

Report of the National Seminar on  
HOW GANDHI MATTERS: ASSESSING THE  
RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN SOLUTIONS  
FOR INDIA AND THE WORLD IN  
THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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*Held at Gandhi Teerth, 23-24 August 2019*  
*Organized by the Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon*  
*&*  
*The Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla*

This two-day National Seminar, jointly convened by the Gandhi Research Foundation (GRF), Jalgaon, and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla, was held on the idyllic campus of the Gandhi Teerth (Jain Hills) in commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary, under the aegis of the GRF Board of Directors represented at the event by Shri Ashok Jain (Chairman, Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd. [JISL]) and Professor Sudarshan Iyengar (former Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapeeth). Appropriately entitled "How Gandhi Matters: Assessing the Relevance of Gandhian Solutions for India and the World in the 21st Century", the seminar's aim was to discuss not only the continued significance of Gandhi's legacy but also how to reinvent it in dealing with contemporary problems confronting the subcontinent, in particular, and the globe, in general.

Before reporting on the deliberations during the seminar, a brief historical and political overview would be conducive to our contextual understanding of Gandhi's relevance, and also familiarize the reader with the 'state of the art' in Gandhian studies: Given that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was an unconventional political leader and thinker, it is easy neither to interpret nor to categorize him. Yet, needless to say, Gandhi impacted as a democratic humanist

whose influence surged in the firmament surrounding the First and Second World Wars in the context of anti-colonial national liberation movements in the Asian and African world. Moreover, his extraordinary contribution continues to be relevant for the various transformations of nationalism in the subsequent phases (during the Cold War and post-Cold War) of supranational regional integration and capitalist globalization, and the more recent de-globalization or “slowbalization” caused by the rise of right-wing nationalism all over the world.

Gandhi entered on to the Indian political stage at a time when the prevailing descriptive and explanatory categories of political understanding and action had run out of steam. On the one hand, Congress moderates had been proved to be irrelevant and ineffective; on the other, Congress extremists had been reduced to the margins of law and politics by the powerful repressive colonial state apparatus on charges of preaching violence and sedition. Gandhi appeared as a flickering flame of political thought and action, lightening the seemingly dark and hopeless scenario with his courageous and innovative political strategy of nonviolence, *satyagraha*, and his goals of *swaraj* and *swadeshi*. No wonder that Gandhi has been differently, or indeed simultaneously, interpreted as a traditionalist (in view of his defence of *varnashramadharma* minus the caste system, or his trenchant critique of modernity), as a modernist (viz. his anti-colonial nationalism and ‘constructive politics’), and as a postmodernist (given his belief in cultural relativism and contextual truth). His 1909 political manifesto, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*,<sup>1</sup> is open to a hermeneutic interpretation that is conservative, liberal, and radical – all rolled into one.

How Gandhi combines his unique individualism and communitarianism is exemplified in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1925 ff.). Straddling diverse epistemological discourses, he underscored, on the one hand, the normative philosophical imperative regarding the purity of both ends and means, philosophical anti-statism and the privileging of civil society and conscientious individualism; on the other, he emphasized the experimental and pragmatic discovery of contextually valid truths, and the need to make contingent compromises on myriad issues. Committed to his “constructive programme”, which represented grassroots politics per se, he endeavoured to bring about the emancipation of *Harijans*, communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims, the widespread use of the *charkha* and *khadi*, the introduction of basic education, natural health care and hygiene,

and the propagation of a *rashtrabhasha*, just to name some of his major initiatives.

Eric H. Erikson (*Gandhi's Truth: The Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, 1969) in his psycho-history of Gandhi (exemplifying a neo-Freudian approach to history and politics) postulates that the phenomenon of a mass movement and charismatic political leadership is predicated on the juxtaposition of the "Man and the Moment". In short, in the persona of Gandhi, biography embedded in history succeeded in producing a mass movement of heroic historical signification that intrigues us even today.

Contrastively, in his last major speech before the Constituent Assembly of India, its chairman, B. R. Ambedkar, in defending the draft Constitution, urged the Assembly to put the past behind and to abide by the spirit of the Constitution. Hence forward, Ambedkar advocated that civil disobedience, *satyagraha* and the breaking of laws, which represented "the Grammar of Anarchy", should be forgotten. Whilst showing due respect to this legal luminary, and fully acknowledging Ambedkar's constitutionalism, nevertheless, we also need to bear in mind that our national ideational heritage of Gandhian civil disobedience has continued to assert itself in numerous popular mass movements led by Vinoba Bhave, Jaya Prakash Narayan and Sundarlal Bahuguna, to name the most prominent satyagrahis of post-Independence India. Arguably, both these streams of constitutionalism and *satyagraha* have contributed to the success, and indeed the survival, of democracy in India.

All things considered, Gandhi certainly matters today not only for India, but for the world at large. Yet his contemporary global importance requires more explicit articulation: As the world faces an uncertain future, to what extent can Gandhian alternatives be availed of, for instance, to tackle the enormous increase in class and regional inequalities, or to confront the challenges to democracy due to capitalist globalization? Do his ecumenical endeavours in establishing communal harmony offer solutions towards mitigating religious fundamentalism and terrorism, aggravated by the global rise of extreme-right parties and movements? Does the legacy of this prophet of nonviolence provide us with crucial clues towards deflecting a nuclear holocaust, or towards abating global warming? To find answers to the existential problems of our times, we are called upon to examine more rigorously Gandhi's ardent faith in truth and nonviolence. We need to understand the implications and consequences of his deep respect for religious pluralism (*sarvadharmasamabhava*), coupled with his exemplification of ethical politics, as well

as his emphasis on “need rather than greed”-based consumption and proprietorship (in the form of *aparigraha* and trusteeship) defined by simple living and health-care, in harmony with nature. Our aim in this National Seminar was to evaluate the way in which Gandhian precepts and practices, in private and public spheres, can instantiate a cosmopolitan global citizenship for planetary survival, practised by *swadeshi* nationalists in the global village. Towards this end, some relevant themes were formulated and discussed in six sessions (each comprising three to four cutting-edge papers) bearing the following captions:

Session 1: Gandhi’s Historical Contribution: Debates and Controversies

Session 2: Gandhi’s *Swaraj* and its Relevance Today

Session 3: Gandhian Economics and Ecological Sustainability

Session 4: Gandhi’s *Sarvadharmā Samabhava* and his Discourse on Social-Political Justice: Viable Solutions for India and the World?

