INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By

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Prime Minister of India

It was a year ago that Dr. Elmhirst invited me to attend this Conference and inaugurate it. It seemed to me rather odd that he should mention this matter to me so far ahead. But as you know, he looks ahead and with his usual foresight he tried to tie me down to this engagement before there was any possibility of my saying that I was too busy or too occupied. But, in any event, I would have gladly accepted his invitation partly because of my deep interest in the subjects which you would discuss, partly because Dr. Elmhirst is an old friend and India owes a great deal to him. So, now that I am here, I am glad of it and may I congratulate you, whoever may be responsible for choosing this gracious and attractive city of Mysore, for this Conference ! (Cheers).

I need not tell you that I am not an expert ; I am not an expert of the subjects which you are discussing. In fact I am not an expert of any subject that I know of. Far from being an expert, I am not even a modest farmer. But force of circumstances, various accidents brought me into touch years ago with the conditions and problems of our peasantry. In those days, there used to be in various parts of the country and notably in my own State, vast landed estates and tenants—often tenants-at-will working there. About 40 years ago I came into rather intimate touch with these people. That created a tremendous ferment in my mind. That ferment has not subsided yet. Even in India there are various kinds of farmers and peasants, some relatively prosperous, some not so and some excessively poor. The average picture that comes to my mind is of the last category because I came in contact with them a little more than the more prosperous farmers in India. So when I think of them there is a deep ferment and sometimes even some anguish and some kind of passion to be able to help in raising the level of these people. Also there is a deep faith in me and because of my deep faith in my people and because of this passionate desire on my part to be able to do something worthwhile for them, that perhaps I have a place in this Conference. Your expert knowledge, I do not possess, but, I do possess an extreme and passionate desire that something should be done about them, and that something should be done as rapidly as possible. And yet I know, and have had the experience of many heart-breaks in the process of, how slow things move, specially in the agricultural field, specially when hundreds of millions of people are involved, and perhaps one has to adapt oneself, even though one does not like it, to this relatively slow movement.

As you know, ever since we attained independence, the real problems of the country faced us. The real problems mean the economic and social problems and the biggest of the problems was that of raising the level of living of these people—hundreds and millions of them—not merely raising the level of living, although that was important and is important even now, but making life worthwhile for

them, making them self-reliant, not merely to be kicked about and crushed by misfortunes, and helping them, to some extent, to mould their own destiny. When I say about being kicked and crushed, I should like to add another picture of them which is equally important and that is this ; in spite of their misfortunes and poverty they have never given up or forgotten the way to sing, dance and laugh. And that is, I think, some virtue. Sometimes people are surprised when they visit our villages and see the conditions of extreme poverty there and yet find the men, women and children laughing and playing, and not allowing themselves to be submerged by circumstances and by their daily miseries. Anyway this problem of raising the level of living of our people becomes our immediate problem. It is naturally, as you know, a very intricate problem. The problem becomes more intricate and difficult when we deal with vast masses of humanity. I tried to think of them, not as a big number, even though statistics are important, but rather as individuals ; and I remember when I was asked the question as to how many problems I had to face in India, I said 360 million problems. All those people seem to me as living individual entities to be helped, to be looked after and to be co-operated with. We are here as fellow-travellers moving in one direction; we are all going together and so we thought of appointing a Planning Commission. Our resources were obviously limited, and unless we used those resources to the best advantage, a part of them may be wasted in wrong effort. We have in fact to harness the labour and the efforts of vast numbers of human beings to achieve the desired and the planned results aimed at—at any rate to try to go in that direction. Well, we appointed the Planning Commission and the Planning Commission conferred with all manner of thought, and experts drew up a Five-Year Plan, our First Five-Year Plan. It was really our first attempt at planning. We did not have enough data or statistics and we were naturally bound down by the circumstances. We had to carry on with available data. We cannot start on a clean slate. Nevertheless the stress in the First Five-Year Plan was on the improvement of agriculture and higher yields. We have a number of river valley schemes,—huge efforts, which would provide irrigation facilities to large tracts of the country. We also naturally provided for a certain industrial development in the First Plan. Then it so happened that we had some good fortune in regard to our monsoons and our harvests and as usual we became rather complacent. Our production increased and we said we would become self-sufficient before long. Remember, that one of the effects of partition of India was to take away from us parts of India which were specially rich in wheat and cereal production. That has been one of our problems and we said we would get over all these problems. At the same time, we felt that industrial development was essential and inevitable if we were to go ahead as a country and raise the levels of living of our people. So, while we continued to attach great importance to agriculture, inevitably we began to think more and more of industrial development. Industrial development again made us think rather of the basic industries—the mother industries, out of which will arise other industries. And from that point of view, we thought of the Second Five-Year Plan, where we laid stress on agriculture, of course, but we thought a little more about industrial development. We were ambitious enough to plan for huge new Iron and Steel plants. We thought of machine-building plants and many other like things. We thought of basic industries because we realised that unless we laid the proper foundation, our industrial progress would be slow and we would be forced to depend on external factors. Then came a jolt. The two good harvests were succeeded by atrocious

