

“India's Diversity is The Result of Its Cultural and Economic Openness”



*L-R: **Sanjeev Sanyal**, President, The Sustainable Planet Project and Adjunct Fellow of the Institute of Policy Studies at the National Univ. of Singapore; **M.V.Subbiah**, Retired Chairman, Murugappa Group; **Nayanjot Lahiri**, Professor of History & Dean of Colleges, Delhi University; **Harsh Neotia**, Chairman of Ambuja Realty Development Ltd.; Moderator: **Sugata Bose**, Gardiner Professor of History and Director of the South Asia Initiative Harvard University, USA.*

"India has always been culturally and economically close to the world. We have the ancient example of an Harappan outpost acting as the go-between for trade with Iran and beyond," said **Ms. Nayanjot Lahiri, Professor of History and Dean of Colleges, Delhi University.**

She was speaking at the session on **'Old and New India: Is Anything the Same?'** during the **'Ideas India 2008' seminar, organized by Aspen Institute India** here today.

The eminent panelists in the session deliberated over the issue of whether India has been outward looking economically, culturally and politically. The dominant thought was that India has energetically and enthusiastically embraced the cultural and economic dimensions of the world from the ancient times.

While talking about India's past and also about the links between India and the Roman world, and the influence of European culture in the Mughal era, She said,

"Ashoka was the first to use the socio-religious policy to spread his ideas in other countries."

Commenting on the globalization factor, she said, "We need to look for long term legitimacy for globalization," adding, "Much has not changed from the ancient times when we look at the plight of the Indian woman. In early times, the women were killed by giving them dhatura now they are burnt with kerosene."

"Our food, clothes and colour are different, yet we call ourselves Indian. That is our strength – our unity in diversity," said **Mr M V Subbiah, Retired Chairman, Murugappa group**. He said that Indian culture is an open source system.

"We are the most individualistic and self-actualized people, we don't believe in team games," he said, adding, "the reason for this was the fact that from time to time different events have occurred which have led to a situation where individualism has emerged as a winning factor. In fact, individual enterprise has been the motivating force behind many of our achievements."

Mr Harsh Neotia, Chairman of Ambuja Realty Development Ltd, said that the destiny-oriented thought makes us the most tolerable people in the world. "We are highly dependent on karma and easily accept all happenings as our fate," he said.

Citing the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who used non-violence as a weapon against the British Government, Mr Harsh said, "Although we are aggressive in nature but there is a lack of aggressiveness when it comes to the military actions. As a military country, we need to be aggressive consistently."

Mr Sanjeev Sanyal, President, The Sustainable Planet Project and Adjunct Fellow of the Institute of Policy studies at the National University of Singapore, pointed out that there is a fossilization of civilization from the past. "Culturally we are fossilized civilization," he said, adding, "The civilizations, from time to time, tend to go backward. There is a need to renovate and take risk in order to bring development. We need a culture where we are able to engage with the world."

Expressing his views on the development of cities, he said "urbanisation needs to be done in a way that it is sustainable."

Mr Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of History and Director of the South Asia Initiative Harvard University, USA, while moderating the session, said, "Both individual and community based mechanism is important to boost entrepreneurship in the country."

**New Delhi,
December 19, 2008**

