

Ladies and gentlemen, Distinguished guests, Dear students and teachers,

Good morning!

I am delighted to welcome you all today to this special program. First, let me thank Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti as well as Project Coordinator Ms. Mansi Sharma for initiating this remarkable event. I would also like to thank Ms. Jill Carr-Harris, who kindly agreed to join us today and tell us about Global Peace March.

I am very glad to inform you that a group of young musicians from Armenia has also joined us today, and I hope their performance will make our programme not only meaningful but also entertaining.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the great apostle of peace and non-violence. His death anniversary on January 30th is a sombre occasion to remember his martyrdom, which even today, after 72 years, holds its relevance and conveys a very deep meaning.

It's rightly said that Gandhi belongs not just to India but to the entire world, and his thoughts still have a special resonance in all the corners. A leader, statesman, politician, writer, journalist, barrister, philosopher and social activist, he wore several hats in his lifetime and touched upon the lives of billions around the world. Indeed, I would say that there is hardly any country in the world where Gandhiji's passion for non-violence and his genuine humanism have not inspired people, transcending the divisions of race, religion and ethnicity. And Armenia is no exception.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This event could not be timed any better. On the 2nd of October 2019, a year-long Global Peace March called Jai Jagat 2020 kicked off in Delhi *en-route* to Geneva, travelling through 10 countries, spreading the message of inclusion, social responsibility and non-violence. Jai Jagat will pass through Armenia in the next few days and let me tell you that Armenia's participation in this initiative is not defined by its geography only. In May 2018 the world witnessed the Armenian Velvet Revolution - a genuine example of nationwide peaceful protests that concluded with nonviolent transfer of power; a phenomenon very unusual in our part of the world where the concept of "might is right" still matters. Therefore, Jai Jagat can be considered a successful, if only for

reminding participant nations of Gandhi's testament of non-violence, tolerance and compassion.

Always leading by example, he taught us to stand strong in the face of fear and hold fiercely our faith in truth and freedom, even when confronted with extremism, injustice, brutality and prejudice.

Gandhiji has left the legacy of teachings of morality, self-sufficiency, forgiveness and non-violence. He lived with his ideals and did not compromise them in the most difficult of times. Today, I take the liberty to reflect upon an integral component of his philosophy, which has regrettably either been assigned to oblivion or grossly misinterpreted. I would like to talk about idealism.

What is idealism? Well, it is an inward conviction, a form of faith. And although it never can be proven true, it is necessary for the permanence of the world and mankind.

Today, we are losing our faith in idealism and regard it mostly as an abstract philosophy rather than a practical approach to daily life. Idealism is still competitive for the purpose of childhood education, but reality often turns out to be brutally material. This view of the world leads us to constant rivalry and struggle, both domestically and internationally. As a result, the textbook of modern politics becomes *The Prince of Machiavelli*.

Thus, we divide our lives into two compartments: one in which we indulge ourselves in fine theories and sentiments, and another in which we shake off this dream and deal with reality in all its earthly manifestations. The latter also diminishes the value of moral education.

All this is taking place at a time when the fabric of society is unravelling at ever-greater speed; when selfishness, greed, meanness and violence seem to be taking over the goodness of our communal lives.

In recent decades, for various reasons it has become increasingly difficult for teachers to teach moral values as established truths, rather than as interesting topics for discussion

I think the modern education must urgently inculcate essential civil competences such as self-awareness, self-control, empathy, and the arts of listening, cooperation and resolving conflicts. Including elements of social consciousness in school curricula will enable children to develop awareness of

and joy in their surroundings, instead of breeding rivalry and violence. This is how we can instil the sprouting grains of non-violence into their innocent souls.

Dear Friends:

I suppose some may suspect me in hypocrisy or profanation and reply that nowadays true idealism is inapplicable due to our yearning for material success. We all undoubtedly aspire to do well in life, and I don't propose that we deceive ourselves concerning reality, or create alternative realities, best described by The Beatles as the world of the "nowhere man". On the contrary, the life of Mahatma Gandhi and all other individuals who changed the world, have demonstrated that idealism could be attained only by deeper interpretation of the world and by victory over oneself.

In this regard I'd like to cite the 19th century Russian General of German origin Friedrich Maximilian von Klinger who in his essay titled "*How it is possible without deceit, and even in constant conflict with evil, to overcome the world*" said: "First of all, one who would overcome the world must give up thinking of what people call happiness, and must with all his might, without indirectness, or fear, or self-seeking, simply do his duty. He must, that is to say, be pure in mind and heart, so that none of his actions shall be stained by selfishness. Where justice and right-dealing are called for, there must be in him no distinction of great or small, of significant or insignificant. Secondly, for the protection of his own strength and purity of conduct, he must be free from the desire to shine, free from shallowness of vanity and restless search for fame and power".

I admit, it's easier said than done; but let us try to live by those principles and ideas. It will make this world better for us and coming generations.

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Gandhi Centre