

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
ON THE OCCASION OF 18TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF  
SWARNA BHARAT TRUST**

**Nellore, February 22, 2019**

1. I am delighted to be here for the commemoration of the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Swarna Bharat Trust and review and learn about its socially relevant and people-centric activities. I have been told that these cover many areas, ranging from education to healthcare and agriculture to skills training. The person who inspired the founding of the Swarna Bharat Trust and the person who invited me here is, of course, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu. He is a son of this soil; he is a very old and dear friend and colleague of mine; and above all, he is today the Vice-President of our country.
  
2. Venkaiahji – or perhaps Venkaiah garu as everybody here knows him – is a multifaceted personality. He is a thinking person and a deeply sensitive human being. What is most remarkable about him is that in long years of public life, he has collected a very large number of friends. Some of these friends may have been political associates of his in the days when he was still active in politics. Some may even have been political opponents. Yet, when it comes to making friends, such differences have never mattered to him. Truly he is Ajatashatru – without enemies. He is liked by all and trusted by all. His credibility and goodwill have helped him in his role as Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha even in challenging circumstances. The country is thankful to Nellore and to Andhra Pradesh for giving us our popular and well-liked Vice-President. And I must add here that Venkaiahji has done a lot to promote the rich Telugu culture and delicious Andhra food in Delhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen

3. When the Swarna Bharat Trust was conceived, it drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's slogan of "Back to the Villages". Recognising that the majority of our fellow citizens live in rural India, Gandhiji had spoken of the need to develop villages with amenities appropriate for a dignified and simple but prosperous life. He focused on farming,

sanitation, education and sustainable living. Gandhiji's ideas and his basic philosophy are still very relevant. Today we speak about eco-friendly fabric – over a century ago, Gandhiji was urging our people to spin cotton for their personal use. Similarly, the success of Swachh Bharat as a national mission, and achieving the goal of universal availability of modern sanitation, is a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi in the 150<sup>th</sup> year of his birth.

4. In taking forward the ideals of Gandhiji, Venkaiahji has told me that the Swarna Bharat Trust was inspired by another exceptional individual – Nanaji Deshmukh. Nanaji was a reformist role model. He renounced the opportunity of high office to help transform rural communities into productive, self-sufficient units. His work in Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh, is an example for the rest of the country. And as I have found on coming to Venkatachalam, it has left a deep imprint on Venkaiahji. In a happy coincidence, I am coming here almost exactly a month after Nanaji was honoured with the Bharat Ratna.

#### Friends

5. As I said earlier, the ideals of Gandhiji are still relevant and will always remain relevant. However, with changing times, it is important to renew the methods to achieve those ideals. In this regard – and in our endeavour to enhance the quality and dignity of life and work for those of our people who reside in villages and toil on farms – technology can be a great enabler.
6. I will give you an example. I happen to travel to many parts and many states of our country, meeting fellow citizens from all walks of life. Across India, I find, farmers are benefiting from the government's initiative to provide soil health cards. How does this initiative work? The chemical composition of every small holding is carefully analysed. Need for specific nutrients and suitability for specific crops is assessed. Then this information is recorded with the help of a soil health card. Imagine the utility to millions of our dear, hardworking farmers!
7. This is only one instance; there are several others. I am glad to learn that the Swarna Bharat Trust too emphasises the use of science and technology and of innovation in helping rural communities. I am confident that with the blessings of our Vice-President this noble work

will continue. My best wishes are with the Trust, and my best wishes are with the people of Venkatachalam, of Nellore and of Andhra Pradesh.

Thank you  
Jai Hind!