

**INDIRA GANDHI MEMORIAL LECTURE BY THE PRESIDENT
OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT ASIATIC SOCIETY,
KOLKATA ON NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

Kolkata: December 14, 2015

1. I am honoured to deliver the Indira Gandhi Memorial Lecture of the Asiatic Society for the year 2013. I am grateful to the members of the Council as well as members of the Advisory Board of the Asiatic Society for inviting me to deliver this Lecture.

2. The Asiatic Society, founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones, was declared as an Institution of National Importance by an Act of Parliament at the initiative of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During the inauguration of the bi-centenary celebrations of the Asiatic Society on 11th January, 1984, Mrs. Gandhi had observed and I quote: *“Some institutions reflect history and some contribute to it. This Society has done both. Through its work, it has revealed India’s cultural and intellectual achievements to Europe. When we were enveloped in doubts and difficulty, it let in a ray of light. To our own people, this meant a rediscovery of our heritage and restored our self-respect.”* (unquote)

3. It can be said that the revival of India’s spirit originated here. The world’s attention was drawn to India’s philosophical thought, literature, mathematics, astronomy and scientific investigations. The Society popularized Sanskrit texts as well as the great store of scientific and philosophical knowledge in Persian and other languages. The foundations of Indian archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy, historiography, etc. were laid here. Research investigations were pioneered which brought into being many national organizations.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

4. The topic for today's lecture is "National Integration". Our country has maintained remarkable unity and identity through the centuries, in spite of her vast size and immense diversity. National integration is essential for the idea of India to grow. With India emerging as an influential player in the international arena, the problems of our nation with a population of 1.28 billion can be successfully handled if we think together, work together and grow together.

5. The foundations of national integration must be laid in the minds and hearts of all Indians. Every citizen of this country must know what India is and has been. He must be broadly aware of our long history and the great civilizations that grew on this soil. All Indians must learn about the people who came here from different parts of the world and made their own contribution to the splendid mosaic that Indian culture is. Knowledge about different religions and great saints who took birth here should be part and parcel of everyone's education. Every Indian must be familiar with our age-old contacts with the outside world and our contributions to world civilization. Most important of all, the basic unity that keeps us together amidst the immense diversity of our peoples, ethnicities, languages and cultures should be ingrained in every individual citizen, especially the youth.

6. As with every other country, our beauty, achievement and potential for future growth are peppered with some deficiencies and failures. Every Indian citizen must also be aware of our mistakes of the past and limitations which have created problems of inequality in our midst. Every one of us must also have a vision of a great India that we are determined to create, a vibrant democracy based on the values of equality, justice, freedom and the dignity of the individual, as enshrined in our Constitution.

7. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book '*Discovery of India*' describes in a comprehensive and panoramic manner our

past. It is our responsibility to ensure that every child in our country is given that opportunity to discover India for himself or herself. Our educational system has a very important role to play in this regard. The work of schools must be continued at home by the family, and outside through non-formal channels of education like the mass media.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

8. India is an ancient civilization but a young nation. Its ethos and multi-layered culture has held generations in thrall. Mere knowledge about India is not enough. We must also learn to love our country as our own mother. As our love deepens, it will start encompassing all that surrounds us. We will begin to love the lofty mountains, dark forests, green valleys, fertile plains, lovely rivers, expansive beaches, the flora and fauna, the shrines, and the wonderful historical monuments. We will start loving the immense variety of people in our country, their languages, cultural traditions and achievements. And, we must love even more the great sons and daughters of India and the patriots who lived and died for our freedom. Our love must further expand to include a commitment to the values for which India has stood for ages - such as respect for women, mutual goodwill, non-violence, non-attachment, commitment to society and unity in diversity. It is this love for motherland in every citizen that gives strength and vitality to the idea of national integration.
9. Along with knowing and loving our country, every citizen must continuously strive to serve it. The ability of our country to meet the challenges that it face from time to time and the capacity of our people to develop their full potential will depend upon the devotion and persistence they bring to the welfare of their motherland. If India is to meet the challenges of development and carve an honourable place for herself in the comity of nations, its citizens must make efforts continuously to increase production, distribute wealth and provide services equitably among all the people. They must constantly endeavour for

national advancement and for achieving a shared vision of a great India.

10. Friends, in a nation, every individual belong to several groups simultaneously. That makes the groups as important as individuals. It is therefore necessary to also lay the foundations for national integration at the group level. An individual belongs to his family, his profession, place of residence, language, religion, country, the whole world and ultimately, the entire universe. He owes, simultaneously, loyalty to all these groups. Loyalties to these different groups do not however need to be in conflict with one another. They can exist in harmony and whenever these interests collide, methods of reconciling them should be in place.
11. National integration demands that every citizen recognise the primacy of national interest over group or individual interests. Pursuit of larger social objectives yields good results, not only for society as a whole, but also for all its component individuals or groups. We must, therefore, educate each citizen or group to subordinate his personal or group interests, whenever necessary, to the imperatives of national development. This will promote national integration.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

12. Sometimes, it does happen that regional interests overtake our commitment to the national interest. We have to guard against any such tendency. While all Indian languages must receive encouragement and support, in a linguistically plural society like ours, some accommodation in favour of the national imperatives will always be required.
13. We must encourage a broad human outlook in all our citizens and educate them to rise above caste or communal loyalties. We must learn to respect the rights and sensitivities of minorities, both in letter and spirit. We must cultivate a secular and democratic outlook, and promote a way of life that is inclusive and does not interfere with civic duties and rights as

well as responsibilities of individuals. We must strive to maintain an atmosphere where every community feels a part of the national narrative.

14. Focus should remain on raising standards of living and reducing existing disparities in power, wealth, income, consumption and utilization of social services like education or health. The State must do its best to reduce regional imbalances and provide a just, fair and good administration which will ensure equal treatment to every citizen, irrespective of his caste, religion, race, colour, sex or place of birth.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

15. There is much that the academic community of our country can do to promote national integration. Institutions such as the Asiatic Society are nurseries of leadership for the future. They must continue to innovate and keep pace with the times. History has no holidays and efforts to foster national integration must be a continuing 24/7 endeavour. It would not suffice to merely make sporadic thrusts in this regard.
16. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi told a convention of academicians in 1976 which I quote: *"It (Indianness) is something which holds us together and which has held this country together for thousands of years"*. (unquote)
17. Let me conclude with a call to each and everyone here to understand and love our motherland. Let us create on the foundation of our intrinsic unity, a strong and compassionate nation respected around the world. Let there be no forces that divide our society. Let us consolidate our thoughts around a common vision of a great nation. Let us dedicate ourselves to work together and take our nation to greater heights.

Thank you,
Jai Hind.
