

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHILE ON THE TOPIC: GANDHI FOR THE
YOUNG**

Santiago, April 1, 2019

1. I bring warm greetings to you from the people and the youth of India. As countries, we may be distanced from each other, but as societies, nurtured and nourished by the Andes and the Himalayas, we have much in common and much to share. We both have been inspired by each other's leaders and their legacy. I pay my respects to the leading lights of Chile and this prestigious University, Nobel laureates Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral. Of the latter, we are celebrating her 130th birth anniversary this year. I also wish to recall the contribution of Eloisa Diaz, the first medical doctor of Chile and South America, and an alumni of this University in whose name this hall where I speak has been marked. The humanism of your thought leaders are so deeply reflected in Mahatma Gandhi's teachings that I am almost tempted to dilate upon them. But that I leave for another day.

2. From Chile to China, from Mexico to Malaysia, on 02nd October—the International Day of Non-Violence--this year, the world will celebrate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Yesterday, I had the honour to pay my respects to him at the Plaza de la India in the city. That Mahatma Gandhi has shaped human history is well-known. But more importantly, his simple, yet revolutionary ideas continue to be the light in darkness, hope in helplessness, faith in disbelief for us. Amid a turbulent 21st century, I consider this occasion to be opportune to deliberate with the future generation of Chile, on the relevance of Gandhiji. Personally, speaking of Mahatma Gandhi is a reinvigorating experience of reinforcing the core human values that define us, that keep us happy. Today, I invite you to engage with this legendary leader in a creative and meaningful way.

My dear students,

3. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, brought us freedom through a nonviolent struggle. His political strategy resting on the moral force, a force that he called truth force or soul force, was unique and

novel. His life had several folds, each more meaningful than the other. For me, he was the “experimental” Gandhi defying class and race boundaries to go to England for higher studies; the pedagogue Gandhi seeking to integrate the “mental” and the “manual” for nurturing the foundations of “integral education” that sought to combine the head, the heart and hands of both the learner and the teacher; the creative Gandhi transforming “salt” into a powerful symbol of mass movement; and the determined Gandhi with his frail body walking through the villages of India with a lamp of truth amid the all-pervading darkness of violence that marked our Independence. He was unique in his approach. A close associate of Gandhiji said that the Mahatma combined both Kranti - that is - revolution - and Shanti - that is – peace - in his being. This made him an inspiring illustration of courage and struggle: the courage to retain the clarity of thought and conviction even amid the worst form of turmoil. You would also know that Mahatma Gandhi inspired many others who were leading revolutionary struggles such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Gandhiji influenced the activities of freedom and civil rights movements in all five continents of the world.

4. His main guiding principle was truth, his life a continued exercise in discovering and pursuing Satya or Truth, hence the term for his movement, Satyagraha, which essentially means insistence on Truth. The tools that he used in pursuit of Satyagraha were Ahimsa or nonviolence. He believed morality to be the foundation of life and conduct; and truth to be the end-objective of life. For him truth and love were same as God. And he sought to realize God by serving humanity.
5. Mahatma Gandhi belonged to all cultures and he drew from all religions. While deeply rooted in Hinduism, Gandhiji was also influenced by Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam as also by thinkers such as Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. He thus came to represent the confluence of all that was best in the East and the West.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. We also remember Mahatma Gandhi for his advocacy of the theory of universal love and compassion. On one level, this translated into his belief in “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” – that is - the world is one family. It meant tolerance and openness to different cultures and ideas and the

non-application of any judgmental criteria, except the criteria of truth. On another level, this manifested itself in his philosophy of Sarvodaya or the uplift and salvation of all. He believed that all action should ultimately aim at enhancing the dignity and destiny of all human beings, no matter how socially or economically disadvantaged. The world would indeed be a better place if all of us strove to apply this principle to guide our actions and our thoughts. And it is these principles which form the bedrock of our foreign policy, our initiatives to help and share with those in need and our sincerest attempts to continuously strive for a world of peace and harmony.

7. Mahatma Gandhi carried his concept of universal love to include living in harmony with nature. He advocated both sustainability and ecological sensitivity at a time when the industrial revolution and increasing mechanization were the mantra guiding the world. He promoted concepts which are now enshrined in the sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations. In our own approach to combining development with environment protection, we have been guided by his teachings. He would say and I quote: "*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.*" Our global initiative to set up the International Solar Alliance and offer solutions for Climate Change is inspired by these mighty words.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Chile is a musical society. You as a culture have made music your lifeline. This is a common value that you share with Mahatma Gandhi. He believed that music was the essence of life. True to his syncretic nature, Gandhiji engaged with Rabindranath Tagore on teaching of music in the world university in Shanti Niketan to draw from sources around the world, to be all-inclusive. It is befitting tribute to him, that as we celebrate his 150th birth anniversary this year, we have over 130 countries singing his favourite bhajan or hymn –“Vaishnav Jana To Tene Kahiye”. Yesterday, we heard its melodious rendition by your famous singers Cecilia Frigeiro, Joakin Bello and Juan Elgado.

My dear students,

10. Mahatma Gandhi practised what he preached. He spoke of the Soul of India residing in our country's villages, and the importance of developing the institutions of rural India. Again, he embodied these principles in his own life, from living in an Ashram or a self-sustaining community, to his espousal of Khadi or hand-woven cloth, not only as a symbol of resistance to the domination of the Indian market by British manufactured goods but also as an extension of his philosophy of self-reliance and eco-friendliness. Many of Gandhiji's concepts, which seemed out of sync with the world that he lived in, are today becoming increasingly relevant and finding their own momentum.

11. Many of the policies that the Indian Government follows are inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, from the Swachh Bharat programme with its emphasis on sanitation and public health and to our fight against climate change. When we strive for gender equality and the uplift of all disadvantaged sections of society, we are following in Gandhiji's footsteps. When we advocate the need for harmonious urbanization and develop the rural hinterland, we are echoing Gandhiji. He was both a nationalist and an internationalist and even today, the ethical standards by which we judge our leadership have been shaped by Mahatma Gandhi. His influence, not only in India but on the whole world, was all-pervasive. It is no wonder that we call him The Mahatma – The Great Soul.

12. Yet, at the end of the day, Gandhiji was a human being. Many writers and commentators have focused on the persona of Mahatma Gandhi. Whatever their assertions, it is beyond question that Gandhi was a unique persona who inspired both the East and the West, who forged new pathways for human endeavour, while at the same time maintaining the strength and sanctity of tradition and spiritual roots. To all those who are adrift today in a sea of doubt and scepticism, his life, thought and philosophy would inspire them to regain inner strength and confidence. Mahatma Gandhi was more than just a man, he was an ideology, an institution that still resonates more than a hundred years after it was developed. As I conclude, I wish to recall the prophetic words of Albert Einstein- and I quote "*Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood, walked upon this Earth.*"- unquote.

13. I hope I have inspired you enough to bring a bit of the Mahatma in your daily lives.

Muchas gracias!