

ADDRESS MADE ON AUGUST 14 MIDNIGHT, 1972 DURING THE CELEBRATION OF
THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA
IN THE ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

Friends,

The stroke of midnight tonight will mark the passing of twenty-five years since the historic day on which India attained independence from British rule. We have assembled at this hour to commemorate that solemn occasion of a quarter of a century ago. Our first duty tonight is to recall to our minds, the sacrifices, the tribulations of the thousands of our countrymen and women who were engaged in decades of struggle to build a new Indian nation and to unchain it from thralldom to an alien Imperial power.

I am sure you will join me in paying our reverent tribute to all the great patriotic sons and daughters of our land who struggled, suffered and nay even died in that cause.

This is an occasion when we must search the story of the past twenty-five years to discover what lessons has to teach and what morals to point to us.

Our struggle for Swaraj was in a sense not meant for independence for India alone. India really formed the spearhead of the movement for independence of many of our neighbouring countries from European dominance. Several of our neighbours have, however, since attaining freedom seen a chequered history of disruption of democracy and the establishment for varying periods of despotism and autocracy.

We, in India, though we have encountered many adverse circumstances, have successfully faced the colossal problems arising out of partition, of frequent droughts, floods and near famines and a series of economic set backs. Nevertheless, throughout this period we have kept our sights clear. The task before us was that of fashioning a modern nation out of the material furnished by an ancient country.

India is a land of many religions, many languages and many races. Our endeavour through the last quarter of a century has been to weld all our people into a strong sense of their common Indianhood. The work of national integration has been the most challenging task before us. We have, therefore, always laid stress on the building of a secular and democratic State. Our Governments and the leaders of our people have steadfastly kept these objectives in view. We have, on some occasions, suffered set backs on our road to these goals, but because we have never faltered in our steadiness of purpose in the pursuit of these ends, we have been able to make fair progress and also been able to preserve the ideals for which our country stands. It is only by continuing to adhere to these aims and ideals that our country and our people can hope to march forward in future and succeed in building a peaceful India with prosperity and well-being of all.

It is not enough for us however to limit our attention to the last twenty-five years. India has an ancient history going back to the hoary past and every chapter of it holds lessons and warnings for us. In the remote centuries our land was often torn between waring kingdoms and principalities and our people divided into mutually hostile factions. This inevitably led to India frequently falling prey to foreign invasions. Now that we have achieved unity and freedom through the struggles and sacrifices of our people during the past few decades, we must be constantly vigilant and ever endeavour to preserve these gifts. Even today some of our neighbours may have aggressive designs against us. All the efforts made towards prosperity and well-being will be reduced to dust if we are not at the same time prepared to defend our values against enemies trying to destroy them. Our watchwards today, therefore, must be unity, strength and dedication to the task of building a well integrated, secular, modern State constantly working for the wellbeing of its people.

GOD BLESS YOU ALL