

# **‘The Message from Shri Ram Lala Temple in Ayodhya’**

By Shri Nripendra Misra, Chairman, Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra

On the occasion of CUTS 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, New Delhi,  
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## **Welcome Speech by Pradeep S. Mehta, SG, CUTS International**

Jai Siyaram!

At the outset, let me express my gratitude to Sarvashri Khanna and Misra and to the distinguished audience for gracing the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of our organisation.

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

*“For a civil society organisation from a developing country to be able to last this long is something to be really proud of. I want to congratulate you personally and CUTS for the substantive work that you do”,* Dr Okonjo-Iweala said in the fireside chat.

Our second event was held in New Delhi with Shri Amitabh Kant, Sherpa G20 India and Shri Harsha Vardhan Shringla, Chief Coordinator, G20 India Secretariat in June, 2023. Their thrust was on climate change and how the developing world could cope with it. This was held before the G20 India Summit in September, 2023, when Shri Kant and his team succeeded in producing a unanimous declaration in spite of all hurdles. It was a milestone event for India and the World.

In between, we had many events which included three in Australia, one in USA, one in Japan and the last one in Chennai with Dr C. Rangarajan. He spoke brilliantly on the growth prospects of India in a very positive manner.

This is the 12<sup>th</sup> of this series. These events have helped us in fostering a dialogue between our past and the present, while addressing the future. Thus helping us with our work agenda for 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. Sarvashri Khanna and 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 proposed OECD’s multilateral investment agreement. It put us on a firm footing nationally and internationally,

and the faith that he showed to a fledging organisation and which mattered a lot. He also put me in his Think Tank, following which I served on several national advisory committees on International Trade Policy chaired by the Commerce & Industry Minister.

That said, I still remember the manner in which Shri Khanna got all officers of the Trade Policy Division of the Commerce Ministry onto the same page and we 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. He also recognised the value of our research which helped the Government of India to frame its own trade policies.

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.

Our pitch for consumer welfare is something which put us squarely on the centre stage of international trade policy, which was otherwise focused on producer interests. Said the venerable trade economist, Jagdish Bhagwati, *“In a country like India where there is an excessive abundance of intellectuals who seem to think that virtue materialises just because you wish it so, and who therefore do harm rather than good, Pradeep has been one of the rare voices for advocating policies that achieve virtuous outcomes. CUTS is by far the most impressive non-governmental organisation today”*.

Fortunately, I have the rare honour of having been NGO adviser to three WTO Director Generals: Supachai Panitchpakdi, Pascal Lamy and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. Perhaps, the only Indian to have been thus recognised.

Thus, much before the term “the arrival of India at the global stage” gained prominence, it was well-wishers like Sarvashri Khanna and 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 event, some may wonder what is its relationship with our core areas of work.

To me, the answer lies in the fact that Shri Ram Lalla’s temple in Ayodhya is a civilisational milestone, a leap of faith for many of us.

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 rather 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 or patrons. My blessings came from Gita, my mother. *“Karmanya vadikaraste, maan faleshu kadachana”*.

Drawing from our example and there are millions of such in India over the centuries, Shri Ram Lalla’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 an intrinsic part of solutions of global problems. India is growing and unlike many wrong impressions, many new entrepreneurs too are entering the business community, thanks to the push of doing business easily, though more needs to be done. There maybe few areas of concentration and surely these will be addressed as we move forward.

Other than upfronting the value of ‘social harmony’ and underlining the importance of ‘national resurgence’, Shri Ram Lalla’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. In future, we pray and hope that the regimes ruling our great country, India, imbibe the values of Maryada Purshottam Raam.

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 Lalla’s temple has reminded us of 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 Misra to deliver his valued keynote, after which Shri Khanna is requested to take over the proceedings.

Jai Hind!