



GANDHI AND THE WORLD

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GANDHI AND THE ETHICS FOR COEXISTENCE

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Abstract: *In the short trajectory of the human species in the stage of life, only 350 thousand years in the weave of the almost four billion years of experience since the first unicellular organisms, we humans, are learning to live with each other as well as with the other living manifestations. It has not been easy – everything suggests that we are in the first school series.*

However, we cannot justify it, alleging the lack of teachers. There were many whose voices are still echoing, renewing their hope in our capacity of learning. Among those voices the in recent past, stands out the one of Mohandas Gandhi, a man of action with whom the ideas, on their own, do not succeed in seducing. He submitted them to the sieve of daily experience. If the reality confirmed their efficacy and collective benefit, yes, he shared his ideas with his partners and millions of daily readers who followed his articles published in several Indian regional languages.

Thousands of books have been written about him, and he is the subject of academic thesis in the whole world through essays, theatre performances, music, poems; that is the reason why focus is needed on the mobilisation and transformation that promotes his ideas as articulated in social projects, i.e. collectives such as those below:

- *Non-violence and Public Security – with the Military Police of the State of São Paulo and the Civil Police of the State of São Paulo.*
- *Pedagogic Seminars Gandhi and Non-violence – designed for professors of public schools of the States of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, with UNESCO institutional support.*
- *Gandhi Project – with the Fundação Casa units, with youth in prison.*
- *Gandhi News Network – with CONASEMS – National Council of Municipal Health Secretaries, reaching out to more than 1,500 participants from more than 500 municipalities of Brazil.*

- *Gandhi Week – with UNESCO institutional support, for 36 consecutive years, in the first week of October with activities held in the several Brazilian States – mainly in schools – focusing on promoting dialogue, social inclusion, and sense of civic co-responsibility, i.e. the Ethics of the Co-existence.*

Hon'able Vice-President of India and President, ICWA, Shri Venkaiah Naidu, distinguished authorities, and panelists, I am deeply honoured to take part in this memorable encounter to celebrate the legacy of Gandhi's life and inspiration. To this day, it mobilises humankind to transform this planet into a home where all forms of existence, both living and inanimate, can co-exist with mutual respect and validation.

Before I start, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ambassador Viswanathan for his invaluable co-operation during his time as a diplomat in Latin America, especially in Brazil when, in 1996, the first Consulate of India was created in São Paulo and a fruitful and intense cultural dialogue was established between our two countries.

Despite the appalling violence we have witnessed along the 20th century, it was also a stage of significant progress. The end of formal colonialism, the vote for women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the interreligious dialogue introduced by the Second Vatican Council and amplified by the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the United Nations' First World Conference on the Human Environment; the struggle for civil rights, and against apartheid, etc. Fortunately, this list is long. The Mahatma was a visionary and had the foresight of the structural needs for a healthy co-existence between humans and with the natural environment that sustains us.

In his own words:

- The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed.
- I have suggested (...) that woman is the incarnation of *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. (...) Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity. (...) It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world (...). (*Harijan*, 24.2.1940)

- Tolerance gives us a spiritual discernment that is as distant from fanaticism as the North Pole from the South. True knowledge of religion destroys the barriers between one and the other creed and gives rise to tolerance. As we cultivate tolerance towards other beliefs, we gain a deeper understanding of our own. (*Young India*, 2.10.1930)
- A person who hoards material or moral wealth does it only at the expense of other members of society. If so, does he have the moral right to use it primarily for his own personal profit? No, he does not have this right. (*Harijan*, 16.2.1947)

However, Gandhi also warns us: these guiding principles for our way of being in this world cannot be imposed by rules, laws, or regulations. They must spring from education, from an ethical commitment that can only last if it comes from a free and conscious will.

The lack of ethics is deadly. Corruption kills. To hide and manipulate information in public affairs, also, leads to death. Indifference in face of social inequality that causes suffering leads to the perpetuation of unfair exclusion and discrimination that belittle all of us, without exception.

Presuming we become human by learning from other humans, and that within us there is a place of liberty for conscious choice, we should decide: which values will guide our choices and decisions? The golden rule is a compass always at our avail: "Treat others as you would wish to be treated."

Each one of us is the outcome of endless interconnections, be it material, biological, cultural, or spiritual connections. All that exists in the universe depends on relationships – from atomic particles that share energy or ecosystems that share food chains. We do not exist. We co-exist. Or, once again, as Gandhi put it: "All that exists is your neighbour."

To give life to the lessons of the Mahatma, Palas Athena Association has created several programmes. I would like to describe very briefly only a few of them.

- Beginning in 1982, and every year since, we have been celebrating Gandhi Week – always during the first week of October. In public

venues, schools, parks, and auditoriums we organise talks, plays, workshops, and activities to teach Gandhian principles and to make Gandhi more known to the public in general. Countless partners throughout Brazil, in many cities, have joined in and now help to disseminate non-violence and simpler living to Brazilians (Pictures 1, 2, and 3).



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

- One of these events involved the Military and Civil Police forces of São Paulo. In 1998, 82,600 military police officers and 42,000 civil police officers attended seminars and received materials on Gandhi and Non-Violence, and then took part in an essay-writing contest (Pictures 4 and 5).



Picture 4



Picture 5

- Another long-lasting project is our partnership with Fundação Casa – a network of correctional facilities for young people sentenced to confinement or rehabilitation. Since 2006, we have been offering the interns seminars on Gandhi and Gandhian principles. These seminars are a creative, interactive, and artistic way of conveying the message of non-violence. As of 2018, we have also been in charge of seminars for the staff of this correctional network of institutions (Pictures 6 and 7).



Picture 6



Picture 7

- The Gandhi Network – Health, Culture of Peace, and Non-Violence is an initiative born from our partnership with the National Council of Municipal Health Departments, with the institutional support of UNESCO. Its goal is to contribute to the reduction of violence and to disseminate the principles of the culture of peace and non-violence within the governmental health facilities (Pictures 8 and 9).



Picture 8



Picture 9

Gandhi was most generous by daily perfecting his own self as a gift and an example, so I would like to end with his message to all of us:

“If I could give a present to you, I would leave you the feeling of love for life.

The awareness of all that has been taught in all times
I would remember the mistakes made, so as not to repeat them.
I would give you the ability to choose new paths.

If I could, I would leave the respect for all that is indispensable:
Besides bread, work.

Besides work, action,
Besides action, friendliness

And if all else were missing, I would leave a secret: to search within
yourself the answer and the strength to find the solution.”

Thank you very much!