

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT  
OF INDIA ON 'MAHATMA GANDHI'S THOUGHTS AND  
PHILOSOPHY & ITS RELEVANCE TODAY'**

I am indeed happy to be present here today to celebrate 150th Birth Centenary of the greatest Indian of Modern times – the Father of our Nation – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It is beyond any doubt that leaders like Mahatma Gandhi are epochal personalities. Their thoughts and actions transcend times and remain a source of exemplary inspiration for several generations. At the outset, I congratulate Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan for organizing a series of lectures on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and life.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. Bharti Vidya Bhavan was itself set up by K.M. Munshi in 1938 with Gandhiji's blessings. I am happy to know that they have been promoting 'Sanskrit and Sanskriti' for the last 80 years. I am told that Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan has started this Lecture Series with the objective of apprising the youth, students and teachers of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts and Philosophy and their relevance today.

3. Today I have been asked to address the gathering on **"Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts and Philosophy and its Relevance Today"**. Dear Friends, in some way or another, we all have encountered and got acquainted with Gandhiji's thoughts

and philosophy. Gandhiji's greatest contribution to the world is his philosophy of **Non-Violence** and a treasure of doctrines that are associated with Truth.

4. Bapu, as we fondly call him, remains the greatest moral giant, visionary, original thinker, teacher and above all a common man who understood 'struggle'. He was instrumental in realizing not one but the aspirations of numerous nations through his Philosophy of non-violence and the doctrine of *Satyagraha*, whose literal translation means insistence on and demand for the truth, the right and the just. The struggle for freedom from apartheid in South Africa was led by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who subscribed to Gandhiji's concept of non-violent protest. Martin Luther King Jr. led the fight for equal rights for African Americans in the US without resorting to the use of arms, Union Leader Lech Walesa led Poland to democracy in a similar fashion. In Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi led her pro-democracy activists in the spirit of Gandhi.

Dear Friends,

5. Gandhiji was of the strong belief that use of violent means would not serve the purpose of achieving freedom in the true sense. The nobility of means, for him, was as important in achieving justice as the end itself. In fact, at a time when the entire nation was working towards Independence from the British, Gandhiji went ahead of the professed goal of political

independence. He understood that poverty, ignorance, intolerance, disease are also shackles from which India had to break free. He understood that true independence comes only with full opportunity for freedom of the mind and spirit. He said, and I quote, "***Mere withdrawal of the English is not independence. It [Independence] means the consciousness in the average villager that he is the maker of his own destiny; he is his own legislator through his chosen representative.***" (Unquote)

6. Truly a Mahatma, Gandhiji is the Father of the largest democracy – a noisy, vibrant, sprightly democracy.

*Ahimsa* has been the core of Indian ethos and He is the modern stalwart of *ahimsa*. Indian democracy is built on the pillars of three 'D's - Debate, Discussion and Dissent. However, I am deeply disheartened at the violence taking place these days around us – violence that not only perpetrates physical harm but mental, intellectual and socio-economic as well. There is an utter disregard for the life of fellow humans; there is mistrust and hatred; there is suspicion and jealousy. Our civilizational guiding values of '***Sarve sukhinsha bhavantu***' seem to be losing its meaning. We must today ask ourselves if we have lived up to the aspirations of the Father of our Nation, as indeed our basic guiding principles evolved over 5000 years of civilizational history.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

7. Bapu lived and died raising the moral and spiritual standards of humanity, nurturing and spreading by the example of his own life the virtues of Faith, Truth, Love, Compassion, Dignity of Labour, Humility, Fearlessness, Regard for Human Rights and Freedom, Service to God and Humanity by personal sacrifices. We are today at a juncture where we need to renew our pledge to follow the path trodden by him. This is not only essential but imperative for sustaining our true identities as Indians.

8. Mahatma Gandhi envisioned an India where our rich culture and heritage are leveraged to get ahead in this globalised world. He rightly placed utmost emphasis on learning from our roots. We have centuries' worth of knowledge to guide us. He preached a return to simplicity and absence of conspicuous consumption. He always said, and I quote, "***The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed.***" (Unquote). He firmly believed that in order to strengthen our economy we must strengthen the grassroots. And as always, I urge the younger generation, students, innovators, businessmen, teachers, policy-makers and flag bearers of our democracy to harness the potential of our rich resources - human and natural - and look within. To follow in his footsteps, we must aspire to be human beings who treat one another with respect and dignity.

Dear friends,

9. The world has become a global village and it is necessary for us to learn to live with others while understanding them. A nation where almost 70% of the population still lives in the villages, the concept of Gram Swaraj- creation of a self sustainable village economy, as popularized by Gandhiji is more than relevant today. Gandhiji through his teachings and anecdotes has taught us about Satyagraha, Gram Swaraj, unity, harmony, concern for the poor and deprived and how to coexist in this globalised world. His relevance, I believe, has only exponentially increased and will always continue to do so. Today, it pleases me to see so many of our young entrepreneurs finding innovative solutions to the needs of the nation. I encourage more and more such youth to give birth to their ideas through start-ups. For this, it is important for our institutes of higher education to create linkages with the industrial and marketing sector to provide hands-on experience to our graduates. We must together realize his dream of self-sustaining village economies. Our rural and indigenous handicrafts and artisan skills are today renowned and valued the world over. This is the perfect opportunity to preserve and promote our heritage.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Since today we are dwelling upon ***Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts and Philosophy and its Relevance Today***, we must

also understand that his ideals extend beyond politics. Mahatma Gandhi tried to bring vigorous moral force in Indian Politics. And in these testing times, his ideas of purity of means and supremacy of individual conscious become more relevant than ever. It is indeed astonishing that a man born a hundred and fifty years ago is still talked about with such great reverence. I would like to recall this incident where a journalist asked of President Barack Obama upon his election, to name one person who is no longer living, with whom he would like to have dinner and he promptly answered Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi was truly a Universal Man. The unity of his thoughts, words and actions was inspiring. There is not one aspect of human life that he has not meditated upon, understood, improved, practised and presented to the world. His life teaches us to constantly examine ourselves and seek the truth. His philosophy and principles are a guide to a moral way of life - one that teaches us to be, above all, a good human being.

Dear Friends,

11. I am happy to learn that Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has asked all the members of Bhavan family including the schools and colleges to strive to inculcate Gandhian values in our people in general and students in particular. I commend the efforts of Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan and implore all of you to imbibe his values individually. Like Gandhiji is still alive in the hearts of millions of people across the world from all walks of life irrespective of nations, race, caste,

creed, religion, and so must his values. With these words, I wish to conclude and hope that these Series of Lectures will inspire its audience to love one another and learn to be good human beings. I congratulate the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan once again.

Thank you

Jai Hind