

Good evening. It would be apposite to begin with the place in which we have gathered this evening. That is Kamani Auditorium, in the heart of Delhi, a city that has long been one of India's great centres of culture and the performing arts. Since it opened in 1971, Kamani has welcomed theatre, music, dance and a remarkable range of artists and performers. For a few hours, people who may have nothing else in common sit together, listen to the same words, watch the same story and respond, each in their own way, to shared experience. Tonight, is one such evening in this long, illustrious history, curtesy of the Salwaan trust. Nanhi Chaan foundation led by Sh. Harpal Singh ji whose vision deserves appreciation, in collaboration with theatre world production through Madam Lushin Dubey and Ms. Bubbles Sabharwal, human beings required distinguished reputation at different levels.

The development of modern theatre in the city is closely connected with the cultural life of independent India. The Sangeet Natak Akademi was established in 1952, and the National School of Drama followed in 1959. In the decades that followed, Delhi became an important meeting place for classical traditions, folk traditions and contemporary theatre. also a way of engaging with

history, society, ideas and the questions confronting a young Republic.

That word, Republic, brings me to another reason why this evening seems particularly fitting. Delhi, is also the constitutional centre of our country. Across the road is the supreme court, whereas served once, which always reminded me of my holy book The Constitution of india which speaks of a grand vision housed in four word **justice, liberty, equality and fraternity**. These are not simply principles directing the machinery of the State. They exemplify a vision of how human beings, who are to live together with dignity and as equals. In that setting, we turn to the Buddha.

The Buddha's central concern was with the human condition. He asked a question that remains as relevant today as it was then: why do human beings suffer, and is there a way beyond suffering?

His response was not simply a set of beliefs. It was a way of living, expressed most famously through what came to be known as the **Noble Eightfold Path. It speaks of Right Intention, including goodwill and non-harm.** It asks us to

practice Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood. Also, it calls for Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration and Right Intention.

The Buddha's emphasis on non-harm, goodwill, careful speech and awareness of one's own mind has a continuing relevance. So does another quality in his life that I find particularly compelling: the inclination to question. He encountered suffering and allowed it to disturb his settled view of life. He questioned, searched and was willing to leave behind what was familiar in the hope of discovering something deeper. That spirit of inquiry matters in a constitutional democracy as well. Constitutionalism does not ask us to accept power or received wisdom unquestioningly.

Today, the institution across the road i.e., The Supreme Court, in its own way, exemplifies by ensuring conformity to the Constitution, the Eightfold Path.

This evening is being presented by the **Salwan Education Trust**, because its own history carries a remarkable connection with some of these ideas. The story of the Trust goes back to 1941. The Salwan vision speaks of education not simply as academic achievement, but as a means of developing confidence, compassion, critical thought, integrity

and a sense of service. Those are qualities that matter most to the young generation because the continued survival and thriving of a constitutional democracy ultimately depends upon citizens who can think, question, listen.

May I be allowed to place some questions before us. What does it mean to recognise another person as our equal? What does freedom demand of us? How do we respond to suffering that is not our own? How do we speak to those with whom we disagree? And, perhaps most importantly, what kind of human beings must we become if the values of our Constitution are to become a concrete reality?

No Constitution, no judgment, and no performance can answer these questions completely for us. But they are questions worth continuing to ask. And so, as the lights go down and the performance begins, I invite you to put aside, for a little while, whatever image of the Buddha you may already carry. Allow the stage to introduce him to you. Perhaps we will encounter a historical figure, perhaps a spiritual teacher, perhaps simply a human being searching for an answer to suffering. And perhaps, somewhere in that search, we may recognise a question of our own.

Thank you