

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT
THE SEMINAR ON "SOLUTION OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES THROUGH
MAHAVIRA PHILOSOPHY" ORGANIZED ON THE OCCASION OF MAHAVIR
JAYANTI**

Rashtrapati Bhavan Auditorium, New Delhi: 22-04-2013

1. I am indeed happy to join you for the seminar titled, "Solution of Global Challenges through Mahavira Philosophy", being held a few days prior to the Mahavir Jayanti. I take this opportunity to extend my warm greetings to all of you.
2. I congratulate the Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati for organizing this seminar on a topic of great relevance to contemporary times. At a time when the world is faced with multiple challenges and we are seeking ways and means to overcome them, the philosophy and teachings enunciated by Bhagwan Mahavira holds great significance. This is a time to bring his message and teachings to the forefront of our approach in dealing with today's problems.
3. Ladies and Gentlemen, Bhagwan Mahavira was born as Vardhamana in a royal family to King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala in 599 B.C. in Bihar. Despite the luxuries at his disposal, he preferred to lead a simple life. At 30 years of age, he left the pleasures of the world and discarded all material comfort to become a monk.
4. He meditated for 12 years to overcome all desires, after which, he attained self-realization and divine knowledge, or *keval jnana*. He spent the next 30 years travelling throughout the country overcoming immense physical hardships to preach the eternal truth. Because of his simplicity and espousal of high morals, he was able to reach out to many believers. His teachings were based on the concept of self-realization for the attainment of *Moksha* or liberation.
5. Bhagwan Mahavira is the 24th and the last Tirthankara. According to Jain tradition, a Tirthankara is an enlightened soul who having been born as a human being attains enlightenment through meditation and

self realization. Tirthankaras are also called *Arihants*, or the one who destroys inner enemies like anger, greed or ego. Bhagwan Mahavira, in human form, became divine as an enlightened soul.

6. Bhagwan Mahavira propounded a philosophy with the sole aim to improve the quality of life. He strongly adhered to the theory of *Karma* and held that it is *karma*, or our deeds, that decides our destiny. His message deals with how one can gain freedom from the cycle of birth, life, pain, misery and death, and achieve *Moksha* or liberation.
7. He advocated right faith or *samyak darshana*, right knowledge or *samyak jnana*, and right conduct or *samyak charitra*, as crucial for attaining liberation. To denote right conduct, he specified five essential principles, namely non-violence or *ahimsa*, truth or *satya*, wrongful possession or *asteya*, chastity or *brahmacharya*, and complete detachment from people, place and material objects or *aparigraha*.
8. Bhagwan Mahavira simplified religion by making it devoid of any complicated rituals. He taught that human life is supreme and that it is important to have positive attitude in life. He preached the universal gospel of love, stressing that living beings, irrespective of size, shape and form are equal and deserve equal love and respect.
9. In his life time, he used the principles of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct to resolve many social ills and reform the society. He brought about social progress on issues such as slavery of women, equality of status to women, and social equality.
10. The universal truth of Bhagwan Mahavira's philosophy and teaching make them equally applicable to the modern world. For contemporary problems like erosion of environment and natural resources, violence through war and terrorism, religious intolerance, and economic exploitation of poor, answers could be found in his teachings.
11. Ladies and Gentlemen, the deterioration of environment and depletion of natural resources has engaged the attention of the world today. Bhagwan Mahavira's doctrines of *Shatjivanikay* and *Ahimsa* are a

meaningful approach to address this growing crisis. *Shatjivanikay* denotes living beings as having six types of body formation comprising the mobile living being that has 2 to 5 senses, and the living beings with one sense that are water, earth, air, fire and plant. The practice of *ahimsa* should be towards all living beings and not just human beings alone.

12. These concepts exhort human beings to exercise utmost care in consuming natural resources and to desist from polluting the environment. Bhagwan Mahavira prescribed moderation in the use of resources by adopting carefulness, self restraint and a limit to possession of durable and non-durable assets. Bhagwan Mahavira also showed us the path of careful consumption.
13. Ladies and Gentlemen, Bhagwan Mahavira's teachings are in consonance with the need to mitigate economic disparity. He preached that both non-availability and excess availability are dangerous. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is one of the causes for growing intolerance today.
14. Bhagwan Mahavira preached for eliminating the feeling of possessiveness and replacing it with the concept of trusteeship of wealth. He showed the virtue of this ideal by his own example. He renounced his wealth completely and led the life of a recluse to attain true knowledge.
15. Bhagwan Mahavira realized that differences in individual capabilities and needs exist. He therefore preached social ahimsa comprising compassion, equanimity, love and tolerance to encourage his followers to focus on their own betterment by letting others also achieve the same.
16. The teachings of Bhagwan Mahavira are still very apt and relevant today. He preached that one is neither downtrodden nor blessed by birth. He mentioned that man should be known not by his birth but by

his actions. Practicing such a principle would further the cause of a just social order, an ideal espoused by the builders of the modern society.

17. The world today is unfortunately divided by race, religion and nationality. It is also marred by numerous conflicts that originate from such segregation. Bhagwan Mahavira gave the doctrine of *Anekantavada* or multiplicity of views and said that opposites co-exist, like white and black or rich and poor. He asked for the differences and diversities to be reconciled through dialogue and practice of social ahimsa. In today's context, nothing can be more relevant than this.
18. Ladies and Gentlemen, Bhagwan Mahavira's doctrine talks of multi-faceted development. He had said, (quote): "*The nature of all living beings is to be happy. Every one wishes to eliminate pain so that he or she can be happy forever*" (unquote). At a macro level, the happiness of a country or community rests on the pillars of sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of natural environment, and establishment of good governance. These are imperative goals of any democratic polity today, and they have great potential for being realized by adhering to Bhagwan Mahavira's teachings.
19. The three A's of *Ahimsa*, *Anekanta* and *Aparigraha* of Bhagwan Mahavira's philosophy can provide answers to many modern day problems. I am delighted to know that under the guidance of Acharya Dr. Lokesh Muni, Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati is working towards building a society free from violence, terrorism, exploitation, poverty, communalism, caste distinctions, and other social ills. I am happy to note that for his untiring efforts, Acharyaji has been honoured by the Government with the National Communal Harmony Award, 2010.
20. I am confident that the Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati will continue to work towards social progress in the country. I wish the organization all success. I once again wish all my Jain brothers and sisters on this auspicious occasion. Let Bhagwan Mahavira bless us.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
