

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MANJEEV SINGH PURI, ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIA TO THE UN, AT A PANEL DISCUSSION ON "*UNLEARNING INTOLERANCE : JAZZ AS A FORCE FOR EDUCATION AND DIALOGUE*", DURING THE EVENT TO OBSERVE THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY ON APRIL 30, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Thank you very much for inviting me and for giving my delegation the great honor and opportunity to sponsor today's event. Mr. Chairman, when I walked in here, I was told by my colleague from the US delegation Ambassador Dicarlo, that she was told "*Madam please improvise*". So here goes the sheet of paper that my colleague, Prakash Gupta, prepared for me.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to make another observation. There must be something very good that your Committee is doing, that today, we have many more people who are attending after passing through the visitor's entrance rather than those of us who sport these blue colored passes. I am very delighted to be able to welcome so many of you - the wonderful people who make New York and other parts of US, their home.

My colleague sitting here, the Acting Head of the Department of Public Information said to me - "*India and Jazz ? I did not realize you had anything to do with it*" and I told him " Friend, I know we are exactly on the other side of the globe, if you look at it with the United States in the center. But you know we are the country, which is not only the great mega diverse country in terms of bio diversity but also perhaps the most mega diverse country, in terms of culture, in terms of ethnicity, and above all, in terms of welcoming everything from all around the world. And I dare say, we not only welcome all of these and give it a home, but give it a loving home. In my understanding, Jazz is one of those wonderful things.

It traversed, the seas, the Atlantic ocean and some parts of the Indian ocean, the land route which connects Europe and India, and somehow landed up in the sub continent, more so in particular the city of Calcutta, which was then the reigning city of the British colonial empire, which we were a part in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It found a beautiful home and a home which then later on spread to Mumbai, and has found permanent home and a permanent place in India since then. In terms of perhaps one of the biggest things that we do, which is produce films in Bollywood, the underline theme of the great song and dance sequences that you see, have this wonderful connotation and wonderful relationship of having a base in jazz music, as a result of the inter play which happened in the late 1920s and early 1930s. An inter - play which was greatly facilitated by the presence of wonderful people from the United States, who served in India during the end the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, and later on as a cultural Ambassadors of United States.

You know for Jazz we often use the word : improvise. A jazz musician doesn't necessary have to read, though he or she has to be trained and needs to know what they are doing. They obviously have a certain parameter in which they perform but they have this ability to transcend, to go beyond that. Indian classical music, in a

very interesting sense, does exactly that. It is one of the oldest forms of music in the world, obviously rigid in its own way, but allowing for a great deal of improvisation. So the connections with jazz, is not only the connection of the mind, that improvisation - has been integral to us, and the way we take things dutifully forward. Also when the discovery of Indian music, especially Indian classical music took place here in the west, in the United States in particular, it was jazz musicians who came forward and who adopted and introduced some of the leading lights of Indian classical music and made them available to the wider audience of the world, in particular the United States.

Today we are marking in the United Nations for the first time the International Day of Jazz. This is a great occasion something absolutely wonderful and I am very delighted to see the Chief Archivist, Mr. Morgenstern, representing the history of Jazz. It is very good to welcome you here sir and also welcome of course, to so many of you who are involved in the world of jazz in various ways.

The Government of United States along with a leading foundation are presenting a fantastic and a very large scale concert to honor Jazz today in the evening. It also features two maestros from India. I heard about it several weeks back when the Government of US circulated a note for all members here. And I must say, again, it is something typical of my country, I guess, it is spirituality and the matters of the heart that some of these things come together.

Around the same time, I happened to meet a wonderful person Mr. Susheel Kurien, who hails from India. I met Susheel at a dinner and Susheel and I started speaking about Bombay, Mumbai- the city where he grew up and where I studied, and we spoke about the changes that we notice in Mumbai. Mumbai is a city which quintessentially grew up to become one of the largest cities in the world, one of the major financial heavyweights in the world, center of business industry- equivalent of the Wall Street in our country and quite a large one, if I may say- all of this happened during India's growth during the period when we were part of British Empire.

I asked him how he sees Mumbai having changed in the last 40-50 years, mentioning that the ones I notice, are the changes that have been captured in the Indian Film Industry. Indian films from the time that they started getting made, which was only a few years after films were launched in the entire world, invariably featured in their music sequences a saxophone player. They also invariably featured a piano. But as I see things having evolved over many years perhaps decades, their music remains very vibrant, it remains very lively, and at the heart and soul of the films. But I notice that the saxophone has tended to be missing. I see also the piano has gone missing, the notes are great, the musicians are being heralded all over the world and they have been winning Oscars and so on and so forth. I believe that in a large way Jazz has contributed to the an India, which also makes for theme of today's panel which is "Unlearning Intolerance: Jazz as a force of education and dialogue", because I think that jazz gave us a unique experience and insight into globalization, into maybe the ethos in the ways of thinking of the people here in the west, but

allowed us in India, to imbibe the spirit of cosmopolitanism. We have grown tremendously. The economy has grown. The urban areas have grown. But maybe we have become much more metropolitan. I don't know if I can really draw the distinctions between cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan behavior and metropolitan behavior but in my own mind, it's the way in which I think about so much of the change in urban India.

But coming to my own story about Susheel, so at the same time when I met Susheel, I spoke to him about Mumbai and then he said, " Hey, you know something, I have just made a film" and I said " Wow, I thought you were one of the achievers of the corporate world, the good Indians who migrated to New York , United States have done well for themselves, Wall Street, the big consultancy firms etc, " he said " *yes, yes, I was doing all of that, but I chucked it up a few years back now I play music in a lovely place and I made this film*". I said what was the film, and he said he made a film on the history of Jazz in India!

Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, that there could not have been a more beautiful coincidence than the one I am relating to you. And I really must thank my friends from the Committee on Information, Ramu Damodaran, an old friend of mine, and the Mission of the United States for having agreed to join us and help us in this- for us to be able to bring this to you, to the other side of the world. The entire business of Jazz, as a global medium is being celebrated today and I am extremely happy and delighted and indeed immensely pleased to be able to say "look the exact other side of the world has also provided a home, indeed, a loving home for jazz".

We are very happy and proud, and very happy that Susheel, you've done something which would allow everybody to know that jazz , not only spread from various parts of the United States to the other parts of the United States but has actually been a global idiom, and has gone global, and I am very delighted that my country India could have been a part of it. I want to thank you all very much, especially Ambassador Rosemary Dicarlo and her delegation, DPI, the Committee on Information, and above all, you, Ladies and Gentlemen who have joined us here today.

I am sure today will not only be a wonderful experience for all of you but I think that you will take back quite a lot, hell of a lot, if I may say so, from this particular beautiful element which I am very glad we were able to do it, at the United Nations, which quintessentially embodies the spirit of people coming together, the world being one place, and all of us working together on this theme, and indeed as the old Indian saying goes that "*the world is indeed one big family*".

Thank You.

BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS