



**Address to Parliament on the Occasion of the State
Visit of His Excellency Shri Ram Nath Kovind,
President of the Republic of India to
St. Vincent and the Grenadines**

By

**Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister of
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

Office of the Prime Minister
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**ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE STATE
VISIT OF HIS EXCELLENCY SHRI RAMNATH KOVIND,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA TO ST. VINCENT AND
THE GRENADINES, ON THURSDAY MAY 19, 2022**

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**DR. THE HON. RALPH E. GONSALVES
PRIME MINISTER OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

MADAME SPEAKER, HONOURABLE MEMBERS:

On behalf of our government and people, I formally welcome to St. Vincent and the Grenadines His Excellency Shri Ram Nath Kovind, the President of the Republic of India, his wife, his daughter, and official delegation. I take this opportunity, too, to express solidarity greetings to my friend, the Honourable Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, his family, his government, and the magnificent people of India.

Today is truly historic in the relations between our two countries: It is the first time that the President of India is visiting us; and it is the first time, too, that the Head of State or any other high-office holder, of India is addressing our Parliament. Your Excellency, we are most

honoured by your esteemed presence. We are thrilled that you have chosen to visit us, alongside Jamaica, on your current Caribbean journey. This is truly extraordinary; it is of inestimable consequence!

St. Vincent and the Grenadines and India are inextricably bound to each other through ties of blood; our commitment to democratic values and liberty; our stance of non-alignment from hegemonic power blocs globally; our quest for peace, security, and progress for all nations and peoples; and our practical bonds of friendship grounded in high principle and mutual interests. Your Excellency's visit will undoubtedly strengthen further our existing unbreakable ties which bind.

Your Excellency, between 1861 and 1881, the records show that 2,472 citizens of colonial India were brought to colonial St. Vincent as indentured labourers to work mainly on the plantations owned by Anglo-Saxons. The wrenching crossing of the "Kala Pani" — the taboo of the dark or black waters from India to the Caribbean — remains for our nationals of Indian descent not only a source of a painful dissolution of identity but also a resource for an enduring embrace

of India and a simultaneous reconstruction of life and living in our Caribbean, in our St. Vincent and the Grenadines!

The incubus of British colonialism was unable to defeat or destroy the unconquerable spirit of our indentured brothers and sisters who came to us from the ancient Indian civilisation of glory, merit, and worth.

Through the fever of our history, and the process of creolization, the disparate strands of our population mix — indigenous Callinago and Garifuna, descendants of enslaved African bodies, of indentured Madeirans and Indians, of the Anglo Saxon planter-merchant elite, and the more recent arrivants from the Middle East — have evolved as an integrated whole, a metaphoric symphony of oneness in which the occasional dissonances are resolved or muted through our informal, even invisible, cultural well-springs or our formal institutions. From all this has arisen “a genius of our people”, exemplars of social cohesion, inclusiveness, tolerance, and social solidarity in life, living, and production.

[Thus, in our national life, in this our veritable symphony of oneness, the chords of India lives in us; so, too, the metaphoric songs of our indigenous forebears; so, too, the rhythm of Africa, the melody of Europe, and the home-grown lyrics of our Caribbean, our St. Vincent and the Grenadines!]

Your Excellency, daily in innumerable ways, the presence of India is felt in St. Vincent and the Grenadines beyond the impact of our treasured nationals who are the descendants of indentured servants from 19th century India. Today, professionals from India in various fields, including medicine, engineering, project management, information technology, and teaching, have come to live and work among us; many have become naturalised citizens of our country; many have children who are Vincentians by birth.

Through the outreach of the Indian government, the Global Organisation for Persons of Indian Descent, the Indian Heritage Foundation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and with the active support of the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the joinder between our two civilisations is deepening and broadening.

This is a most uplifting enterprise! We commemorate, in remembrance and hopefulness, Indian Arrival Day, every year, in the month of June.

And, of course, our people have arguments about whether Brian Lara or Sachin Tendulkar is the best batsman of the 21st century. We watch the IPL on TV and we all have our favourite teams; and many of our people are Bollywood fans. Practically all of us are fond of Indian cuisine. The list goes on! And on June 21st every year we ought to follow India's lead in embracing the "invaluable gift" of the International Day of Yoga, to aid the unity of our minds and bodies, thoughts and actions, health and well-being.

Your Excellency, there is a beauty, an amazing grace and wondrous ease, in the telling story of the close bilateral nexus between our two geographically-distant countries of unequal power, conjoined within the frame of a multi-lateralism of nobility and compelling congruence: Our Caribbean civilisation, including its Vincentian component, is young, searching, and enterprising; that of India is old, revered, and vibrant; St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a

population of 110,000; India's population is 1.38 billion, marginally second only to that of China; St. Vincent and the Grenadines' land mass is 150 square miles, India's territory covers 1.269 million square miles — the 7th largest in the world; St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US \$870 million, India's is US \$3.54 trillion, the 5th largest economy in the world. India is a growing world power, which cannot be ignored; St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a small island development state, insisting on its rightful place at the global table.

Still, these unequal measures hamper not our close friendship: We work with each other in an equitable partnership in this complicated, challenging world to make lives more secure, more peaceful, more prosperous, more inclusive for all humanity. Globally, India is supportive of the agenda of Small Island Developing States; we share similar perspectives on climate change, on bio-diversity, land degradation, and desertification; we work closely together at the United Nations on practically every issue arising from the global political economy, including the reform of the United Nations itself, particularly in respect of the structure and functioning of the

Security Council; and we are in sync on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the achievement of which both our countries are deeply committed.

Further, our bilateral cooperation on education, cultural exchanges, science, technology, health, solar energy, disaster preparedness, “quick impact” projects, and the arrowroot industry, among others, are very beneficial to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And through an initiative with CARICOM, India has offered to our region a generous line of credit of US \$150 million.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is keen on deepening and broadening our relations. Importantly, we have accorded favourable consideration to the establishment of a diplomatic mission in India, a subject that I have discussed with Prime Minister Modi; I expect that this will be effected in 2023. I very much look forward to informal discussions with Prime Minister Modi on our further work together when we meet next month at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. We are in search of investors

from India, and enhanced trade particularly through regional initiatives.

[Personally, I fell in love with the nobility of the Indian, African, Arab, and Latin American civilisations some 55 years ago. I am still in love with these, and all the world's civilisations — the majesty of humanity. I was one year old when India became independent; I have watched India develop extraordinarily under an array of distinguished leaders from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi.]

Your Excellency, please inform the people of India that, among other things, India lives in the heart and mind of the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and of each Vincentian, at home and abroad! Long may all this so remain: A unison between the civilisations of India and our Caribbean!

Welcome again; and thank you!