

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
AT
THE FIRST ASIAN BUDDHIST SUMMIT**

New Delhi, November 5, 2024

Let the flowers offered to the Buddha here spread the fragrance of our goodwill in all directions. Let the lamp we have lit here spread the light of wisdom.

I am delighted to be here today as I see before me a cross-section of the modern-day Sangha. Many of you have come here from faraway places; you speak different languages. You are wearing robes of different colours and shades. But all of you are united in your striving for Dhamma, walking on the path shown by the Buddha. It is my honour to welcome you all to India and to this Summit.

The International Buddhist Confederation, or IBC in short, must be commended for organising this two-day conference. The theme chosen for the Summit, 'The Role of Buddha Dhamma in Strengthening Asia', is as apt as it is timely. Over these two days, you – monks, scholars and practitioners – will engage in dialogues and discussions about the Buddha Dhamma and its role in contemporary society.

India is the blessed land of Dharma. Here, in every age, there have been great masters and mystics, seers and seekers, who have shown humankind a way to find peace inside and harmony outside. The Buddha holds a unique place among these pathfinders. The enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya is an event unparalleled in history. He not only attained incomparably rich insights into the working of the human mind, he also chose to share them with all people in the spirit of "Bahujana sukhaya bahujana hitaya cha" – for the welfare of the masses.

For forty-five years after his enlightenment, he went from place to place, preaching the Dharma. He took his message to a variety of audiences – kings and artisans, men and women, monks and lay people. To spiritually evolved people he explained the causes and conditions that shape human experience; to ordinary people, he taught how to lead a moral life.

What is Buddha Dharma? Ashoka, the great emperor who shunned violence after embracing Buddhism, had this definition of it carved on a pillar: [Quote] “Dhamma is good. And what is Dhamma? It is having few faults and many good deeds, mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity.” [Unquote]

Over the centuries, it was only natural that different practitioners would find different meanings in the Buddha’s discourses and, thus, there arose a variety of sects. In broad classification, today we have Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, with many schools and sects within each of them.

Moreover, such flowering of the Buddha Dharma proceeded in many directions over different periods of history. In one wave, it was transmitted to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia and other places in South-East Asia. Another wave took the words of wisdom to Tibet and Nepal, and then to China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere.

While their interpretations of the Tathagata’s message differ widely, what must be noted is that there is no contradiction among them. The Buddha’s first discourse at Sarnath, near Varanasi, remains fundamental and layers of further and further refined understanding of it are added to it.

This spread of Dhamma over an expanding geographical area created a community, a larger Sangha. In a sense, India, the land of the Buddha’s enlightenment, is at its centre. But, what is said about God is also true about this larger Buddhist Sangha: that its centre is

everywhere and circumference nowhere. This is all the more true because, apart from “Southern Buddhism” and “Northern Buddhism”, it has also been spreading in the only remaining direction in the last two centuries and it has come to be known as “Western Buddhism”.

Dear Friends,

When the world today is facing an existential crisis on many fronts, not only strife but also the climate crisis, your large community has much to offer to humankind. The various schools of Buddhism show the world how to counter narrow sectarianism. Their central message remains focused on peace and non-violence. If one word can capture the Buddha Dhamma, it has to be ‘karuna’ or compassion, which is what the world needs today.

As the theme of the Summit has captured it well, we need to discuss the role of Buddha Dharma in strengthening Asia. Indeed, we need to expand the discussion to see how Buddha Dharma can bring peace, real peace, to Asia and to the world – a peace free from not only physical violence but also from all forms of greed and hatred – the two mental forces at the root of all our miseries, according to the Buddha.

India has and will continue to do all it can to partner with you in this endeavour, just as you too have contributed to it. Here I am thinking of the preservation of the Buddha’s teachings, and how it has been a great collective endeavour for all of us. His precious words would have been lost after his Mahapariniravana, but it was an assembly of monks, held in Rajgir, who preserved his message for posterity. Eventually, his followers collected his discourses in the Tipitaka. It was first set down in the verbal form, transmitted from generation to generation, and it too might have been lost. Monks in Sri Lanka set it down in writing on palm leaves. Later, when the great library of Nalanda was destroyed, many texts could be recovered from the Tibetan and Chinese translations. This is what makes Buddhist literature a truly shared heritage for us.

You will be glad to learn that we have continued such efforts in this century too. It was only last month that the Government of India granted the status of 'classical language' to Pali and Prakrit, among other languages. While Sanskrit has already been included in that category, Pali and Prakrit will now receive financial support which will surely contribute significantly to the preservation of their literary treasures and to their revitalisation.

This summit, I am confident, will go a long way in strengthening our cooperation, based on our shared heritage of the Buddha's teachings. I am sure you will have a fruitful dialogue over the next two days. Let me end by extending the invitation to those of you who have come from abroad to visit the National Museum here and also the places in the Buddhist Circuit for a view of the rich Buddhist heritage.

May Dhamma bring joy and happiness to all!

Thank you,
Jai Hind!
Jai Bharat!