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**Address at the Function marking the 150th Anniversary of the Revolt of 1857 and the Birth Centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, organised by the Sadbhavana Samiti, Hansi, Haryana, 10 October 2006.**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have gathered here today to commemorate the 150th anniversary of our First War of Independence that began in 1857, and also the Birth Centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, which the Sadbhavana Samiti, Hansi, has organised. On this occasion, I pay my humble tributes to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the other martyrs of the 1857 War of Independence. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Sadbhavana Samiti for organising this function in Hansi and for its deep commitment to the lofty values of secularism, communal harmony and peace, values cherished by our freedom fighters and the Founding Fathers.

Friends, Hansi occupies an important place in our history, as it was one of the key centres of that great event associated with our struggle for Freedom. The *Lal Sarak* of Hansi still reminds us of how the freedom fighters of this town and the surrounding villages like Putthi Mangal Khan, Rohnat, Hazampur and Jamalpur preferred death over slavery. The inhuman torture and the other intimidatory tactics of the colonial rulers could not kill their urge for freedom and they joined the War ready to make the supreme sacrifice, which hundreds of them indeed did. Names like Shaheed Hukam Chand Jain and Shaheed Mirza Munir Beig, and many others will always remain a source of inspiration for the people.

As history has recorded, during the Revolt of 1857, the people of this area fought valiantly against the might of the British Empire and had to suffer untold miseries. They are justly proud of their brave and illustrious ancestors who sacrificed everything for the cause of the country's Independence. It is indeed a glorious moment for all of us as we mark this event in all its solemnity. On this occasion, let us pay our humble homage to the freedom fighters and offer our tributes to the martyrs.

The War of 1857 was undoubtedly an epoch-making event in India's



Photo Gallery

struggle for freedom. For what the British sought to deride as a mere *sepoy mutiny* was India's First War of Independence in a very true sense, when people from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and language, rose against the British rule. Late Comrade Hiren Mukherjee, who was a profound scholar and veteran of the communist movement, even regarded the 1857 event as marking the genesis of nationalism in India and said that India after 1857 did not remain what it was before.

On this solemn occasion, when we are observing the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our First War of Independence and the birth centenary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, we must note that there was a discerning connection between the war of 1857 and the movement launched by Shaheed Bhagat Singh for the liberation of our country. As we know, when Indian immigrants in the USA and Canada formed the *Ghadar Party* in San Francisco in November 1913, the War of Independence of 1857 was their direct source of inspiration, so much so that the very name *Ghadar*, meaning mutiny, was drawn from the Great Uprising of 1857. Though Indians from Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and other provinces contributed to the formation of the Party, its main base came from the peasantry of the undivided Punjab, and many of them belonged to what today is the State of Haryana, a fact about which you all are very proud of. The sacrifices made by the members of the *Ghadar Party* for the cause of independence inspired the whole course of our freedom struggle subsequently. The revolutionary zeal displayed by Kartar Singh Sarabha, who was in his teens when he was sent to gallows along with many fellow freedom fighters, was a big source of inspiration for Bhagat Singh and his generation of revolutionaries. Thus, we can see the continuum of the chain of events, from the 1857 War of Independence to the movement launched by Bhagat Singh and his comrades, in the context of the overall history of our Freedom Movement. The entry of leaders like Bhagat Singh into the Freedom Movement, in fact, considerably helped it in gaining greater momentum, inspiring the future generations to continue the same, which has ultimately helped us to win our freedom.

When we gather here to remember our martyrs and freedom fighters, we must also remember the fact that they were inspired by certain values - the values that were meant for upholding national unity and communal harmony. It was in this tradition that our revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh were nurtured. We recall with reverence the exceptional contributions made by our freedom fighters and particularly by martyrs like Bhagat Singh for whom India's freedom was the first and immediate goal to be achieved as a prerequisite to the country's regeneration. He, in many ways, gave a wholly new orientation to the Freedom Movement in the country.

He had, in fact, visualised a united India free from communalism and casteism, superstitions, reactionary values and moribund traditions. He always separated religion from politics and the State. Referring to the *Ghadar Party's* movement, he wrote in one of his articles: "The martyrs kept religion outside politics. Their conception was that religion was the

private matter of individuals. Others should not interfere in that, nor should it be injected into politics.'

No doubt, it was the tireless endeavours and the many sacrifices of a whole gamut of martyrs from those of 1857 up to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and later, which eventually paved the way for our independence, the fruits of which we are enjoying today. Not only did these martyrs give up their lives for the sake of the country's freedom but also left a message for the future generations --- a message of sacrifice, courage of conviction, a strong belief in the ultimate victory of the people in their war against oppression.

Today, almost into the seventh decade of freedom, we need to introspect and see to what extent have we been able to realise the dreams of our Founding Fathers and the Martyrs of our Freedom Movement. Their dreams about a resurgent India and an egalitarian society free from class exploitation and oppression still remain unfulfilled. Our people still confront various forms of iniquities, deprivation and discrimination, as also the scourge of poverty. Political democracy can be translated into real and meaningful socio-economic democracy only when all iniquities and deprivations are removed. I am sure, the courage of conviction, tenacity of purpose and selfless sacrifices of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and other martyrs will continue to inspire generations to come.

With these words, I once again pay my humble tributes to the martyrs of the 1857 War of Independence in Hansi and other parts of the country, to Shaheed Bhagat Singh and all other freedom fighters who set an outstanding example of patriotism and valour by sacrificing their lives for the sake of the country's dignity and freedom. Let us all rededicate ourselves to the lofty ideals and values for which they lived and died. I am grateful to Sadbhavana Samiti of Hansi and to Shri Prabhash Joshi for this opportunity provided to me.

Thank you.

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