

“Ambassador Nirupama Rao:  
Poet, Diplomat, and Trailblazer”

Introduction of Indian Ambassador to the United States

Nirupama Rao

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Whittenberger Auditorium

Indiana Memorial Union

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5:00 p.m.

Thank you, David.

Good afternoon and welcome.

During his historic 2010 address to the Indian Parliament, United States President Barack Obama said that “the relationship between the United States and India—bound by our shared interests and our shared values—will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, Indiana University welcomes a dedicated public servant who has been instrumental in building that partnership: Her Excellency Nirupama Rao, India’s Ambassador to the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, Remarks by the President to the Joint Session of the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, India, November 8, 2010. Accessed April 4, 2012. URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/remarks-president-joint-session-indian-parliament-new-delhi-india>

Ambassador Rao earned a Bachelor's degree in English with honors from Mount Carmel College, in Bangalore and later earned a Master's degree in English Literature from Marathwada University.

Inspired by the example of her uncle, who had served in the Indian Foreign Service, and by the model of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Ambassador Rao knew she wanted to become a diplomat from the time she was a teenager.

Although her parents wanted her to become a doctor, she persisted, and joined the Foreign Service in 1973. Over the course of nearly forty years, she has served with distinction in a wide range of positions around the world, and has been at the forefront of Indian diplomacy.

Her service has truly spanned the globe.

She has served, at various times during her career, in the Indian embassies in Vienna, Moscow, Beijing, and Washington, D.C. In the mid- to late-90s, she served concurrently as India's ambassador to Peru and to Bolivia.

Ambassador Rao has also served two stints in academia: as a Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and as a distinguished international executive in residence at the University of Maryland,

Throughout her career, she has been a trailblazer and a role model, particularly for women in public service.

As High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, she was India's first female High Commissioner, and, in 2006, she became the first woman to serve as India's ambassador to China.

In 2009, she became just the second woman to serve as Foreign Secretary, the head of the Indian Foreign Service.

And last September, she was appointed as India's ambassador to the United States.

This impressive range of experience only begins to hint at the skill that Ambassador Rao brings to diplomatic matters.

With regard to her ability to foster and build upon the relationship between our nations, the *Washington Post* recently noted that experts on U.S.—India relations call Ambassador Rao “the perfect woman at the perfect time,”<sup>2</sup> citing the extensive contacts she made within the Obama administration as foreign secretary, her extraordinary rapport with India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, her candor, her elegance, and ease.

Ambassador Rao continues, of course, to be deeply engaged in strategic dialogue surrounding not only our two nations, but also surrounding the situations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Myanmar, and other nations.

In addition to her talent for diplomacy, Ambassador Rao is also an accomplished writer. She has published a book of poetry, *Rain Rising*, about her travels and her heritage. Her poems have been translated into Russian and Chinese. Ambassador Rao says that poetry is her “way of coming up for oxygen,” and that it lifts her up.<sup>3</sup>

She has also been praised for another form of concise writing. As civil war raged in Libya last year, Ambassador Rao took to Twitter to help keep Indian citizens living in Libya updated during the evacuation. Her efforts to disseminate information via social media garnered praise from members of the Indian press.

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<sup>2</sup> Emily Wax, “She's a Woman on a (Diplomatic) Mission,” *The Washington Post*, November 3, 2011, p. C01.

<sup>3</sup> Esther Williams, “Rain Rising: A Diplomat Poet's Reflections,” *The Sunday Times of India*, March 13, 2005, Accessed Jan. 31, 2012. URL: <http://sundaytimes.lk/050313/plus/11.HTML>

By the way, Ambassador Rao became the first senior member of the Indian Foreign Service to use Twitter when she opened her account about a year ago. She had 150 followers within the first hour<sup>4</sup> and now has more than 32,000 followers.

A senior U.S. diplomat recently said that Ambassador Rao is “an extraordinary diplomat [who has] ...helped shape every advance we made in U.S.-Indian relations in recent years, and both India and the United States are lucky to have her.”<sup>5</sup>

We feel lucky—and honored—to have her with us in Bloomington today to speak about the current state—and the future state—of relations between our countries.

Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guest, the Honorable Ambassador Nirupama Rao.

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<sup>4</sup> K.P. Nayam “Proper Channel Rules in Age of Twitter: Sole IFS Follower for Foreign Secretary,” *The Telegraph* of Calcutta, Feb. 20, 2011, Accessed Jan 31, 2012, URL: [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110221/jsp/frontpage/story\\_13611797.jsp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110221/jsp/frontpage/story_13611797.jsp)

<sup>5</sup> “Is There a Future for the U.S.-India Partnership?” Remarks of Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns, delivered Sept. 27, 2011 at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., Accessed Jan. 31, 2012. URL: <http://www.state.gov/s/d/2011/174093.htm>