

Speech of Dr. Manmohan Singh, Former Prime Minister on the occasion  
of the inauguration of G Parthasarathi Conference Hall at RIS (20  
February, 2015)

Shri Shyam Saran, Chairman, RIS; Shri V.S. Seshadri, Vice-Chairman, RIS; Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, Distinguished Members of the Governing Council and General Body, Past Members present here, and Dear Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am indeed honoured by the invitation extended to me to inaugurate the G. Parthasarathi Conference Hall at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). This is a historic moment for all of us who have had the privilege of knowing and working with the late Shri Parthasarathi who was the founding Chairman of RIS and played a vital role in its subsequent emergence as a well-respected centre of excellence. Let me begin by recalling that I came to know Mr. Parthasarathi when he was our Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Our association became more intimate after he came back as the Vice-Chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), which he built brick by brick. I took part in several meetings of the selection committees of JNU that he constituted. What impressed me most even in my first contacts with him was his passionate desire to build an institution which would be worthy of the great ideals and ethos of our nation.

His emphasis was always on a multidisciplinary approach for solving real-life problems. He strongly believed that there were several layers of rationality and any single discipline which claimed that it had understood all that went into the pursuit of rationality, would be an imperfect view of the complex entities that one dealt with in human

affairs. Another thing which struck me was the way he conducted his meetings. Mr. Parthasarathi put the pursuit of excellence as a high priority in selecting people for key assignments. His commitment both to the pursuit of excellence and the reduction of social inequalities was so transparent that it left an indelible impression on all those who came in contact with him. He never forced his views on members of the selection committees, yet he knew how to guide the deliberations gently but purposefully. The fact that the Jawaharlal Nehru University has grown to be such a renowned institution of national learning is, in a large measure, due to the sustained and dedicated hard work that Mr. Parthasarathi did in the most formative period of its evolution.

His great role in persuading another great personality of our time, Sheikh Abdullah, to accept the logic of Kashmir being an integral part of India is unforgettable. When the history of that period is written, I think Mr. Parthasarathi's role in bringing out that reconciliation will be admirably recorded. Take another example of his interaction with Mr. Laldenga whose trust and confidence he won through his well known tact and patience. This was yet another unique trait of the personality of Mr. Parthasarathi. He inspired trust and confidence. One could confide in him and one could be sure that confidence would never be betrayed.

Now coming to RIS, I must underline that I worked very closely with GP in the RIS. I had been a member of its Governing Body and, of course, its Vice Chairman and Chairman respectively afterwards. I used to admire the way GP used to guide the deliberations of the Governing Body, gently but firmly and enable a common approach out of a diversity of views as to what RIS should be doing in a fast changing world. He

allowed everyone to speak and, at the end of it, he did produce a meaningful consensus. He knew that forcing solutions would be counter-productive. He used to be firm in the belief that we had to evolve a consensus, but not at the cost of sacrificing the basic values and goals and objectives for which our nation stood.

Another hallmark of his personality was that his accessibility. He was least conscious of status. He never compromised on his deep and abiding commitment to social equality. These values and convictions continue to guide succeeding generations. Although GP was a rather reticent person, and did not speak much about his own contributions to shaping events, all those who had come in contact with him would feel what a difference G.P.'s presence made to our understanding of a situation and to finding a practical solution to seemingly intractable problems. The best tribute that we can pay to his memory is to remain steadfast to the goals, ideas and ideals for which he struggled and which he pursued with utter sincerity throughout his life time.

Before concluding, I must add that the vision of GP that RIS should work as a leading and effective global think tank of developing countries for promoting greater South-South economic development cooperation, must always remain the guiding principle for the work of RIS. I wish RIS every success in its endeavours for giving voice to the concerns and aspirations of the developing world. The world needs an alternative narrative which reflects the need to create a more equitable and just political and economic order.

Let's now join together to pay our homage to the memory of a great son of India, a great statesman, a patriot, a great scholar and a great multifaceted personality by dedicating this modern and well-appointed

conference facility to the memory of Shri G. Parthasarathi. I now have great pleasure in naming this conference hall the "G. Parthasarathi Conference Hall."

Thank you.