends with the entry of two young athletes, a boy and a girl, proudly bearing aloft the Tricolour. They run two ceremonial laps around the Samadhi with the flag fluttering proudly above the gathering, to honour the memory of Rajiv Gandhi who gave his life for the Nation.