

Speech

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Mr. President, Chief Justice of India, Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, foreign dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen –

It is a part of the life of a lawyer to be prepared for surprises; and when I was called upon suddenly a few minutes ago to speak on this occasion, I felt that, because what I have to say will not be any different from what others might say, I should not hesitate.

We are today celebrating the lapse of a hundred years. A period of hundred years in the history of the Universe is a speck of dust in the vast expanse of the sky, but in recorded human history a period of hundred years, particularly the period that has passed between 1866 and 1966, is of considerable importance. This period has seen changes so vast that the institutions of a hundred years ago—the institutions that man creates and demolishes have become almost unrecognisable. Monarchies have tumbled. There have been two world wars. In our own country this period of hundred years began almost with the commencement of the rule of British Crown and that rule had disappeared. It is surprising that the fondness with which man creates institutions, the importance that he attaches to them, the permanency that he attributes to them, are all based upon a lack of foresight. This is because institutions grow out of certain ideas which form the bases of these institutions. In the world of Science, the most amazing discoveries, that appear to open out new vistas of knowledge, become after a lapse of time, out-dated and are thrown away on the refuse and rubbish bins of time. Institutions come and go and the history of man changes and all that is held near and dear passes away into the void of eternity. When the greatest scientific truths become out-dated and worn out, they also pass away into oblivion. But, an institution, like the High Court, retains its place in the life of the nation, without being affected. That is because there are certain things basic and everlasting in man. These are affection and feeling of brotherhood of man for man and above all the sense of justice. And that is why the Temple of Justice is the most permanent of all the temples on earth. That is why we are able to stand today and say that this institution—above all other institutions in our country—has successfully buffeted all the vagaries of time.

Mr. President, I have received your warning that we must not refer to our past. But, it is not easy to think of the present without reference to the past; for, the present evolves out of the past and projects into the future. I also cannot resist the temptation of speaking about the past, because of three things for which Allahabad has always stood. It has stood for its hospitality, it has stood, and has a reputation from ancient times, for providing occasions for the gathering of the learned; and, in very recent history, it has acquired a reputation for standing against tyranny and oppression. Its tradition of hospitality has been continued on this occasion by the opportunities that have been given to us by our guests, who have honoured us by their presence here today. And by coming together, they participate, with us all, in the glory of Allahabad, having its beginning, in the mists of antiquity, from the time of Harshvardhan who organised an annual gathering of learned men, a gathering which has now passed into the tradition of the Magh Mela. By coming together today on this historic occasion and providing us with the sight of the assemblage of persons of learning and wisdom, unlike any other, Allahabad has ever witnessed, they have enabled us to fulfil and perpetuate the second glory of Allahabad. As to the third, led Allahabad became the centre and the focus of fight for freedom of this country, and the inspiration for that fight went out from some of the men belonging to the glorious past of this institution. That inspiration of theirs blossomed into independence and it has been kept alive by the Allahabad High Court. From the time of Sir Walter Morgan up to that of Nasirullah Beg, there has been a long line of Judges continuing to do whenever injustice was done; and, I would like to say particularly when the Chief Minister of U.P. is present here, that even today, by the exercise of Court has been standing as the sentinel and the surest safeguard against the exercise of arbitrary power.

Mr. President, it is the memory of these three things, not merely the passing of a hundred years, it is the memory of our permanency, it is the memory of our traditions, that have been kept unbroken, and the memory of what this High Court has stood for for a hundred years, that we are celebrating today.

The Chief Justice has spoken about the Centenary of the future. It is not easy to say, and I myself would not dare to forecast what this country would be hundred years hence; but I am absolutely certain that, if we would be celebrating a second Centenary and if we would be having, on that occasion, visitors from Mars and from Venus and even from other planets and stars, they would still be able to say that this High Court has continued its traditions of justice, independence and impartiality. Mr. President, it is with that hope and confidence that we thank you most deeply for gracing this occasion.