

## CONCEPT NOTE

International Seminar on  
**Debating Gandhi in 21<sup>st</sup> Century India**

10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Organised by

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In 20<sup>th</sup> century the world witnessed life and work of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi which on an intriguing analysis open up many possibilities for society, politics, economics, world order and political systems across the world for many centuries to come. Influenced by the writings of Rousseau, Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau, Gandhi developed his critique of modern civilization and mainstream path of capitalist economic development as reflected in his writings in *Hind Swaraj* and *Young India*. Gandhiji's non-violent mode of resistance successfully intimidated the British but independent India failed to translate his dream of a 'ram-rajya' with village panchayat as the most powerful centre of governance. At a theoretical level, Gandhi developed some fundamental ideas, viz. - Sarvodaya economy, Non-Violence (Ahimsa), Truth, Trusteeship, Harijans, Charka based small scale production, Local level self governing institutions, Altruism- in order to attain his dream society, the 'Ramrajya' . At the level of activism, Gandhi played an unparalleled role in Indian freedom struggle through leading the Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement and the Quit India movement. One of the chief method of Gandhi as a political activist was fasting and he used that in 1932 to avoid separate electorate demand for the untouchables. Gandhi passed away within a year of Indian independence witnessing the partition of India. The very imagery of Gandhi is an image 3P's - of strong 'Personality' , 'Peace' and indigenous path of 'Progress' . The Gandhian way of nation-building is a communitarian approach with twin thrusts – a) character-building of men and women in the society, and b) socio-cultural, economic and political reforms based on togetherness of truth, non-violence, spirituality, selfless service, Swadeshi and Satyagraha. The Gandhian way of nation-building has evolved through experiments about building a non-violent social order. It has come into being by the labour of love for building a humane society based upon the troika of truth, non-violence and Satyagraha. It was a result of convergence of initiatives and efforts by collectives of men and women in settlements, farms, Ashrams and prisons; villages and towns; South Africa and India - between 1904 and

1948 and beyond under the guidance of Gandhi and his close associates. Indeed, the idea that personal commitment is the starting point for bringing about change on a grand scale is one of Gandhi's major contributions. In seeking to bring about radical change through the transformation of public standards, principles, values and ethics the Gandhian way brought to bear a profound moral and religious consciousness. Gandhiji is a symbol of 'reverse colonialism' in the sense that Gandhi's philosophy has been the biggest intellectual import across the world. *Gandhigiri* or the way to bring about a change in heart through constantly spreading the message of love, sympathy and logical reasoning have been a guide to action for many in settling petty disputes in daily lives. *Gandhiana* reflects a rejection of the universal way of life and promotion of alternative path of development through small scale industries, politics through nonviolence, philosophy through care for the down-trodden and social action through collective effort for self reliance. Research and theorisation on Gandhi has always attracted national and international scholars. In the context of globalised market economy (having global risk that requires local protection), ethnic upsurges and multipolar world order, Gandhian outlook is the only roadmap for the national and international rights and peace movements, local self governance and providing justice and care to the underprivileged. Contemporary history searches for alternates. Gandhi was not an 'arm-chair theoretician' and hence the best salute to this immortal self will come only when 'Reading' Gandhi and 'Doing' Gandhi go together to build roadmap for achieving a 'just', 'equitable' and 'humane society'.

The context, texts and talks of Gandhi in early 20<sup>th</sup> century bears a seminal influence in 21<sup>st</sup> century in India and beyond India. The proposed international seminar wants to deliberate on what reading Gandhi has in offering for contemporary times across all sectors – norms, politics, economics, society, culture, international relations, governance, federalism, gender, social movements and the likes. In the normative sphere values of tolerance, dialogue and interpersonal communication, altruism and simple living are in demand profoundly in contemporary society beset with revived nationalist fervour among leadership of important nation-states of the world. In politics a milieu of hate speeches, electoral violence, non-ideological slides and emotive populism has set in that requires the injection of Gandhian model of non-violent satyagraha politics that calls for a change in heart rather than change in power. In economics the Gandhian model of trusteeship and sarvodaya economy needs to be addressed vigorously to find alternate to capitalist neo-liberal model of development that raises the spectre of displacement and ecological disasters. The idea of 'one-dimensional man' seems to be replaced by 'one-dimensional

