

INDIA-SOUTH AFRICA TIES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Address by Abhishek Shukla, Consul General of India in Cape Town at South African Institute of International Affairs, Western Cape Branch – May 27, 2019

Ms. Sheila Camerer, Chair, South African Institute of International Affairs, Western Cape Branch

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the South African Institute of International Affairs for according me this platform to dwell upon this topic, which is of immense relevance not just for the two countries but also the regions at large. A good turnout I see today evening is a testimony to this fact.

When Sheila and I were discussing possible topics for the talk, we browsed through several options but none could do justice with the expanse of the relationship, both in time and space as good as this one. And why should that be?

The example of ties between India and South Africa is perhaps one of only a very few examples in history as well as contemporary times where two countries have been so irrevocably intertwined. The two cousins are joined at hips, if that usage were to ably demonstrate the shared history and common aspirations of the two peoples.

One might say what is so common or shared between the two countries. The fact that India and Africa were part of the supercontinent called Gondwana some 140 million years ago won't count. India with its 1.3 billion people would appear far removed from the 58 million South Africans. There were 900 million registered voters in the Indian general elections conducted recently; the numbers for South Africa were 26.75 million. India has 22 official languages, South Africa 11. Both the countries are also separated by geography and at present in different points in their economic growth curve.

But I would say commonalities between the two countries, in history, in people, in economy, culture as well as challenges are far greater than the attributes that distinguish them apart.

Let's go back more than one and a half century. It was 16th November, 1860 when the first ship called Truro, having set sailed from Madras a few weeks earlier, arrived at the port of Durban, carrying more than 342 Indians. This was the first time Indians were shipped outside to work in sugar plantations by the colonial powers. This trend quickly picked on; by 1876, there were an estimated 10,626 Indians in Natal. By 1891, Indians in Natal numbered 35,763, almost as numerous as Europeans - 46,788. By 1914, more than 150,000 Indians had been shipped to South Africa to work in sugar plantations.

While the first wave of "indentured" labours primarily hailed from the present-day Indian provinces of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and settled in and around Durban, the later day Indian immigrants were qualitatively different. They were essentially entrepreneurs who hailed from Gujarat, Maharashtra, a few from Rajasthan and came to South Africa to seek greater fortunes. This wave found home, besides Natal, in Transvaal as well as in Cape areas.

I must regale you with the story of a common cuisine which tells a great deal about the historical connect between the two nations. That of 'Bunny Chow', one of the most popular culinary delights in South Africa.

<Story>

Another remarkable date in the chronicle of Indians in South Africa is 24th May, 1893 when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi arrived in South Africa. From 1893-1914, when he finally left the shores of South Africa, he was a changed man. Mahatma Gandhi had arrived in Durban at the invitation of a fellow Gujarati, a merchant by the name of Dada Abdulla who, interestingly, was suing his cousin for certain defaults on payments. The case was won and Gandhi Ji prepared to return India in June 1894 before he was persuaded to stay on and fight against the proposed legislation in Natal Assembly that would prohibit Indians from enrolling as voters. He ended up staying till 1914.

Mahatma Gandhi's travails in South Africa in a way qualitatively defined the issues confronting Indians in the then South Africa and subsequently formed the bedrock of the engagements between the two countries.

Since we are chronicling important dates in our shared history, 7th June, 1893 must also be mentioned. Gandhiji was on his way to Pretoria and boarded the first-class compartment of the train. He was asked to join his brethren in a third-class coach and when refused, was promptly thrown off onto the platform in Pietermaritzburg railway station. Not just that, when the lawyer resumed his journey next evening and reached Charlestown, the white coachman of the stagecoach to Johannesburg refused to let him sit inside; he encountered difficulty in finding a hotel in Johannesburg, again on account of the colour of his skin and was almost thrown off from the first-class compartment in the train from Johannesburg to Pretoria, but for the intervention of a fellow white passenger.

