



Samita Nandy

# The Next 'Maharajah'

## In Conversation with Federal Heritage Minister Dean Del Mastro

### — Samita Nandy

The Maharaja: The Spendor of India's Royal Court and narratives around patronage in India and Europe will end at Art Gallery of Ontario on April 3, 2011. However, aristocratic glamour will continue to be celebrated in the upcoming tour of His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales and Miss Catherine Middleton. The Royal Tour will take place from June 30 to July 8, 2011 and will include celebration of Canada Day in Ottawa as well as sites in Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and the National Capital Region. This is a symbolic marker of institutional norms in their wedding. It plays a historical role in the cultural maintenance of what it means to be 'royal' through successive generations and relations of the British Monarch. At the same time, in the esteemed words of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, it is a "delight" for the Canadian

nation. My candid conversation with Federal Heritage Minister Dean Del Mastro sheds some light on what may be perceived significant for Canada. As



Prince William and Catherine Middleton

the Parliamentary Secretary at the House of Commons, the Honourable Del Mastro performs a supportive role to the ministerial staff in planning and coordinating the tour with Buckingham Palace as well as Canadian cultural heritage. In this position, the Honourable Del Mastro expresses the rationale for considering Canada in the couple's first

overseas tour. For him, the Royal Tour is reflective of the "long" and "close" relationship that the Canadian government has shared with Britain. The honour in hosting the

tour of Prince William and Miss Catherine Middleton particularly reinforces loyal commitments to British royalty. What makes their popularity more meaningful for Canada, as the Honourable Del Mastro further asserts, is that there is "curiosity" and "excitement" among people who want to get to know them. For this purpose, the

young Royal couple will meet and greet, make themselves available, share long standing relations with Canadians and respond to the growing media attention. This Royal Tour

will be different from that of Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh in 2010. The difference is a temporal one. For the contemporary generation, Prince William and Miss Katerine Middleton, in Del Mastro's words, have qualities of a "rock star" and will attract "youthful attraction."

Prince William shares legendary fame related to the lineage of the Monarch. Miss Catherine Middleton also shares Royal fame now. She reflects historical positioning of the British Queen and court whereby Royal women were at the centre of celebrity culture. As the Honourable Del Mastro adds, "When you are the princess and husband is second in line to the throne, there is a diplomatic responsibility and celebrity status attached to that." He adds that part of the celebrity is the "pouring affection" and "people want to know them." As seen in celebrity photography and aesthetic tastes in fashion, the Honourable Del Mastro indicates that Miss Catherine Middleton, like Princess Diana, is very comfortable with the crowd. The ordinariness in this can be compared with that of Princess Diana as a celebrity activist. This ordinariness is also reflected in Prince William's marriage to a commoner, invitation of a hundred British people including street kids, and

reflection of everyday struggles of class division (Taylor, 2010; Lawless, 2010). These people will be likely drawn from charities and supported by the Royal couple (Taylor, 2010). Unlike participation of celebrities like Rick Mercer and Lisa Ray in the luncheon of The Queen in 2010, the Honourable Del Mastro speculates the equal participation of ordinary citizens and public leaders in this Royal Tour. Federal Heritage Minister Dean Del Mastro concludes that "we are all just people with similar traits and characteristics. Sometimes, we elevate people and how different they are but we have much in common with them." The British royal fame of Prince William and Catherine Middleton will, then, not only reflect the extension of parliamentary democracy but new ways of interrogating and celebrating humanitarian visions in Canada.