

INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF DR B R AMBEDKAR
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2017 ON
RECLAIMING SOCIAL JUSTICE, RE-VISITING AMBEDKAR

Hon'ble Chief Minister's Speech

21-07-2017 / 5-00 P M / Dr Babu Rajendra Prasad Auditorium,
University of Agricultural Sciences,
Gandhi Krishi Vignana Kendra Campus, Ballari Road, Bengaluru

Shri Martin Luther King-III,
World Renowned Social Reformer,
Founder President and Chief Executive Officer,
Realizing the Dream Incorporated.

Shri Rahul Gandhi-ji,
Hon'ble Vice President,
All India Congress Committee and
the Chief Guest of this Historic Conference ,

Shri Kailash Satyarthi-ji,
Nobel Laureate and Human Rights Activist,

Shri M. Mallikarjuna Kharge-ji,
Leader of the Congress Party in Lok Sabha,

Shri Prakash Ambedkar-ji,
Former Member of Parliament and
Grandson of Dr B. R. Ambedkar,

Prof S. K. Thorat-ji,
Professor Emeritus,
Jawaharlal Nehru University and
Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research,

Dr G. Parameshwar,
President,
Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee,

Acclaimed Speakers of
National and International Repute,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. ಪ್ರಪ್ರಥಮವಾಗಿ ಇಲ್ಲಿ ನೆರೆದ ಸರ್ವರಿಗೂ ಭೀಮ ನಮನಗಳನ್ನು ಸಲ್ಲಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ.
2. I am indeed overwhelmed to witness the magnificent realization of organizing this mammoth International Conference on **Reclaiming Social Justice, Re-visiting Ambedkar,** a theme that is highly relevant in these times of communal intolerance, hitherto never seen in the history of Independent India.
3. This International Conference has been organized to commemorate the 126th Birth Anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar, who envisioned an ideal society in which many interests are consciously communicated and shared, who gave the people of India a Constitution that secures foremost, to all its citizens Social Justice; who felt that annihilation of caste is the vital for Socio-Political Reform in India and who firmly believed that the Rights and Opportunities are equal and common to all humans.
4. Seventy years ago, when India became free, we also embarked upon a quest for Equity and Justice. Making a radical departure from the "graded inequality" of the past, the Constitution of India guaranteed the Indian citizens social, economic and political equality, regardless of race, religion, caste, gender or region.

5. Time has come to reclaim the idea of social justice through the thought and vision of one of the founding fathers of our Constitution, Dr B R Ambedkar.
6. Dr Ambedkar's life and times revolved around the massive struggles waged by the depressed classes and the under privileged sections of the Indian Society. His ideas and vision gave intellectual and political basis to the struggle of the Dalits during the 20th Century. There is little doubt in my mind that many of the complex issues that the nation faces today require solutions within the ambit of Ambedkar's thoughts.
7. Today, the idea of India as a plural society is at cross roads. Values that our civilisation and culture held in high esteem are facing a critical test in view of the onslaught of divisive and exclusivist ideas.
8. This Conference could not have come at a more opportune moment. I am confident that the scholars, who have travelled far and wide would ponder over the current social, political and economic challenges and the deliberations would guide us towards equity and justice in the years to come.
9. Those who know Karnataka would agree that this State is an appropriate choice for a conference of this magnitude. Dr Ambedkar's ideas resonate profoundly with Karnataka's long, rich and heterogeneous legacies upholding social justice and equality.

10. The earliest and most successful assault on caste and hierarchies was made in this land by Basavanna who during the 12th century heralded a powerful anti-caste movement drawing energy from the socially under privileged classes.
11. The movement also offered a powerful critique of the hierarchies of case, class and gender.
12. The legacy of the Vachanakaras blended with the legacies of the Bhakti, Sufi and Tatvapadakara traditions to lay a strong foundation of egalitarian outlook towards life.
13. All through the freedom struggle, leaders from Karnataka infused the anti colonial struggle with the emancipatory spirit of social reform and anti-untouchability programmes and the awakening of the backward classes.
14. Karnataka has seen robust movements of Dalits, Backward classes and farmers. Most of these drew inspiration from the ideas of Dr B. R. Ambedkar.
15. With all humility, I must admit that my own ideas and vision were shaped by diverse sources of inspiration ranging from socialist, Lohiaite ideas to Ambedkarite Dalit movements.
16. I understood early in my life that Ambedkar's vision of equality, freedom and brotherhood can only be realised when those at the bottom of the pyramid, namely, Dalits, backward classes and the minorities come together.

