



Session with the

Deputy Prime Minister

Address by Dr A C Muthiah, President, FICCI

Friends, on behalf of all of us here, I have great pleasure in welcoming our Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of India, Mr L K Advaniji, the most dynamic Minister we have. Friends, we have two distinguished personalities here to chair the meeting and co-chair. We have Lord Navnit Dholakia, President of the Liberal Democrat Party, the third-largest Party in the United Kingdom, to chair this session and we have Senator the Hon'ble Dr Linda Baboolal, President of the Senate Parliament, Trinidad & Tobago, to co-chair. Now, may I request Lord Navnit Dholakia to chair the session.

Thank you.

Address by Lord Navnit Dholakia, House of Lords, UK

Mr Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Singhvi, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday, 9th January was described as a day when Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa. But it has another great significance. Yesterday, for the first time, in the history of India, NRIs, the Non-Resident Indians, became NRIs, but this time it means Now Real Indians. The process started with the appointment of Dr Singhvi as High Commissioner to London. He opened up the High Commission's gates for all of us. He, as the first citizen of India in the United Kingdom, brought with him the culture, values, religion of Bharat. He gave India back to Indians in our new adopted homeland. Thank you, Dr Singhvi.

India, the world's largest democracy, has its values enshrined in its Constitution. Let me remind you, it is about levity, it is about justice, it is about equality and it is about fraternity. All our actions in India or abroad are accountable because that is what democracy is all about. Dictators throughout the world should note. It is for this reason that as NRIs we should remind our adopted homelands that we cannot allow terrorism to destroy our liberties wherever it raises its ugly head. Terrorism of many minds must be defeated. Democratic nations of the world must not ever be allowed to lose the civilized values. But the question of equality is also important. Let me tell you an anecdote about my own equation of what equality means. When I was appointed to the House of Lords, on my very first day, laden with a heavy brief case and piles of papers in my hand, I made my way to the House of Lords and saw an English colleague of mine at the gate and he said, "Lord Dholakia, you seem to be very heavily laden with papers. May I carry your bag?" I said, "Please do." There was a broad smile on my face and he said, "You must be very happy being appointed a member of the House of Lords." I said, "No, there is another reason and the reason is this that for 250 years my forefathers carried your bags; today, we are equal because you are carrying mine."

But, you know, one of my greatest joys of being a Member of the House of Lords is to have my Coat of Arms which has Ganapati at the top, the symbol OM of Hinduism, the black bucks that represent Bhavnagar, my hometown and, more important than that, a message for all of us – my motto – compendium sees the day.



Let me just say that there have been some interesting debates and discussions. Migration and the global economy are the two sides of the same coin. International workforce, as has been demonstrated, is now an acceptable fact as far as the world is concerned. Look at the contribution an Indian makes throughout the world - in the United Kingdom, in the Silicon Valley of the USA and the technological field of Germany. However, the process of globalization must not simply be restricted to economic advancement. Globalization has never undermined our national interests. It has promoted them. The global approach gives us an edge in promoting equality. It must be at the heart of our society. Equality matters because it holds our society together. Social disorders across the world have demonstrated what can happen when we have discrimination and tragedies take place. We should, in the global context, accept and celebrate our differences and our multiple identities – the Canadian-Indian, the American-Indian and the British-Indian have a common thread that unites them. Yet, there is a distinct development of each of these communities. This is our strength, and we should not allow it to be undermined.

The essence of equality offers everyone to say in which way we should want to lead our lives. It is a clear statement that leads towards a participating society. It is a sign of a healthy democracy and a process of good citizenship. When we discuss about dual citizenship, we were never to forget, we were never to be confused what effectively it means. No one should underestimate the values placed by the minorities, on their ethnicity and their belief in multiculturalism. Equally, one must not underestimate that cultures do not remain static. Communities change; conflicts often occur on matters of gender, generation, religion, language and the communities' relationship with the wider society. There is nothing to be frightened about. But let us not forget that inequality is the root cause of poverty and this is very clearly demonstrated by the statement made earlier by Mr Sam Pitroda. Poverty is not just about the lack of fulfilment of basic needs. It is also about the reasons for that lack which is widely and may also receive cultural interpretation affecting different communities throughout the world.

