

Mahatma Gandhi's Hungarian connect

*Speech by H.E. Anshuman Gaur, Ambassador of India on the occasion
of the 156th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi,
Budapest*

2 October 2025

Jó napot kívánok

Good Afternoon.

Director of the Hopp Ferenc Museum, distinguished guests, members of the Indian community, friends of India, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to stand before you today as we gather to commemorate the 156th birth anniversary of a man who needs no introduction, yet whose life and message demand continuous reflection: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, whom we lovingly call Mahatma, the great soul.

Today, we are not just celebrating a historical figure; we are reaffirming our commitment to the timeless ideals he championed—ideals of peace, truth, and non-violence, or *Ahimsa*. It is particularly poignant to celebrate this occasion here in Budapest, a city of profound history and resilience. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Pécs University and the organising team for preparing this iconic venue for today's celebration.

While Mahatma Gandhi never visited Hungary, his ideas and his spirit found fertile ground here. The bridge between India and Hungary was built not of steel or stone, but of shared intellectual and spiritual curiosity.

One of the most significant figures in this connection was the Hungarian philologist and painter, Ervin Baktay. A great admirer of India, Baktay travelled extensively through India and wrote about its culture and philosophy, introducing the richness of our heritage to the Hungarian people. In his works, he expressed deep admiration for

Gandhi's principles, helping to sow the seeds of Gandhian thought right here in the heart of Europe. Baktay's book *Gandhi: A Book on Mahatma Gandhi, the Hero of India's Freedom* was a milestone in introducing Indian philosophy and Gandhiji's ideas to the Hungarian public in the 1930s.

Around the same time, Rozsa Hajnéczy's novel *Fire of Bengal* also depicted Gandhi and his freedom movement.

In 1934, Gyula Germanus published *The Light of India - Mahatma Gandhi* in Budapest, where he described Gandhi's life, character, and teachings.

In the 1960s, Gandhi's message was kept alive and presented in various studies by the poet and translator Istvan Janosy, who saw Gandhi as an example to follow. Laszló Németh, a leading Hungarian writer, paid tribute through his stage play- *Gandhi's Death* in 1963. Historian and sociologist Vera Gáthy later gave detailed scholarly accounts of the independence movement and Gandhi's role, publishing a significant monograph in 1970.

In the 1980s another important work was written by Gyorgy Kalmar, a well-known political journalist who lived in India: *Gandhi. Dreams — Politics — Reality*.

Mahatma Gandhi's writings -- *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Autobiography) and *Hind Swaraj* were translated into Hungarian and republished several times, ensuring his voice reached generations of readers.

On the occasion of Gandhi's 150th birthday, the Hungarian Post Office issued a commemorative miniature sheet containing four identical stamps. This philatelic specialty brings forward the memory of the Father of the Nation in Hungary and among international stamp collectors.

And of course, we cannot forget the artists Elisabeth Sass-Brunner and Elisabeth Brunner, who met Gandhi. When Elisabeth told him she

wished to paint him, Gandhi humbly replied, “Why do you want to paint an ugly man like me?” To which she beautifully answered, “Oh, but I want to paint your spirit.”

This intellectual admiration was mutual. Gandhi himself was a man of global consciousness. He believed that the quest for truth and freedom was a universal one, not confined by borders. He once said, **"The golden rule of conduct is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall see Truth in fragment and from different angles of vision."** This sentiment perfectly captures the spirit of the Indo-Hungarian friendship—an appreciation for different perspectives united by a common search for understanding and peace.

Hungary also honours Gandhi tangibly - in The Garden of Philosophers overlooking the Danube, where a statue of Gandhi by sculptor Nándor Wagner stands, and through the Gandhi Secondary School in Pécs, unique in Europe, serving disadvantaged communities.

In a world grappling with conflict, division, and ecological crises, Gandhi's teachings are more relevant than ever. His life was his message, demonstrating that profound change can be achieved without resorting to violence. As he so powerfully stated, **"An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind."** This warning echoes through our time, urging us to choose dialogue over destruction, and empathy over animosity.

So, what is Gandhi's most relevant message for us today? I believe it is his unwavering belief in the power of the individual to effect change. He showed us that one person, armed with courage and conviction, could challenge an empire. He championed the idea of *Swaraj*, or self-rule, not just in a political sense, but as a personal, spiritual, and economic discipline. It is a call for self-reliance, for taking responsibility for our communities and our planet. It is a

reminder that the great transformation we wish to see in the world must begin within ourselves.

As we pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi today, let us do more than just remember him. Let us try to live his message. Let us be the change we wish to see in the world. Let us build more bridges of understanding, just as thinkers like Ervin Baktay did. And let us reaffirm our collective faith in the power of peace and dialogue to create a better future for all.

Thank you.