

CHAPTER

18

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE

from First Servant of the Indian People

Speech by Jawaharlal Nehru

After gaining independence from Britain, India became free on August 15, 1947. On that day, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, delivered a speech to the Indian people. As you read this speech excerpt, think about the problems that Nehru believed his nation had to resolve in order to move forward.

Fellow countrymen, it has been my privilege to serve India and the cause of India's freedom for many years. Today I address you for the first time officially as the First Servant of the Indian people, pledged to their service and their betterment. I am here because you willed it so and I remain here so long as you choose to honour me with your confidence.

We are a free and sovereign people today and we have rid ourselves of the burden of the past. We look at the world with clear and friendly eyes and at the future with faith and confidence.

The burden of foreign domination is done away with, but freedom brings its own responsibilities and burdens, and they can only be shouldered in the spirit of a free people, self-disciplined, and determined to preserve and enlarge that freedom. . . .

Our first and immediate objective must be to put an end to all internal strife and violence, which disfigure and degrade us and injure the cause of freedom. They come in the way of consideration of the great economic problems of the masses of the people which so urgently demand attention. . . .

We cannot solve these problems suddenly, but we cannot also delay their solution. So we must plan wisely so that the burdens on the masses may grow less and their standards of living go up. . . . We have to change rapidly our antiquated land tenure system, and we have also to promote industrialization on a large and balanced scale, so as to add to the wealth of the country, and thus to the national dividend which can be equitably distributed.

Production today is the first priority, and every attempt to hamper or lessen production is injuring the nation, and more especially harmful to our labouring masses. But production by itself is not enough, for this may lead to an even greater concentration of wealth in a few hands, which comes in the way of progress and which, in the context of

today, produces instability and conflict. Therefore, fair and equitable distribution is essential for any solution of the problem.

The Government of India have in hand at present several vast schemes for developing river valleys by controlling the flow of rivers, building dams and reservoirs and irrigation works and developing hydro-electric power. These will lead to greater food production and to the growth of industry and to all-round development. These schemes are thus basic to all planning and we intend to complete them as rapidly as possible so that the masses may profit.

All this requires peaceful conditions and the co-operation of all concerned, and hard and continuous work. Let us then address ourselves to these great and worthy tasks and forget our mutual wrangling and conflicts. There is a time for quarrelling and there is a time for co-operative endeavour. There is a time for work and there is a time for play. Today, there is no time for quarrelling or over-much play, unless we prove false to our country and our people. Today, we must co-operate with one another and work together, and work with right goodwill.

from Jawaharlal Nehru, speech broadcast from New Delhi, August 15, 1947. Reprinted in Jawaharlal Nehru, Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches 1946-1949 (New York: John Day Company, 1950), 7-8.

Jomo Kenyatta

Practicing Harambee

"We must unite together . . . and forget tribalism. We must not let the Europeans forget that the land they tread is ours. We should work hard, and try to educate our people . . . so that they can take over the government of the country. . . ."—Jomo Kenyatta, speech (1946)

Jomo Kenyatta dedicated his life to removing British colonial rule in his homeland of Kenya. When it won independence, he became the new nation's first president. He recognized that ethnic loyalties could pull the country apart. He always reminded Kenyans to follow the principle of harambee, which means, in Swahili, "let us pull together."

In 1890, Kenyatta was born Kamau Ngengi in the highlands north of Nairobi, Kenya's chief city. He was a member of the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in the country.

While Kamau was growing up, the British encouraged settlement by offering free land to any British person who wanted it. They offered fertile Kikuyu land. Soon, English settlers had large farms throughout the area. Sometimes they bought the land—although the Kikuyu thought that the settlers were merely renting it. More often, the British simply took it.

Kamau made early contact with the Europeans. When he was a child, missionaries cured him of a painful foot disease. He then attended their school and learned to read and write English. He also converted to Christianity. Many years later, he credited the missionaries for their schools and clinics. However, when they tried to end African customs, he said, "they upset the life of the people."

In 1915, Kamau's life work took shape. That year, the colonial government of Kenya passed a law stating that only whites could own land. The Kikuyu chief used Kamau as an interpreter when the chief protested the law before the colony's supreme court. Kamau spoke eloquently, but the court, which was controlled by the British, upheld the law. About this time, he began to wear a beaded belt that was called, in Swahili, a kenyatta. Soon, he adopted the word as his name.

During the 1920s, Kenyatta joined Kikuyu groups that hoped to develop into a political force. He became the editor of a monthly magazine, the first one published by Africans in Kenya. In 1929, he was in London campaigning for African rights. He spent most of the next 15 years in Europe, studying

and teaching. During this time, he wrote a brilliant book about the Kikuyu. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, he defended African customs and described how colonial laws caused problems for Africans.

During this period, Kenyatta organized a movement for African self-rule. He returned to Kenya in 1946 and quickly became the leader of the Kenya African Union. From the start, he worked to bring non-Kikuyu people into the group.

In the 1950s, many Kenyans were frustrated by the lack of progress in this campaign. Some joined a secret society called the Mau Mau and began attacks aimed at the British. English settlers were alarmed. The colonial government arrested Kenyatta and other leaders, even though they had no connection to the troubles. He was convicted in 1953 of planning and managing the Mau Mau revolt. Most Africans viewed the trial as a farce and the conviction as unjust. Kenyatta spent the next seven years in prison.

The revolt died down, and the British took steps toward granting independence. When Kenyatta was freed in 1961, he was immediately chosen as president of the Kenya African National Union, the chief political party. Two years later, Kenya became independent, and he was elected as its leader.

Kenyatta told Kenyans that hard work and cooperation were the keys to building their country. He constantly preached harambee, trying to ensure that Kenya's different ethnic groups worked together. He led his country for 15 years. Living into his eighties, he was called Mzee, a Swahili word meaning "Old Man." This showed the love and respect of his nation.