If poverty were all about economies, then money would solve most of our problems. But it is not. Poverty is about power and control. It is about ownership of property and legal rights. It is simple to talk about health and education, but strip it to its bare essential, we need to address the power relationship as well. In the world communities, the gap is still growing between the rich and the poor and between man and woman. Half of the six billion people on earth live on less than fifty rupees a day. Another two billion are poor, but making some progress. Then, there are one billion people who are doing well, some exceptionally well. Since half the people are not progressing, the global income gap is widening. Only a small amount of the wealth of the advanced nations is finding itself to the underdeveloped countries.

Economic progress and the benefits of technology are passing them by. It is not only a moral dilemma to have so many people living in poverty, but it also may ultimately turn out to be dangerous in destabilizing influence. India does not need a lesson on poverty. The West must address its policy as a matter of priority. Globalization should assist in eliminating poverty, and not hinder it. India has contributed so well towards its progress. The rest of the world can follow their example. But here also is a message for the non-resident real Indians. We have an example as to how we can contribute. Just a small, small clink in trying to tackle poverty is the example of the Loomba Trust in which Dr Singhvi acts as a trustee. Thousand children in ten States in India are now benefiting by education because they are of widowed mothers. That shows the responsibility that we have. But take it further – 20 million non-resident Indians. Is it not our duty and our responsibility to make sure that we also contribute towards eliminating poverty first in our homeland, and then also elsewhere in the world?

Finally, may I say that I felt deeply honoured, but also humble in the way that you

bestowed the honour on me yesterday. In 1994, I received from Her Majesty the Queen the Order of the British Empire. To me, the honour you bestowed upon me yesterday was even a greater joy. I have always said that I am a proud Britisher and I am also a proud Indian. Many a time, people say – How would you prove it? That reminds me of the story that when Hanuman was asked to demonstrate his affection and loyalty for Ram and Sita, he opened his chest and there was the image of Ram and Sita there. I say it to the Indians in India – ask any NRI to open his chest and you will see a map of India scratched over there. But my plea, both to India and the Indians abroad, is let no one as Martin Luther King had said and I paraphrase it – let no one judge us by the colour of our money, but more by the contents of our character which is based on everything decent that India has offered.

Colleagues, it is my great duty now to introduce to you my Co-Chairperson for this session, the Senator the Hon'ble Dr Linda Baboolal, President of the Senate Parliament in Trinidad & Tobago.

Address by Senator The Hon'ble Dr Linda Baboolal, President of the Senate Parliament in Trinidad & Tobago

Mr Chairman Lord Dholakia, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of India, Nobel Laureate and My Countryman Sir Vidiya Naipaul, President of FICCI, Other Distinguished Panellists, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me say thanks to the Government of India for organizing this conference and for giving us the opportunity to participate. I bring greetings from the Prime Minister and the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago and more so from the women of the Indian diaspora of Trinidad & Tobago.

I chose as my topic – women of the Indian diaspora in Trinidad & Tobago and for a few minutes I would just like to tell you something of their struggles. The 19th century was a period of globalization of labour and after the abolition of slavery the British, the French and the Dutch Governments gave their full support to the transport of Indian labour to replace the loss of African contract labour caused by the abolition of slavery. Slavery had but barely ended in 1838 when the first shipment of Indians reached what was then British Guyana. In this degrading exchange in body trade, I think we should call it, and in the beginning women were not initially considered essential because money or labour was the requirement and in the calculation of the plant toppers of the time, men could provide this requirement far better than women. Little consideration was given to the social needs of the Indian women until about 1890.

At this time, it was decreed that one-third of every shipment should be women. As these women were brought to the Caribbean, they were placed at the lowest end of plantation labour which in itself was considered to be the meanest of all colonial occupations. They were indentured on the estates at wages that were lower than that paid to the men and they were excluded from the better jobs on the plantations like driver, bookkeeping, skilled labour, etc. In a social situation where women were scarce and, therefore, in great demand, they became subjects of great dispute and fierce competition and after each day's labour in the fields, they were expected to resume the house work and child rearing in the domestic atmosphere.

The remarkable fact about the lives of these indentured women and their daughters and grand daughters is the manner in which they were able to surmount these enormous problems. Rather than adopting a fatalistic attitude and bowing to the allotted role, they used their creativity to forge a new life for themselves and their progeny in the Americas. They used those aspects of the ancestral tradition which were applicable to the new situation and rejected those aspects which could not

be effectively used in the new world. They gave their lives for the education of their children; they became mothers to the men who had been emasculated by the plantation experience and who sought to drown their grief in alcohol leading to many family problems.

