

*Speech by Sushil K. Premchand*

*on the occasion of the*

*Opening of the Premchand Roychand Gallery*

*at the छत्रपती शिवाजी महाराज वस्तु संग्रहालय – Prince of Wales Museum*

*Mumbai,*

*on 21 November, 2002*

Ladies and Gentlemen, Kalpanaben, Mr. Bhabha, friends and family. I am honoured to stand here in front of you on this unique occasion, the opening of the Premchand Roychand Gallery at this splendid Museum, which will always be known to me fondly as the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India!

As regards my family, I am especially pleased that my mother is with us today, in the company of her first great-grandchild, my grandson – Ayush. This occasion is being witnessed by four generations of the Premchand family. Apart from Ayush & my mother, my wife, Neeta, and our elder son, Sanjeev – with his wife Madhavi – are present. Our younger son, Nikhil, is a hospital doctor in the U.K. and sadly could not get away from his work. We are proud to be here in full force to celebrate this opening with you.

As always, time is short – and repetition is boring! Thus, to respect your time, I shall not reiterate Kalpanaben's earlier words of appreciation. I would like to limit my thanks to two special people, without whom this new Gallery might never have been conceived – or built!

These persons are the Director of the Museum, Dr. Kalpana Desai, and my wife, Neeta. During a chance conversation, they hit upon the notion, the excellent notion, that Mumbai needed a Gallery for visiting exhibitions that met international exhibition standards, and that the Prince of Wales Museum would be *the ideal location* for this space.

Adding substance to good ideas is something like weaving fabric. The fibres – the ideas – form the warp & the weft. Without the integration of these elements, there is **no** fabric – merely a collection of spun fibres! By uniting the warp with the weft, we *start* creating fabric. But the need is for not a *sliver* of cloth – but a "*length*" of substance!

The Museum and the Gallery of international standards represent, if you will, the warp in this analogy. The weft was Neeta's awareness of our intent to celebrate 150 years as a business house in the year 2006 – and she knew that we were looking for a suitable gift to the City of Bombay, now Mumbai, from which we have benefited so much, over the generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the notion of our firm donating this Gallery generated unprecedented enthusiasm. We *started* the process of weaving this unique fabric, of creating this excellent opportunity. And the Premchand family is thankful that the Trustees of the Museum extended us the honour of allowing us to integrate the needs of the museum and our desire to "do something" for Mumbai. But many more "metres" of fabric are needed to clothe this Museum – we hope that other business houses will join us in "weaving this fabric"!

The honour is two-fold: We were “permitted”, nay encouraged, to help with a substantial part of the East Wing renovation; but more particularly, we were permitted to name the new travelling exhibition Gallery in honour of my great-grandfather, Premchand Roychand.

There is an old Sanskrit proverb:

“He who allows his day to pass by without practising generosity and enjoying life’s pleasures is like a blacksmith’s bellows – he breathes but he does not live”.

Premchand Roychand always gave. He enjoyed living – and giving! His best-known gift to the City of Bombay is the Rajabai Clock Tower and the University Library building adjacent to it. This is but one of his many significant gifts to education and to other good causes, in many places in India.

His name is well known in Calcutta for the Premchand Roychand award, given to the best Master of Arts Student at the University. But in *this* City, now Mumbai, which he helped transform into the financial capital of India, there is nothing that bears the name of Premchand Roychand. We felt that it was appropriate to celebrate 150 years of the firm that bears his name, by establishing something in Mumbai, *in his honour*.

My great-grandfather, known for his munificence, was known equally for his humility. To this date, we have no idea of how much he gave to charities and good causes across India, especially in Bombay and in Surat, the City of his birth. Indeed 2006 is a special year on two counts – we celebrate *our* 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but it is also the *100<sup>th</sup> death anniversary* of this great man.

There is a particular poignancy to this gift from our organisation to the City, more specifically to the Museum where we stand today. The late Jomo Kenyatta said:

“Our children may learn about the heroes of the past. Our task is to make ourselves architects of the future.”

And Premchand Roychand was a true architect of the future.

A museum is a centre of learning, much more than a repository of beautiful artefacts. This travelling & special exhibition Gallery will surely help generations of our youth to learn to become such “*architects of the future*”, and to learn about the world, the world in which they live and the world beyond the shores of India.