That night, and the subsequent events, changed the man; the ruminations over that cold night and experiences of compatriots in South Africa sowed the seeds of Satyagraha- literally meaning 'quest for truth,' a unique form of passive resistance against the discriminatory and exploitative colonial regimes, in not just India and South Africa but scores of countries around the world.

Though he left South Africa in October 1901 with family apparently for good, fate had other plans for him. He was requested by the Natal Indian Congress to return to South Africa to secure the rights of Indians in the flux after the Boer War. Gandhi Ji found himself back in South Africa in December, 1902, once again spearheading the quest for political rights and social equality.

Gandhiji's profile during his years in South Africa was a very active one and, in a way, served as a template for his later day leadership of India's own struggle for independence. Many of the tactics as well as strategies he deployed in South Africa, the model of popular involvement, his own personal experiments and habits, owe their genesis to his exposure to the prevalent conditions and interaction with friends in South Africa.

It was here that Gandhi in 1903 started 'Indian Opinion', a multi-lingual (Hindi, English, Gujarati and Tamil) newspaper focusing on Indian issues in South Africa and positioning itself as the voice of the Indian community. This served as a model for newspapers like 'Navajivan', 'Young India' and 'Harijan' later published by Gandhi in India.

It was here that Gandhi started unique experiments in Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. Phoenix Settlement near Durban started first as home to the printing press publishing 'Indian Opinion' and later evolved as a unique model of simple and austere living community where inhabitants built their own houses and farmed and cooked their own food. Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg sought to become the home of 'passive resisters,' and was modelled on similar lines as the Phoenix Settlement.

These two experiments were precursors to Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and Sevagram (literally meaning village of service) in Wardha, Maharashtra in India.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi was sent to prison, not once but many a times, on a few occasions with hard labour, for demanding equal and non-discriminatory treatment and access to opportunities.

It is often said, and rightfully so, that South Africa was the karm-bhoomi (land of action) of Mahatma Gandhi. Madiba himself said, speaking of Gandhi: "India's soul truly does lie in South Africa."

In his famed autobiography- Long Walk to Freedom, Mandela mentions several instances where approach to his political work was influenced by the Gandhian model. Pixley Seme had visited Tolstoy Farm in 1911 and was given a tour of the Farm by Gandhi himself where they also discussed the latter's passive resistance movement. In Jan 1912, as a result of Pixley Seme's efforts, around 60 Africans met in Bloemfontain and formed a body called South African Native National Congress (later renamed as African National Congress) with Rev. John Dube as its first President. Gandhi hailed the birth of ANC as the "awakening of Africa."

Gandhi deeply admired John Dube; Dube, on his part, endorsed Gandhi's defiance of orders to leave the colony in Jan, 1908 and

his passive resistance movement as a result of which he was arrested. Writing anonymously in his newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal*, Dube praised 'the courageous manner in which the Indians are acting in Transvaal.' Dube's own Inanda settlement lay in close proximity to Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement.

In 1946, the Jan Christian Smuts Government passed the Asiatic Land Tenure Act which curtailed free movement of Indians, circumscribed the areas where Indians could live and work and severely restricted their rights to buy property. This law, known as 'Ghetto Act' was a precursor to the hated 'Group Areas Act' which would eventually circumscribe freedom of all South Africans of colour.

The Indian community was outraged and launched a concerted two-years campaign of passive resistance against the Act. The Indian community, led by Dr. Dadoo, President of Transval Indian Congress and Dr. G. M. Naicker, President of the Natal Indian Congress launched a mass campaign, which, in words of Madiba, "influenced them (meaning ANC) with its organization and dedication." This campaign was inspired by the 1913 passive resistance campaign in which Mahatma Gandhi led procession of Indians crossing illegally from Natal to Transvaal, defying the strictures of the Government.