These women recreated family life and knitted the broken community into a coherent whole. The Muslim and the Hindu women came from strong traditions of culture and civilization. They maintained their religions through the religious books, *the Ramayana*, *the Quran* etc. and because of their efforts their children started to enter the professions and by the eighties began to go abroad for further education. These early foremothers laid such a foundation that by the Forties of the last century their granddaughters had become higher professionals in medicine, law, university education, etc. and by the 1950s these daughters of the diaspora became increasingly involved in public affairs entering politics, journalism, creative writing, etc.

This is, in fact, the story of solid achievement against very formidable odds. It is a time of painful tale, but there was always the rainbow at the end. In all this, the women of the diaspora have been playing a major role in nation-building in the societies where they have settled despite the many prejudices and discriminatory practices which had to be overcome. When education became available, it was mainly the boys who gained the preference over girls since girls were expected to marry and raise families. But the inner core of strength and determination inherent in these women caused them to overcome all obstacles and become charters of their own destinies. Our women, thirsty for knowledge, grasped educational opportunities. They heard of women like Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Dr Sarojini Naidu, Saroj Dutt, Aruna Asaf Ali and, of course, Indira Gandhi. They were their role models and they identified with them.

In what way did women of the diaspora contribute to their emancipation and the development of the nation of Trinidad & Tobago during the last 150 years? They used their wit to reshape the Indian destiny. They became leaders in their own homes and communities, turning patriarchy into matriarchy. They took possession of their wages and used this to create physical comforts in families while saving some on the side. They recreated the family unit. They put education high on the agenda for their sons and daughters. Women played a leading role in 1934 in the initiation of strikes on the sugar estates for better conditions. It was they who brought out the men and the children in mass demonstrations against the abusive overseers and disheartening conditions. By the forties, there was an educated cadre of women who began to make their dent and their mark in society. Dr Stella Abid, for instance, was the first Indo-Trinidadian woman to qualify as a medical doctor.

Today, as we attend this conference, we hope to learn from the ancient wisdom of India. But India too can learn from her diasporic children. There are links present. They just have to be strengthened. Although women of the diaspora have played a leading role in the development of Trinidad & Tobago and other countries, their role has not been well documented or given true importance despite the fact that our diasporic communities would never have been reconstructed but for the assertive role of these women. In today's world, the women of the diaspora continue to buttress their respective societies and to battle the negatives which still exist. They have crossed all boundaries and continue to forcefully and fearlessly claim their places in every sphere of life.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity. Before I close, I just want to make one observation and that is I wish that we had more women attending this conference.

Thank you.

Address by Nobel Laureate Sir V S Naipaul

Well, I am slightly at a loss because in the short time I have been here I have heard so many of the same things again and again and what is worst from my point of view, they have anticipated many of the things I was going to say and I have had to recast very quickly my thoughts about this matter. I know that this occasion has the element of the trade fair. I think very much one is aware of that as one entered this building today; and the idea of money and commercial success of the recent Indian emigrants to the United States and Europe may be the driving force of this gathering and so it should be because without economic success there can be nothing; without economic success there is a kind of cultural degradation and failure very often.

Dr Baboolal has talked about the difficult conditions of the people of Indian origin, who were transported from about 1880 in great numbers to places like Trinidad and South Africa. But it is also important for us to remember that that degradation lay within the country. The country did not give these people any kind of protection. And that is going to be a little bit the theme of the brief statement I will make now. It is very good that the date of this conference is the date of Gandhiji's return from South Africa in 1915. I think very few people in the country would know much about what the Mahatma actually did in South Africa. Very few people would know that really he was a failure in South Africa; that his 20 years there ended in nothing and that everything collapsed and should we say 30 years afterwards the great system of apartheid was introduced by the Nationalist Government.

Anyway, out of that failure there arose a great independence movement. So, it is directly linked to the experience of these poor, expatriate, indentured people with very few rights.

