

**PAGE - 3 LONG WALK TO FREEDOM**

A few moments later we all lifted our eyes in awe as a spectacular array of South African jets, helicopters and troop carriers roared in perfect formation over the Union Buildings. It was not only a display of pinpoint precision and military force, but a demonstration of the military’s loyalty to democracy, to a new government that had been freely and fairly elected. Only moments before, the highest generals of the South African defence force and police, their chests bedecked with ribbons and medals from days gone by, saluted me and pledged their loyalty. I was not unmindful of the fact that not so many years before they would not have saluted but arrested me. Finally a chevron of Impala jets left a smoke trail of the black, red, green, blue and gold of the new South African flag.

Awe- amazed   
Spectacular- beautiful in a dramatic and an eye-catching way   
Array- an impressive display   
Troop- soldiers or armed forces   
Precision- accuracy   
Bedecked- decorate   
Unmindful- not conscious or aware   
Chevron- a pattern in the shape of a V   
Trail- series; chain

Just after the newly elected President’s address to the audience, an impressive arrangement of fighter jets, helicopter and soldier transporters raised everyone’s heads up in the sky. It symbolised perfection as well as military’s respect and obedience towards the free country. The high commanders, who have won medals for their bravery, also saluted and promised their loyalty. Mandela mentions that he was well aware that these commanders, who were now saluting him, would have arrested him under the previous rule as during the oppressive white supremacy, he was considered to be a criminal. The air show finally ended by making of the South African flag in the sky from smoke beneath the jets.

The day was symbolised for me by the playing of our two national anthems, and the vision of whites singing ‘Nkosi Sikelel –iAfrika’ and blacks singing ‘Die Stem’, the old anthem of the Republic. Although that day neither group knew the lyrics of the anthem they once despised, they would soon know the words by heart.

Symbolised- be a symbol of   
Lyrics- the words of a song   
Despised- hated, had a very low opinion of

The author remembers the day as the playing of two National Anthems of the country; one of the whites and the other, that of the blacks. On that day, no one knew the wordings of the anthem of the blacks but Mandela was confident that everyone would soon learn this anthem that they once hated.

On the day of the inauguration, I was overwhelmed with a sense of history. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a few years after the bitter Anglo-Boer war and before my own birth, the white-skinned peoples of South Africa patched up their differences and erected a system of racial domination against the dark-skinned peoples of their own land. The structure they created formed the basis of one of the harshest, most inhumane, societies the world has ever known. Now, in the last decade of the twentieth century, and my own eighth decade as a man, that system had been overturned forever and replaced by one that recognised the rights and freedoms of all peoples, regardless of the colour of their skin.

Overwhelmed- have a strong emotional effect   
Erected- build; construct   
Racial domination- when people of one race have power over another race   
Inhumane-cruel, brutal   
Overturned- reverse.

On the day of the inaugural ceremony, the author was remembering the days of past when this whole system of apartheid emerged. It resulted in inequality and inferior treatment of dark-skinned people. They were deprived of their basic fundamental rights. As a result, one of the world’s most brutal and inhumane society was born This began even before he was born. This system created an atmosphere of extreme cruelty and injustice for a particular part of the community. Now when he is in his eighth decade as a man, he along with countless others, have changed this entire system that treats humans as humans irrespective of their colour, caste, gender, or age.