

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF UNVEILING OF THE
STATUE OF MAHATMA GANDHI**

Paramatta, Sydney, November 22, 2018

1. I am delighted to be visiting Paramatta. It is an honor for me to unveil the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, our Father of the Nation in these beautiful surroundings. I thank you for honouring him in your country. And I thank Prime Minister Morrison for his august presence here.
2. This initiative has a very special meaning. To help spread his legacy and timeless message across the world, the Government of India had, just a month ago, launched a two-year long series of events on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary year. I warmly invite all of you to join us in these celebrations.
3. Mahatma Gandhi belongs not just to India, but to the entire world. His universal teachings have a special resonance in all corners. In these times of strife, his powerful message of nonviolence and peaceful coexistence stands all the more relevant. His favourite bhajan or song "*Vaishnava Jan To Tene Kahiye*" the essence of which is compassion, kindness and goodness for others, for once and for always, without letting pride enter one's mind. This captures the inner voice of the Mahatma. I thank your melodious singer Heather Lee for giving her voice to the song as a tribute to our Father of the Nation. Many others, across the five continents, have also paid a similar tribute to his thought and legacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas and values resonate, deeply and powerfully, in this land. There is a special connect between

Gandhian thought and the Australian way of life. Mahatma Gandhi always championed the cause of environment and nature. His idea of compassion and kindness extended beyond the human pale around him. He had deep respect for forests, rivers and our habitat. These are values that you passionately own, share and keep close to your hearts in your daily lives.

5. On another note, Gandhiji and the Australian society strike a common cord. He, as you do, had the deepest regard and respect for multicultural ethos. He said and I quote – *“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible.”* –unquote. As a country which is home to people from every part of the world, Mahatma Gandhi’s legacy could not be more relevant to its values and ethos.
6. The statue to be unveiled today on the initiative of Paramatta City Council also symbolizes the historic bond that ties our nations together. As the world’s largest democracy and as a country that celebrates its diversity and openness, we take immense pride in our relations with Australia. The vibrant link at the people-to-people level adds vigor and vitality to this relationship.
7. Going forward, I am optimistic that our two countries, which share so much in common, can achieve so much more together. On this special occasion, I am especially gratified by the presence of a large number of Indian diaspora members. They serve as a living bridge between their new home and the land of their ancestors. Gandhiji himself was a *“pravasi”* or an expatriate. He lived in South Africa for 21 years before he returned to India and went on to change the course of our history.
8. I am happy to note the tremendous contribution made by hundreds of thousands of qualified, hardworking, diligent and enterprising Indian Diaspora members in the nation making of

this beautiful country. I convey to them and to all Australians good wishes and love from the people of India.

9. May we all resolve today to draw inspiration from the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and work for the lasting benefit of humanity? I once again thank the Lord Mayor for making this event a success and all those who have contributed to this wonderful initiative.

Thank you!