

**SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL, AT THE VALEDICTORY
CENTENARY LECTURE IN MEMORY OF BABU JAGJIVAN RAM**

Parliament House, New Delhi, 5th April 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to deliver the Valedictory Centenary Lecture organized in the memory of Babu Jagjivan Ram. The commemoration of hundred years of the birth of Babuji, as he was popularly known, is a fitting tribute to one of the great national leaders of our country.

Babu Jagjivan Ram made enormous contributions to India's freedom struggle and later to nation building in the post-independence period. As a national leader and a parliamentarian, he had a powerful presence and played a significant role, spread over almost five decades, in shaping India's political and constitutional development as also in bringing about social change. His dedication to work, his belief in human dignity and his philosophy of - malice towards none and charity to all - made him an exceptional human being.

His life is a lesson on how one can succeed and contribute positively to society and to the country despite difficult circumstances, constraints and challenges. Born in 1908 to an extremely under-privileged family, he lost his father at a tender age. The responsibility of bringing up young Jagjivan Ram was left to his mother who was instrumental in ensuring that Babu Jagjivan Ram continued and completed his education. It was education that empowered Babu Jagjivan Ram and gave him the capacity to serve the nation and society. Today also, it is education that is the foundation and the very basic requirement for improving the lives of people and empowering the socially disadvantaged groups. Government, society and families have a duty to ensure that children receive education.

Like Vasanti Devi, Jagjivan Ram's mother, who ensured that despite social and economic hardships her child got education, I call on all mothers and fathers to ensure that their children, both boys and girls, go to school.

Providing access to primary education to all is our firm commitment and obligation. We have to make special efforts for children coming from under-privileged backgrounds. There are many young bright boys and girls who have various hidden skills, talents and a passion to do things that can be of help to society. However, their potential must be recognised and can be channelised for the purpose of nation building. Societal leaders in various fields should come forward and take such students under their wings, so that just like in the life of Babu Jagjivan Ram, nascent talent and the optimism and idealism of youth can go on to find its full potential. In this context, it is important that education

schemes for the weaker and disadvantaged sections of society, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are implemented and properly monitored. In addition, children coming from these backgrounds should be provided with facilities that would help in bringing them at par with the rest of society. Hostel facilities, nutritional support and extra coaching classes are some of the areas that require our attention. I am informed that the Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna has been launched this year for the construction of hostels. This scheme is a fitting tribute to Babuji who throughout his life championed the cause of education. It is also fitting that his daughter Smt. Meira Kumar, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment will be responsible for implementing this scheme. I am sure that the goal of an enlightened India and the vision of her father would be a strong motivation for implementing this scheme effectively.

The standards set by Babu Jagjivan Ram and his ideals are an important legacy for the nation. All those who came in contact with him appreciated his intellectual capacities, his clarity of thought and his organizational skills. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was so impressed by the young Jagjivan Ram that when he met him in 1925 in Arrah, he invited Babu Jagjivan Ram to study at the Banaras Hindu University. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose took notice of him at Kolkata when in 1928 he organized a Mazdoor Rally in which approximately 50,000 people participated. Similarly, Gandhiji appreciated his work in relief camps set up after an earthquake in Bihar in 1934.

In 1937, he was elected to the Bihar Legislative Assembly as a candidate of the Depressed Class League. To form the government, the British sought his support by offering him a large sum of money and a ministerial berth but Babuji chose to go with the freedom fighters and rejected the offer of the British. Leaders of India's freedom movement were impressed by this act of patriotism and Gandhiji said that Jagjivan Ram had emerged as pure as gold in the test of fire. Subsequent years saw greater political participation of Babuji in the fight for India's independence and for social reforms. Babu Jagjivan Ram participated in the Satyagraha and Quit India Movements and was imprisoned twice. Indians were ready to sacrifice their careers, comforts, profession, wealth and lives for the freedom of India, across the length and breadth of the country. The same spirit of sacrifice, acts of patriotism and integrity of character shown by freedom fighters like Babuji should guide us as we work to create a modern India.

Babu Jagjivan Ram, as one of the founding fathers of the Constitution and as an important leader of the Constituent Assembly had highlighted the need for the inclusion of social equality and social justice as one of the ideals enshrined in our Constitution.

Promoting people's welfare in general and the upliftment of the oppressed in particular became his passion in life. Social justice must accompany our quest for growth. India has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies of the world. We hope to continue to grow as a nation and as an economy. At the same time, we have a constitutional and a moral duty to bring the weaker and the marginalized sections into the growth trajectory.

A growth process that bridges the divide between the haves and have-nots, between rural and urban areas, between regions and communities and between genders is the inclusive agenda that we should pursue.

Babu Jagjivan Ram held many portfolios as a Minister in free India. In the Ministries, sectors and issues that he tackled, he worked hard to bring improvement. As the first Labour Minister of India from 1947 to 1952 he introduced policies and laws for labour welfare and contributed much to the productive potential of the country. As Minister of Communications from 1952 to 1956, he decided that telephone exchanges should be opened in all district towns and public call offices in all sub-divisional towns. Such a foresighted step enhanced the communication network to a great extent.

As Food and Agriculture Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram pulled the country out of a severe drought, heralded the Green Revolution and for the first time made India self-sufficient in food. Babuji helped reshape agricultural priorities and revamp the agricultural research management system in a manner that there was synergy between scientists' expertise and farmers' experience. We now need a Second Green Revolution that will enhance our agricultural productivity and make India an agrarian superpower. I would urge all policy makers, scientists and farmers to work towards this objective.

Gandhiji had said, "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there will be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in harmony."

Babuji lived his life to achieve just such an ideal. He died in July 1986. His passing away brought to an end an era representing perhaps the most important phase of the country's transition from pre-independence to independence and on to a vibrant democratic society. His legacy will live on and continue to inspire new generations in social and political activities and in the continuous search for a better society.

And with this I pay my tributes to Babu Jagjivan Ram.

Thank You.

JAI HIND !