Session 5: The Scope of *Satyagraha* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Session 6: Gandhi, Science and Modernity: An Ambivalent Relationship?

On the morning of 23 August, the National Seminar was inaugurated by the lighting of the lamp. The introductory words by Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar, member of GRF Board of Directors were followed by a short welcome address by Professor Gita Dharampal, Dean of Research at the GRF and convenor of the National Seminar – the co-convenor of the Seminar being Professor Mahendra P. Singh, National Fellow at IAS. In order to highlight “how Gandhi matters”, she drew attention to Gandhi’s pre-eminent status as the “Father of the Nation”, epitomized so ingeniously in Ranga’s *Rashtra Pita Mahatma Gandhi Bharat* map (signifying ‘Gandhi is India, and India is Gandhi’). Yet, simultaneously, she alluded to the paradoxical irony that the independent Indian nation which emerged was quite contrary to his deepest convictions. However, to resolve this ‘aporia’, she asserted, Gandhi’s life’s message of truth and nonviolence provides the answer, as he bridged not only social, economic and religious divides but also the temporal and discursive one between tradition, modernity and post-modernity. Thus, underscoring Gandhi’s relevance for the contemporary world, she concluded by accentuating his enigmatic attractiveness for today’s youth.

This set the stage for initiating the seminar that was greatly illuminated by three incisive keynote addresses, presented by three eminent public intellectuals and scholars, namely Ramachandra Guha

(historian and writer), Professor Sudhir Chandra (Indian historian and author) and Dr. Purushottama Bilimoria (research fellow at Berkeley, California). The detailed elaborations relating to Mahatma Gandhi's achievements, underscored by Ramachandra Guha in his inaugural address, were complemented by Sudhir Chandra in his valedictory address that stressed how the contemporary world needs Gandhi more urgently than ever before; in particular, Prof Chandra urged the audience to be more fully aware of its responsibility and thereby to become more accessible to Gandhi's message. Contrastively, the historically oriented power-point presentation by Purushottama Bilimoria demonstrated the wider and deeper influence of Gandhi's strategies for nonviolent protests and the struggle for rights, justice and solidarity in the American Civil Rights movement. All these three cutting-edge presentations as well as the 21 session papers were enthusiastically received and discussed by a large audience of university professors, students (from colleges and high schools), researchers, international student interns, eminent Gandhian scholars and venerable Gandhian activists, but also by newcomers to Gandhian thought.

After this concise overview of the seminar proceedings, it will be opportune to elaborate in more detail on its substantial contributions. Thereby, pride of place must be given to the inaugural keynote address by Ramachandra Guha<sup>2</sup> entitled "Four Arguments with Gandhi". After emphasizing his longstanding fascination with Gandhi, inspired by his meeting in 1981 with two rare personalities, viz. the initiator of the Chipko movement, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, and the Gandhian historian and political intellectual, Dharampal, Guha in a most engaging manner proffered that Gandhi, though known as the Father of the Nation, represented for him the personification of the "mother of all political and social battles" not only during the Freedom struggle but also concerning India's future. In this connection, Guha then presented the four major 'arguments' or issues with which Gandhi wrestled during his lifetime and whose pivotal impact still resonates in the contemporary arena, namely the importance of nonviolence, the abolition of untouchability, striving for Hindu-Muslim communal harmony, and ensuring economic welfare for the poorest.

With regard to Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, Guha cautioned that *Hind Swaraj*, considered his seminal political manifesto, was overrated in this respect, and that his most interesting ideas on the concept of nonviolence were scattered in his many articles. To exemplify this, Guha discussed the crucial importance of

an essay, entitled “The Cult of the Bomb”<sup>3</sup> (published in *Young India* in 1930) that contained a rigorous critique of the culture of violence propagated by revolutionary organisations such as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army of which Bhagat Singh was a founding member. Besides underscoring that revolutionaries were out of sync with the basically nonviolent culture of the Indian masses, Gandhi’s two main arguments against the use of violence were articulated as follows: firstly, that violence would lead to increased repression by the rulers and, secondly, that violent acts would only postpone the attainment of freedom that could only be achieved by developing an organic unity in society. Yet Guha, whilst affirming the viability of Gandhi’s message for today’s conflictual situations, conceded the limits of nonviolence, and cited the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber who expressed his doubts in his correspondence with Gandhi about nonviolence being efficacious against Hitler. In acquiescence, Guha maintained that nonviolent resistance had little chance of impacting under a dictatorship, such as the Third Reich, whereas it could succeed in democracies such as India and Britain.

