

International Girit Conference – Speech

- Program Director
- Chairperson of the INJAS Trust Professor Keshav Singhal Singh CBE
- Honorary Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth
- Honorary Minister Kalpana Devi Kanjoo-Shah
- Former First Minister of Wales Professor Mark Drakeford
- Lord Bhikhu Parekh of Hull
- Fellow speakers
- Fellow Indians
- Fellow supporters of the Indian Diaspora
- and all in attendance today

All Protocol observed.

Vanakkam, Namaste, Salam Alaykum and a very warm South African Goodafternoon.

Let me start by thanking INJAS Trust and its fellow organizers for allowing me to participate in this International Girit Conference; it is truly an honour.

In keeping with the nearly 1000-year journey of Indians migration from India to the modern day Global Indian Diaspora; I thought it only fitting to execute my speech in 2 parts; talk to the the Indian Diaspora in South Africa and then my journey as an Indian South African.

The Indian Diaspora in South Africa is home to one of the largest Indian Diaspora's outside of India; a statistic that started from "not so favorable conditions" but that has truly translated into a "super-force" that has illustrated to South Africa and the World the tenacity of Indians to do better.

The Indian Diaspora in South Africa are largely descendants from Indians who arrived in South Africa in the 1800's; transported across the seas eg. the ship Truro from Madras or the ship Belvedere from Calcutta. Arriving in South Africa; our forefathers and mothers role was largely as indentured labourers which over time were directed to work in the sugarcane industry, the mining industry and the railway industry; amongst others. Conversing in the English language, as you can imagine was a challenge at first; with many of them only speaking Tamil, Telegu and Hindi but a challenge that was quickly overcome as a result of their willingness to learn. Religious beliefs at the time was diverse as majority were Hindu with Muslim and Christian minorities however this diversity did not prevent them from jointly executing the tasks. As can be imagined, this importation of Indians into South Africa was an introduction to Colonialism supported by indentured labour practices and that which in the years to come was then followed by Apartheid; all of which "promoted" inequality and segregation towards the Indian Diaspora in South Africa. Fast forward to 1994, the election of Honorable President Nelson Mandela, is when the Indian Diaspora in South Africa as with the other previously disadvantaged race groups were given rights of equality eg. we could then live in areas previously prevented, we could then go to schools previously prevented, we could then go to restaurants previously prevented, etc....

AND TODAY

The Indian Diaspora in South Africa, having walked through all the social and economic challenges presented over centuries, is a significant contributor to South Africa's social and economic landscape. We participate in and also lead industry's; from mining to rail to education to oil and gas to energy to tourism to transportation, etc..... and we are a significant contributor to the South African GDP, the South African skills base and the South African culture. South Africa recognizes our Indian Diaspora for our academic prowess, for our flavorful cuisine, for our beautiful cultural clothing, for our deep and diverse religious faith, for our love and expression of Bollywood and most of all for our hard-working professional and ongoing appetite to grow both socially and commercially, and I stand here proud to say that The Indian Diaspora in South Africa is proud of our heritage and culture

AND hence before I move on to my journey as an Indian South African

- **I say Jai Hind, may India continue to be the global social and economic force that it is,**
- **I want to express thanks to Mahatma Gandhi for enabling Indian rights in South Africa,**
- **I want to say thank you to the many Indian South Africans who contributed to the building of a then Indian University, the University of Durban-Westville**
- **And I want to say thank you to The Indian Diasporas around the world for supporting the Indian Diaspora in South Africa**

Moving on, a 2nd goodafternoon to all. My name is Dr Kinesh Pather;

- a proud Indian South African who was born in and resides in South Africa
- a husband to an Indian South African lady
- a father to an Indian South African daughter and son
- and a grandfather to an Indian South African grandson

In addition to the above 3 generations, of my personal family tree, I am an ex-medical practitioner and currently a business-man who has achieved success through the entrepreneurial approach, amongst others; in the oil and gas sector, the mining sector, the energy and infrastructure sector, the railways sector and the steel sector. These achievements, post tertiary education spans a journey that is approximately over 40 years. Yes, there were many struggles in achieving success but I am proud to stand here and convey to you that my Indian-ism upbringing contributed to me being able to push through the struggles as I was grounded on values of trust, honesty, integrity and supporting growth and development.

As an Indian in South Africa; I grew up in the “era of apartheid” (pre-1994); a very very very tough time as it was an era that intentionally restricted my aspirations and an era which I had to navigate over terrain that was not welcoming to Indians growth, that was racist as a result of the complexion of my skin and that confined my skills and dreams so much so that it at times felt like a “prison”. So was it hard, YES. Did I survive it, YES and this was through the teachings passed down from generations in my family and that was even practiced by the original Indian Diaspora in South Africa of being grateful, working hard, perseverance and treating all with dignity and

respect. BUT yes, I must also add that as a forward-thinking individual who believed in fairness and equality I “raised my hand and voice” working as best as I could with the anti-apartheid movement/s to help fight for equality for all previously disadvantaged South Africans.

Then came the critical time in South Africa’s history, 1994; a milestone which not only ushered in President Nelson Mandela but also “abolished” apartheid and introduced equality for all South Africans. This was the slingshot I needed and whilst I was a proud medical practitioner slowly but surely building a medical practice; the “Indian” in me wanted more growth and more development and hence during the very late 1990’s early 2000’s; with the support of my wife and my family we said let’s GO FOR IT with IT being the entrepreneurial route. Supporting this passion of course was the change in South African policy and frameworks which now allowed Indians in South Africa and other previously disadvantaged groups from entering previously disallowed spaces. We could now be business owners, strive to be national and international sportsmen and women, strive to be government leaders, etc..... and as you can see by my “sleek 20 something physique” I did not choose sport.....I chose business and so my journey as a business person began. My early interests began with the Trade Unions of South Africa and then over time progressed to me being a shareholder in national and international entities; that which continue today. In doing so, I am also proud to say that some of these interests are intentionally with Indian entities from India so as to expand the Indian Diaspora Globally but also recognizing the commercial value and skill. Yes, some areas are tougher than others but overall on behalf of my Indian South African personal and professional family I stand here proud to say that overall our business interests are doing well and we are grateful for our blessings.

Now, rewind to a few years back; whilst pursuing my business trajectory which afforded me an opportunity to not only travel to India and other parts of the world, I had the opportunity to engage with Indians and other nationalities who have an immense amount of skill and determination but are limited when it comes to resources; networks, mentorship, funding, etc.... In addition realized that even those who are successful are yearning for engagement with others. As a result I, together with fellow Indians from South Africa co-founded a non-profit organization to enable a collective voice and to support the growth of previously disadvantaged persons in South Africa; SAIBA. SAIBA, of which I am the Chairperson, is an organization that is inclusive to

all (religion, gender, age, etc...) and as a collective we have far and wide reaching arms into the socio-economic landscape of South Africa and we intend to expand and grow this to Indian Diasporas and other complimenting Diasporas across the globe.

Now my professional and personal journey together with its challenges and its successes, has and I must say been possible as a result of my parents and their entrenched Indian upbringing, that which I recognize and applaud them for. Key amongst these beliefs and teachings is the entrenched love for family and friends and the entrenched pride for the Indian culture; that which I have and continue to practice and which I urge all of the global Indian Diaspora to continue to support and grow.

Let me again say thank you to the Girmit International Conference convenors, say thank you to the dignitaries and fellow speakers present and thank you to the attendees. As an Indian South African I hereby extend an invite for you to visit South Africa, engage with our Indian Diaspora and support growing the socio-economic landscape for all around the world.

I thank you.