

FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE DELIVERING A LECTURE ON THE TOPIC “IS GANDHIAN PATH THE RIGHT WAY FORWARD FOR THE CONFLICT TORN WORLD TODAY”

I am extremely happy to be present amongst you all to celebrate the **150th Birth Anniversary** of the greatest human of the 20th Century, who has few peers, Beacon of Hope, not just of our Nation but of the World – **Mahatma Gandhi**. While I am proud in sharing his nationality, his own persona and philosophy was universal, and as is increasingly becoming evident – eternal.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. The topic of today’s lecture: ***Is Gandhian path the right way forward for the conflict torn world today?*** And I would like to begin this lecture by stating, Gandhian path is not only the right way forward, but **the only way forward** for the “conflict torn world today”.

3. I am reminded of American historian, Will Durant, words today. He so rightly said about the Mahatma and I

quote, "Not since Buddha has India so revered any man. Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity of soul and forgiveness of enemies. We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint."

Dear Friends,

4. The advent of Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi on the political stage of British India in the second decade of the last century was to change, indeed metamorphose India's polity as well as the society for all times to come. He made the Congress Party as also the entire politics mass based. He took the political discourse, that was hitherto limited to council chambers, lawyers bars and intellectual drawing rooms and journalistic periodicals, out to the people and for the first time ever, galvanized the entire Indian Mass across provinces and princely states into one giant movement for independence. The issues for him, were no longer to be those of the planters, teachers, lawyers or Zamindars. For him it was to centre around the

impoverished peasantry, depressed classes, education and social harmony.

5. When he decided to tour India dressed as a common Indian, travelling in the 3rd Class compartments of trains, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who Gandhi himself described as his "**Political Guru**", initially expressed apprehension. However, after a discussion between them, Gokhale gave him his considered opinion that such an exercise, though uncommon will get unprecedented results. The outcome thereof was visible in Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad Mill strike and the Non Cooperation Movement. What followed thereafter, is as they say History. Speaking about the advent of Gandhi, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru said in his biography, and I quote, "***He was humble but also clear-cut and hard as diamond, pleasant and soft spoken but inflexible and terribly earnest. His eyes were mild and deep, yet out of them blazed out a fierce energy and determination. This is going to be a great struggle, he [Gandhi] said, with a very powerful adversary. If you***

want to take it up, you must be prepared to lose everything.” [Unquote]

6. It happens rarely in history that a person is capable of addressing not only the issues of their times, but generations to come. That invisible force, which runs deep in each Indian and the very idea of India, is Mahatma Gandhi. There is no other way of describing Gandhiji, no way of explaining his life, no manner of telling what we have achieved because of him because nothing we say or do can do justice to The Mahatma. He is an unparalleled, invisible Force that drives our nation forward, each and every day of our lives. We realise it or not, his presence is indomitable, inalienable and unassailable in our National consciousness as well as conscience.

7. Gandhiji is not just the Father of our Nation. He was also the maker of our Nation. He gave us the moral vector to guide our actions, a measure by which we are judged. Gandhiji saw India as an inclusive nation where every section of our population lived in equality and enjoyed equal opportunity. He saw India as a country which would

celebrate and constantly strengthen its vibrant diversity and commitment to pluralism. Gandhiji wanted our people to move forward united in ever widening thought and action. And most of all, he did not want us to convert the celebration of his life and message into a mere ritual.

8. The ideals that Gandhiji espoused are part of our collective living heritage. This heritage is deeply imbued with the idea of being '**one people.**' It is a celebration of our diversity, our plural culture, our many languages, religions and different modes of life. This was the idea that moved those who strove for India's freedom. Our deep and abiding commitment to democracy stems from this idea. We continue to be guided by these ideals; we remain committed to them not because it is our past, but because **it is also our future.**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

9. Gandhiji said '***My Life is My Message***'. Smt Indira Gandhi in her foreword to the 90th Volume of the

monumental compilation of Gandhiji's writings, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, explained the significance of these words. She wrote and I quote, "***He was one of those who spoke as he thought and acted as he spoke, one of those few on whom no shadow fell between word and deed. His words were deeds, and they built a movement and a nation and changed the lives of countless individuals.***" (Unquote) Dear friends, only a person who saw **Truth as God** could speak of Life itself as a message.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

10. Today our country, as indeed the world, is grappling with a number of concerns, primary among which to my mind are environmental concerns, which have only aggravated in the last few decades. These are indeed concerns that put a question mark on the very survival of the Human Race and the Mother Earth. Air pollution is one of the worst scourges to have affected India. According to reports, the average life expectancies are likely to go down by about 15 months

because of air pollution. It is also a known fact that we are home to 11 out of 20 of the most polluted (in terms of air pollution) cities in the entire world. The dreaded formulations of climate change are no more projections of the future. They are here and now. Temperatures are crossing 50 degrees in summers in our cities. The increasingly tormenting heat waves in the past years are but an indication of the worsening global warming and climate change situations. The Polar and Himalayan glaciers are melting at an alarming rate, floods and other such natural disasters are occurring with increasing frequency. The number of forest fires, floods, earthquakes and such other calamities over the past years has been unprecedented. These are the new and the real conflicts and tensions of the new world.