Moving on to his second argument, namely concerning the caste system and the abolition of untouchability, Guha admitted that, for a historian, Gandhi’s stance was most intriguing given his transformative, non-static approach to the problem which developed in a threefold processual manner as follows: Firstly, according to Guha, whilst Gandhi condemned the practice of untouchability, he did not question the legitimacy of caste (or *varna*) as such, considering the latter to be defined by occupational differences which endowed society with a certain degree of order based on an ideal division of labour. In a second stage, Gandhi advanced to advocating intermixing and inter-dining between different castes, and thirdly, at a later juncture, he supported caste intermarriage as well. Appreciatively acknowledging Gandhi’s dynamic approach, Guha, however, then drew the audience’s attention to three kinds of criticism levelled against him on this controversial issue, namely firstly, by Marxists for whom class was everyday reality, whereas caste was only a spurious entity; secondly, by orthodox Brahmins who considered that Gandhi, having insufficient knowledge of Sanskrit and the *Shastras*, had no right and competence to interfere with Hindu tradition, which even prompted the *Shankaracharyas* to ‘excommunicate’ him due to his radical views; thirdly and contrastively, for B.R. Ambedkar, Gandhi was not radical enough, and, hence, in a famous essay pleaded for the annihilation of caste.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar that

began in 1931, Guha perspicaciously observed that both protagonists were to modify their positions. Moreover, in defence of Gandhi, he underscored that no upper-caste Hindu did more to challenge the caste system, and nor did any other Indian contribute more towards exterminating untouchability than him.

Turning to the third argument, namely Gandhi's endeavour to achieve Hindu-Muslim harmony, Guha conceded that this was articulated most forcefully in *Hind Swaraj*, for in South Africa he had experienced communal harmony in mobilizing the Indian diasporic community. According to Gandhi's understanding, it was the British colonial power that was responsible for disseminating the notion of 'inborn enmity' between Hindus and Muslims. Yet, on returning to India, Guha pointed out – from his reading of unpublished sources – that, despite his supreme endeavour to establish Hindu-Muslim harmony, Gandhi experienced intractable communal tensions as well as outright opposition at several junctures. The accusation by his foremost Muslim critic, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, that Gandhi was basically a Hindu politician, was shared by a large section of educated Muslims, in the middle of the 1940s, which supported Jinnah in the movement for a separate homeland. For their part, Hindu radicals vehemently criticized Gandhi for not being Hindu enough, and claimed that through his Muslim appeasement politics he was responsible for the deaths of Hindus.

Tackling his fourth 'argument with Gandhi', Guha admitted that Gandhi's economic philosophy was difficult to pinpoint and that the alternative routes to the elimination of poverty, sketched by him, were considered quaint and archaic by his modernist contemporaries. In this connection, Guha reminded the audience of a slogan commonly heard in Nehruvian India, namely "Industrialize or Perish!" However, for Gandhi, the consequences of industrialization amounted to *Industrialise – and Perish!*<sup>5</sup> Most presciently, Gandhi had stated that in view of the threat posed to humanity and nature by Britain's (a small island's) craze for industrialization, if a populous nation like India were to be infected by the same craze, the whole planet earth would be consumed as though a hoard of locusts had descended on it. To forestall this cataclysmic vision, the alternative Gandhi was envisioning for India, as articulated by his economist, J. C. Kumarappa's "economy of permanence",<sup>6</sup> was that of long-term, sustainable economic development.

To conclude his talk about the four arguments that animated Gandhi's politics and philosophy, Guha underscored their continued and heightened relevance today, not only for India but for the

world in its entirety, and hence his bottom line was to encourage the audience to seriously revisit Gandhi's ideas to ensure a future of peaceful, harmonious and equitable living. In the lively ensuing discussion, the validity of Guha's message was confirmed.

Contrastively, the historically oriented power-point presentation by Dr. Purushottama Bilimoria (Distinguished Teaching & Research Fellow, Graduate Theological Union and Berkeley, California) demonstrated the wider and deeper influence of Gandhi's strategies for nonviolent protests and struggle for rights, justice and solidarity in the American Civil Rights movement. Entitled "Gandhi, African Americans and the Civil Rights Movements: Toward Globalizing Nonviolence", Bilimoria's informative talk, presenting a wide range of photographs and historical newspaper articles, highlighted the myriad links, parallels and influences that existed between Gandhi's role in the Indian Independence movement and the African American freedom struggle, which culminated in the Civil Rights Movement.

According to Bilimoria, the most important non-Indian influences on Gandhi's thinking originated from Thoreau, Emerson, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Christian sects like the Quakers. Yet, the linkage with Gandhi of personalities, organizations and events in the history of the African American freedom struggle was even more impressive, of which Bilimoria cited some prominent examples: for instance, Booker T. Washington and Gandhi, whilst in South Africa, experienced a mutual interest in each other's work; and the Pan-African Congress, held in London in 1900 was inspired by the Indian National Congress as was also the case for Niagara Movement, co-founded in 1905 by W.E.B. DuBois (NAACP), who wrote a review of Gandhi's autobiography. Marcus Garvey (founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association) was named as a prime example of a Black nationalist who was greatly influenced by Gandhi's non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s. To spotlight the intense interest among Afro-Americans in Gandhi's perspective and strategy on nonviolent conflict resolution, Bilimoria, in conclusion, drew the audience's attention to the importance of Howard University in Philadelphia that was to become a reputed academic centre from which Gandhian thought spread and, thus, would provide an inspirational foundation for the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s onwards.<sup>7</sup>

The final keynote talk of the National Seminar was in the form of the Valedictory Lecture given in Hindi by Professor Sudhir Chandra, a reputed historian and Gandhian scholar;<sup>8</sup> its title in



