

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
COMMEMORATION OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE
VISHWA SHANTI STUPA**

Rajgir, October 25, 2019

1. I am immensely happy to be here on this auspicious occasion of commemorating the Golden Jubilee of 'Vishwa Shanti Stupa', built at this ancient Buddhist site. I congratulate the Government of Bihar, Rajgir Buddha Vihar Society, followers of Nipponzan Myohoji and disciples of Most Venerable Fujii Guruji for this celebration. My special appreciation for the delegates from different parts of Asia, Europe and America particularly from Japan who have travelled to this holy site for the anniversary. You all are ambassadors of World Peace.

2. I feel fortunate standing here on Ratnagiri Hill, facing the Vulture Peak, from where Lord Buddha is said to have preached the Lotus Sutra for seven years. I had the privilege of participating in the anniversary celebrations of this Peace Pagoda in 2015 and 2016, as Governor of Bihar. I was also the Chief Patron of Rajgir Buddha Vihar Society. I came to Rajgir in 2018 to inaugurate the 'International Conference on Dharma-Dhamma'. Every visit to Rajgir, one of the favourite abodes of the Buddha, fills me with special joy.

3. We have assembled in a sacred land of spiritual revolutions that transformed societies. Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Pataliputra and Nalanda are the birth-places of these changes that took place several centuries ago and spread across the world. Not far from this place, Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under a tree at Bodh Gaya. Jainism and Hinduism took deep roots in this region which underlines the amazing diversity thriving in our country since ancient times.

4. Therefore the 'Vishwa Shanti Stupa' is a symbol of unity, peace and non-violence. Its message has universal resonance, which rises above cultures, religions and geographies. It also reflects the abiding partnership and extensive cooperation between the peace-loving democracies of Japan and India. This ceremony is happening in a period marked by significant increase in mutual engagement between our countries within the Kyoto-Kashi spirit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. My great predecessor, the Late Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, had laid the foundation stone of this Stupa in 1965. It was inaugurated by my another illustrious predecessor, the Late V. V. Giri, in the Gandhi Centenary Year of 1969. As we all know, Mahatma Gandhi followed Maha-Karunik Buddha's ideals of universal love and compassion. Buddha's teachings find reflection in Gandhian ethos. I am happy that in this month of 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, we have assembled here to mark the 50th year of this Vishwa Shanti Stupa. Thus, while commemorating the Golden Jubilee of the Stupa, we are also paying homage to the greatest missionary of peace in the modern world.
6. It is well known that Fujii Guruji initiated the idea of building Shanti Stupas across the world. This impressive Stupa is primarily a result of Fujii Guruji's untiring efforts and the fine work of renowned Buddhist architect and artist Upendra Maharathi. Fujii Guruji met Gandhiji and also stayed at the Wardha ashram. Gandhiji and Guriji were two great souls bound by one common goal of promoting non-violence and peace. Such was the impact of Nichiren Buddhism of Japan on Gandhiji that he learnt the chant 'Namyō Ho Renge kyo' and his prayer sessions would begin with the chant. I have just returned from a visit to Japan. During the visit, on October 21, I also met a delegation from Gotemba Peace Foundation set up by Fujii Guruji.
7. I had had the privilege of meeting Fujii Guruji about 45 years ago. I still remember that evening, probably it was in the year 1974, when he entered the New Delhi residence of the late Morarji Desai,

chanting and beating drums with his disciples and Morarjibhai welcomed them with folded hands. Fujii Guruji, a Buddhist monk, and Morarji Desai, a follower of the Hindu way of life and worship called Sanatan Dharma, were bound together by their common spiritual goal – World Peace. I had the privilege of working with Morarji Desai who was the Prime Minister of India from 1977 to 1979.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The influence of Buddhist ideals and symbols on our democracy is both profound and visible. We have adopted the Lion Capital of Ashoka as our national emblem. In the lower house of our Parliament, called Lok Sabha, above the chair of the Speaker are inscribed the words, “Dharma Chakra Pravartanay”, which means ‘setting in motion the wheel of Dhamma or righteousness’. The chief architect of our Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, highlighted the debt our parliamentary democracy owes to ancient Buddhist Sanghas.

9. The messages and followers of the Buddha spread across much of Asia in ancient times. They paved the way for one of the earliest waves of globalization. The Buddha’s eight-fold-path not only transformed the spiritual landscape worldwide but also encouraged ethical and sustainable social, political and commercial practices. Later, Buddhism spread to other continents also. Its emphasis on compassion, equality, moderation and non-violence presented in a rational manner attracts the modern mind. The appeal of Buddha goes far beyond the 500 million followers of Buddhism worldwide. Taking forward the essential spirit of the Buddha’s path, Mahatma Gandhi influenced leaders and people across continents to emerge as a global icon. Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi preached unity of thought, action and spoken word, and showed us our innate potential for goodness. Their own lives became their message. In the timeless teachings of Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi can be found solutions to the fundamental problems facing an individual, a community, a country and the entire world.

10. There is a need to connect increasingly larger number of people with the ideals of the Buddha. Promoting heritage tourism in places related to The Buddha is an effective way of attracting people, especially the youth to the spirit of Buddhism. I am told that Japanese entities are providing assistance to the development of Buddhist Circuit. The Union Ministry of Tourism and the State Government of Bihar are cooperating with the International Finance Corporation on an integrated Buddhist Circuit Tourism Development Project. With these efforts at providing better connectivity and facilities, the quality of services for visitors will continue to improve.
11. Lord Buddha had said, 'Natthi santiparam sukham' which means 'there is no bliss greater than peace'. Peace is a necessary precondition to development. The essence of Buddha's preaching emphasised peace within as precondition to attain peace outside. Spirituality, peace and development reinforce each other. Conflict, turmoil and under development feed upon each other. The solemn objective of every participant in today's function should be to promote peace and harmony as potent means to reduce poverty and conflict.
12. From Buddha to Gandhi, the 'Light of Asia' has shown the right path to the world. I am sure that it will continue to brighten our pathways to a future full of peace, harmony and prosperity.

Thank you
Jai Hind!