This campaign launched by Indian community in South Africa received moral support by ANC Youth League; several African leaders spoke at their meetings, including Dr. Xuma, the President of ANC. Madiba saw his close friends- Ismail Meer, J. N. Singh, Ahmed Kathrada, Amina Pahad suddenly leave their homes, family and work behind and go to prison. The Indian campaign became a model for the type of protests that leaders in Youth League like Mandela were calling for.

In 1947, Dr. Xuma, Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker, presidents respectively of ANC, Transvaal Indian Congress and Natal Indian Congress signed the 'Doctors' Pact' agreeing to join forces against the common enemy- the repressive regime. This was a significant step in achieving the unity of African and Indian movements.

So inspired were the Youth League leaders with Mahatma Gandhi's passive resistance programme that they forced change in the top

leadership of ANC, along with its line of campaign. In December, 1949, Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo got the then President-General of ANC, Dr. Xuma changed as the former wanted a more active adoption of the 'passive resistance programme' by ANC, which the latter refused. This also led to the ascension of Youth League members to the senior organization in ANC.

While the Indian campaign of passive resistance in some ways inspired Madiba and ANC, Indians also actively participated in South Africa's own struggle against Apartheid. In 1940s while studying law at Wits, Mandela made friends with stalwarts like J. N. Singh, Ismail Meer, Ahmed Bhoola and Ramlal Bhoolia. In fact, Madiba used to call Ismail Meer's apartment where everybody congregated as 'headquarters for young freedom fighters.'

In the famous Treason Trial of 1956 leaders like Ahmed Kathrada, Ismail Meer, Chota Motala, Yusuf Dadoo, Kay Munsamy, Billy Nair, MP Naicker and Monty Naicker were detained.

Indres Naidoo, Reggie Vandayar and Sirish Nanabhai were active cadres in Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

Ahmed Kathrada was one of the 10 'Rivonia Trialists.' in the 'Little Rivonia Trial' that followed, Mac Maharaj, Lalloo Chiba, MD Naidoo, M Pather and Salim Essop were also imprisoned. Many Indians supported the struggle from exile- Abdul Minty, MP Naicker, Phyllis Naidoo, Kader Asmal, Essop Pahad and Aziz Pahad.

Prominent Indian Robben Islanders included Ahmed Kathrada, Satyandranath "Mac" Maharaj, Billy Nair, Lalloo Chiba, Danabathy Naidoo, Rajoo Moodley, Indress Naidoo and others.

If you visit the old Parliament building in Cape Town, you will observe a wall mounted picture of a *sari* clad woman among a group of other women. This is the picture from march on 9th August in 1956 to the Union Buildings in Pretoria by more than 20,000 women who protested the extension of the hated 'pass laws' to African women; leaders of the group, as mentioned below the frame were - Sophia Williams, Rahima Moosa, Helen Josephs and Lillian Ngoyi.

This picture grants both a perspective and a powerful image of the association of our two peoples.

In addition to the efforts by Indians in South Africa, India was also at the forefront of the international community in its support of the anti-apartheid movement; it was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid Government (in 1946) and subsequently imposed a complete - diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports - embargo on South Africa. India worked consistently to put the issue of apartheid on the agenda of the UN, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other multilateral organizations, and for the imposition of comprehensive international sanctions against South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) maintained a representative office in New Delhi from the 1960s onwards. India actively worked for the AFRICA Fund to help sustain the struggle through support to the frontline states.

This is a brief summary of the rich past of the two countries. Clearly, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the two peoples were wedded to each other by a common cause.

I would date 'present' of the ties from 1990s onwards. India restored relations with South Africa after a gap of over four decades with the opening of a Cultural Centre in Johannesburg in May 1993. Diplomatic and consular relations with South Africa were restored in November 1993 when the then South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha visited India. A Consulate General was thereafter established in Johannesburg. The Indian High Commission in Pretoria was opened in May 1994, followed by the opening of the Consulate General in Durban the same month, followed by the office in Cape Town in 1996.