So, there is that connection which I want to talk about. Those of us who say that the question of the diaspora is larger; it has history, it goes back a long way. There are different cultural basins in the world. There is the Chinese cultural basin; there is the Mediterranean cultural basin; there is the Arabian basin; there is also the Indian basin which, for a thousand years or so, until about 1400 AD, provided the culture of India and South-East Asia. The German scholar, Han Rexima, called his book about Indian art – *The Art of Indian Asia*. And the great scholar Kumaraswamy called his work in 1927 – *The Art of India and Indonesia*. I want to talk to you a little about Kumaraswamy because his career matches the Mahatma's; and although, perhaps, they never crossed, they both were aspects of the same thing – self-discovery. But Kumaraswamy is not as well known as he should be because other things take precedence. His father was a man from Sri Lanka, Ceylon, a very rich man. His mother, I believe, was English, possibly Irish. His middle initial is "K" – Anand K Kumaraswamy and the "K" stands, quite oddly, for "Kentish". He inherited a fortune when he was young at his father's death. So, in the 1890s when he was a young - man he was born in 1877-, he was quite wealthy. And what he did with his wealth at high watermark of empire and for a man living in England with all of English life open to him, was extraordinary.

He decided to study the art of Indonesia, the art of Ceylon in the first place and then the art of India. There has been work done about Indian sculpture and metal work before. What Kumaraswamy did for painting was quite staggering. He used his fortune to come to India and to travel and to find in second-hand book shops and in palaces the work of the Rajput courts. At that time, it was not the subject. People knew nothing about it. And almost everything we have built about Indian painting, especially of that Rajput school comes from Kumaraswamy's noble work as a very, very young man. He put together, quite early, a collection of about 900 paintings.

This is why I want to talk to you about – we must not always think of other people victimizing India. We must often think of what Indians can do to themselves. Having spent his own fortune, assembling this collection which, if he had not assembled,



probably would have perished, having analyzed, having said this is what the school is about, this is what it does and that is an intellectual and aesthetic labour of prodigious range if you think about it to organize a subject that has not been organized or written about before. He tried to get a museum established in India before the First World War. He thought that he would give the collection of 900 pictures to this museum. There was some talk from the Nizam's Government that they might be interested, but that came to nothing. He then went to the Banaras Hindu University which was just being set up and he said – you have my collection, but please establish a Chair of Indian art and make me your first professor. They told him to go away and he did go away. He took his collection to Boston and there it is one of the principal glories of the Boston Institute of Fine Arts. If you go and see the Kumaraswamy collection treasured, they have brought out one by one for you. It remains a great collection. But I want you to contemplate this. This collection was made and offered to India by a man who spent his own money and India told him to go away.

The idea of being a victim Dr Baboolal spoke very poetically and painfully about it should not be something we must dwell on too much. We should rather turn the barbs a little sometimes on ourselves to find out why we have failed historically, why the great Indian civilization of South-East Asia collapsed, why were the Dutch had to rebuild Parambalam, why those buildings, beautiful things like Parambalam and Borambadur had been allowed to fall into decay. We have to understand this. We have to develop a true sense of history and we must stop blaming the British for everything. We must look back.

I am very glad to be here and I just wanted to drop this little stone into the pool of your thoughts and I hope it will ripple and create some interest. Thank you very much.

Address by Mr L K Advani, Deputy Prime Minister of India

Chairman of this Session, Lord Dholakia, Co-Chairman, Dr Linda Baboolal, and the very special Guest at this Session whom we have just heard, Nobel Laureate Mr V S Naipaul, and Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even though it was a brief intervention and he himself called it a stone that he has thrown and he hoped that there will be ripples, I am sure that this brief speech is entirely true to the reputation that Mr Naipaul has for being very forthright and for being very honest and what he said has a lot of truth in it. I am sure that it would be much more than ripples that would be resulting from this stone that he has thrown. It will make us all introspect, think of so many things. There has been a tendency to blame those who go abroad. But he started with Gandhiji going abroad and then on that basis all this taking place. In fact, I would like to assure him that when this particular convention was thought of, it was not thought in terms of economics, because we believe that this diaspora is extremely valuable for us not merely in financial terms and it is true that these days Indians abroad have made a place for themselves insofar as affluence is concerned. But it has not always been so.

