

Keynote Speech

at the

**South Asian Conference for
'Promotion of Korean Studies in India and South Asia'**

by

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I am greatly honoured to be invited to the South Asian Conference for Promotion of Korean Studies in India in India and South Asia which is organized by the Centre for Japanese, Korean and North East Asian Studies, School of Languages of Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Academy of Korean Studies, Republic of Korea.

It is a great pleasure to meet several old friends and scholars. I had the privilege to work with this esteemed Centre of East Asian Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University as well as to visit the Academy of Korean Studies near Seoul in Korea.

Korean Studies in India are relatively new though the interest in Korea goes back several decades. Korean Studies in India had actually started in the 50s at the Indian Council of World Affairs, Sapru House. When the School of International Studies at ICWA shifted to the newly established JNU, they were located at JNU. If lately the consciousness about Korea in India has increased, it is mainly to the drive and enterprise of the Korean Government and its people. It is the common cultural heritage and a long historical connection that India and Korea share, can be regarded as the main ground for our mutual understanding and interest. The two countries may be geographically apart; but belonging to the same set of Asian culture and tradition they are today trying to learn more about each other societies, international relations, and basically values and aspirations. It is in this context the need for Korean Studies in India and Indian Studies in Korea becomes imperative and urgent. While such studies are gradually increasing with universities and educational institutions in both countries taking initiatives, our knowledge about each other still remains marginal and limited. To my mind, we have to expand our understanding of Korea a great deal. For me, personally this realization has been not of the recent time; but it goes back to the mid-80s when I had the pleasure and privilege of serving

in the Republic of Korea - at a time when the relationship was gradually evolving and being built-up.

India-Korea relations have come a long way since the Olympics in 1988 conducted magnificently by Korea. In a way this was a turning point in the modern history of Korea. The on-set of democracy from 1987 and its rapid evolution since then has put Korea on a remarkable path of interaction with the rest of the world in a confident and self-assured manner. The 'can-do' spirit which Korea displayed in the 70s and 80s in building its infrastructure continues to inspire the country. Today the growth in India's contacts with Korea covers practically every field. Our bilateral trade has now substantially expanded. It stands at \$17.1 b. in 2010. The signing of the comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Korea in 2009 was a remarkable achievement for both. This led to a rapid expansion of our trade and investment. To enter into an agreement on peaceful nuclear energy cooperation during our President's visit to Korea last June is yet another major milestone in our relationship. Visits at the highest level between India and Korea are now a regular feature. It is a matter of great satisfaction to the two countries. President Lee Myung Pak was the Chief Guest at the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi in January, 2010.

The canvass of our bilateral relationship has become wide and bright. I do not need to go into various details today but suffice it to say that unless we study Korea in greater depth, the relationship will not stand on a sound footing. The under-pinning of mutual knowledge is absolutely essential. For this we certainly have a good base. The teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha Sakyamuni continue to inspire us both. During the Silla dynasty in Korea or perhaps even before, Buddhism had reached Korea. It was therefore a matter of great happiness for me to launch earlier a book "The Ancient Korean Kingdom of Silla : Political Developments and Religious Ideology" edited by my good friend and a great Korean scholar Dr. Pankaj Mohan of the Academy of

Korean Studies. The words of Rabindra Nath Tagore about Korea's place in Asia as 'a lamp illuminating the East' continue to resonate in the hearts of the Korean people. India's participation and contribution during the tragic events of the Korean War in 1950s is still recalled in Korea. On this foundation, what can our two Asian societies do today in fulfillment of a new vision for Asia will remain as a main challenge and guiding light for the future. As the centre of gravity of global economic and even strategic power shifts to Asia and a new trend towards multipolarity emerges in the Asia-Pacific, Korea and India can assume their places as major poles with responsibilities and important roles. The security and stability of this vast Asia-Pacific region is crucial for both Korea and India. For the two countries, situations in their respective sub-regions such as Northeast Asia and Pakistan-Afghanistan are fraught with tension and often violence. They therefore need to have closer and regular consultations with a view to finding ways to evolve a security architecture in the region. We are active partners in the ARF, ADMM+ and East Asia Summit and should work closely. We stand to benefit a great deal through mutual cooperation. Economically, as members of G20, India and Korea are emerging economies and have a great opportunity to contribute to the economic stability and prosperity of the region. We both are engaged in creating in the long term an Asian Economic Community. The goal is distant but attainable and India and Korea should pool their resources towards their end.

Finally, it is the people from our two countries who are known for their dynamism and creativity need to come together and develop closer communication. Education is one field in which traditionally Indian and Korean people have always placed a great premium. We also have old connections in this regard. The Hangul script in Korea is said to have been derived from the Sanskrit script. Similarly, there are several other linkages. The need for research to understand our mutual history, culture, films, languages, medicine, music, textiles, etc. cannot be over-emphasised. Both

Korea and India have a strong soft power. We must employ it vis-à-vis each other. That will do no harm; but instead cheer us up. I do hope that Governments and business enterprises on both sides would show greater interest and enthusiasm in promoting research and studies about each other in the future. A day should not therefore be very far when Korea will not appear as distant nation but rather a partner whom we know well.

Thank you.