

Ministerpräsident of Lower Saxony Mr. Stephan Weil
University President Prof. Volker Epping
H.E. Ambassador of India to the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Parvathaneni Harish
Member of the German Parliament and member of the Foreign Affairs committee Adis
Ahmetović
Consul General of India Ms. Soumya Gupta

Good evening, Vanakkam, Namaste.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of India for this award. Knowing the seriousness and rigour of the selection process and being one of the youngest among millions to receive this award makes me deeply humble and humbled at all times. In this context, I would like to make it clear that without the kindness, flexibility and wishes of H.E. the Indian Ambassador to Germany, the Prime Minister and the President of the University, it would not have been possible to make this event a reality in Hanover.

Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

My voice trembles, for it is a great honour for me to stand before those who have just spoken before me with such kind, uplifting and inspiring words, which I do not know if I deserve - time will tell - but also those who sit before me with boundless achievements, awards and honours. The journeys I have undertaken so far have taught me so much about life and I am sure it will not stop.

Hailing from a small village in South India, I understood very early in my childhood that living in harmony with nature is inevitable and right. It makes me happy that I can still spend some of my time understanding and improving a small piece of land where rice and crops are grown.

The last day of my school life, I wanted to enjoy with two of my closest friends after the last exam. But within two hours, I received the news that they were no longer alive, they died in the swimming pool. My school days ended with a tragedy that taught me that you should live your life today as tomorrow is uncertain.

My time at university showed me the power of trust. Early one morning in late December 1999, my professor called me and gave me the invitation letter from Hanover. The rest is history: I landed in Hanover on 30 January 2000. I did nothing but trust my professor, which more than proved its worth. Both host professors are still here today, after 22 years, and are close to me, and I still value their advice very much.

"We must be the change we want to see" - Mahathma Gandhi.

This quote comes closest to my heart and attitude towards life. After completing my PhD, I attended a conference in Zurich on the future of agricultural research and development. On this trip I became aware and thoughtful because almost all the delegates were close to retirement age. I very much appreciate the experience but more importantly, never discuss

the future without the youth. This led me to the idea of founding the youth network YPARD, which is now present in more than 170 countries around the world.

Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I firmly believe that intense and continuous thought paves the way to reality. Through my political involvement I have learned: what is important is resilience, consistency in decision-making, absolute humility and the strength to always serve others and not oneself.

"The secret of happiness lies not in possession, but in giving. He who makes others happy becomes happy." André Gide

This quote is true in that many of you have chosen to share your happiness, time, care, concern and love with me so that today you are my friends and beyond. Karma plays a role in such occasions, maybe we have had a connection at some point in our lives, maybe it is a philosophical train of thought.

This university has been my home for 22 years, be it in teaching, research or administration. I will always remain grateful to this temple of knowledge.

When I am asked where I am from, whether from Germany or abroad, I always say: I have had the great fortune to visit more than 40 countries on most continents to study and work, but my birthplace is Thanjavur and my life place is Hanover.

Any recognition or award, in my opinion, is always the result of teamwork.

Before I end my speech, I would like to express my great gratitude. I am grateful for all the help and support I have received, be it from family, friendship, collegial support and sometimes the unknown. I will never forget my schoolmate who helped me with simple maths problems that are still a nightmare for me, the university mate who took me home over 70 km in the middle of the night when I was ill, the person who collected my missing passport from Frankfurt Airport on 30 January 2000 and those who have supported me and been there for me in word and deed throughout my life to this day.

Dear esteemed dignitaries, family, friends and acquaintances,

Our former Lord Mayor and current Minister President, Mr Stephan Weil, once said "Hannover is the most beautiful city in the world."

Yes, it is and it will remain so, because Hannover is a city of science, culture and international diversity.

India is my birthplace, my start in life, that's a fact. But Hanover has long been my home, Lower Saxony is my home.

Thank you very much.