In fact, my own interaction with the diaspora when I first became Member of Parliament, was that which instilled in me immense confidence about the potential our country has. I may start with recounting a small episode that took place over 25 years back when as Minister of Information and Broadcasting in Shri Morarji Desai's Government I had an occasion to visit Kuala Lumpur to participate in a UNESCO Conference. There, I was Union Minister and in my honour the Ambassador organized a reception in the evening and, of course, people of Indian origin were there in large numbers. But when I interacted with the local Malaysians, one of them told me an interesting story. He said – affluent Malaysians, when they retire, generally do not stay here; they go to Europe,

they go and settle in Britain or in France or in Switzerland. But even in France if that affluent person gets sick, he is unwell, goes to a doctor and the doctor examines him and tells him – mind you, one of your kidneys has failed completely and unless you undergo an operation soon, have it removed; otherwise the other kidney is also likely to be affected. The moment he hears the word “operation”, he does not go to a surgeon. In Paris, he goes to his travel agent and tells him – book me a ticket for tomorrow for Kuala Lumpur, I have to go back to Malaysia, I have to have an operation there. To the person who was recounting this story, I said, – “Are your surgeons so good?” He said, “No, not my surgeons, but it is your surgeons.” He went on to add and said that it so happens that most of the Indian surgeons are Sikhs; and so when this gentleman who comes here for an operation is taken to the operation theatre and naturally given anaesthesia and when he recovers from his anaesthesia and he sees over his head a bearded person with a turban he feels reassured that he must have taken out only the kidney, nothing else.

Now, you imagine the sense of pride an Indian feels when he hears incidents of this kind, episodes of this kind. This is 1978 that I am talking about. At that time, within our country we particularly who had been in the Opposition for all these decades, we used to see everything going wrong, at least in the Government circle – our hospitals, our doctors. I said – here our doctors have created this kind of reputation that a person does not go to the surgeon in Paris, but chooses to come back to the Indian Sikh surgeon in Kuala Lumpur for that. This is the potential that we have and yet, in spite of this potential this country is backward, this country is poor, this country is illiterate. Ever since I have always been saying – if only we are able to mobilize the potential of this country, channelize it in the right direction, make the Indian feel proud about the identity of being an Indian. You can imagine when I heard Dholakiaji speaking about Hanuman and willing to bare his chest and show that it is Ram and Sita who are there, how happy I feel. And it is persons like him or Dr Linda or many among you – ten of you who have been honoured yesterday – but when I think of the gathering that is here, I can think of so many persons who would have been honoured if the number had not been confined to ten, so many others.

It is this that gives me confidence that while the early decades of Independence – somehow what happened was that before 1947 there was an ambition in the whole people, a collective ambition to be free, to be independent. After 1947, gradually the collective ambition disappeared and gradually it became Indian individual ambitions, individual aspirations. Two reasons why it has taken nearly 55 years to think about this convention are – one is the happy confluence of two historical developments, the coming of age of India and the coming of age of Indians working and living abroad. They were earlier not recognized everywhere. In fact, these days there is a lot of talk about IT – Information Technology. My own introduction to information technology started with a small digital diary around 1985 or so. I became interested and then I happened to come across a book on Bill Gates who was described as the richest man in the world. Reading that book, I felt it would be worthwhile if I am given an opportunity to visit Microsoft and there came an opportunity as a Member of Parliament. I had to go to San Francisco and then I visited Seattle. What amazed me in the Microsoft was that 25 per cent or 30 per cent of the computer engineers, technicians working there were Indians. This is way back in 1991. It was then I started wondering – I said computer and software and Indians are at the helm of affairs. Of course, later on everyone became conscious of this. But it is this that gave me confidence that if only we are able to bring together these elements.

Dr Singhvi has coined an excellent word. He calls them – Bharat Vanshi. “Vansh” is a very fine term really and Bharat Vanshi is good. I do not know whose idea was it, whether it was Dr Singhvi’s, FICCI’s, Dr Muthiah’s or Dr Amit Mitra’s, but there could not have been a better and more auspicious start for this conference than the *Jugal Bandi*



between Shehnai and Sitar played by two Bharat Ratanas yesterday. The audience clapped and clapped and that too became a part of the self-creation of the auspicious musical moment. What is it really which we were celebrating through the music of Ustad Bismillah Khan and Pandit Ravi Shankar? It is our common Indianness to which Lord Dholakia referred to – our Bharatiyata, the bond that unites all of us who belong to Bharat Varsh, the great global Indian family. Indeed, we are celebrating the beginning of a global *Jugal Bandi* between Bharat Vasis and Bharat Vanshis.

