

Something Happening in India that this Nation Should be Proud of

Vasant Gowariker**

Several years ago, I was asked if I could give the Kale Memorial Lecture at this famous Gokhale Institute. I couldn't make it. Little did I realise then that the destiny will have it that years later I would be called upon to stand-by for one of the most eminent jurists of our times, Mr. Nani Palkhiwala. Those of you who have heard Mr. Palkhiwala speak would know that had he been here today he would have shared with you, in his most inimitable style that few could match, his vision of the 21st century India. While I am his substitute here today, I realise that I am no substitute. And the more I think about my appropriateness the less I think about my appropriateness. The least I can do under the circumstances is to deal with a subject that is very close to Mr. Nani Palkhiwala's heart. That subject is India's population.

Before I speak on the subject, let me express my gratitude to Professor Wadhwa for the honour he has done to me in inviting me to give this Memorial Lecture. When Rao Bahadur Kale donated Rs. 1.3 lakhs in those days, he was leaving behind a legend for posterity in the form of this unique Gokhale Institute, and a mechanism for mustering a chain of thoughts of some of the most eminent personalities of our times. The Kale Memorial Lecture series, going on almost uninterruptedly for the last 60 years, has attracted speakers from almost every walk of Indian public life, and I confess that I feel diffidence at the prospect of being counted one amongst them. In addition, I am aware that the Kale Memorial Lecture series is a very formal and serious affair. For the last 60 years, the practice has mostly been that the speaker reads off from his printed text and this practice was followed even by the people of eminence of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Dr. John Mathai, Dr. Chintamrao Deshmukh, Dr. Dhananjayrao Gadgil, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Dr. V. K. Rien, and last year the then Chief Justice of India, his lordship Shri A. M. Ahmadi. On this background, I beg your tolerance for my audacity for having to stand on my hind legs and not following the glorious tradition of reading from a printed text. I am sure you will kindly forgive me as I was given this task only six days ago and I couldn't get round to preparing my speech in a printed form. But I assure Dr. Wadhwa – and all of you ladies and gentlemen – that I will soon make a printed copy of my speech available if someone wants to refer to it.

While speaking about Indian population, one symbolic reference to the technological whirlwind sweeping across the country might be necessary. Professor Wadhwa just made a reference to the year 1992 when the Institute conducted a major survey involving 4000 eligible women. Around the year mentioned by Professor Wadhwa, one optic fiber could transmit 1000 messages simultaneously. Today, the same fiber can transmit one million messages simultaneously. That was something unthinkable a decade ago. Because, this exponential rise in the carrying capacity of a fiber optic means all the 23 volumes of Encyclopedia Britanica can be transmitted from

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