

Thank you so much. Hardik abhar. It is an honor to be recognized here, in the state where I was raised, by the diaspora that helped raised me.

I want to say a word about the work we do, and a word about growing up in the Indian community in Connecticut.

First the work. The last year and a half has been a watershed for social movements: the Arab spring, the Occupy demonstrations, democracy rallies in Russia, Hungary, Malawi. My wife and I were at Ramlila Grounds in Delhi in August, where tens of thousands of people had gathered to support Anna Hazare's hunger fast. I believe there is a common aspiration underlying all of these movements: that law and government should be palpable earth in people's hands, not abstractions sealed in books or courtrooms.

Our work is about practical ways of realizing that dream. I lived in Sierra Leone for 4 years, in West Africa, just after the end of a brutal 11 year civil war. Exploitation and arbitrariness in governance were among the root causes of the war. I co-founded a program to help rural Sierra Leoneans address injustice and hold government accountable. A conventional legal aid model would have been unworkable, as there were only 100 lawyers in the country, and more than 90 of those were in the capital Freetown.

Instead we trained a frontline of community paralegals in basic law and in tools like mediation, advocacy, education, and organizing. We found that paralegals are often able to squeeze justice out of a broken system: stop a school master from beating children; negotiate child support payments from a derelict father; persuade the water authority to repair a well. In exceptionally intractable cases, as when a mining company in the southern province damaged six villages' land and abandoned the region without paying compensation, a tiny corps of lawyers can resort to litigation and higher-level advocacy to obtain a remedy.

Last year we started another organization, Namati, to build this field of legal empowerment around the world. In India, for example, we have beautiful environmental laws on the books that are flagrantly ignored in practice. We are working with communities in coastal areas to monitor the conditions that industrial firms commit to when they receive their environmental clearances.

Namati convenes a network of people from every continent who are committed to this ideal of grassroots justice. Please join us at namati.org.

Now, before I close, a word about growing up in Connecticut. Kutchis have a duha:

Kutchro khele khalak me

ji maha sagar me machh

jit jit heckro kutchi vase

ot diyan di kutch

“Kutch is playing in the universe like the big fish in the ocean. Wherever one Kutchi is living, there it’s Kutch day after day.”

Perhaps the same is true for the Indian community in Connecticut as a whole: we keep living our heritage, day after day.

One of my best memories from childhood is the Danbury Ethnic Festival. Every summer each of the many cultures represented in Danbury would set up booths on what to my child’s eye were massive grounds. Dancehall reggae and fried plaintain at the Jamaica booth; *caldo verde* and Portugese folk dance at the Portugal booth. My parents helped man the India booth, with *kesar pista* ice cream, paper kites on colored string, and *dandia raas* lessons.

That story turns bittersweet though. The Danbury Fair Grounds were converted into the Danbury Fair Mall. The ethnic festival was moved to the smaller Rogers Park and, eventually, disbanded altogether.

I remember that festival as America at its best. It represented a spirit of learning and sharing, a celebration of diversity but also of the wider community to which we all belonged.

It strikes me, brothers and sisters, that as both America and India strive for material prosperity, it will take intention, and hard work, to keep alive the best of our traditions.

Thank you