I referred to the historical development, the coming of age of India and the coming of age of Indians working and living abroad. As a result of this, India's perception of NRIs has changed and NRIs have helped change India's image abroad. But the second reason which I would like to refer to is that Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Government, more perhaps than any previous Government, recognized the true potential of the Pravasi Bharatiya community – well before we came into office. We have been seriously thinking of how best to strengthen the cultural, spiritual and economic relations between India and PIOs, India and NRIs. The idea of providing dual citizenship at least in respect of certain countries and introduction of the PIO Card had been in our mind for a long time.

I recall yesterday Shri Yashwant Sinha, our External Affairs Minister, starting with a quotation from Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech 25 years ago, when he was not the Prime Minister, he was the External Affairs Minister of the country. Without sounding immodest, I can say that Shri Vajpayee's Government attached the very high priority to PIO-NRI issues and tried to address them with sincere commitment and perseverance. The setting up of the high-powered Committee under the able leadership of Dr L M Singhvi and the quick follow-up on its recommendations is the testimony to this commitment – the first Pravasi Bharatiya Conference is the culmination of this long and persistent effort.

Some of the comments made this morning in some of the newspapers make me observe that I would like to explain why the Government has considered dual citizenship in respect of only certain countries so far. One of the primary factors guiding our decision was the simple requirement that the host country should also have a law granting dual citizenship. In countries where such a provision does not exist, PIOs cannot enjoy the status of dual citizenship. Another factor with which I am directly concerned is our thinking about our national security. I deal with this problem every day and I can tell you that there was a time when the problems of internal security and the problems of external security were totally distinct. The Defence Minister looked after external security, the Home Minister looked after internal security. But in the last four-and-a-half years that I have been in Vajpayeeji's Government, these two are so intermeshed that the External Affairs Minister, the Defence Minister and the Home Minister have constantly to work together because its external security and internal security have become totally interlinked. You cannot think of one without thinking of the other.

Therefore, when we were thinking about this particular problem of dual citizenship, we decided that for a start we identify such countries which have a law of dual citizenship and also in which case extending this particular facility will not, in any way, jeopardize our security. I hope this is appreciated. But I would like to say that even apart from these six, here we have sixty countries represented, and the remaining which have not been included insofar as dual citizenship is concerned, I would like them to go through Dr Singhvi's Committee's recommendations. They are elaborate and they relate to all. It would be our task to implement them – examine them and implement them and then we would be taking full advantage of your ability, your potential, your talents and similarly we would like to extend whatever we can in order to make you contribute more to the country of your choosing. You contribute more even to this country, to India. But it is those recommendations which would be needed. This is only one. Naturally, it attracted attention; it has been talked about and it would certainly need an amendment of the law, the present citizenship law.

Special attention is being paid to problems of overseas Indian blue-coloured workers. The Prime Minister mentioned some of the initiatives we have contemplated. Several more will follow. We sincerely seek suggestions and ideas from all of you on how best to address the problems of this very important and valued section of the NRI community. I hope this web site will be fully used for that purpose.

Distinguished participants, you have excelled in the world with your talent and brain power in diverse fields. My message to you is short and simple – continue to excel in whatever you are doing and wherever you are working. The more you accomplish, the greater is your service of India. Normally, it may be seen that the more you accomplish, the better would be your own position and your own family; but I look at it in a different way that the more you accomplish, the greater is your service of India. I am convinced that more captivating than the past and present success stories of the Pravasi Bharatiyas will be the greater heights that you are poised to soar to in the future. Directly, Sir Naipaul may not have contributed to India. But the manner in which he acquitted himself, I have with me the English version of the book that has been released in Hindi today, *Beyond Belief*, and I brought my own copy with me only to have it autographed by Sir Naipaul which he has done it kindly. And on that cover – Elizabeth Hardwick, perhaps she is an 80-year old academician in UK – and she says Naipaul is one of the greatest living writers in the English language. His schemes, his vision of human destiny in our time are composed with a perfection of language, a flawless structure and, above all, a profound knowledge of the world.

As I said, what he did is simply to accomplish great heights in the fields in which he was working. He may have lived outside India for so many years. But it is he who, after Tagore, became the first Indian to get a Nobel prize for literature. Now, it is a great achievement.