ones and an extraordinary run of bad luck upto now, upto last year and this year also ; it is quite an unusual run of bad luck which knocked us on the head and much more on the poor peasants' heads. Of course, India is a big country and even when bad harvests come on account of bad luck or floods, they do not spread all over the country but still vast areas are involved, and in the last two years we passed through terrible ordeals. It upset all our planning, agricultural and industrial—because our limited resources had to be diverted for importing foodgrains—and we had to resort to heavy imports because we could not allow our people to go without food. Also prices tended to rise and in a country like India, where the main price determining factor is foodgrains, if foodgrain prices rise, that upsets other things. We were anxious that it should not be so not only because we did not want the prices of foodgrains to rise but because we did not want inflationary tendencies to creep in. We did not want all the estimates about the Second Five-Year Plan to be upset. They would be upset if prices rise. So all these difficulties pursued us and I am not going to dwell on that long. But, I merely want to draw your attention to the recent background. We realised, as never before, that the basis even of our industrial advance was a stable and increasing agricultural production. Of course, apart from industries, agriculture is important for us—very important, because 80 per cent of our people are engaged in agriculture. It is obviously important to have enough food for every one ; but even from the point of view of industrial advance, it was essential that there should be adequate agricultural advance in production so that even if bad seasons come, as a result of failure of monsoons, or as a result of floods, etc., we can survive them without much difficulty and that the prices may not rise too much. At the same time, we want our farmers to have good prices. I have no doubt that most of you are in favour of that. But much as we favour that, we have to remember the consequences of that on our economy. Everything goes up. Salaries and wages go up and all our estimates for planning are upset. So we realised, even more than we had ever done before, the absolute and the utter necessity for concentrating on agricultural production—both food production and commercial crops which earn for us the much-needed foreign exchange.

Now, I should also like you to look at one other aspect of our problem—the aspect, that we are a country which attained political freedom eleven years ago and which is economically under-developed and backward—call it what you like—and that it is a country, not with considerable resources. Undoubtedly we have the potential resources—potentially, we have a great wealth—but it takes time to exploit this wealth. It will take time and will require hard labour too. But the point is, we do not possess it now—it is all potential. So, while our resources were limited, we gained political freedom and it gave political consciousness to the hundreds and millions of people. We gave them adult franchise, to everybody including the people who might be called socially backward. Because we had taken our people with us, people quite rightly began to make demands upon us—very legitimate demands to improve their standards. But we did not have, and do not have, the resources to meet these demands. So, this great difficulty faces us, a difficulty which is common to most of the countries of Asia and even of Africa—a difficulty which in this form did not come to the countries of Western Europe or America. In the countries of Western Europe and America, the economic advance took place over a long period of time. Great resources were built up before the political demand came. After all, even in

a country like England, adult suffrage came quite recently. Throughout the 19th century, suffrage was very limited ; and this democracy was therefore a limited democracy and therefore the demands from the people who were not politically strong enough to push them forward in Parliament, could not be pressed with any strength. They could possibly be ignored till the economic advance took place. The resources were built up in these countries before the demands made upon them became too strong ; and when the demands came, they could be met. The economic revolution in other words, took place before the political revolution in those countries. Now here, the process has been reversed. We have got to face political revolutions everywhere, and the economic revolution is slowly coming in at a slow pace. The problem always is, what to do at a particular moment when a legitimate demand is made. We have not got resources to fulfil it. Take any field, e.g., education. Our Constitution lays down that there must be free and compulsory education for every boy from the age 6—14, within ten years. Well, 8 years have passed. We have made considerable progress in education, but are nowhere near that objective. We have to deal with hundreds of millions. I do not know exactly how many boys and girls will be there. But our figures run to hundreds of millions and we have not just got the resources, or trained teachers. We go, but not fast enough, because resources are not there. We are going in for social legislation which is fairly advanced in our country, side by side with industrial progress. But the fact of the matter is, our resources are not enough to bear the burden of this social legislation and we have to go ahead because of the political and social consciousness in the country, so that it becomes of the most urgent importance that we add to our resources. Again, when we add to our resources, the question always is, how much we can save out of that and how much surplus we can have for investment for the future advance ; how much we are going to spend on benefits today, because the masses want benefits to-day and we would like to give them. But the more the benefits we give them, the less we can save for the future advance. So, this is a complicated problem coming up before us all the time, in our planning, in our Governmental work ; and of course we try to find the balance. Sometimes the balance slips to the wrong direction. I venture to tell you this merely to see that you may realise—I have no doubt, you do realise—the various aspects of the problem as they present themselves to us; and yet in all these variety of problems, the foremost, we do believe, is agriculture and agricultural improvement and greater production. Now, I have no shadow of doubt that production can be increased in India very greatly—for two reasons. One is that the present rate of yield per acre is very low. There is plenty of room for advance. The second is that wherever effort has been made—and efforts have been made in a large number of areas in this country —yield has gone up, two-fold, three-fold and even four-fold. Of course, it is all very well to increase the yield and to help people on land. It is all very well, to help 300 million people today. But the difficulty comes in, to what point it can be done. I do not say, it yields four-fold all over India. But I have no doubt, we can increase it—we can double it. If we double it, it solves all our problems, even the problem of increasing population and leaves something over for export. How long it will take I do not know, but I do not think that it will take us as long as sometimes people imagine. I am told that under the very best of circumstances, no country has shown an increasing yield of more than 3 or 4 per cent per annum. I do not know if I am right or not. But of course, the more you advance, the less room there is for rapid advance.

Then there is another aspect. Some countries have made in recent years a very remarkable progress in industrial development—very remarkable indeed in industrial development, education, health, etc. But that rate of progress, so far as I know, has not been shown in agriculture. Agriculture has proved to be a tougher problem. It is not very difficult for me, given the resources, to put 3 or 4 steel plants. We pay for them, train some people, and the steel plants start working after 3 to 5 years, although it takes much longer to train the men to run it. But it is a much more difficult job to deal with the large mass of agricultural population. Naturally, they are tied up to old customs, old grooves of thought, old methods of working and it is difficult to pull them out. It is not impossible, in fact it is less difficult than I previously thought, provided the right approach has been made, but they are not going to be hustled about it—they have to be convinced. The right approach is always convincing them in a friendly way and more especially by an example. Nothing goes farther than an example. That is so. But still the fact remains that one is held up by one's tremendous enthusiasm, suffers shocks and breaks up, coming up against this tremendous wall of humanity used to certain methods of working. What is much more unfortunate is, a certain lack of initiative on the part of those suffering from poverty and from old habits, which do not encourage initiative ; and the poor man, the poor peasant always looks to some governmental apparatus for working out things for him, which of course is a very bad thing. The essential thing required for him is the spirit of self-reliance, the spirit of self-help, the spirit of co-operation. Obviously, Government must help. Now the curious thing has happened. The way the British Government described itself to the common folk in India was that it was their father and mother, *Ma-Bap* Government—father-mother Government, which did everything themselves. Whether they did everything or not, it prevented them from doing anything themselves and taking the initiative. It was not the fault of the British Government, it was the fault of the system. Another thing has happened. We very rightly, I think, put an end to those large landed estates. We gave them some compensation and took the land over, and by and large created peasant proprietors. Most of them are small. The old big landlord by custom and convention and in his own interest, did one thing—he performed the social duty by looking after the wells and the tanks in the villages which used to irrigate round about. Now, the normal thing would have been for the village community to take charge of the wells and the tanks, which they did not. They were not used to it ; they expected somebody else to do it ; it may be our fault, may be the fault of the local authority, whatever it was, but the result was, we suddenly realised after a few years that thousands of wells had gone to pieces and could not be used properly and now it involves enormous labour to build them up again. We have to build them up, but it is impossible to rely upon Government apparatus to go about repairing every village tank ; it is for the village community to do. They must have the initiative and enterprise. They can do it and will do it. It is only giving a different twist to their mind. I am pointing out to you the difficulties. We lost a great deal because of these wells and tanks going to pieces. But they used to irrigate, especially in times of drought, areas round about. They could not irrigate and the drought came. So we struggled with these problems and we tried to find a balance—various balances between industry and agriculture.

