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Remarks by Sir James Murray, British Diplomat

It is my agreeable task to read messages from three distinguished absentees. But first I would like on my own behalf to say a few words about Jagdish who – along with Padma – has been a close personal friend for some twenty years.

I am a Scot, born and bred. But my working life was spent among the English and I conceived a considerable respect for that remarkable people. Now, in my view, Jagdish is incomparably the best Englishman in New York. George Santayana in “The British Character” remarked that “England is the paradise of individuality, eccentricity, heresy, anomalies, hobbies, and humor.” I do not suggest that Jagdish fits into all these categories. But he does embody many of the characteristics of the English that have impressed Santayana and me. Jagdish has a light-hearted outlook on life in general. What I mean is that he makes a clear distinction between those aspects of the human condition that should be taken seriously and those which should not. He believes that many of the foibles of the human race merit wry amusement rather than self-righteous indignation. Since he finds so much to chuckle about in life, he has the more passion to devote to the things that really matter to him – decency, tolerance, intellectual rigor and common sense. He has little time for ideological argument or highfalutin philosophical systems. When he is grappling with a problem he is always looking for ways forward that are feasible and practicable for ordinary mortals. He is always on the lookout for the possibilities for unintended consequences and aware of the risks of wrong-headedness on the part of political practitioners. And he expresses his views in elegant, forceful, and remarkably jargon-free English. These are qualities that have made him an invaluable advisor to statesmen all over the world.

It is clear from the Indian Prime Minister’s message that the citizens of his country of birth regard him as an admirable Indian. It is equally clear from the proceedings at today’s conference that the citizens of his country of adoption regard him as an admirable American. So we see in Jagdish a veritable tri-cultural icon that we are indeed fortunate to have among us.