17. I have spent my political life trying to integrate the democratic and constitutional framework of Ambedkar, the egalitarian spirit of Basavanna and Antyodaya vision of Mahatma Gandhi.
18. As a Finance Minister and as Chief Minister, when I sit down to prepare the Budget of the Government, the first thing that comes to my mind is the vision of the poor man in my village who stood at the doorstep of the rich farmer begging for a bowl of rice for his ailing daughter.
19. Political rights cannot be actualized by hungry stomachs. Dr Ambedkar had rightly warned us that political equality cannot become a reality unless we ensure social and economic equality.
20. During the last four years, all our policies and programmes have been designed to ensure economic freedom to our citizens particularly those who are marginalised, stigmatised and disadvantaged. We in Karnataka also believe strongly in Prof Amartya Sen's categorisation of " Development as Freedom ".
21. Our policies pursued the idea of development as a tool to provide opportunities to those who suffered inequalities and inequities over generations.
22. We have therefore been emphasising on access to quality education. A network of schools, including residential schools and hostels has made quality education accessible to the poor.

23. We were the second State in the country to statutorily earmark 24.1 per cent of our resources for the welfare and development of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.
24. We have also made Departments of Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare proactive by significantly increasing their budgetary allocation.
25. We have focussed our attention on the welfare and development of farmers and to create jobs for the youth. We pursue a path of development that empowers the Dalits, gives them dignity and includes all. Against this backdrop, the Karnataka Model of Development is worth studying.
26. In the last 70 years, our country has made significant strides as a political and economic democracy. We have become self sufficient in food production. We have emerged as a global agricultural power. We have undertaken giant strides in atomic and space research. However, there have been significant failures.
27. People belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as well as backward classes continue to face discrimination and hurdles in their path of progress. The recent spate of communal and caste-based attacks has shown that we cannot afford to rest. We have seen Dalits being flogged in Gujarat for skinning a dead cow.

28. Today, we are told that being a good Indian means we have to ignore the inequality and exploitation in our midst; that we need to adhere to rigid norms regarding food, clothing, language and free speech; that we have to privilege the majoritarian view of India.
29. I reject that view as totally opposed to the letter and spirit of our Constitution. Let me remind you that as early as 1945, Dr. Ambedkar had stated that in India majoritarianism is untenable in theory and unjustifiable in practice. Now, in that light, we as a nation need to understand that tolerance of such regressive and divisive ideas is not the way out. If anything, tolerance would just postpone the harmful impact of majoritarianism. We need to fight for a truly egalitarian India.
30. Today, in many parts of India, citizens are no longer equal before the law, and some are more equal than others. Hatred and atrocities towards the Dalit, Adivasi, and minority (both religious and ideological) have risen exponentially. Millions of Indians are being systematically denied access and opportunities to a better life. This poses a grave threat to India's inclusive conception of polity and citizenship.
31. This is completely antithetical to the idea of India. I am reminded of what Babasaheb Ambedkar had once argued.

32. He said that "a nation is not a people synthesised by a common culture derived from common language, common religion or common race...Nationality is a feeling of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel they are kith and kin..." In this light, I condemn the branding of a few thinkers as anti-national and the very use of that terrible term. This is because, in a plural system, morality is also diverse and the idea of India cannot be constricted to a narrow definition.
33. We therefore, need to develop a narrative based on cultural and civilisational ethos of tolerance and compassion that our country is known for. We need to imbibe the thoughts of saints like Buddha and Basava and visionaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr B R Ambedkar.
34. What is at stake today is the legacy of pluralism and secularism. These were the gifts of the religious and philosophical traditions of the land. Dr. Ambedkar drew on these as well as on the democratic practices of Buddhism to sustain these values within a modern democratic political system. He understood that the state in independent India would have to play a strong transformative role to ensure equality and freedom.
35. It is sad that the deep bonds between democracy, secularism and equality are being eroded under the onslaught of intolerant forces of conservatism.

36. Who else, other than Dr. Ambedkar can provide us the intellectual strength, ethical clarity and the capacity to chalk out truly transformative and emancipation of programmes ? I sincerely hope that the deliberations at this conference which has become a meeting point for the concerned intellectuals across the globe, shall provide us the guidance we need.
37. Some of the world's finest minds have gathered here to comprehensively assess the contemporary challenges and opportunities that India faces. Through their deliberations, the Karnataka Government will launch the Bengaluru Declaration, which will outline specific constitutional, institutional and policy responses to the concerns of social justice, human rights, freedom and democracy. To borrow from Dr Martin Luther King, the declaration would be " a stone of hope, out of the mountain of despair ! "
38. This visionary blueprint will respect, protect and further the collective aspirations of every Indian, while taking special care to uplift and empower the Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, women and Minorities. In doing this, it will pave the way for both Karnataka and India to rise to ever-greater heights.

39. Shri Rahul Gandhi ji, Shri Prakash Ambedkar ji, and all those distinguished activists, academics and policymakers gathered here today, I wish to conclude Dr Martin Luther King who once said that "we've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountain top . . .I've looked over and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land". I once again thank you all, for being part of this epochal Conference.

Jai Hind ! Jai Karnataka !! Jai Bheem !!!
