

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER
PRESIDENT OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF BOOK
RELEASE “INDIA’S VIBGYOR MAN”**

I am happy to be present on this occasion of releasing the book ‘India’s Vigyor Man’ – a collection of writings of Dr L M Singhvi, edited by Dr Abhishek Singhvi and Shri Lokendra Malik. It is indeed a pleasure to be dwelling upon a personality that had different hues and colours and the book’s title pretty much symbolizes the diversity of Dr L M Singhvi’s works.

2 Our paths crossed on many occasions, especially when he was the High Commissioner of India in Great Britain from 1991-1997 and I was the Minister of External Affairs from February 1995 to May 1996 and thereafter, when he was a Member of the Rajya Sabha from 1997 onwards in the Treasury Benches while I was in the Opposition. A jurist, an envoy, a politician, a prolific writer and a poet, Dr L M Singhvi was indeed, a true post independence renaissance man who strode diverse fields with equal mastery and consummate ease.

3 The three biographical sketches of Dr LM Singhvi at the beginning of the book are comprehensive. The title is taken from a brilliant article by Gopal Gandhi on Dr LM Singhvi many years ago, published in Hindustan Times. In that he had said: “There used to be, in my childhood days, before Kwality stormed the ice-cream world, an ice-cream called Vibgyor, an acronym for the rainbow’s colors. Dr Singhvi's was a Vibgyor mind, a Vibgyor temperament. He felt genuinely and strongly that all the colors of India had a claim to our chromatic appreciation.”

4 Coming back to the subject of this book, Dr L M Singhvi! One has known him as an erudite parliamentarian and a top lawyer, as a pioneer in the field of addressing the issues related to overseas Indians (*pravasi bhartiya*), a diplomat par excellence, as also a scholar and traditionalist. However, to my mind, Dr L M Singhvi’s most generic contributions have been in the field of institutionalizing Panchayati Raj and tirelessly pushing for the idea of an Ombudsman (The Lokpal) – an issue that I had to grapple with at length during my tenure as a Minister in the UPA government during 2010-12.

5 As a young 30 year old Lok Sabha Member, he was besotted with the 'Ombudsman' after a visit to Scandinavia. He talked of it incessantly, on his return in 1962, in and out of Parliament. When Pandit Nehru asked him: "Young man, you speak of this so much? To what zoo does this animal belong? You must indiginise it," he created and coined the words Lokpal and Lokayukta. It is a happy coincidence that his crusade for a Lokpal found concrete expression almost 50 years later in the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee which his son, Dr Abhishek Singhvi, happened to chair. Similarly, it was the LM Singhvi High Powered Committee on Revitalisation of Panchayati Raj, commissioned by Rajiv Gandhi, whose report in a record two years ultimately led to the 1992 constitutional amendments which installed decentralized self governance with over twenty articles inserted for the first time in the Indian Constitution.

Dear Friends, Ladies & Gentlemen,

6 It was when Dr LM Singhvi explained to Atalji his idea of a *Sethu Bandhanam*, a metaphysical, spiritual and cultural bridge that binds Indians globally to India, that the

diaspora project was born. In one year, the High Powered Cabinet Ranked Committee of LM Singhvi produced the most comprehensive diaspora report ever. A separate Ministry for it, dual citizenship, PIO cards, celebration of the return day of India's most famous NRI on January 9, the day Gandhiji returned, were institutionalized.

7 Dr LM Singhvi presided as India's High Commissioner in U.K. during the golden period of Indo UK relations. He saw three British PMs and five Indian ones in his seven year tenure, the longest ever for any Cabinet Rank appointee, indeed any diplomatic appointee, from India to any country ever during 1991-92. It was also an index of the bipartisan support he evoked across the political spectrum.

8 As a diplomat, Dr L M Singhvi served as the longest serving High Commissioner to Great Britain for 07 long years, a tenure second only to that Shri V K Krishna Menon, in terms of duration. Gopal Gandhi in his essay on Dr LM Singhvi titled "The Vibgyor Man" says —"His was, by any standard, an outstanding innings in London. He could start the daydrafting in Hindi verse a message for a poet's birthday, to be faxed to Delhi, breakfast with a visiting Indian

minister, call on the foreign office mid-day, lunch with a senior British journalist, have tea and scones with a member of the English nobility, address Indian students later in the evening, host dinner for a Nobel laureate and end the day either asking for a Shakespeare bust to be put up somewhere in India or a Tiruvalluvar, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi or Ambedkar bust somewhere here in England. He did this, more or less, for seven years.”

9 I also take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Abhishek Singhvi on this endeavour. As we all know from his earlier book length writings and articles on diverse themes, this is not his first and will certainly not be his last endeavour. This seems to be a prolific year for him. After his earlier collection of writings “Candid Corner”, released many years ago, his second collection “ Straight Talk” was released a few months ago and now this one edited by him. There are many more books in a man of his diverse talents and I would urge him to find the time to write them.

10 A vibrant democracy is constituted, mainly, by five major estates viz. Parliament, executive, judiciary, media and civil society. Dr. Abhishek Singhvi is amongst a handful

of intellectuals in the nation with scholarly, professional and experiential expertise in most of these. As a top legal luminary and a keen observer of the judiciary, he is a recognized stakeholder in that field. Through his Parliamentary interventions and his role as a Spokesperson of the Congress Party he has established his credentials in Parliament as well as the Media. His comprehensive knowledge of governance and working of public institutions makes him a clinical scholar of the Executive and a noted commentator of civil society.

Friends, Ladies & Gentlemen,

11 The themes and sub themes addressed in the book are truly timeless and transcend politics, political parties, governments and current events. They raise conceptual issues and issues of everlasting importance for the nation at large. Their diversity is truly bewildering. I would recommend this book to students and young scholars of policy and governance. It would equip them with a sharp understanding of the institutional dynamics of our nation. They will more easily figure out how the nuts and bolts of the Indian democracy function. It has valuable insights for

inter-disciplinary governance and inter institutional policy making.

12. I am sure that its readers will find it enjoyable and the book will help them get newer insights and perspectives into not only the life and times of Dr L.M Singhvi, but also the varies issues that the chapters touch upon.

Thank you
Jai Hind