



Dr. R. A. Mashelkar
Chairman, Council of Advisers, Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation

Respected Shekhar bhai Bajaj, Dr Abhay Bang, our revered Chief Guest of the day, distinguished trustees of the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation, distinguished chairpersons of the awards committee, proud award winners - more correctly, awardees who have made us proud - distinguished members of the Bajaj family, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me extend a very warm welcome to all of you as we gather on this great evening of celebration.

A very special welcome to Dr Abhay Bang, our chief guest, who has been my role model, my inspiration.

His life and work embody the quintessence of Mahatma Gandhi's timeless teaching: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Abhay Bang and Rani Bang became beacons of hope and healing when they decided to dedicate their life for the forgotten and forsaken souls of Gadchiroli remote region, where life's most basic assurances often faltered.

Through tireless dedication, Abhay and Rani Bang redefined rural healthcare, crafting a model that breathed new life into vulnerable communities.

Their sacrifices, made with grace and humility, stand as a testament to the enduring power of selfless love and the transformative spirit of service.

In their hands, healthcare became more than medicine - it became a sacred act of empathy and shared humanity.

Their work echoes beyond the villages they nurtured, resonating as an inspiration for generations to come, preserving the values of compassion, resilience, and collective upliftment.

The very presence of Dr Abhay Bang amidst us illuminates this evening with the magnificent glow of this great true Gandhian, a unique Gandhian - I dare say we can't find handful of them today!

Many ask a question about the relevance of Gandhiji's teachings of the 20th century in today's 21st century.

In 2010, as lifetime trustee of Gandhi National Memorial Society, I asked this question to 50 thought leaders of India.

The respondents were Gandhians, from Abhay Bang to Elaben Bhat; industrialists, from Rahul bhai to Narayana Murthy; scientists; from M S Swaminathan to Anil Kakodkar.

Can you believe that Amjad Ali Khan, Mallika Sarabhai, Sunil Gavaskar, Kiran Bedi, Christopher Benninger also responded.

There was such a huge diversity in our respondents!

Each one looked at Gandhiji from his or her own window of experience.

But the answer was only one. Gandhiji is more relevant today than ever before

All their words of wisdom have been captured in my book 'Timeless Inspirator: Reliving Gandhi'.

In fact, the book begins by the contribution by our chief guest, Dr Abhay Bang titled 'On meeting the Mahatma'. He poignantly says how Gandhiji's influence on his life began even before he was born.

I also remember some great insights by our own Rahul bhai in his contribution 'Reinterpreting Gandhiji for our times'.

But to my mind, the best proof of the relevance of Gandhian values in today's world is this evening itself!

But this evening would not have been there but for Legendary Jammalal Bajaj. Let's take a brief peep into the past.

Jammalal ji was an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and exemplified Gandhian principles in every facet of his life—political, social, business, and personal.

His adherence to these values laid the foundation for his deep involvement in the Indian freedom movement, social reforms, and nation-building initiatives.

Understanding that Gandhian ethics could be the cornerstone for a better society, Jammalal ji infused these ideals into his business practices, promoting ethical entrepreneurship and prioritizing the welfare of workers and communities.

This very philosophy behind perpetual pursuit of Gandhian values in all walks of life led to the establishment of the Jammalal Bajaj Foundation.

By nurturing these Jammalal Bajaj Awards for 46 years and counting, the Bajaj family has demonstrated that Gandhian values are not relics of the past but crucial blueprints for building a better future.

I am proud to say that our awards stand as a living tribute to the enduring power of conviction, a profound message for a world that still yearns for Gandhi's message of peace, tolerance, and love.

Remember, Gandhiji taught us that when the power of love overcomes the love of power, that opens the way to a peaceful world.

Remember what Gandhiji had said "Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being."

Today, we find tales of violence that shatter the soul, wars that obliterate hope, and inequalities that deepen the chasm between the privileged few and the suffering many. Societies stand divided, scarred by hatred, discrimination, and unchecked ambition. Trust erodes as nations build barriers instead of bridges, and greed outpaces compassion, creating a dissonance that suffocates the spirit of unity.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, we need Gandhiji today more than ever before.

The world shaped by Gandhiji's vision would see power redefined not as the ability to dominate, but as the strength to uplift. Borders would be seen not as battlegrounds but as thresholds of shared culture and humanity. Gandhiji's spirit is the only one that offers an antidote to mend the fractures with the binding thread of non-violence.

This evening belongs to all our illustrious Jammalal Bajaj 2024 awardees - you are the modern-day Gandhian warriors. We congratulate you. We thank you for being what you are and for having done what you have done – in preserving, protecting, promoting and practising Gandhian values.

Your work, characterised by unwavering perseverance and passion, illuminates the way forward for today's conflict-ridden world.

As Gandhiji once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." You have embodied this call to action, creating a ripple effect that will inspire countless others.

Gandhiji had also rightly put it, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

Indeed, in your own gentle way, you have shaken the world.

May your dedication continue to illuminate our shared journey and create a better world, compassionate, caring and truly inclusive - with smile on the faces of all 8 billion people of the world and not just a privileged few.

Thank you.

