



**UNVEILING OF THE BRONZE BUST OF
SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI**

**INDIRA GANDHI CENTRE FOR INDIAN CULTURE
PHOENIX**

TUESDAY 26 APRIL 2011

17 30 HRS

SPEECH

BY

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP
PRIME MINISTER**

**Your Excellency, Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil, President of the Republic of India,
Distinguished Guests,**

It is with a feeling of great pride and emotion that I am here, this afternoon, for the unveiling ceremony of the bust of Shrimati Indira Gandhi. I have fond memories of inaugurating this centre, together with Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in 2000.

It is fitting that we should be unveiling this magnificent statue of Shrimati Indira Gandhi here at this Centre for Indian Culture which bears her name, for Shrimati Indira Gandhi was a great believer in the dissemination of Indian art and culture.

Shrimati Indira Gandhi did us the singular honour of making the first State Visit to Independent Mauritius in 1970 when she laid the foundation stone of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, which owes its existence thanks to her generosity.

During her speech she reminded us how Dharma and culture are intertwined. I quote:

“When we speak of the culture of the people we refer, not merely to their collective experiences, but to the system of values which they mould out of these experiences. The quest of Dharma has been the key-note of Indian Culture. Thousands of years ago, at the very dawn of history, our seers proclaimed that the duty of man was to seek the light and to fight against darkness, to seek the truth and to fight against untruth. Thus Dharma connotes, not only the spiritual quest for truth in its widest sense but, incessant social action. The two aspects have been fused in every great Indian. On the spiritual plane, we have never thought that truth is anyone’s monopoly, or that reality is capable of any single particular interpretation. It has

been said in our most ancient books that truth is one, but the wise describe it in many ways”.

Unquote.

In response, the Father of the Nation emphasized the role that the Mahatma Gandhi Institute will play in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the people of Mauritius.

Shrimati Indira Gandhi had a special love for Mauritius.

She affectionately referred to Mauritius as “Chota Bharat”.

And she occupies a place of choice in the hearts of Mauritians.

It is still very vivid in our memory how some 150,000 persons, close to one fifth of our population at that time, gathered at the Champ de Mars, on 4th June 1970, to give a triumphant welcome to Shrimati Indira Gandhi and her sons, Rajiv and Sanjay. This first visit was an important landmark in the relations between Mauritius and India; and it inspired us to pursue with renewed vigour the ideals and values, which we share and that nourished us from the very beginning.

Shrimati Indira Gandhi made it a point to be amongst us again in October 1976 for the inauguration of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

The friendship between the Gandhi family and my family goes a long way. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam first met Jawaharlal Nehru when, as a student in London he became the President of the London Branch of the Indian National Congress.

I have personally met Shrimati Indira Gandhi when she came to Mauritius together with her family.

The bonds of friendship with this illustrious family have grown from strength to strength since then. My wife and I consider Shrimati Sonia Gandhi as a personal friend.

A woman of substance in her own rights, Shrimati Indira Gandhi was the First woman Prime Minister of India who, at a crucial phase of India's development managed by sheer dedication and vision, to carve a highly respectable place for her country on the international scene. Her accomplishments are telling:

- She was amongst the First woman elected to lead a democracy.
- She remains the world's longest serving lady Prime Minister. She was elected for three consecutive terms, from 1966 to 1977, and for a fourth term, from 1980 until her assassination in 1984.
- And Shrimati Indira Gandhi remains India's only lady Prime Minister.

It would take hours to enumerate all her achievements. But what strikes us is the significant increase in the literacy rate, the increase in food production - the agricultural reform programmes she carried out which transformed India from a net importer of food to a food exporter, and the legendary '*Gaaribi Hatao*' campaign. She promoted science and technology and gave the go ahead for the launch of India's first satellite in space.

Shrimati Indira Gandhi played a prominent role in international affairs and invested a lot of efforts to improve relations with her neighbours. Perhaps what is of greater significance was her relentless fight for an international order where more justice and equity could prevail.

And at this point I wish to quote Shrimati Indira Gandhi herself. She said: *'There are two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit'*.

And she added: *"Try to be in the first group because there is less competition there"*.

Her words speak volumes about the imperfections of human nature and are as relevant today as they were then.

Shrimati Indira Gandhi is a symbol of pride for India and its people, especially the women. She contributed to position India's security interests on the world scene. Her leadership, political skills and perseverance will always be remembered, not only by the people in India, but also around the world, particularly other developing countries where she continues to be a source of inspiration.

It is no coincidence that this unveiling ceremony is being so graciously honoured by Her Excellency Shrimati Pratibha Patil, the First woman to ever occupy the highest post in India and who is on her first state visit to Mauritius.

As I said in my Address in Parliament this morning, your extraordinary personal journey, Excellency, is a living example of the triumph of patience, determination and dedication over adversity.

We are honoured that the first country you have chosen to visit in Africa is Mauritius. As you pointed out this morning in your inspiring Address in Parliament, I quote:

“Our bilateral relations are rooted in mutual respect and mutual benefit. Our ties are extensive in scope and comprehensive in content. India will continue to remain a valued and trusted partner of Mauritius, in its multifaceted comprehensive development”.

Unquote.

I am confident, Excellency, that, under your enlightened leadership, the strong bonds of affinity will be further strengthened between India and Mauritius in the years ahead.

On behalf of the people of Mauritius, I thank the Government and people of India, as well as, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, for this statue. The sculptor, Shri Ram Sutar, ought to be congratulated for this beautiful piece of art.

I am sure that our *“great little country”* as Shrimati Indira Gandhi used to describe us, will continue to be inspired by this great lady and by all those who, like you, Excellency, constitute India’s pantheon.

Thank you for your attention.
