

Address by the Ambassador at 30th Budapest Rath Yatra (Chariot Festival)

13 June 2026

Respected spiritual leaders of ISKCON Hungary, distinguished dignitaries, members of the vibrant Indian diaspora, and dear friends of India,

Good afternoon, and Namaskar.

It is an immense delight for me to stand before you today in the magnificent city of Budapest. We gather this beautiful afternoon to celebrate a remarkable milestone: the 30th edition of the Rath Yatra, the grand Chariot Festival, organized by ISKCON Hungary.

To witness this vibrant congregation of devotion, color, and joy unfolding against the backdrop of this historic European capital is not merely a visual spectacle; it is a deeply moving spiritual experience that transcends borders and speaks to the universal heart of humanity.

For three decades, you have brought the soul of ancient India to the streets of Budapest. As we look at these splendidly decorated chariots today, we are immediately transported across continents to the sacred shores of the Bay of Bengal, to the ancient temple city of Puri in the Indian state of Odisha. It is there that the Rath Yatra has been celebrated for centuries in its grandest form, drawing millions of pilgrims from every corner of the globe.

To truly appreciate the gravitas of this moment, we must delve into the cultural context and the profound spiritual background of this festival. The Rath Yatra marks the annual journey of Lord Jagannath—whose very name translates to the "Lord of the Universe"—along with his elder brother, Lord Balabhadra, and their sister, Goddess Subhadra.

In the vast and intricate tapestry of Indian spiritual traditions, the Rath Yatra occupies a uniquely revolutionary space. Typically, the architecture of faith requires the seeker to travel great distances, making arduous pilgrimages to seek the Divine within the hushed, secluded sanctum of a temple. But during the Rath Yatra, this paradigm is beautifully and radically reversed. The Divine steps out of the temple to be amidst the people. It is a profound declaration that grace is not confined by walls; it is freely accessible to all, regardless of background, origin, or station in life. It is the Divine coming to the streets to embrace humanity.

Another beautiful tradition embedded within this festival is the ritual known as *Chhera Pahara*, where the sovereign King sweeps the chariots with a broom before the journey begins. It is a powerful reminder that in the eyes of the Divine, the monarch and the commoner are absolutely equal. It is a timeless lesson in supreme humility.

But what truly powers this festival is not the magnificent wooden architecture of the chariots; it is the deep faith that moves through the people. When thousands of hands reach out to grasp the thick ropes, pulling the chariots forward, they are engaging in a supreme act of collective devotion. It is a physical manifestation of surrendering the ego. The people realize that it is their shared love and unity that pull the wheels of the cosmos forward.

The ancient spiritual texts of India, particularly the *Katha Upanishad*, utilize the metaphor of the chariot to describe the condition of human existence. The scriptures tell us: "*Know the Self as the master of the chariot, and the body as the chariot itself. Know the intellect as the*

charioteer, and the mind as the reins." The horses represent our senses, navigating the complex roads of life.

When we participate in the Rath Yatra, we are not just pulling a wooden structure through the streets of Budapest. We are being reminded to align our own inner chariots. We are pulling our lives toward a higher truth, seeking to bring our senses, our mind, and our intellect under the guidance of divine wisdom. It is a moving meditation, a reminder that when our actions are anchored in spiritual consciousness, our journey through the turbulence of the modern world becomes a path of harmony, purpose, and ultimate liberation.

This profound wisdom, however, would remain geographically confined if not for the tireless dedication of organizations that carry this light across oceans. In this regard, I must take a moment to laud the role of ISKCON.

For decades, ISKCON has served as a bridge between Indian culture and heritage, and the broader world. You have not merely translated ancient Sanskrit texts; you have translated a way of life. Through the universal language of *Bhakti*—devotion—you have made the timeless wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita accessible to millions. Whether it is through this magnificent 30th Chariot Festival, your widespread food distribution programs, or the sustainable, spiritual living modeled in Krishna Valley here in Hungary, ISKCON has taken the philosophical heart of India and made it a living, breathing, and enriching reality for the people of Hungary.

The global resonance of Indian culture has never been stronger. Today, the world is looking toward the East not just for economic partnerships, but for holistic solutions to the anxieties of modern life.

My Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi ji, has consistently emphasized that our festivals are not just celebrations of myth, but carriers of profound human values and articulating a vision where India's spiritual and cultural heritage is viewed as a vital contribution to global peace and well-being.

Reflecting on this very festival, Prime Minister Modi, in his message during the Rath Yatra last year beautifully captured its universal essence. He stated: *"May this holy festival of faith and devotion bring happiness, prosperity, good fortune, and excellent health to everyone's life."*

This is not a prayer limited to one nation or one community; it is a universal invocation for the welfare of all humanity. It reflects the core Indian ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—the world is one family.

It is entirely fitting, and deeply moving, that this message of universal brotherhood finds such a welcoming and vibrant home here in Hungary. India and Hungary are bound together by warm, and long-standing friendly relations. Our partnership is robust, anchored in mutual respect, shared democratic values, and a commitment to a meaningful exchange of views across the entire spectrum of our bilateral agenda.

Yet, beyond the crucial spheres of diplomacy, trade, and politics, there is a profound, organic connection between our peoples. Time and again, I have been struck by the extraordinary openness and the deep intellectual curiosity of the Hungarian people.

Hungarians have never been content with superficial understandings. You possess a long, proud history of scholarly exploration of the East. This intellectual curiosity is vividly reflected today in the increasing, widespread popularity of Indian cultural heritage streams across this country. It is not merely a passing trend. When Hungarians embrace Yoga—which we will soon celebrate on a grand scale across the country for the International Day of Yoga—they do so with dedication and a desire to understand its deepest mechanisms.

When they turn to Ayurveda, they are seeking fundamental, holistic balance. And when they engage with Indian spirituality, as we see here today, they do so with a genuine, open-hearted desire to integrate its profound wisdom into their daily lives.

This beautiful synthesis of Indian spiritual heritage and Hungarian intellectual openness is what makes today's 30th Rath Yatra in Budapest so incredibly special. It is a testament to the fact that when cultures interact with respect and curiosity, they do not diminish each other; they elevate one another.

As the chariot completes its journey through the historic avenues of Budapest today, let it be a symbol of the rolling wheel of time and the continuous evolution of our own consciousness. Let the rhythmic chanting, the vibrant colors, and the joyous music remind us that life, at its very core, is meant to be a divine celebration.

I extend my sincere commiserations to ISKCON Hungary for their efforts in sustaining this tradition for three decades. I thank the city of Budapest and its wonderful people for their gracious hospitality and open hearts.

May the journey ahead for all of you be filled with peace, excellent health, and unbounded spiritual joy. May the blessings of Lord Krishna, Lord Jagannath guide your paths, today and always.

Thank you. Jai Jagannath!