

Address by Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, at the 12th National Conference of National Trust Organisation and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, December 3, 2007

“I am delighted that the International National Trusts Organisation and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage have joined together to organise this important conference here in New Delhi. We in India are honoured to host this important meeting. Delhi after all is a particularly apt venue for such a conference, given its long and magnificent history and the wealth of its living heritage.

With its 5000 years of history, Delhi, or the many Delhis that make today’s Delhi, represents a fusion of faiths, a fusion of cultures and a fusion of civilizations. Like India itself, Delhi lives in many centuries at the same time. The old and the new co-exist and inter-mingle.

We have been conscious of the need to preserve, protect and promote our cultural heritage, here in India. But we cannot be satisfied with the status quo. We have not always succeeded in doing what we ought to do. Our cultural properties have been exposed to various threats – natural and manmade – over the centuries. Conquerors, explorers, colonizers, vandals and thieves have added their bit to the vagaries of nature and the passage of time.

It is in recognition of this record and the need to protect and preserve what is left, that our Constitution enjoined on us the responsibility to take measures for the preservation and conservation of our heritage. We have over the years built up a legal framework and created institutional arrangements, through the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the provincial Archaeological Departments.

We need to look beyond the government. We need civil society organizations and citizens to actively participate in the protection and preservation of our heritage and monuments. I compliment the Indian National Trusts for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and particularly Shri Mishraji for all the good work they have done so far and wish them greater success and greater sense of fulfillment in their work in years to come.

The main theme of this conference is “Heritage and Development”. There is a very clear and positive correlation between the preservation of heritage and the level of development of a society. We do see that developed countries have been able to generate the resources required for protection and preservation of monuments. However, one must not draw a simplistic correlation between the two.



To assume that all we need to do is more resources to do more for our heritage would be wrong and a simplistic vision. Resources are undoubtedly required. But what is more important is the mindset - a value system and a culture - that respects the past and wishes to learn from it. Unless we respect our inheritance, unless we are prepared to learn from it, we will not invest in its preservation.

In developing countries like ours, a great part of public policy attention is focused on the immediate challenge of survival and development. Public opinion is often focused

Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, and David J. Brown of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, light the diya

on issues of livelihood and security, and there is little attention paid to larger issues of culture and preservation. One must not get trapped into this binary choice between development and conservation of heritage. The two must go together. We need, therefore, strategies and policies that facilitate such a “walking on two legs”.

Conservation should not be seen as an 'elitist' preoccupation. It must make itself meaningful to society in a manner that engenders community participation on large scale. To be effective, conservation efforts need to be coordinated with a comprehensive planning policy through the preparation of 'local area plans' and participation of the resident community.

We need to ensure that conservation efforts have components for local employment generation, education, awareness programmes, improving access to urban facilities and enhanced maintenance of open spaces through public participation. Heritage sites such as the Taj, The Humayun's Tomb or the Qutub Minar, if properly managed and integrated into the city planning and development process have the capacity of improving living conditions of the thousands who inhabit their neighbourhoods.

In the United States, conservation efforts were led by the public and aimed at preserving the character of historic neighbourhoods of a special architectural character, rather than individual buildings. This received huge public participation and success.

I wonder how many of you have visited the new site of the ancient Buddhist University of Nagarjuna, on the island in the Nagarjunasagar Lake in Andhra Pradesh of our country. The original site was in the valley that was submerged by the construction of the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam. However, with support from UNESCO and the Government moved the remains from the original location in the valley to the top of the hill, which is now an island. History, archaeology and culture have all been preserved in a beautiful manner. We feel proud visiting the site today. At the same time, we were able to pursue development by constructing that dam which has contributed enormously to the prosperity of the farmers and people of that region.

Conservationists and protectors of human heritage have time and again faced the wrath of conquerors and fundamentalists of various sorts in various parts of the world. In recent years we see a renewed threat to heritage conservation from fundamentalists, extremists and terrorists. Fundamentalism in attitudes and beliefs often targets mankind's heritage structures and sites, leading to their destruction. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan is only one sad and stark example of such threats to heritage preservation.

Your deliberations should address this issue and discuss the various ways in which heritage awareness can be promoted even in a situation characterized by conflict. I urge you to send a message around the world that no one has the right to destroy what humanity has inherited from the past.

Heritage covers a number of fields – natural heritage, cultural heritage, and living heritage. The preservation of each of these strands of our heritage requires the participation of a wide range of disciplines. We need the active involvement of scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists, city planners and local governments. While adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to conservation, we must respect the approach of each discipline. A conference like this must help evolve such a catholic approach.

This is an important opportunity for all of you to learn from each other. I hope you will do so while enjoying Indian hospitality and the warmth of Delhi's winter. I wish your proceedings all success.”