And again the problem arose about the institutional framework in agriculture. I have told you that so far as big landlords were concerned, that system ended,

by and large, it ended all over India. Maybe, here and there some relics might remain, but we have not finished our land reforms. There are many other things to be done. In the main we believe in the removal of intermediaries between the man who works and the State, and we are trying to achieve that. Now remember the proportion of land to the population in India because great deal depends upon that proportion. By and large the average holding in India is very small. When we give all the land to the people who want it, it will be even smaller and that is the problem. You may deal with it in countries where the proportion is different or where the proportion between industry and agriculture is very different. It does not apply to India at present and even to a large extent it will not apply because of the fact that the holding is pitiably small. What are we to do with that pitiably small and uneconomic holding? You cannot expect any progressive methods being employed. Poor man, he does not get the chance. What are we to do about that? It seems to me that the only possibility is to have co-operative efforts for co-operation to develop, so that we may profit by their joint effort. The State will help it, no doubt, but again I am terribly anxious to root out this ingrained habit amongst our people, ingrained during the British times, the habit of not developing their own initiative and relying on somebody else to do things for them. It is of course the habit of poverty—the poor man; also remember the old tenant of a big landlord—if the poor tenant worked hard and increased the yield from the land, immediately the landlord demanded higher rent from the tenant. Why then should he work hard when he does not profit by it ? With the removal of the landlord that idea goes, no doubt. So, I was talking about the co-operatives. The State, of course, ought to help in every way but I am terribly anxious that the co-operatives should be the business of co-operators and not the State-co-operatives imposed on the tenants run by the State officials. I do not want the State officials there. We have too much to do with the State officials, to see them cover the whole land with State apparatus and reduce the initiative of the peasant. So, what should be the institutional aspect, I do not know, but I am merely putting some ideas before you. I believe the only way out is the development of co-operatives—real co-operatives. I believe that real co-operative effort among our peasantry will lead to what are called small co-operatives—a village co-operative or may be of two or three small villages, coming together. But the point is that the members of the co-operatives should be more or less known to each other, not unknown. It should not be an impersonal thing because the poor peasant will not be able to function. But if they know each other, they know who is the good man and who is not good; whom they can trust and whom they cannot trust. If they make hundred mistakes, they will get on with it. Of course the argument is that the small co-operative has very little resources. True, then the only way is to join up a number of small co-operatives into a bigger federation, call them what you like.

Well, these are the real problems which you may discuss or not—I do not know—but which come before us in various ways when we deal with them. As you know, any problem involving a human being is difficult. Large numbers of human beings have more difficult problems. In agriculture we have to deal not only with men and women but with animals and farms and all kinds of these things, and to find some balance between them. A little upset somewhere, and our Plan may go to pieces. So, all these difficulties are there—they come and they are dealt with, no doubt, and they are got over. But, the progress becomes slower

than we thought and sometimes a little bit of frustration comes in. Why can't we go faster ? Then you remember that we are on the march and we are not marching by ourselves—individuals or small groups. We are a large brotherhood of 360 million people on the march, and we have to go together and we cannot run away from each other and we have all to help each other. In this process I do believe that if the initial difficulties have been got over, the pace will become faster because, as I said, I have a tremendous faith in the innate good sense of our people, of our peasantry.

Then, there is the question of population. We have a very big growing population, although it often surprises people to know that the rate of growth is not so terrible as some people have imagined. But whatever the rate may be, if 360 million people grow, the number becomes bigger and bigger, and the real weight of growth comes. I believe that our birth rate is slowly going down and will go down, but faster than the birth rate, the death rate goes down which is no doubt as a result of better health. But at the same time it helps in keeping the population ratio up and all kinds of estimates are made of future population—20 and 40 years ahead. I do not know what is going to happen in 20 or 40 years except presumably that we will be more in number than we are now. I hope that on the one hand we will be able to restrict the growth of population, and on the other, to look after them better in the matter of food or other conveniences even though their number increases. But in any event, the question of restricting the population growth takes some time; it cannot take place quickly and suddenly. The process has started in India and it is yielding results and it will go on yielding results. What the actual results will be, I cannot say, but real results will come after some years. The main thing is not to place reliance on restricting the population growth in the future. That will come I hope and we will work for that. But we are increasing our capacity to deal with our present and growing population.

So here we are. We are one-sixth or one-seventh of the human race in India—a large number. Fortunately, the people are peacefully inclined; sometimes some of them may misbehave as some of us do, but broadly speaking, peacefully inclined, with no aggressive intentions against anybody—living at peace with themselves and with others. But what makes a difference is, what the fast spreading population feel about all these matters, whether they are peacefully inclined or not, but ultimately they depend, as all people in the world, on so many uncertain and unknown factors in the future. No one can prophesy what will happen. All that we can do is to work our hardest on every plane, on the plane of production, on the plane of equitable distribution, so that we may build up a society where every person has more or less an even chance and every person has the necessities of life, and the State is more or less a welfare State, and at the same time always remembering in doing so that there are cultural and spiritual values that count. It is not merely greater production which is necessary, but the society must have some standards, some cultural values and some spiritual values. Otherwise all this material progress may lead perhaps in a wrong direction.

Now I will inaugurate this Conference and in order to do it in the right way I shall ring the Cowbell ! (Loud and prolonged applause).