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I am glad to be here with you for this great event, even if age and infirmity mean that I am only here electronically. But my son, who always looks to a sustainable future, tells me that, to save time, money and CO₂, such electronic appearances (perhaps enhanced to 3D) will become the norm, so it is appropriate that a new Centre, designed for the future, should be inaugurated in this way. It also reminds us how mathematical science, through Maxwell's equations of electromagnetism, underpins the technology of our era.

India has a rich and subtle cultural past which includes great periods in the development of arithmetic, from the humble but crucial decimal system, to the higher reaches of number theory. In more recent times it produced the remarkable genius of Ramanujan, whose fame continues to grow and is embodied in a movie, currently being filmed in Trinity College, Cambridge, the home of Isaac Newton.

India has also produced Nobel Laureates, such as Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar in Astronomy, Sir C.V. Raman in Physics, Amartya Sen in Economics and Venkatraman Ramakrishnan in Biology. While I have no direct connection with Raman I did visit his famous lab here in Bangalore and I clearly remember the impression left on me, by one of his papers, which starts off by saying "From my own collection of diamonds I have been led to the following conclusions..."

But I am glad to say that the other three, together with Ramanujan, were all Fellows of my own College, Trinity. When the President of India visited us in Trinity some years ago he was even more impressed by the names of Jawaharlal Nehru and the famous cricketer Ranjitsinhji.

The ICTS, whose inauguration we are celebrating today is a branch of the Tata Institute in Mumbai. I have visited the TIFR many times over the years and got to know the key mathematical figures there, including S. Chandrasekharan, M.S. Narasimhan and C.S. Seshadri. Many of their students came to work with me in Oxford and Princeton, notably the brilliant mathematician Vijay Patodi, whose life paralleled that of Ramanujan, dying at the early age of 32.

I also got to know a young physicist, Spenta Wadia (happily still alive), who has been the driving force behind the establishment of the ICTS. The fact that I had physics friends is an indication that the frontiers between disciplines were breaking down, and this has become the main feature of our times. The old rigid disciplines of the past are giving way to a much more fluid scene, which is why the ICTS is the right body for the future.

The future belongs to the young and the science that is now emerging will affect the lives of everyone on the planet. The ICTS has a noble task, that of providing the right atmosphere to inspire the next generation of scientists. When I was a young man in 1954, I heard the great German mathematician Hermann Weyl eulogize the Fields Medallists by saying that their work showed that the “old gnarled tree of mathematics was still full of the sap of life”. I am happy to end on that cheerful note.