

Speech by Malini Parthasarathy at the inauguration of The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, January 31, 2013

Honourable President, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, Mr. L.K.Advani, and other distinguished guests, friends, well-wishers and people who have come from all over the country to express solidarity with the idea of the Hindu Centre. I express my sense of most overwhelming gratitude and humble acknowledgement of a historic task that we should accomplish. It is also a singular honour that it is being inaugurated here at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the ultimate symbol of this great Republic. It augurs well for the Centre as an active instrument of public service.

The context in which the idea of the Centre has emerged is the sharp sense of a breakdown of the basic consensus of governance and also a sense of an increasing polarization of the discourse, to the extent that legislative business is not allowed to proceed and Parliament is very often held hostage and reduced to a matter of just counting the vote. So we do want to, we do think we need the Centre to bridge this gap, a widening, increasing gap in perception that is holding the whole country to ransom and causing great public anger. So we think the Centre should help to strengthen the foundational liberal principle which has made this country great.

The Centre ought to be a practical instrument of change rather than solely engaging in theoretical explorations, especially when there is a lot of frustration and anger. We don't want to just add to piles and piles of knowledge. We do want to make sure all the three streams of activity, our research, our seminars and our workshops, our lectures and Round Tables where we hope to do our bit for internal reconciliation, like you do Track 2 for India and Pakistan. It's an ambitious task, but we hope to do it for the Kashmir or Maoists issues or even the North-East. So the idea is that the Centre functions as a multi-faceted body, not just as a theoretical, academic institution.

We see our role also as taking forward a re-examination of fundamental constitutional principles that have become so contentious, controversial, for instance the definition of nationalism. Shri Advani is also here, I mean the whole struggle between composite nationalism and cultural nationalism, we do think that needs to be debated quite constructively, and try to take the definitions forward with a view to strengthening the liberal foundations of our Republic.

We also think that things like secularism, social justice, all these things would have to be re-examined with full earnestness, open mindedness but with a clear commitment to the original framework on which the constitution was founded.

On this very historic occasion I take it on myself to pledge that the Centre will make every serious endeavour to help elevate the tenor of public discourse. We come from a tradition of constructive participation in nation building. So I would like to dedicate the Centre to our eminent forefathers, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar and Kasturi Srinivasan,

whose impassioned commitment to public activism, as they were the builders of The Hindu, shall ever be our inspiration.

We are very, very grateful to the distinguished leaders of Politics, Industry and other spheres who have come here today to witness the Centre's launch. We very earnestly request your support and your help in taking this initiative forward and to make sure that we can really work together in the task of getting our county back on track.

Thank you.