English translation was “Gandhi’s Relevance and Possibility: Our Responsibility”. Focussing on the last year of Gandhi’s life, Prof. Chandra, whilst reaffirming Bapu’s epic relevance for India’s nonviolent freedom struggle, was, nonetheless, at pains to impress upon the audience the Mahatma’s growing irrelevance towards shaping developments as the subcontinent gained Independence from colonial rule. He pointed out that not only was Gandhi absent from Delhi on 15 August, but also that, being in the midst of communal turmoil in Calcutta,<sup>9</sup> Gandhi said the day for him was not a matter for celebration and that it would be spent meditating, introspecting and fasting. In his despondency, he even refused to deliver any message to the press, be it national or international. To stress Gandhi’s tragic predicament, Chandra points out to the audience that, though the Mahatma had struggled against the British Raj for 32 years, he survived in Independent India for only five and a half months. Reiterating the historical fact that Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Vinayak Godse on 30 January 1948, Chandra, however, then formulated the rhetorical question as to whether Gandhi was killed only by Godse and whether he died only on 30 January 1948. Reinforcing the disturbingly painful implications underlying these interrogations, Chandra maintained that Gandhi’s 169 days in Independent India were filled with sorrow, and that on his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday (on 2 October 1947) he prayed to be relieved from this world, for he had become irrelevant with the coming of Independence. Having articulated this agonizing truth, Chandra then contended that even during Gandhi’s long and valiant struggle for India’s freedom, impassioned acceptance of his exalted leadership was interspersed by signs of recalcitrant rejection not only on the part of factions in the political spectrum,<sup>10</sup> but also by his closest associates.<sup>11</sup>

However, to conclude his excruciating scrutiny of Gandhi’s last year, Prof. Chandra struck a more positively constructive tone by averring that Gandhi was more relevant today than he was in his own day.<sup>12</sup> Yet, though the world needed Gandhi more urgently now than ever before, never had it been more unready for him. Therefore, he exhorted the audience to seriously reflect on this potentially destructive irony, and enjoined everyone to realise their crucial responsibility in resolving it in becoming more accessible to Gandhi’s message.

Now, we shall turn our attention to the six thematic sessions, spread over two days (dealing with Gandhi’s historical contribution, his concepts of *swaraj*, *sarvadharmā samabhava*, *satyagraha*, his

implementation of economic and ecological sustainability, as well as his ambivalent relationship with science and modernity) and briefly review the papers presented in each of the panels.<sup>13</sup>

In the first session on “Gandhi’s Historical Contribution: Debates and Controversies”, chaired by Prof. Gita Dharampal, seminar convenor and historian,<sup>14</sup> Nishikant Kolge (Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi) presented a paper entitled “How to Understand the Life and Philosophy of Gandhi: Some Suggestions”. Sketching two general opinions held about Gandhi, namely the depiction of him as the ‘Mahatma’ and ‘moral genius’ versus the ‘shrewd politician’ and ‘political strategist’, Kolge considered them to constitute a false dichotomy that tended to imply a life of double standard which was, however, certainly not the case with Gandhi. According to Kolge, these above-mentioned qualities all coalesced in Gandhi, a person with an inner dynamic, possessing the highest moral integrity, evident in theory and practice, and testifying to an underlining consistency of approach. As borne out by concrete evidence cited by Kolge, whilst Gandhi valued the nitty-gritty of his constructive programme to be on par with national politics, he also adopted a humanistic syncretic religious and philosophical approach defined by his own individual uniqueness.

In the second paper of the first session, entitled “Revisiting Mahatma’s Educational Philosophy in the Light of the Present Millennium”, Amitabha Mukherjee (Assistant Lecturer, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan) maintained that in his educational philosophy Gandhi followed the 11 principles of Patanjali’s *Yoga-pradeepa*, viz. *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, *Asteya*, *Aparigraha*, *Brahmacharya*, *Sharirshrama*, *Aswada*, *Sarvatra Bhayavarjana*, *Sarva Dharma Samantva*, *Swadeshi*, and *Sparsha Bhavna*. Thus, anchored in ancient Indian culture and ideals, Gandhi’s educational experiments intended to regenerate these ideals and practices, with the aim of challenging the imposition of a westernized curriculum under colonial disposition. The speaker maintained that Gandhi’s basic education was meant to combine theory and practice (in particular, to promote the unity of ‘head, heart and hands’ in pedagogy), exemplified in bringing together an academic curriculum with productive handicrafts. Thereby, Gandhi was also desirous of guaranteeing the autonomy of these *Nai Talim* schools by making them self-sufficient and self-supporting, also in financial terms. In, thus, providing free and compulsory education, in the mother tongue, defined by an equitable teacher-student relationship, Gandhi intended to nurture in India’s independent citizens’ qualities such as leadership, cooperation, a sense of

community, coupled with an aesthetic sense and respectful love for the nation's heritage and traditions. To conclude, Mukherjee reiterated that Gandhi's (as well as Tagore's) philosophy of education did not constitute an 'out-of-the-box' thinking but was imbedded in Indian culture, and that it should serve as an exemplary model for today's educational practice.

The session's third paper, presented by Satish Kumar Jha (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Aryabhatta College, University of Delhi), was entitled "Ethics of Renunciation and *Satyagraha*: Gandhian Engagement with Trust, Legitimacy and Freedom and its Relevance for Contemporary Democratic Discourse". In his impressively cogent presentation, Jha focussed on the modalities for guaranteeing trust and legitimacy in order to counter their contemporary erosion. In this connection, he underscored how for Gandhi, after initially attempting to achieve this through his discourse on *satyagraha*, the idea of renunciation was to become the answer towards conferring legitimacy and trust in the realm of political action as well as on its practitioners.