I shall conclude my initial remarks by sharing my vision for India's future. I have often said that 20th century was the century of the West, especially of Britain and America, for some time even of Russia. Experts predict that the 21st century will be a century of the East. It should be our endeavour to make it an Indian century. What does this vision mean for the Pravasi Bharatiyas and would-be Pravasi Bharatiyas? Let me elaborate. All of us know that India's past was glorious. India was a land of plenty and progress with a highly advanced culture, enjoying a prestige that had spread far and wide. Unfortunately, our motherland came to be at the receiving end of history in the last millennium. It is only with the attainment of Independence from the colonial rule in 1947, apologies to Naipaul, that India could start a new journey free to write her own destiny.

Many of your forefathers left the Indian shores either out of compulsion or want. In the colonial times, they were taken to far-off lands to work as indentured labourers. Even in free India many of you went out in search of greener pastures and better opportunities for realizing your full potential. May this first Pravasi Bharatiya Conference be the occasion for all of us to pledge that never again in future shall Indians leave India out of compulsion. The age of alien rule is gone forever, never again to return. Of course, the people will continue to go to foreign lands for work and business opportunities which is welcome. But, here again, it shall be our resolve to create such conditions in India that our people, especially talented people, are not forced to leave India for want of opportunities and a proper working environment here. This is our responsibility and I, on behalf of the Government, can pledge that we shall endeavour to see that this happens.

Thus, I see a future in which Pravasi Bharatiyas will be proud that their motherland has become a developed nation, capable of guiding the course of the 21st century and we have set a target that today when someone describes India as a developing country, I

feel it is a euphemism for describing us as a not undeveloped country and, therefore, I look forward to the day and the President and the Prime Minister have set a date and said by 2020 no one should call India a developing country; it should be ranked as a developed country. Similarly, I see a future in which Indians will be proud that their Pravasi counterparts everywhere are recognized societies contributing to the all-round progress of their host countries and to the glory of Bharat Varsh. After all, I must say, as a person who has been dealing with problems of security that I would like to refer to Indian Pravasis in America particularly; what has strengthened India's case is the high socio-economic profile that the Indian community now commands in the United States. The whole world is today aware of Indian-Americans' shining achievements in information technology, medicine, banking and financial sector, management, education, literature, journalism and other fields. I do not want to mention names. But I happen to be originally a journalist and, therefore, it makes me proud that one of our own Indians is very high in the field of journalism in America. Some of them are beginning to make their mark even in films.

In fact, Indians are recognized as high achievers in other parts of the world, too. For example, how proud we all feel at the fact that the most celebrated biography of one of the greatest men of our times, Nelson Mandela, has been written by a Pravasi Bharatiya, and she is here, Ms Fatima Meer of South Africa whom we honoured yesterday. We honoured her yesterday with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman. At the same time, the cinematic biography of Nelson Mandela is also being created by an Indian film-maker, Shekhar Kapur. This is truly a rare honour for India and Indian talent. It is not out of place to recall here that Nelson Mandela himself was inspired by another illustrious Pravasi Bharatiya, Mahatma Gandhi.

I compliment Singhviji and his colleagues and the entire Committee which made this very valuable report to the Government and laid the foundation for this particular first Pravasi Conference, first Pravasi Sammelan. I entirely agree that this should not be just an event in itself. It should be the beginning of a process and a process which has, as its objective, to ensure and guarantee that India does come to occupy a place in the international community commensurate with its potential. I remember the speech delivered by Aurobindo Ghosh when India became independent on the 15th of August. The All India Radio put it out, in which he said that India was at one time looked upon as Vishwa Guru. I see no reason why once again it should not reach that place and the whole world start looking at India as a beacon light of enlightenment.

With these words, I am grateful to the organizers of this conference for having allowed me to present this speech, though originally the conception was that I have to make only a ten-minute or 15-minute speech and there would be interaction with the audience. Subsequently, the organizers told me that it is too large a gathering for a real interaction. So, I have no objections for questions if the organizers want. It is up to the Chairman. I am willing to abide by the Chairman.

Ms Nadira Naipaul

... you have very noble sentiments about the NRIs to bare their chests. I want to ask ... what about the Muslims? ...to prove their secularism, in the secularist India... Muslims, Christians and secularists.