South Africa's first Cabinet appointed by Madiba had 6 Indians out of the total of 16 members. In 1999 General Elections, out of 400 MPs in the National Assembly, 41 were Indian origin. The 1999 Cabinet had 4 ministers and 2 deputy ministers who were Indian origin, besides the Speaker of the National Assembly. Frene Noshir Ginwala was the Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa from 1994 to 2004. She was appointed as the first chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in April 2005.

President Nelson Mandela was awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna in 1990 for his role in the anti-apartheid movement. This was just a few months after he was released from Victor Verster Prison.

On the passing away of Dr Nelson Mandela on Dec 5, 2013, the President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee led a multi-party delegation, comprising of members from all major political parties to attend the State funeral.

Since 1993, the relationship is going from strength to strength. There has been a steady consolidation of our close and friendly ties with South Africa, bilaterally and through BRICS, IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa), IOR (Indian Ocean Rim) Association and other fora. In June 2003, the Foreign Ministers of India, Brazil and South Africa met in Brasilia and agreed to set up a Dialogue Forum for regular consultations. Subsequently, in 2006, this dialogue forum was upgraded to Summit level; five Summits have been held so far.

The healthy gamut of bilateral relations now spans from economic and commercial cooperation, defence, culture, health, human settlements, public administration, science and technology to education.

India's Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) has been an important bulwark of promoting cooperation in development of human resources. The ITEC programme has contributed to improving skills and enhancing knowledge of nearly 1,000 South African nationals since 1993-94, in areas such as rural development, agriculture, information and communication technology, poverty alleviation, mass communication, journalism, entrepreneurship and other multi-skill development training aimed at increasing competitiveness in the job market.

There have been regular defence cooperation and exercises. Enhancing engagements under the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) framework, two Indian Naval Ships Kolkata and Tarkash visited Simons Town from 1-13 October 2018 for joint exercise with the Brazilian and South African navies and deepen the bonds of cooperation and friendship in the field of naval cooperation.

On the business side, trade between India and South Africa is growing at a steady pace. It crossed US\$ 10 billion mark in 2017-18 and the only way to go henceforth is up. Two major business initiatives in 2018 have been instrumental in adding further steam to this- India-South Africa Business Summit held in and Invest in India Business Forum. India's investments into South Africa are growing constantly. It currently stands at US\$ 10 billion and has been instrumental in generating more than 20,000 jobs locally.

Synergies exist for collaboration between the two countries in sectors like food & agro-processing, deep mining, defence, fin-tech, insurance and infrastructure. India could also partner with South Africa in start-ups, health care & pharma, gems and jewellery, bio-tech, IT and IT enabled sectors.

All major Indian MNCs including TATA, Mahindra, Vedanta, Jindal Steel, Sun Pharma, TCS, WIPRO, HCL, Zensar, TechMahindra, etc. operating in South Africa. TATA Group is believed to have invested more than US\$ 1 billion in South African market. In February, Vedanta inaugurated Gamsberg zinc mine in Northern Cape. Through its mining operations, Vedanta Group is expected to cumulatively invest around US\$ 1.4 billion in South Africa. Virtually all big names in Indian pharma sector- CIPLA, Sun, Zydus, Dr. Reddy's, Himalayas, etc, have robust presence in South Africa.

Likewise, Indian operations of South African giants like Sasol, Sanlam, Old Mutual, ACSA, Bidvest, Life Healthcare, Momentum, SAB Miller, Discovery, etc. are going from strength to strength. Naspers has a roaring presence in core e-commerce segments in India - online classifieds (OLX), online payments (PayU), leading online travel company (MakeMyTrip), Educational technology firm (BYJU's – Think and Learn Private Ltd.) and online food delivery (Swiggy). While it owns and operates both OLX and PayU, it has emerged as the largest investor in Swiggy (leading its last two rounds of investments with a total investment of US\$ 660 million) and in BYJU's (with a US\$ 540 million investment) – both in December 2018. It also had investments in online retailer Flipkart. NASPERS made US\$ 1.6 billion profit from sale of its 11% stake in Flipkart. First Rand Bank is into Corporate Investment Banking in India.