11. Long before the world had sensed these dangers of greenhouse emissions, Gandhiji had warned us about the perils of unplanned and reckless industrialization in his book *Hind Swaraj* in 1909. As we recall his wise words, ***“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but***

not every man's greed. Today, we have reached unacceptable levels of degradation and wanton destruction of nature. Today, our youth is questioning us, demanding answers from us, and rightly so, as to why we were so reckless in our thinking and so engrossed in our haste to become supreme powers, that we forgot what we are leaving for our children. As of now, we are leaving, burnt Amazons, melting poles, intolerable levels of heat, millions of tons of plastic, dying natural habitats of plant and animal species and above all, despair. Because we are yet not ready to accept and bring change. I am reminded of Bapu's words on conservation of natural resources and protection of our environment. He said and I quote, ***"The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So we have to handover to them at least as it was handed over to us."***
(Unquote)

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

12. It is time that we start thinking of total physical and transcendental shift in our values and approaches towards production, consumption, habits and in our lifestyle. Gandhiji always emphasized on moral responsibility of the individual at personal, social, national and universal level. To that extent he said, and I quote, ***“Live more simply so that others can simply live.”*** He believed that if human wants are reduced to a bare minimum, it would have a compounding effect on the well being of all, including the environment. His vision for achieving so was based on self-reliance, self help, decentralization, localized and small scale industrialization.

13. Similarly, Gandhiji said he had no use for economics without ethics. This simple injunction created a moral frame within which human ingenuity has to function. The limits to human greed have to be defined by inner imperatives and not external constraints. This inner imperative that he called beautifully ***“a small, still voice”*** is available to all of us, if we cultivate the capability to listen to it and follow its dictates.

14. By placing ethics at the heart of economics, Gandhiji gave us an idea whose significance we have just begun to understand. This is the idea of Faith. All of us live by and through trust. Gandhiji asked us to have faith in the goodness of our hearts and the hearts of others. This goodness would enable us to act as Trustees of what is ours and not ours. More importantly, to be a Trustee is to see Nature as belonging to all creation and those who are yet to come. Thus, if we have to secure the future of the coming generations, we will have to take sincere efforts in following the footsteps of the Father of the Nation towards building a society in which our future generations can live and breathe happily.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. India, with its population of 1.3 billion has been home to the harmonious mingling of ethnicities and religions for centuries. We are clear that lasting peace can be built only on a foundation of mutual respect and not just tolerance, which was consistently and eloquently advocated by Gandhiji. Mahatma Gandhi influenced many leaders across the world

through his thoughts and action including Martin Luther King Jr, Lech Wałęsa, Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Dalai Lama. Martin Luther King Jr. went to the extent of saying, and I quote, "***Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished their method.***" [unquote] He said on another occasion: "***If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony.***" [unquote]

16. The Mahatma once asked: "***What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?***" [Unquote] Ladies and Gentlemen, I have no hesitation in stating that the ideas of truth, openness, dialogue and non-violence espoused by Gandhiji provide the best way forward for a world confronted with intolerance, bigotry, terrorism and Xenophobic politics. His values and vision are more relevant today than any time before in a

world desperately searching for permanent solutions to conflicts and tensions. These ideals therefore need to be propagated far and wide, especially amongst the youth.

17. Gandhiji was a revolutionary of an extraordinary nature, with a rare farsightedness clearly demonstrated, a century ago. Throughout his life, Gandhiji learnt from each and every experience. He had the insight and ingenuity to suggest measures to root out a problem rather than search for ways to subside it. On his passing away, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had rightly said and I quote, "***The light is gone and yet it will shine for a thousand years***" (unquote). Since then, the world has witnessed sea-change in social, political and economic landscapes. Yet, the importance of Gandhian thought of truth, morality and ethics remain integral to our national consciousness. Gandhian philosophy never turns obsolete, as even decades after his death world leaders continue to follow his ideals to achieve human development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. Gandhiji's dream was guided by the light of knowledge and wisdom gained over centuries. Hence, a great responsibility is on us, the custodians of Gandhiji's legacy, to play a key role in this transformation. The support and contribution of the wider section of society, is necessary for this. On the celebration of his 150th Birth Anniversary, I hope and pray that we truly understand the depth and expanse of Gandhiji's vision, and the ways in which it can become a guiding path for us. Gandhiji's dream is our dream; his vision must lead us through the challenges of the present towards a clean, green and self-sufficient Bharat.

19. I wish to conclude with the words of American writer and novelist, Pearl S. Buck, had this to say after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and I quote, "***He was right, he knew he was right, we all knew he was right. The man who killed him knew he was right. However long the follies of the violent continue, they but prove that Gandhi was right. 'Resist to the very end', he said,***

***'but without violence'. Of violence the world is sick. Oh, India, dare to be worthy of your Gandhi.'* (Unquote)**

Thank You

Jai Hind