Mr L K Advani

I am very happy that you have put a question of that kind. I am very happy. Muslims, Christians, that is all. The third is no community. All of us are secular. Please listen. She

referred to the fact. I do not blame her. The image that has been created in certain sections abroad, even in India, is that the present Government is concerned about Hindus. It is not concerned about Muslims or Christians or other minorities. Let me say that there cannot be a more unfair image than this. If you wait for a while, let me convey what I want to convey. It would be best, rather cheer me after every sentence. Please do not. Because this is an impression which even well-meaning people do have in their minds. I am not blaming them. After all, every person, every party does and particularly if he has been in public life for a long time, he does create an image and that image, if it is wrong, has to be corrected.

I would only say – let us all recall the circumstances in which India became independent; the circumstances in which India, against the wishes of the Congress leadership of that time – Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel – was partitioned. This happened in 1947. Many people were unhappy. Mahatma Gandhi would not stay for the Independence Day celebrations. He went away to Naokhali. Pakistan was created. Pakistan declared itself a theocratic State, an Islamic State. The Constituent Assembly was meeting and the Constituent Assembly completed its work in 1950. On 26th January that year, the first Constitution of free India was adopted.

I would ask all of you, particularly the scholars, to go through the elaborate debates of the Constituent Assembly. No one advocated that because Pakistan has been created on the basis of the two-nation theory and it has declared itself an Islamic State, India is presently comprised of areas which have a Hindu majority, so, let India become a Hindu State. No one even pleaded for that. Only recently, I had an occasion to speak on this subject in the Indian Parliament. I said - theocracy and a theocratic State is unacceptable to Indian tradition, to Indian history, to Indian culture. India can never be a theocratic State. India can never be a theocratic State and this is what I emphasize even today.

Of course, even in 1947, with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel we have seen the kind of killings that took place at that time. It was horrible. I have been a resident of Sind. I belong to Karachi. In fact, I wanted to refer to the fact that it is not merely after Independence that we have built up such a huge diaspora. We have Harileela here, sitting here and many people from Sind had gone abroad even in those times. I remember very well that some time when I first went to Hong Kong I found that most of the people, Indians in Hong Kong, were from Sind, were Sindhis. When I went recently to Spain, I found that most of the Indians in Madrid in Spain were from Sind. So, I am familiar with that. But we must understand that India has been a secular country for a long time. It is part of a tradition and it will remain secular. If anything like what happened in Gujarat last year happens, it has happened in between these 55 years also, we feel sad, we feel ashamed and we only say that it is an aberration. It must not be repeated. I have again said, let us have it behind us.

In India, the Constitution guarantees and the history of the last 55 years guarantees that there shall be no discrimination against any citizens on grounds of his faith, on grounds of his religion. This is a commitment which the whole nation has made and it is on that basis that we, at this diaspora also, tried to include all from all, irrespective of faith. Let them come here. In fact, I had an occasion to visit Israel and Israel told me that they felt very happy that even when the Jews were discriminated against in several countries, it was in India that never was any Jew discriminated against on grounds of his religion. This is the tradition of this country and that tradition we hold dear and we are proud of that tradition. At least, speaking on behalf of the Government, I can affirm and assure that this secularism is so embedded in our thinking that there can be no departure from that.

Thank you.

Colleagues, may I now call on Dr Singhvi to propose a vote of thanks.



**Address by Dr L M Singhvi,
Rajya Sabha MP and Chairman,
Organizing Committee of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas**

May I say how deeply, how very much in the debt of Shri Advani we all are for making this wonderful session so heart-warming? How very much we appreciate Lord Dholakia and Dr Baboolal for chairing this session. How very grateful I am to Lady Naipaul for making the session interactive. I must say that in fairness to Lord Dholakia what he meant was to use a mythological metaphor which shows that in your heart there is an image. In the heart of every Pravasi Bharatiya, he said there is the image of India and India symbolizes true secularism, India symbolizes the constitutional values which are consecrated by India. May I say how delighted we were by the explanation or the answer of Shri Advani. And, finally, may I say how deeply in the debt of Sir Vidiya we are for a wonderful presentation.

When Cromwell became the Lord Master, Lord Protector of Britain, he asked his painter – do me a favour, paint me words and all. I think it is necessary that we address every issue that concerns our identity, our ways, our feelings, our successes. Sir Vidiya, thank you very much for not merely causing ripples but beginning to cause waves, and I do hope that this will be a session we will all remember.

Thank you.