

Speech by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan  
Monday, 19. 11. 2012, 12.30 pm  
At the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of IGNCA

Most respected Hon'ble President of India;  
Hon'ble Minister of Culture, Government of India;  
President, IGNCA; Member-Secretary, IGNCA;  
Your Excellencies and the distinguished members of the audience:

1. I am honoured by the invitation to say a few words on this memorable occasion. I am the voice of the past, I am a peripheral participant of the present and a dreamer of the future. I am also the experiencer of idealistic aspirations as also moments of acute crisis.

2. The President of the IGNCA, who has carried forward the mandate of the Centre for the last five years, has given a detailed account of the accomplishments of the institution and has also articulated his vision of the future of the institution. It is not therefore necessary for me to add a word more. I seek your indulgence in sharing with you some memories of the inception of the Centre, the evolution of its conceptual plan and identification of the location. We can call it pre-history! I take this liberty because the new dynamic Member-Secretary suggested that I make my presentation anecdotal. What I have to share with you are memories not on the records of files.

3. Nearly two years before the formal registration of the institution, a notification of the Government of India, was

delivered to me in the early hours of the morning, which said: There will be an Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and

Kapila Vatsyayan has been appointed as its Director at the level of the Secretary to the Government of India. Bewildered, I ran to the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi,, and asked him what did this mean and why I. Most affectionately he said to me, *Papa ka memorial aapne kiye the, Mummy ka be aap hi karenge!* (You converted the Teen Murti into the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and you will also establish a centre in the name of Mummy, Smt. Indira Gandhi.)

4,Over the months that followed, there were many small notes exchanged between the Prime Minister and me, largely informal. I also recall many other memorable conversations with him in regard to my ideas of the Centre, specially emphasizing that it would not duplicate the works of the Akademies, and his ideas that Culture was to be the safety valve of the country's political and social development. I told him its programmes would not be equivalent to annual plantings. Also, the institution will not be a grant-giving institution; it will be all-inclusive, both in terms of disciplines as also areas it will represent, to concretize the Indian vision – being at home in the home, and being at home in the world! The then Prime Minister laughed and he turned round and retorted: will you tell me which other lions you will not ride? These memories are still fresh in my mind.

5.To Shri Rajiv Gandhi I pay my first debt. Elsewhere I have recounted other significant conversations with him. Had it not been for these and his approbation, he would not have been requested to plant the five trees, which represent the wisdom tradition which could soar to the heavens and throw roots to the ground, to regenerate. Nor would it have been necessary to bring together, after arduous journey, five rocks from the five rivers of India – Sindhu, Ganga, Kaveri, Mahanadi and Narmada, symbolizing the perennial flow of the tradition in the constant movement of both continuity and change. I told Shri Rajiv Gandhi that the inauguration will represent the vision and the programme of the institution.

6.After the brutal assassination of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Smt. Sonia Gandhi became the President. She gave direction and leadership to IGNCIA in her inimitable, silent clarity. To her and to the first Trustees, including

the present Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao, Shri R. Venkataraman, Shri Ram Nivas Mirdha, Shri P. N. Haksar, Shri P. C. Alexander, Dr. Abid Hussain, Professor Yashpal, Shri H. Y. Sharada Prasad, and others, the institution and I owe a deep debt, because it is these Trustees at the decision-making level which enabled the institution to weather many a crisis and engage in a multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural and international dialogue at many levels. The visibility of the institution was across the world. Centres of excellence were networked and some greatest minds of the century communicated with each other with ease.

7.I recall particularly the most stimulating discussions between the most eminent scientist D. S. Kothari and the poetess Kathleen Reine, the Astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar with the Todas on Cosmology, the internationally renowned Iranian philosopher Sayyed Hosein Nasr conversing at the deepest level with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. To concretize abstract notions such as Space, Time, the Primal Elements, was not easy - but it was easy, because there was an international community of thinkers who came together. At home programmes were launched cutting across insulation of societal formations and disciplines. The publications and the documentations are the results of these innovative programmes. Today, after 25 years of its exciting but difficult journey, the Centre has potential and is poised to meet the future at many dimensions, hopefully never abandoning its original mandate and idealism.

8.This is also the occasion to acknowledge my and the institution's debts to the donors of the personal collections. Each gift that has come to the IGNCA brings back poignant memories.

-To the late Suniti Kumar Chatterji, with whom I had the privilege of working as the Joint Secretary of the International Congress of Orientalists for over a decade and a half. He wanted to give his library to me. His wife and son respected his wish and gifted the library to the IGNCA.

-To my guru Hazari Prasad Dwivedi. The family's long association with him since his Shantiniketan days.

-The Elizabeth and Sass Brunner's paintings came to the IGNCA, again because of their stay in Shantiniketan and now with me as the executor of the will of Elizabeth Brunner.

-To the son of the great art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy, who generously gave copyright permission to the IGNCA to re-publish his father's works.

-To friends in the international community, to whom I reached out, who in turn facilitated generous gifts to IGNCA - precious material relating to diverse aspects of the Indian intellectual and artistic traditions, from libraries such as the Bibliothique d'Etat de Berlin, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, the British Library, the Oriental Institute of St. Petersburg, the Library of the Minorities in China, Alberuni Library in Uzbekistan. Institutions, national and international, also gave generous gifts as valuable equipment. Amongst these institutions I owe a debt to the Ford Foundation, the Japan Foundation and most of all to UNDP and UNESCO. This was possible on account of long-standing personal friendship. All these enabled the institution to be in the vanguard of using high technology for making a meaningful bridge between cultural heritage and modern technology.

9.What else do I remember? I remember a great deal, but there is no time to share that. This is also not the occasion to speak on the complexities of decision-making of a nation state, parliamentary democracy, autonomy and the challenges which still have to be faced at the level of systems, not at the level of persons.

10.My task as the human instrumentality of concretizing the vision of the person in whose name the Centre was established, the perennial values, thoughts and the knowledge systems of this country, has been as inspiring as challenging in the first decade and a little more.

11.Institutions outlast, as they must, the individuals. It was my privilege to contribute in some small measure in the flow of the civilizational and cultural values embedded in this soil of India, always connecting and addressing the skies.

Thank you.