

PSM's Speaking Note, April 30, 2024

Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

At the outset, let me express my gratitude to Shri Khanna and Shri Misra for gracing the 40th Anniversary celebrations of our organisation.

Over the year, we are organising programmes like this in different parts of the world where CUTS has its footprint, starting with a fireside chat with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, DG, WTO on Challenges and Opportunities for the WTO in April last year.

This is the 12th of this series. They have helped us in fostering a dialogue between our past and the present, while addressing the future.

Today, I am filled with a sense of 'togetherness and fulfilment'. There are several reasons for them.

While I see many friends and well-wishers in the audience and all of them have helped us in our journey, some of you may not have much idea about how arduous it was.

In that respect, there are a few to whom we will remain ever-indebted. Shri Khanna and Shri Misra are two of them.

I remember the support that we received from Shri Khanna in mid 1990s when he was Commerce Secretary of India.

More than the monetary support to do a first-of-its-kind study on the relationship between trade and investment, which put us on a firm footing nationally and internationally, it was the faith that he showed to a fledging organisation and that mattered a lot.

I still remember the manner in which he got all officers of the Trade Policy Department of the Commerce Ministry onto a same page and I understood the true meaning of ‘inclusiveness’.

Similarly, Shri Misra, when he was Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce and in his subsequent avatars, encouraged us to do more and more work in the areas of trade, competition, investment, economic regulations.

Most importantly and beyond ‘framework and results’, he encouraged us to take the views and concerns of the Indian civil society and that of the Global South to the international level.

In the realpolitik of trade negotiations, he kept on underlining that non-academic is as important as academic.

Trade negotiations are not just about protecting and ensuring producer welfare, consumer welfare is equally important.

Thus, much before the term “the arrival of India at the global stage” gained prominence, it was well-wishers like Shri Khanna and Shri Misra, who encouraged an Indian civil society organisation to go out and make its presence felt among the international comity.

Perhaps, they had seen that Indianness is ingrained in us.

Coming to the topic of today's programme, some may wonder what is its relationship with our core areas of work.

To me, the answer lies in the fact that Shri Ram Lala's temple in Ayodhya is a civilisational moment.

It has given us the confidence that we can resolve even the most contentious issues in a harmonious manner and within the limits of our constitution.

While this confidence was there in our society for centuries, more often than not and also periodically, it was hidden than manifest.

In case of CUTS, even when we were small, there was no dearth of confidence.

Otherwise, it would have been possible to continue a journey amidst risk and uncertainty, and without set mentors.

Drawing from our example and there are millions of such in India over the centuries, Shri Ram Lala's temple will give us, the people of India individually and collectively, more confidence in addressing even more challenging issues in every sphere of our life and come out with amicable solutions.

Not only that will provide a balanced pathway towards Viksit Bharat but also and more importantly, it will firmly place India as part of solutions of global problems.

Other than upfronting the value of ‘social harmony’ and underlining the importance of ‘national resurgence’, Shri Ram Lala’s temple in Ayodhya has recognised the ‘Swa’ (selfhood) of our society, which has iterated our commitment to societal obligations.

Therefore, let me underline that this is the value that CUTS has pursued over four decades and will continue to do so.

While working on national, regional and global issues of our interest, we have not forgotten our societal obligations for ensuring fraternity, duty consciousness, value-based life and social justice.

In short, we have followed inclusiveness and will continue to do so.

To conclude, Shri Ram Lala’s temple has reminded us intrinsic linkages between the virtues of life and society, and they will guide us and many others like us in future.

I thank you and request Shri Khanna to take over the proceedings.