

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF
THE ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH CENTRE AT SABARMATI
ASHRAM**

Ahmedabad, Gujarat: Dec 01, 2015

1. I am happy to visit Sabarmati Ashram today and inaugurate this new Archives and Research Centre.
2. I have in the past often sat on this platform of *Hriday Kunj*, which is a special place. *Hriday Kunj* was the sparse dwelling of a frail man who brought a mighty empire to its knees. Every time I come here, I have gone away with renewed hope and faith.
3. Friends, we live in times when the world needs Gandhiji more than ever. The Archives and Research Centre of the Ashram which I inaugurated today is a concrete effort to conserve and disseminate Gandhiji's legacy. The responsibility we shoulder to spread his word and message is more pressing now than ever before.
4. *Hriday Kunj* both inspires and challenges us. It tells what one man's dedication, determination and ideals can achieve. At the same time, it also reminds us of the road we still need to traverse in order to realise Gandhiji's dream of an India free from want, oppression and injustice.
5. This is a hallowed place which each one of us should visit again and again to draw strength and launch forth in the task of building the India that our founding fathers envisioned and made provision for in our great Constitution.
6. 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.
7. 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 unitedly 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. Gandhiji taught us to be morally innovative. If India leads in moral innovation, all other forms of creativity which we have in abundance - would automatically fulfil the Talisman that Gandhiji gave us, namely, wiping every tear from each eye.

9. When I paid my homage to Mahatma Gandhi by placing the Sutar Aanti (सुतर आन्ति), I read the rare hymn composed by him in honour of the Daridra Narayan, the Poor as God. It reads:

*Lord of humility,
dwelling in the little pariah hut,
help us to search for Thee throughout
that fair land watered by Ganges,
Brahmaputra and Jumna.*

*Give us receptiveness,
give us the open heartedness,
give us Thy humility,
give us the ability and willingness
To identify ourselves
with the masses of India.*

*O God,
who does help only when man
feels utterly humble, Grant that we
may not be isolated from the people
we would serve as servants and friends.*

*Let us be embodiments of self-sacrifice,
embodiments of godliness,
humility personified, that we may know
the land better, And love it more.*

I think each and every Indian should meditate upon its meaning and significance.

10. The real essence of Gandhiji's legacy and its continuing resonance lies in his injunction to us that all our actions must keep in mind the last person. The last person in India is often a woman, a Dalit or an Adivasi. We must constantly ask ourselves, do our actions have meaning for them? The "Tryst with Destiny" that Pandit Nehru spoke of was this obligation.
11. We must empower the poorest of the poor. Everyone must act as Trustees of collective welfare and wealth. The essence of being human is our trust of each other. The damage we see to the environment all around us- reminds us of the need for Trusteeship.

12. Every day, we see unprecedented violence all around us. At the heart of this violence is darkness, fear and mistrust. While we invent new modes of combating this ever spiralling violence, we must not forget the power of non-violence, dialogue and reason.
13. Ahimsa is not a negative force. It is not just non-injury. Ahimsa is that moral possibility which can dispel the darkness and make us aglow with light. Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were bearers of this light and that light must continue to guide us.
14. Those who abide in Truth, those who are devotees of Truth as God, of Satya Narayan, do not take lives of others, but sacrifice their own. Gandhiji gave us an object lesson in Ahimsa by taking the assassin's bullets with the name of Rama on his lips.
15. We must free our public discourse of all forms of violence, physical as well as verbal. Only a non-violent society can ensure the participation of all sections of the people, especially the marginalised and the dispossessed in our democratic process.
16. The real dirt of India lies not in our streets but in our minds and in our unwillingness to let go of views that divide society into "them" and "us", "pure" and "impure". We must make a success of the laudable and welcome Swachh Bharat Mission. However, this also must be seen as just the beginning of a much larger and intense effort to cleanse minds and fulfil Gandhiji's vision in all its aspects.
17. Gandhiji would tell us – and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar would agree with him - that so long as untouchability persists, so long as dehumanising practice of carrying night soil persists, we cannot have real Swachh Bharat. Gandhiji insisted on the dignity of all human labour and expressed his desire to be a scavenger. We must remember that Gandhiji wished to be a scavenger of our hearts as much as of our villages.
18. Gandhiji enunciated some of the finest principles of democratic life that should at all times regulate relations of citizens and their government. He said and I quote: *"The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied; unbridled licence is a sign of vulgarity injurious alike to self and one's neighbours."* (unquote) (Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 338).
19. Gandhiji wrote to Gurudev Tagore. "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." Sabarmati Ashram was such a place in his days.

20. Only those who are confident of their conviction, secure in their faith and rooted in their culture can hope to live in an open house, an open society. If we close ourselves in, seek to be immune from other influences, it shows that we are prepared to live in a house that is devoid of fresh breeze. Hriday Kunj's lesson to us in contemporary India is that we must build an open society ever ready to engage with diverse ideas and thoughts on equal terms.
21. Friends, Gandhiji was an advocate of knowledge without barriers. Gandhiji's life should be understood as a whole, not piecemeal, and certainly not fragmented. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru alerted us a few years after Gandhiji's demise and I quote: *"A new generation grows up to whom he is almost a name, a great name to be revered, but nevertheless a name. Within a few more years there will not be many left who have come in personal contact with him and had experience of that vivid, virile and magnificent personality. The legend will grow and take many shapes, sometimes with little truth in it."* (unquote)
22. Our intangible heritage lies in our systems of thought, in ideas that are unique to this land but not exclusive to us, as they seek to embrace not only humanity but life itself. The Institutions founded by Gandhiji and those charged with the responsibility of conservation, preservation and dissemination of his heritage must take the lead in this regard. Debate and research on Gandhiji must be supported by placing in the public domain authenticated versions of Gandhiji's writings. The Ashram must partner with other archives in the country and overseas to create Digital Commons on the life and thought of Gandhiji.
23. I convey my good wishes to the team of the Sabarmati Ashram who have conceptualised and created this archives and research centre. A memorial like the Ashram must remain always alive to the expectations that this nation has from it and be willing and capable of assuming new roles. It must remain forever relevant in the imagination of the people.
24. Friends, Gandhiji's favourite Bhajan, *"Vaishnava Jana To"* was being sung this morning as I entered *Hriday Kunj*. This immortal hymn of Narsinh Mehta says that the true devotee is one who is compassionate and moved by empathy for others. This capacity for compassion and empathy is the true foundation of our civilisation. Gandhiji used a very special word for civilisation, SUDHAR. SUDHAR is not just the good path or the right path but also that which holds human civilisation together. Let us pledge to join hands and build an India that truly exemplifies this SUDHAR.

Thank you.