



**Toast by the Federal President
at the state banquet
during his state visit to India New Delhi
5 February 2014**

India fascinates us Germans and this fascination goes back a long way. It goes back to the enormous respect which the Germans have always had for your country's ancient civilisation. Important thinkers such as August Wilhelm Schlegel and Max Müller studied the culture of India, or to be more precise, they studied the cultures of India. The dialogue between the Nobel Prize laureate of the day, Rabindranath Tagore, and Albert Einstein in Berlin still makes for a good read today. The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the most important protagonists of the German resistance to National Socialism, was impressed by Gandhi's ideas and exchanged letters with him.

I could continue speaking about the past for a long time, but we Germans are just as fascinated by the present, in part due to the contrasts that we see in everyday life in India: your country uses sophisticated technology to reach into space, yet at the same time the issue of poverty reduction is still on the agenda. Nearly every German who makes a trip to India returns home with a strong impression of diversity but also of contrasts.

Germany greatly admires the path to modernity pursued by India in the 21st century. A successful India, which offers its citizens the chance to live their lives in peace and freedom sends an important message to Asia and indeed to the whole world. Such an India stands for the advantages of an open society, for pluralism and for democracy.

Germany considers India to be a key partner in the region. India is the first country in Asia with which Germany held intergovernmental consultations, yet contact extends far beyond both Governments. In Germany we are delighted to see that ever more young Indians are interested in our language and our society – they are very welcome in our country.

An open dialogue between friends is also possible and useful when it comes to points on which we disagree. This includes, for example, capital punishment, which as Europeans we have abolished and outlawed. Our societies may be different, but recognition of the universal nature of human rights is extremely important to both of our peoples. I see the enormous challenges and difficulties that face India in terms of human rights issues. I can only encourage you to do everything possible to enable the citizens of your country to enjoy their rights.

Our strategic partnership also covers global issues. Germany is deeply involved in the process of European integration and will continue to live up to its responsibilities in Europe in the future. By the same token, India is an anchor of stability in South Asia. I am firmly convinced that both of our countries will, each for their own part but above all together, make substantial contributions to the international order of the 21st century, for instance to the long overdue reform of the United Nations system, to name but one example.

It is important that India and Germany closely coordinate on global issues such as security, development, global trade and climate protection. We can help to establish globally recognised rules to ensure that people everywhere can live together in peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now invite you to join me in a toast to the health of President Mukherjee and Prime Minister Singh, who have been such wonderful hosts, and to the well-being of the people of India and to the friendship between India and Germany.