



November 09, 1968

Speech by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

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Summary:

Transcript of a speech delivered by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the dedication of the Homi Bhabha Auditorium detailing her personal experiences with Homi Bhabha and expressing her belief in the need for continued scientific investment for India.

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Speech delivered by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Homi Bhabha Auditorium on the 9th of November, 1968.

Mr. Governor, Mr. Chief Minister, Mr. Tata, Mrs. Bhabha, Distinguished Scientists, and Distinguished Guests:

It is indeed a very great pleasure for me to be here this evening to dedicate this impressive Auditorium in the name of Dr. Homi Bhabha. The stature of a man can be judged by the width of his mental horizon. Homi Bhabha was a man who bridged the generations - he bridged the old and the new, the west with the east. He was equally at home - in fact, more than at home - in the world of science and in the world of the arts. For, he was a creator and a doer - a man of thought as well as a man of action. Indian science owes much to him; in fact, I would say that the whole of India owes him a very great deal. Amongst his many activities he founded this Institute of which we are all so proud, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. It is a living and a wonderful tribute to him. I had the occasion this morning of being shown around, and I must say that I was full of pride to see how it has grown from strength to strength, and to see how it has developed such a fine team of young and dedicated scientists in a number of fields. And, now I am here to dedicate this Auditorium in Homi Bhabha's name.

Most of us here knew Homi Bhabha not only as a great man, as a fine and great scientist, but as a warm and personal friend. I don't know when I first met him, but I know that I got to know him in 1937, in those days when travel was synonymous with leisure, and we shared a voyage from India to Marseilles. It was, in a way, my introduction to science also. For along with us was Dr. C.V. Raman, and since nobody had much to do for two or three weeks that we were on board, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to get to know these great sons of India, and to be educated by them.

Many tributes have been paid to Homi Bhabha and there is hardly anything new which I can add. But for me, to the admiration for him is added a warm affection, not only for the friendship which I had for him, but for the friendship which he gave to my father, and which I know meant a very great deal to my father. In the life of a politician, it seems to be full of glamour from the outside, but it lacks many of those warm moments of sensitivity that other people take for granted in their everyday life. I know that Homi Bhabha opened one such 'window' for my father, and he always found it no matter how tired my father was, no matter how late it was in the night, he always found time for Dr. Bhabha, not only because the problems which Dr. Bhabha brought were important and he wanted to give them urgent attention, but because he found at the same time it was relaxing and it was an entirely new world. We are all conscious of the importance of science to the world, but even more specially to the world of India, the world that is still living in many centuries, that still has a very long way to go before it can provide, as the last speaker said, the good things of life, or even the necessary basic things of life to most of our people.

Art is just as important to man as science is, for without art there can be no full unfolding of the human personality and without art life would indeed be poor. The poet Tagore has said: "The art instinct cannot be confined to intellectual path, social values or moral judgment. Man is born with the capacity to transcend himself and his surroundings; in art he reveals this quality of transcending. When our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression. Then comes art, and we forget the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness, and the spires of our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of

our music to fathom the depth of the ineffable. For man by nature is an artist; he never receives passively and accurately in his mind a physical representation of the things around him. There goes on a continual adaptation, a transformation of facts into human imagery, through constant touches of his sentiments and imagination." This is what Tagore had said. But we find that whether it is art or science, it can be of value to the human being only to the extent that it speaks to that person. Art may be a universal language, if we ourselves were universal in our sympathy. But our very nature, the power of tradition and convention, as well as our hereditary instinct, restricts the scope of our capacity for artistic enjoyment, or even of understanding of new thought form. Our very individuality establishes in one sense a limit to our understanding, and our personality seeks its own affinities in the creation of the power. We see our own image in the universe, and our particular superstition sometimes dictates the mode of our perception.

So when we talk of science in India, it means not only of doing things - whether it is experiment in fundamental research, whether it is the outcome of research in the form of the application of it to technology, to bringing a better life to the people - but it means changing the outlook of the people. It means widening their horizon, enabling them to understand, to want to understand what is happening elsewhere, to want to seek new paths. We seek from our scientists, therefore, not merely that they should be concerned with their specific fields, but that they should at the same time be educationalists, and try to explain the meaning of science, the search for truth, the search for knowledge, to the people around them.

Today, in India we face many problems. They are mostly the problems - the age old problems - of poverty, of economic backwardness, some of the

problems of tradition, of superstition, and added to them the many problems which come out of development, growth and change. But perhaps the greatest problem is the problem of changing faster, changing methods of work, modes of thinking, not only amongst those who are illiterate, or do not have the privilege of a higher education, but even amongst those of us who do have that privilege. I find that when one makes a generalisation and says there should be change, or opportunity should be given to younger people, greater responsibility should be given to younger scientists, technologists and others everybody agrees. But when a specific case comes up, then there are a hundred and one reasons why it cannot be done, and until we can get, until we have the strength to break through this wall which, I must admit, I find a very powerful, strong and high wall imprisoning us, until we can break through, science will have value only for a few in India. It is those who work in this Institute are indeed privileged, for they have the feeling of participation, they have responsibility, and they feel they are contributing. I wish I could say the same for all our other Institutes. But this is the problem which is before us, and which is our burden, and which we must bear, or we must learn how to discard. I am not putting this burden on to you, because I know that it rests fully and squarely on the shoulders of the Government of India. But I would like you to understand that it is not a problem by itself. It is linked to the thinking in the entire country, thinking to which we have been conditioned for hundreds of years, but, perhaps, more specially in the last fifty years or so. We must all work together to see how we can change these things, how we can remove the superstition, for, I think, this also is in a way a superstition that only a certain types of people can do certain work - it is a new form of the caste system. We find in the world, certainly in India, that one type of caste system, if not broken, at least is weakened, but there are

many other caste systems of more recent origin which are still to be broken and to be discarded.

We have paid tributes to Dr. Bhabha - there is this building, there is the Auditorium and, perhaps, many other things, roads and buildings will be named after him. But I think, the greatest tribute to him is the work of the brilliant young scientists whom he inspired, and who in turn will inspire countless number of other young people, and I think that the greatest tribute, the most lasting memorial, to Dr. Bhabha can only be that we keep alive his spirit, that we keep alive his vision, for he was a man of great versatility as Mr. Tata has pointed out, of great and many-sided talents. But what lifted him above the rest was his vision of the future, his faith in India's future. It is only with that vision and that faith that we can mould the future. It is when we lose that faith, when we think that we do not have the strength to do something, then the strength itself ebbs and decreases, and in truth we do not have it. But when we think that we have it, and we put our faith in it, and work with that inspiration, then the strength does gather within us, and we can face the most difficult, the most complicated of problems, and we can solve them. This Institute is a living proof that India can do it, and I hope that this spirit will spread to our other institutions, and throughout the country, and will inspire the younger generation to give their best, and even more than their best, so that India can create that new life for her people, for which science and the word increasing knowledge today gives us the opportunity to do.

I have great pleasure in dedicating this Auditorium, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity of meeting all the distinguished scientists here.