And remember the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt:

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

This Museum receives almost one million visitors a year, a huge number. Of those visitors, high percentages are children. We hope very much that by adding a quality space for receiving travelling exhibitions, we shall be able to attract *top-quality international exhibits* to Mumbai. Thereby, we hope to stimulate the interest of young & old, over many generations, in visiting this Museum, not only to see special exhibitions, but also to enjoy its own unique & exquisite permanent collection.

But we *must* stimulate our children, the generation of my grandson – Ayush, to *want* to learn, to learn about their history, the history of other peoples & lands, and the place of India, historically & prospectively, in this “global” world.

And there is a further, essential perspective to having international exhibits and exhibitions visiting India. I personally believe that globalisation in business and in trade is *inevitable*. But this becomes *pleasurable* only when *cultural exchange* is linked with this business interaction. And business should also *be fun*!

But let us go back to this “*exchange*” of cultures. There are many aspects of this Museum’s collection that would be fascinating for audiences outside of India, and we believe that by being able to receive exhibitions of quality into this City, we shall be able to both give and take, to share in a global cultural exchange through loans *from* this Museum.

Indeed, we shall do our bit to encourage museums that Neeta & I know to participate in such exchanges. We already have the first such plot scripted in our minds. And a further aspect of interchange is the opportunity to benchmark against the best, to learn from other curators & designers of exhibitions. But then, we must give back something of our Indian learning.

The Museum’s East Wing has been beautifully renovated and restructured by Rahul Mehrotra (who is today in Shanghai on business and is particularly sad to miss this occasion). This Wing includes space for a conservation laboratory, additional galleries and a new smaller auditorium, which will be inaugurated in two days by the renowned art historian, our dear friend Dr. Brijinder Goswamy.

So Mumbai now has a Museum with more space and a Gallery that is second to none. We are proud to be associated with this and believe that we have given something of value back to the City of Mumbai. I stand here, in front of this distinguished audience, as a relatively minor businessman, but as a person with a long & proud tradition behind me, three generations behind & *at least* two to follow – to be precise!

But *why* has this project engaged our interest, our commitment? And done that over several years? Ladies & Gentlemen, in part, this has happened because *this Museum accepts the need to be **absolutely accountable*** – which is indeed refreshing to a corporate donor, such as our Group!

I beseech the business community of this City to reflect on the words of Kahlil Gibran:

“Generosity is giving more than you can; pride is taking less than you need.”

Be generous. We all make a *living* by what we *get*, but we make a *life* by what we *give*.

I agreed with Kalpanaben that this was not the time to market the needs of the Museum, for we have a long and pleasurable evening ahead of us. Tonight, we shall *not* discuss the need for a conservation laboratory, or the need to equip this Museum with up-to-date (air-conditioned) vitrines. And we will not review providing better museum signage or improved lighting in all of the galleries, nor securing the equipment necessary to convert some of this new East Wing space into functional, quality museum space. But these *are* “needs” that we *do* need to review *another* day! The Museum awaits further “weavers”!

Today, we have only taken the first steps in a *long* journey – we have only *started* weaving good ideas into something of value and utility. But a “one-man band” can never complete this journey, which requires the active support of other business houses, young & old. In this City that grew out of its textile heritage, let us businessmen start “weaving” again – *cloth of “Gold”* for the “City of Gold”.

There is no measurable value attributable to a rich cultural heritage such as India’s – but this heritage clearly deserves respect – and more! It needs facilities to preserve & protect, to learn & to enjoy, to help our citizens *cherish* our bountiful cultural treasure!

For now, let us ensure we use to the full this new East Wing – and the Premchand Roychand Gallery. We must provide constructive ideas to the Museum’s management – and help them secure quality exhibitions. And that will require this Museum to participate in the bilateral exchange of works of art – to which the Government must agree. But let us join this exciting world of cultural exchange – soon.

I only have one parting request of you. *Stay committed* to this Museum, remember that commitment unlocks the doors of imagination, allows vision and permits us the opportunity to turn dreams into reality.

Today, we open the Premchand Roychand Gallery, which has turned Kalpanaben’s dream of this facility into a reality. I welcome you to this event. I wish you a wonderful evening.