Admitting that a study of the introduction of renunciation, as a conceptual practice, into politics constituted a research desideratum, Jha argued that, with regard to Gandhi, renunciation was exemplified, not only sartorially and physiognomically in an iconic manner, but even more so in his self-abnegative relationship vis-à-vis power through which he succeeded in generating a feeling of trust and legitimacy in the public sphere. However, Jha maintained that, although renunciation and *satyagraha* as concepts and applied praxis were not new,<sup>15</sup> through Gandhian discourse and experiments these ideational practices were reimagined, reconfigured and refreshed, as well as being re-aligned with the construction of the self and the question of freedom. The sum and substance of Jha's paper was to explore the extent to which Gandhian discourse could rescue liberal democracy from its contemporary crisis of trust and legitimacy, by analysing some of the social and political movements<sup>16</sup> in the post-Gandhian period in India, which seemed to have drawn on the Gandhian concept of renunciation and *satyagraha*.

To conclude the first session, Ananta Kumar Giri (Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai) presented a paper entitled "Rethinking and Transforming *Swadeshi*, *Swaraj* and *Satyagraha* for our Contemporary Times: Contingent Histories, Learning with Failures and Alternative Futures" which constituted an extremely dense and entangled discourse-oriented presentation. Since a summarized version will not do justice to its weighty substance

and crucial implications, it is suggested that the text be published in a prominent peer-reviewed journal so that its portent may initiate stimulating intellectual discussion.

The second session, entitled “Gandhi’s *Swaraj* and its Relevance Today” was chaired by Prof. Mahendra Prasad Singh, the Seminar’s co-convenor, who, being a political scientist, could do justice to the topic and also adjudicate the presentation of the three papers, all of which were in Hindi; for the purposes of this report, their titles (translated into English) and only a brief summary of their contents will be outlined.

The first paper, presented by Ram Chandra Pradhan (an eminent Gandhian scholar and Senior Professor at the Institute of Gandhian Studies, Gopuri, Wardha), was appropriately entitled “The Evolution of Gandhi’s Idea of *Swaraj* and its Present Relevance”. In his extemporized exposition, whilst acknowledging the ancient genealogy of the term *swaraj*, Pradhan traced the way in which Gandhi not only transformed its application, but also the logical structure of its significance. Pradhan’s narration revolved around and attempted to provide answers to a cluster of interrogations such as how Gandhi arrived at the idea of *swaraj*, the ways in which his understanding differed from his contemporaries, and the reasons for changing his perspective on *swaraj*, albeit adhering to its basic portent. This investigation culminated in the crucial question as to why Gandhi did not insist on the implementation of his understanding of *swaraj* on the eve of Independence. And to conclude, in posing the fundamental question as to whether Gandhi’s *swaraj* was still relevant in the present context, the speaker answered in the affirmative, underscoring the need for us to heed the *tatva* rather than the *tantra* of Gandhi’s quintessential message.

The second session’s second paper, entitled “An Analysis of the Gandhian Perspective on Rural Development”, was presented by Rinki (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Delhi University). Basically Rinki’s exposition dealt with the topic of the panel, namely to evaluate the extent to which Gandhi’s *swaraj* was relevant in today’s India, by highlighting the importance he had placed regarding rural development. Taking an empirical approach, she focussed on different aspects of Gandhi’s constructive programme, and emphasized the continued relevance of all 18 areas of activity<sup>17</sup> for revitalizing rural India so that villagers could become empowered and experience the benefits of *Gram Swaraj*, as envisaged by Gandhi.

The third and final paper of this session was presented by Tejram

Pal (Doctoral Candidate at Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University [H.N.B.G.U.] Srinagar, Uttarakhand). Entitled “The Relevance of Gandhi’s Philosophy in the Present Context”, Pal’s paper outlined the basic tenets of Gandhi’s message with the aim of underscoring its continued relevance.

The third and final session of the first day, entitled “Gandhian Economics and Ecological Sustainability”, was chaired most competently by Sudarshan Iyengar, member of the GRF Board of Directors and an economist by training. The first paper, appropriately entitled “Revisiting Gandhi’s Ideas on Corporate Social Responsibility”, was presented by Ms. Deepika (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Shivaji College, New Delhi). In her lucid disquisition, Deepika, in revisiting Gandhi’s ideas on trusteeship, aimed to evaluate them in the context of the contemporary institutionalized practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which, as she pointed out, was initially a voluntary undertaking, but which unfortunately was made mandatory through Indian legislation passed in 2013. According to Deepika, Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship should be brought in line with his striving for social equity. Then, although she acknowledged that he may have been influenced by Marxist notions of economic egalitarianism, nonetheless, she emphasized that, contrary to communist ideology, Gandhi was against the violent appropriation of wealth held by proprietors and businessmen, and instead was in favour of them retaining their riches, so long as they held them ‘in trust’ for uplifting the poor. Further, recognizing that the practice of trusteeship was rooted in Indian religious traditions shared by Gandhi, Deepika elucidated his ethically inspired religious approach by citing the following aphorism, attributed to him, namely “happiness is obtained not only by wealth and profit, but also by doing things rightly and doing right things”. In short, she concluded that, in line with Gandhi, economic development and welfare should benefit all members of society, a goal that should be the defining feature of CSR so that, more significantly, a balance between spiritual health and material possession could be achieved, as exemplified by the Mahatma.