society' where massification of consumerist culture alias westernisation of cultural and social customs have grasped the entire world with few and far resistances from the Arab world. Moreover the social ills of inequality, differential treatment to different economic and social classes and poverty still remain problem areas for contemporary society. Herein Gandhi' s view on equality of social dignity across class and caste groups and equality of people' s participation can serve as a recipe to reform the society. Competitive culture of going to the West for education and employment disregarding the competitive culture of serving the people have been the essence of 21<sup>st</sup> century selfhood which needs through churning following Gandhi' s cultural essence of community service, doing one' s job by oneself and creating community jobs through indigenous methods like charka. International relations as a subject is a study of war and peace but in 21<sup>st</sup> century following the 9/11 incident peace seems to be in the backyard of terrorism, migration and global climate problems. Gandhian agenda of peace and non-violence needs to be brought in more vigorously in formulating a non-western view of international relations. Both governance and federalism as idea needs to be come out of its eurocentrism and must be modelled on the requirements of society. Gandhi' s argument about village panchayat being the base for further upper level governance forming a concentric circle and his ideas on decentralisation can refresh our outlook on both governance and federalism. One cardinal feature of Gandhi' s entire life experiments with truth have been the importance of participation and involvement of women in political, cultural and social activities. Therefore the contemporary spree in gender sensitization and gender equality based movements has long been associated with the Gandhian way of managing gender question in society and politics. Coming to the question of social movements, Gandhian model of ' fasting' time and again have been used by contemporary political leaders and the mass movements under Gandhi' s leadership still remains exemplary for present day social movements.

In Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi' s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebration milieu, this proposed international seminar while highlighting the relevance of Gandhi' s ideas, work and writings for contemporary period also raises some critical interrogations for future research purpose. They are – (a) Is Gandhi' s entire package of ideas and action is an autonomous discourse? (b) To what extent Gandhi in his texts and talks amalgamated the principles of modern enlightenment and civilizational ethics of the East? (c) How Gandhi is seen in the immediate neighbourhood of India? (d) Does Gandhian model of trusteeship and economic governance paves for any alternate in our times of money laundering and chit funds and demonetization? (e) How Gandhian

ideas can be conflated in the discourse of international relations and geopolitics? (f) What are the ways Gandhi's preaching can be used to maintain communal harmony and tolerance in post colonial societies? (g) What are the methods in which peace can be maintained in domestic and international sphere across the world following by 'reading' and 'doing' Gandhi?

The major sub-themes around the theme of the Seminar though not exhaustive are:

- (a) The making of Gandhi's ideas and approach: Influence of West and East
- (b) The transformation from Gandhi to Mahatma: Lessons for contemporary leaders
- (c) Gandhi's ideas in relation to Rabindranth Tagore and Subhash Chandra Bose
- (d) Gandhi and the question of social justice, social harmony and women empowerment
- (e) Gandhi's political culture: Reflections in media in our times
- (f) Importing Gandhian ideas in India's neighbourhood and beyond
- (g) Gandhi and environment

Scholars, faculties and research students having interest on the above mentioned sub-themes and other related issues may send their abstract in 300 words to [kupolscseminar@gmail.com](mailto:kupolscseminar@gmail.com). The registration fees(including high tea and lunch on days of seminars, seminar kit and certificate) for paper presenters (faculties and professionals) is Rs. 1200/- and for paper presenters (research scholars) is Rs. 700/-. For outstation participants, in addition to registration fees, accommodation fess of Rs. 1500/- for faculties and Rs. 1000/- for research scholars is to be submitted within due date.

Date of receiving abstract: 14.10.2022; Date of Notification of Acceptance: 20.10.2022

Last Date of submitting registration fees and full paper: 01.11.2022

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