

## Speech of Deepakbhai Parekh

Ladies & Gentlemen

Good evening.

It is an honor to have been invited here this evening to celebrate the achievements of an extraordinary human being, Shri Ratilal Chandaria, whose life is no doubt an inspiration not only to the entire Gujarati community but also to every individual who is searching for a higher goal in life today. A noted entrepreneur from a family whose industrial investments are spread over sixty countries all over the world, Mr. Chandaria himself has always kept a low profile. He could have easily been satisfied with the success he worked hard for and achieved in his family business over the years of his life, however, he set his goal much higher. As a result, his strong ties with his community and his work towards various social causes occupied a large part of his time and today, we stand witness to the culmination of a project which he envisioned twenty years ago - the online Gujarati lexicon, which is the first of its kind in India.

I must confess that I am not a linguist or a literary scholar but there is one quality that I share with them – and that is a common love for words and belief in their potential to change the world. It is only a language that can successfully record history, fuel imagination through stories and impart knowledge- thus providing meaning and structure for all communication. When a language is lost, the people who once spoke its word lose something, a sense of themselves as a people united by their own language. Our country is perhaps the only one to have more than 20 official language as well as many more dialects that are prevalent in different regions.

For me, as would be with any student, language has always been associated with grammar and a dictionary. The memory of making new words and satisfying my curiosity by ruffling through the pages of the dictionary is one synonymous with my childhood and for some of us, is a passion that lasts throughout our lives. At the same time, information was not always available in the earlier days, especially if we owned small dictionaries, we would often have to trudge to the library or ask our teachers for the meanings we were hunting for.

Which is my Shri Chandaria's effort towards creating an online Gujarati dictionary is inspiring. More so, since he is self taught in Gujarati-a feat accomplished through years of meticulous study-and that he has developed a dictionary that he intends to share with one and all through the Internet. It has come out at an appropriate time at a historic setting-the Indian Merchants' Chamber nearing its centenary year, where we have all gathered.

Shri Chandaria's achievement is commendable for many reasons. In India particularly, every region has its own historical and cultural realities and it is our regional languages that have their own words to describe those realities and it is our regional languages that have their own words to describe those realities. Each of these also has their own style, pronunciation and rules of grammar that cannot be generalized. In such a scenario, an exhaustive compilation of words, combined with facility to search for words, check spellings and access a thesaurus for antonyms and synonyms, is very useful.

Pairing this with technology to create an online format is Shri Chandaria's other accomplishment, since unlike a traditional dictionary; it results in an ever-expanding databank of words and information about their usage. Furthermore, accessibility multiples exponentially in the electronic form, and this will make the dictionary available for a cross section of the Gujarati community. What is unique is its compatibility with all operating systems and with a guide in English; it makes it even more convenient. So whether it is accessed by an author, a publisher, a proof reader, a student or just a curious individual, this online tool will be available with all answers, at all times.

The online lexicon also addresses another critical aspect of the present day conditions-the time crunch in the jet age. With all this information being available at the click of a button, there is no denying that this is a boon for all those associated with literary, government and educational institutions who work with the language and translations on a daily basis.

While the practical aspects of this endeavor are noteworthy, there is a larger change that such an initiative is capable of bringing about. On one hand, it will help build stronger ties with Gujaratis,

young and old, living in countries across the world as they connect with their language and gain an insight into their culture. Not only will communication through the written word and sharing of information become easier, but it will also encourage individuals to use their mother tongue more frequently now that the process of understanding and checking has become simpler. The potential of an online format is enormous definitions of words can now be presented in an order that reflects their importance in the language, technical terms can be placed in the proper context and this powerful device can automatically offer suggestions for the correct spelling of misspelled words, even if the initial letter is incorrect.

I believe this will provide a much needed boost to the popularity of Gujarati literature, much of which remains inaccessible to readers, mainly the youth, who are in their early stages of learning and may not be fluent in the language. As more and more people reconnect with their roots, there is bound to be a cultural reawakening which can only have a positive effect on the society at large.

I take this opportunity to heartily congratulate Shri Chandaria on the successful completion of his dictionary project and I am sure that this Gujarati lexicon will pave the way for a renewed interest in the Gujarati language. It would be wonderful indeed if Shri Chandaria's efforts motivate others in India to replicate this invitation in other languages as well.

Thank you.