The second paper of the third session, presented by Sukanya Sarkar Sasmal (Associate Professor, Department of History, Sarojini Naidu College for Women, Kolkata), was entitled “Gandhian Prophecies and Precepts: An Ecological Reading”. As a point of departure, Ms. Sasmal zoomed in on the global challenge of climate change in her sophisticated power-point presentation. Sharing Ramachandra

Guha's views on the relevance of Gandhi's dictum "Industrialize and Perish", she maintained that his critical approach vis-à-vis large-scale industrialization was articulated as early as 1909 in *Hind Swaraj* and was upheld throughout his life. With the village rather than the city being his main focus, he propounded that the village economy should make use of local resources and indigenous knowledge. To highlight the avant-garde nature of Gandhi's constructive programme, Sasmal earmarked his keen interest in waste management, recycling, water management and rain water harvesting. No doubt, the two local instances of Panchagani and Dhom Dam, cited by her as examples of ecologically sound development, would have met with Gandhi's approval. In conclusion, she maintained that, despite the profound economic and ecological changes that have taken place since Gandhi's time, his ideas continue to be relevant.

The session's third paper, presented by Sirshendu Majumdar (Associate Professor of English, Bolpur College, University of Burdwan), bore the concise title "The Idea of *Swadeshi* in Gandhi & Tagore". Yet focussing more on Tagore than on Gandhi, he underscored that the former's famous lecture "Swadeshi Samaj" (1904), articulating with a moral underpinning the ideal of indigeneity and community belonging, preceded Gandhi's use of the concept in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) by five years. Hence, whilst acknowledging the pioneering nature of Gandhi's political manifesto propagating village upliftment, Majumdar argued that Tagore's defining influence on Gandhi's notion of *swadeshi*, which in turn also informed his concept of *swaraj*, should not be ignored.

In the most impressive fourth and concluding paper of the session, presented by Pranav Kumar Vasishta G. V. (Independent Scholar, Associated with *Purnapramati* – A Centre for Integrated Learning, Bengaluru) and entitled "Protecting *Dharma-Dravam*: The Inevitability of Invoking a Sense of the Sacred for Ecological Sustainability", the focus was on how to counter, employing a spiritual metaphor, the ongoing process of the ecological destruction of India's sacred rivers. By maintaining that Ganga was *dharma-dravam*, i.e. *dharma* in liquid form, the young scholar insisted that in order to protect the Ganga, the *Aviral* (uninterrupted) and *Nirmal* (pristine) flows in all its source streams must be ensured. In this statement, Pranav was reiterating the teaching of Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand (formerly Professor G.D. Agrawala from IIT Kanpur) who fasted unto death as part of his "Ganga *Tapasya*" (begun in 2008 and ended on 11 October 2018). To conclude his most succinct presentation, Pranav asserted with enigmatic finesse that "a sense of the sacred"

and “a sense of being scared” were both inevitable “categorical imperatives” for ensuring ecological sustainability, however, adding that a realization of the first imperative was even more crucial than the second one. In validation of this apodictic observation, he cited Swami Sanand who, with rhetorical flourish, had conveyed the following powerful spiritual message: “If we do not even acknowledge the *Adhi-daiivika*<sup>18</sup> plane of existence, then do we have any means to realize the *Adhyatma*<sup>19</sup>?”

On the second day, 24 August 2019, the National Seminar continued with the three remaining sessions, the first of which, namely the fourth session was entitled “Gandhi’s *Sarvadharmā Sambhava* and his Discourse on Social-Political Justice: Viable Solutions for India and the World?” With sovereign elegance, it was chaired by Dr. Anjana Mangalagiri, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, who, being a sociologist, was ideally equipped to moderate the intricately complex topics discussed in this session.

Initiating the debate, Chetana Jagriti (an Independent Research Scholar) presented her paper entitled “Gandhi’s Notion of Religion and the Question of Truth” whereby she focussed on this dual aspect in the context of multiculturalism, comparing Gandhi’s views in this regard with those propounded by Will Kymlicka<sup>20</sup> and Charles Taylor<sup>21</sup>. In contrast to these thinkers, she maintained that Gandhi attempted to balance out the relationship between the individual and society, as he questioned the very nature of religion, in general, and of Hinduism, in particular, which, as she stressed, was defined, according to Gandhi, by the notion of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava*. As evidence of his liberal ecumenism, she referred to his unstinting endeavour to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity even in the backdrop of demands for Partition. Then, perspicaciously, she assessed his discourse on social-political justice as enacted and tested during his *Harijan* campaigns, demanding the removal of untouchability, and also foregrounded his ceaseless struggle to ensure economic welfare and equity through his constructive programme, just to mention two of Gandhi’s seminal concerns. In conclusion, she maintained that these concrete illustrations of Gandhi’s practice of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* and of his endeavours to ensure social-political justice could indeed serve as viable solutions to conflictual problems for India and the world in the contemporary age.

The second paper presented by Himanshu Roy (Senior Atal Bihari Vajpayee Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti House, New Delhi) bore the simple title “Gandhi’s Secularism”.<sup>22</sup> Roy asserted clearly at the outset that Gandhi’s secularism, both

ontological and epistemological, constituted an integral part of his political praxis, public discourse and personal conduct. Thereby, Roy traced its genealogy to show how Gandhi's liberal ecumenism had emerged from his intense relationship with Kathiawadi culture, and was influenced by the popular peasant syncretic culture of rural India, as well as being enriched by his considerable knowledge of the scriptures pertaining to several world religions. In brief, he then detailed how Gandhi's religious liberalism was exemplified in a three-fold manner: first, in his reflections on the religious coexistence of the masses premised on the diversity of professional and economic interdependence; secondly, in his public discourse and his strategy of political mobilizations; and thirdly, was articulated in his views on the 'secular' policy to be adopted in Independent India.

