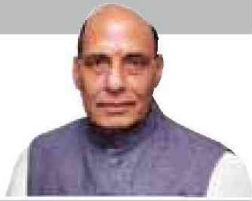


Decoding Prime Minister's Independence Day speech

The Prime Minister's address from the ramparts of the Red Fort was different from the usual speeches. Modi gave a holistic view to the freedom struggle in the present-day context

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India has completed 70 years since Independence and we are now in an era distinctively different on every aspect from innovation, motivation to the direction in which the country is marching ahead. The Prime Minister's address from the Red Fort on the historic occasion of Independence Day had to reflect the same spirit, and it certainly did. But how was it different from the usual speeches?

His speech gave a holistic view to the freedom struggle in the present-day context. When the Prime Minister mentioned about the centenary of Champaran Satyagraha, the 125th year of Sabarmati Ashram, along with the 75th anniversary of Quit India, he made a reference to every major touch point that led to the massive political movement of 1942. When he mentioned about the journey of the nation from *chakra dhari* to *charkha dhari*, it was a portrayal of the inspirational values of our country from the ages unknown to the modern era.

As a colleague, this writer felt the need to appreciate certain remarkable and distinct patterns emerging from his address, which reflect his entire concept of governance, almost like *mantras*. Broadly, there are several underlying themes into which the thrust of every single point he made can be placed. At the very outset, the Prime Minister recalled the contribution and sacrifices made by our freedom fighters and martyrs, who ensured that we remain fearlessly free, indicating the sensitivity of this Government towards its heroes, freedom fighters and those who attained martyrdom in line of duty.

He empathised with those affected by the Gorakhpur tragedy and recent natural calamities, which have affected many parts of the country. This was a reassuring statement for the victims, that even in its celebratory moments, the nation is sensitive enough to not forget those suffering and unable to celebrate. It was heartwarming to see the Prime Minister making his Government's stand clear when he said *na gaali na goli* can resolve complexities in Kashmir. On the contrary, it could only be resolved by embracing the common Kashmiri. The Centre has been consistent in its belief that common Kashmiri wants to be an active stakeholder in the peace process. They have been made victim by vested interests who do not want peace in the valley. The Prime Minister appealed to those who take recourse to violence and exhorted them to abjure violence and adopt democratic means to voice their grievances. He also expressed solidarity with the women who were fighting a spirited battle against malpractices of triple *talaq*. The Prime Minister admired the courage of those women who stood up for their rights.

The Government's concern for poor and weaker sections is well-known. The Prime Minister has dedicated his Government to the service to the poor. Lamenting that there were



projects that had been delayed for decades, he informed the nation that work on those projects have been expedited.

In an outreach to the millennials, the children of the 21st century, Prime Minister Modi said that they were the real *bhagya vidhata*s of this youthful nation, since they are the engine of India's future growth. The youth of this country have been recognised as the 'demographic dividend' and the Government has prepared an action plan to integrate the youth into nation-building process. The Prime Minister mentioned how the bar was set higher for his Government right at the beginning when an Special Investigation Team on black money was constituted through the very first Cabinet decision. Since then, many effective steps have been taken to strengthen India's fight against corruption.

Steps like demonetisation, notification of *benami* law and its enforcement to seize ₹800 crore worth properties, crackdown on shell companies and post-demonetisation data mining to detect suspicious accounts, have underlined the Prime Minister's integrity, the Government's intent and his decisive decision-making ability. Modi assured the citizens that their honesty is cherished and valued — a remark one rarely comes across because most Governments forget the silent majority of honest citizens. He also assured the citizens that those who had looted the nation would not be allowed to sleep peacefully and would be brought to justice.

On the security front, the Prime Minister highlighted decisive actions taken both by the Government and the Armed Forces. Overall security scenario has considerably improved since 2014. In his speech, he also mentioned the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme, which was kept in cold storage for decades. It was Prime Minister Modi who fulfilled the commitment of OROP and gave our ex-ser-

vicemen their due. Our Armed Forces have made innumerable sacrifices and gone the extra mile to protect our nation from its enemies. The best example of our forces, taking extra ordinary measures to protect the country, was when the Indian Army crossed the Line of Control, conducting surgical strikes and successfully destroyed terrorist launch pads close to the border.

Empowerment of India's farmers is also an area of primary concern for this Government. In his speech, issues of empowerment through the Beej Se Bazar Tak Aapke Sath approach of handholding increased irrigation potential, crores of soil health cards, almost double the coverage of farmers under insurance than earlier, better access to markets, hitherto unseen level of Government procurement of pulses, foreign direct investment in food processing to ensure better storage and supply chains — were covered as part of the Modi Government's lofty goal of doubling farm incomes by 2022.

Another notable focus in this theme was the focus on the under-developed eastern part of the nation, that despite its richness and industrious people, has been kept backward. The Prime Minister mentioned about empowering this region to perform to its full potential as a priority. Modi called for an India where democracy does not end at the voting booth but just begins from there to form the bedrock of a participative democracy. His focus on people's participation in issues of governance is commendable. In *lok tantra*, he said, *lok* should drive the *tantra*, rather than Governments devising *tantra* for the *lok*.

Popular support for demonetisation; a smooth Goods and Services Tax rollout; citizen ownership of Swachh Bharat; and people voluntarily giving up Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) subsidy to help the poor get gas connections, were all examples of team India's

jan bhagidari spirit, said the Prime Minister.

This *jan bhagidari* is also the single most overarching theme emanating from the Prime Minister's speech. He called upon the people to dedicate even the smallest things they do to the spirit of nation-building. Taking a cue from great epics like *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat*, he recalled how common cowherds stood with Krishna to lift the Govardhan hill, and even a squirrel wanted to help Rama build the bridge across the sea. Modi also elaborated upon his vision of a 'New India' — an India free of corruption, poverty, terrorism, casteism and communalism. Connecting it to the power of people's participation, he said that 'New India' was possible only if 125 crore people made a *samoohik sankalp* to attain the *siddhi* in 2022.

Taking inspiration from our *shastras*, Modi stressed that the time is right to build a 'New India' and we should not miss this opportunity. The journey from today's India to 'New India' has begun. Modi exhorted the people to join the 'New India' movement, stating that this could be a historic turning point in India's independent history and in its quest for reclaiming the position of *jagadguru*. He stated the vision for future when he said we have got the *Swaraj* 70 years back now we have to transform it to *suraaj* or the righteous Government. How will this goal be attained? By *Bharat jodo* — means all Indians firmly boding together. He emphasised on internalising the empowering attitude of *badal sakta hai* rather than the passive *chalta hai* attitude which is prevalent. Do not ask why but ask why not, he said, (We have to go ahead with the belief and resolve that our country has changed for better, is changing and can be changed)."

(The writer is Union Minister for Home Affairs)
(Courtesy: PIB)