

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

COMMENCEMENT 1995

"Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."

At about the time Samuel Beckett crafted these despairing lines for his character Pozzo in Waiting For Godot, a young Indian student who also happened to be without sight was studying Modern History with a hard gem-like flame at Balliol College in Oxford University. That young man, light denied, would go on to exact day-labor from himself in the course of the next forty years, redefining literary professionalism as he did so, confronting a broad range of subjects in a variety of genres, traditional and otherwise. In time he would establish himself as a chronicler of modern India, as a cultural commentator, autobiographer, political analyst, historian of ideas, short story writer, and broadcast journalist. He would refute by his own example Pozzo's bleak vision of the insignificance of the individual life and the hopelessness of human history.

VED PARKASH MEHTA, "Veddi", child of the Punjab, sometime denizen of Bombay, of Arkansas, California, Oxford, New Delhi, New York, and Dark Harbor, Maine, quondam speaker of Punjabi, Marathi, English, and French, citizen of the world, your superhuman memory, indefatigable industry, seemingly effortless fluency, and unwavering intellectual and physical courage have resulted in a remarkable outpouring of books, articles, and even a television documentary. Walking the Indian Street, The New India, Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles, Portrait of India, A Family Affair: India Under Three Prime Ministers and this year (with Yale University Press) Rajiv Gandhi and Rama's Kingdom -- to name only a few titles -- guide us through your native land with a sure and knowing hand. Your moving autobiographical series, Continents of Exile consisting of seven separate volumes ending with Up at Oxford, published in 1993, affords that rarest of pleasures -- the opportunity to live vicariously in other times and places through the mind and heart of another which is the impetus -- and the end -- of all humanistic readership.

Randolph Visiting Distinguished Professor of English and History at Vassar College, Staff Writer at The New Yorker magazine, and MacArthur Prize Fellow. President Edwards, I am honored to present to you **VED PARKASH MEHTA**, for the degree of **DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS**, *honoris causa*.

Presented by Professor William C. Watterson