Our economy is currently at US\$ 2.6 trillion. We are the fastest growing major economy in the world and are on our way to becoming the fifth largest economy globally. India has jumped to the 77th position in the latest edition of World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report – improving 65 places in last four years. We are one of the top FDI destinations listed by UNCTAD.

India is keen to share the fruits of its economic growth with all nations. South Africa is special.

With the help of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an intensive programme of cultural exchanges is organised throughout South Africa including scholarships for South African nationals.

The South African Indian origin community numbers more than 1.5 million and constitutes about 3% of South Africa's total population. About 80% of the Indian community lives in the province of KwaZulu Natal, about 15% in the Gauteng area and the remaining 5% in Cape Town. South Africans of Indian origin are well-represented in Government, business, media, legal and other professions.

The year 2010 marked the 150th anniversary of the first arrival of Indians in South Africa. 2014 marked 100 years of Gandhiji's final departure to India from South Africa; he reached India on 9th Jan 1915; this date is now commemorated annually as Pravasi Bhartiya Divas.

The year 2017 marked 20 years of the signing of the Red Fort Declaration for Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa. The Declaration was signed in March 1997 by the Prime Minister of India Deva Gowda and President of South Africa Nelson Mandela in New Delhi.

The year 2018 marked 25 years since the resumption of diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1993. 2018 also marked the 125th year of the Pietermaritzburg railway station 'incident' involving Mahatma Gandhi. And this year, as we celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, it's time to renew our ties to another level.

There has been a robust interaction between our top leadership in past several years and that provides regular fillip to the ties. The Prime Minister of India paid a bilateral visit to South Africa in 2016. The leadership meets regularly on the side lines of multilateral summits like BRICS, CHOGM, etc. Earlier this year, President Ramaphosa paid a State Visit to India. He was also the Chief Guest of our Republic Day celebrations. President Ramaphosa was the second South African President, the first one being Nelson Mandela to have honoured India with their presence as Republic Day Chief Guest.

This was a special occasion since this came on the year of Gandhi@150 and Mandela@100.

A shared past offers us an opportunity to build upon the gains and momentum and carry forward the initiatives of the present. Going forward, India- South Africa ties have to focus on a variety of issues:

- Connectivity is a major challenge in fostering a closer business and people-to-people relationship. No direct flight exists at present between the two countries. This not only obstructs easy flow of people, ideas and goods but also restricts the engagements to a sub-optimal level.
- The trading volume between the two countries are also far below potential. While opportunities exist for to and fro flow of goods and services, regulatory issues and less than robust levels of buyer-seller interactions keep trading volumes below par.
- India offers massive potential to South African companies across sectors like IT and ITES, pharma, auto, mining, infra, etc. Likewise, South African companies are known for their expertise in sectors like retail, banking and insurance, aviation, etc. There is a natural connect between us.
- Our business professionals and tourists would also not mind a more liberal and predictable South African visa regime. Of late, this has been one of the bigger concerns in fostering better flow of people to South Africa.
- There is one area where South Africa has a great deal to contribute to India and also benefit from the huge Indian market, i.e. agriculture and agro-processing. South Africa, particularly Western Cape is known for brilliant use of

technology in agri-sector and for being resource-wise. The Indian agriculture sector is low on value-addition and agri-processing at present and it has been the consistent focus of India over past several years to enhance it's proportion in agriculture.

Both the countries had recently had elections to the national Parliament. South Africans reposed their faith on the 'New Dawn' of President Cyril Ramaphosa; many say it is another 'Madiba Moment.' India gave a thumping majority to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has in the past five years led India to new horizons.

As our Prime Minister mentioned in his address at India-South Africa Business Forum during President Cyril Ramaphosa's State Visit to India in January this year, our partnership is about a shared and prosperous future, which realizes the dreams of Madiba and Mahatma for our people.

I conclude on this note.

Thank you for your attention.