

TRIBUTE TO SOLI SORABJEE

By Aarti Mody '10

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with much pride and warmth that I introduce to you my grand father, Soli Sorabjee. Nana commenced legal practice in the Bombay High Court in 1953. In 1971, he was designated Senior Counsel by the Supreme Court of India. Soon after, he held the office of the Attorney General for India, first from 1989 to 1990, and again from 1998 to 2004. Although his practice is mainly in civil and commercial cases, he has always been passionate about administrative and constitutional law, especially in relation to the protection and promotion of human rights. In fact, he was appointed by the UN as a Special Rapporteur for Nigeria, in 1997, to report on the human rights situation in that country. Following this, he became a member and later Chairman of the UN-Sub Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, from 1998 to 2004. He has appeared in landmark cases in the Supreme Court of India concerning freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and has revoked orders of censorship and bans on publications. In this light, he was awarded the second highest civilian award, Padma Vibhushan in 2002, for his forensic performances to uphold freedom of expression and freedom of the press. My grandfather strongly believes that the right to dissent is essential in a democracy like India. He places a high value on tolerance and strongly opposes any form of fanaticism, which, if left unchecked, could eventually lead to conflict.

Nana's favorite non-Indian judges are Lord Atkin of the House of Lords, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Louis Brandeis and Earl Warren of the US Supreme Court. He was extremely fond of the late Chief Justice Subba Rao of the Supreme Court of India, who boldly upheld the human rights of the people.

Next to his love for law, is his passion for literature, poetry in particular. Shakespeare's sonnets are his constant literary companions. He also loves Jazz, especially the blues, and played the clarinet in college, with Benny Goodman as his mentor. As it happens, my first memories of my dear grandfather are of him blasting his jazz through the verandas of the Sorabjee bungalow in Mumbai.

Over the years I have come to realize that my nana is not only the absent minded grandad who forgets our birthdays and blanks off at a moment's notice in the middle of a conversation, but is truly A Renaissance Man who has imbibed the joys of poetry and plays, jurisprudence and jazz

He has always been an influential figure in the lives of his seven grand children, and I, like my mother, aspire to follow in his footsteps, and pursue a career in law. I realize that he has certainly left some large footsteps to fill, but I like to believe that I have genetics on my side!