The third paper, presented by Sopan Shinde (Assistant Professor of English, National Law University, Nagpur) and entitled "The Gandhian Human Rights Perspective and Global Peace", delineated the similarity between the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Gandhi's Constructive Programme, thereby explicitly underscoring Gandhi's relevance today. According to Shinde, civil and political rights, religious and cultural rights, economic and educational rights are all encompassed in Gandhi's ideas of *satyagraha* and nonviolence. Shinde asserted, 'fulfilling the corresponding duties' was Gandhi's formula for the protection of rights, for he had the Indic term *dharma* in mind, signifying both rights and duties. The speaker's final argument was that in our present precarious situation fearing the collapse of civilization, the duty-based Gandhian perspectives of human rights offered us sustainable hope.

For the fifth session, entitled "The Scope of Satyagraha in the 21st Century", Samir Banerjee, an eminent Gandhian scholar, acted as chair and moderated the three papers most proficiently. The first paper by Sanjeev Kumar (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Zakir Husain Delhi College, Delhi University) bore the title "Exploring Gandhi's Method of the Dialogical Truth Force of *Satyagraha*". Its central thesis underscored that Gandhi's model of rational inquiry provided the key to addressing our contemporary existential crises, created by the dominant, current models of economic, political and technological progress. In particular, Sanjeev Kumar maintained that *satyagraha* offered an alternative perspective for nonviolent conflict resolution by using 'soul' or 'truth force'. He went on to trace how Gandhi's *satyagraha* emerged as a useful weapon, espousing common interests shared by otherwise antagonistic parties, mediating between means and



ends, and through a dialogic process of practical rational enquiry appealing to the heart and mind. In conclusion, he affirmed that *satyagraha* provided ways to solve the multi-faceted problems of the current global scenario.

The second paper, delivered in Hindi by Abhishek Saurabh (Doctoral Candidate, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), discussed the relevance of the Gandhi's message for India and the world in the 21st century. The same topic, also in Hindi, was dealt with by the third speaker, Bir Pal Singh Yadav (Assistant Professor, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwa Vidyalaya, Wardha, Maharashtra), who made a forceful case for heeding Gandhian principles in our conflict ridden contemporary age.

The sixth and concluding session was chaired by Dr. John Chelladurai (Dean of Academics, Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon) and discussed the intriguing topic "Gandhi, Science and Modernity: An Ambivalent Relationship?". The session's first paper, presented by Jagdish N. Sinha (member of the Research Council, National Commission for the History of Science, Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi), was entitled "Gandhi, Science and Environment: How He Matters Today". Whilst acknowledging that Gandhi did not discover any new scientific principles, Sinha maintained that recent researches in physics, biology and the social sciences corroborated many of Gandhi's concepts and understanding about nature, and the reality of existence at large. He stressed, in particular, Gandhi's cosmocentric perspective (as opposed to the then prevalent anthropocentric one) regarding his belief in a natural order and in the properties of regeneration and self-healing in the living world, as well as the interconnectedness of all existence. Gandhi's holistic approach, whilst containing the seeds of modern ecologism and environmentalism, he averred, cannot be appreciated within Cartesian and Newtonian parameters of reductionist science, nor be understood within the framework of western development models.

The next paper, presented by Prince Kumar Singh (Doctoral Candidate, Gandhi and Peace Studies, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Wardha), was delivered in Hindi, and discussed "Gandhi as an Experimenter". Basically the speaker confirmed that, since during his life he conducted experiments with truth (as evidenced by his autobiography), Gandhi's approach could be viewed as being defined by scientifically oriented enquiry.

Directing the audience's attention to a slightly different topic, the third paper, presented by Surbhi Uniyal (Research Scholar, Jawaharlal

Nehru University, New Delhi), bore the title “Dependence on Technology: The Relevance of Gandhi’s Views Against Technology”. In her lucid paper, Surbhi Uniyal foregrounded Gandhi’s criticism of technology due to the latter’s dehumanizing, destructive (as evidenced by nuclear weapons) and exploitative side-effects on society. According to Gandhi, the replacement of human labour by machinery and technology had deleterious consequences. Affirming this, she criticised contemporary society’s over-dependence on technology for remembering, calculating and navigating daily activities. However, in conclusion she averred that technology itself was value-neutral and, if used in an ethically responsible manner, could be beneficial for society.

In the session’s fourth paper, presented by Savita Singh (Professor, School of Gender and Development Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi) and entitled “Contemporizing Gandhi: Post-Empiricist Science and Expressivist Modernity”, the prime aim was to reinterpret Gandhi’s idea of modernity by highlighting his alternative views on science. According to Savita Singh, Gandhi’s intense criticism of modernity rested on his apprehension that modern science and its epistemology would trounce the cultural and historical contexts of non-western societies into “one cardboard box of instrumental rationality”. To counter this threatened onslaught, Singh maintained that Gandhi had reinterpreted modernity by highlighting alternative views on science and had underscored the primordial interdependence of autonomous individuals with nature and fellow human beings. It was Gandhi’s expressivist modernism, Savita Singh averred, that provided us with a salutary alternative to the reductionist positivism of modern science.

*Summa summarum*, this National Seminar, in discussing the debates and controversies surrounding Gandhi’s extraordinary contribution, the collective aim was to assess and “reinvent” Gandhian solutions (in nonviolence, moral politics, societal reform, economic and ecological sustainability, and interreligious harmony) to contemporary problems confronting India and the world. It was underscored how Gandhi’s valiant endeavours could serve as crucial “signposts” indicating a road-map towards a *sarvodaya* social order for the creation of a viable future, and thereby to highlight “How Gandhi Matters Today”.

The successful realization of this academic event was made possible thanks to the seamless co-ordination between the IAS (facilitated by its Director Prof. Makarand Paranjape, the co-convenor, Prof. M.P. Singh, and in particular, the Academic Resource Officer, Ms. Ritika

Sharma and her team) and the GRF (facilitated by its CEO, Ms. Ambika Jain, its Chief Administrator, Shri Uday Mahajan, the Dean of Research & Seminar convenor, Prof. Gita Dharampal, and by her research co-ordinator, Ms. Vidya Krishnamurthi, as well as by the supportive assistance of GRF colleagues, such as Dr. John Chelladurai, Dean of Academics, and Ashwin Zala, Program Coordinator). At the Seminar venue itself, thanks to the scholarly presentations (as elaborated above) and enthusiastic feedback from the audience, this innovative discussion forum was a stimulating experience. Last but not least, the efficient organization and the gratifyingly smooth running of the programme was ensured by the unstinting assistance of the GRF's and JISL's indomitable team of technicians, the round-the-clock supervision of the PRO department and the housekeeping staff, and above all, the generous hospitality of the Jain family in the beautiful arcadian idyll of Jain Hills. It is hoped that "How Gandhi Matters" has set the stage for a bountiful sequel of similar workshop Think-Tanks.

### Notes

1. Cf. the new edition of Gandhi's 1910 English translation (Indus Source Books 2019) with an introduction by Gita Dharampal entitled "Reading *Hind Swaraj* in Today's Context".
2. Cf. in particular, Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World 1914-1948*, Allen Lane 2018.
3. Written on the train from Lahore, the city where Sardar Bhagat Singh was born and from where Gandhi was returning to Ahmedabad after attending the Lahore AICC annual session presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru in April 1929.
4. This is the title of an undelivered speech written in 1936 and self-published in the same year as *Annihilation of Caste*.
5. This was the title of the booklet, edited by R.K. Prabhu (Navajivan Publishing House 1966), which comprised articles by Gandhi on this theme.
6. Title of an iconic book by J.C. Kumarappa, first published in 1945 containing a foreword by Gandhi; this book preceded Ernst F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) by several decades.
7. To exemplify this, it should be mentioned that in 1950, Martin Luther King heard Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, speak about his recent trip to India and Gandhi's nonviolent resistance techniques which were to exercise considerable influence on King's onward journey.
8. He has authored the much-acclaimed book *Gandhi: An Impossible Possibility* (Routledge 2017), translated from the Hindi original (Rajkamal Prakashan 2011).
9. Originally intending to quell the riots in Noakali, Gandhi was detained in strife-ridden Calcutta on the explicit request of CM Suhrawardy who had given an assurance to contain the communal violence in Noakali.
10. For instance, after Chauri Chaura in February 1922, Congressman began

deserting him, and soon after the Swarajists, ensconced in the British-Indian legislatures, paid only lip-service to Gandhi; again after his resignation from the Congress in 1934, Gandhi's constructive programme was considered an unnecessary impediment in the way of Congress' hard-core politics towards negotiating Independence.

11. In this connection, we should bear in mind the complex rifts that constituted and simultaneously threatened to tear asunder the often chimerical partnership that existed between Gandhi and Nehru, representing as they did virtual opposites with regard to political visions, temperament and cultural background; for details, consult their correspondence, in particular dating from January 1928 and October 1945, as also the incisive article by Sudhir Chandra: "The Language of Modern Ideas': Reflections on an Ethnological Parable", *Thesis Eleven* (1994): 39-51.
12. Gandhi, as highlighted in Ranga's "Rastra Pita Gandhi Cartoon" (featured by Gita Dharampal in her welcome address), had not abandoned us, Sudhir Chandra insisted; rather we had ignored him, yet Gandhi had the uncanny talent of returning to haunt us!
13. For this concise overview, the ensuing discussions are not being reiterated; however, their portent will be substantially incorporated into the summarized rendition of the various thematic issues.
14. In her opening remarks, she urged the paper presenters to render explicit their constructively critical perspective on Gandhi, and to define their own 'ideological' position.
15. According to Jha, whereas renunciation had been articulated in the early 19th century by Rammohan Roy and later by Swami Vivekananda, *Satyagraha* received prominence through Thoreau's treatise on Civil Disobedience. However, thereby Jha omitted to mention *Satyagraha's* rootedness in Indian tradition; for insightful historical documentation about the Indian tradition of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience, cf. Dharampal (1971): *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition, with some early nineteenth century documents*.
16. As prominent examples, Jha mentioned the movements initiated by Vinoba Bhave, Jaya Prakash Narayan, the Chipko and Narmada Andolan as well as those focussing on anti-corruption, and others, encapsulated under the designation 'New Social Movements'.
17. The 18 areas focussed on socio-cultural, economic, political, health and educational activities. The six socio-cultural tasks emphasized communal unity, the removal of untouchability, improving the status of women, and of *Adivasis*, strengthening a national language, and reinvigorating provincial languages; the five economic priorities identified were ensuring the production of *Khadi*, regenerating other village industries, improving the health of cattle, bringing about economic equity, and securing the prohibition of alcohol; the political aspect of the constructive programme stressed the significance of working for the needs of *kisans*, workers in general, students, and adult education; finally, in the sphere of health and education, the focus was on improving village sanitation, providing education in health and hygiene, and attending to the welfare of lepers.
18. This literally means pertaining to the *daiva* or 'fate, unseen forces and gods'.
19. This signifies the 'spiritual state'.
20. Born in 1962, Will Kymlicka is a Canadian political philosopher best known for his work on multiculturalism and animal ethics.

21. Also a Canadian philosopher (born in 1931), Charles Taylor is professor emeritus at McGill University best known for his contributions to political philosophy, the philosophy of social science, the history of philosophy, and intellectual history.
22. In the discussion, attention was drawn to the fact that 'secularism' in the Indian context signifies the practice of having 'equal respect towards all religions' whereas in the West, it denotes the 'separation of church and state'.