

Interview

**Interview with the Director of Gandhi Museum
Mr. Y.P. Anand**

Y.P. Anand began his career in the railways. He has been the Director at the Gandhi Museum for very many years after he retired from the railways. In this interview he talks to Dr Bindu Puri about the Gandhi museum, its inception and goals, and most importantly, its urgent need for institutional, financial, and, administrative reconstruction.

Excerpts

Could you tell us the kind of activities that the Gandhi museum undertakes and which define the spirit of the Institution?

National Gandhi Museum at Rajghat was opened in 1961 in its present building opposite Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi so that the visitors to the Samadhi could also visit the museum. It has (i) Visitors Galleries containing relics, photographs, art pieces and other memorabilia connected with Mahatma Gandhi including also his bloodstained Cloths (on assassination), (ii) Library – the best-equipped library and Documentation Centre of its category. (iii) Photo Section- from where photographs on Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of Freedom movement are supplied (iv) Audio-visual section and (v) Gandhi Literature Centre (sale section for the visitors) the emphasis is on making visitors aware of Gandhi's life, work, and thoughts in all its aspects.

What is the nature of the problems, if any, faced by the Museum as an Institution in the past decade or so?

The Museum is run as an NGO under a Registered Society, Gandhi Samarak Sangrahalaya Samithi. The main problems being faced are lack of financial resources, lack of space for expansion of Library, and the need for academically competent personnel.

Is it important for Gandhian institutions to maintain a life like interaction with the community in order to remain true to the spirit of Gandhian ideas?

Each institution has its specific area of activity. It is essential that in its specific areas, each institution maintain dynamic interaction with the community.

Can you suggest any parameters to construct techniques for possible interactions between Gandhian institutions and the community at large?

Each institution should identify and delineate its areas of operation, taking into account the changing social environment and needs and keep updating its professional, financial, and administrative capabilities. Only then can it succeed in maintaining interactions in today's competitive and demanding society.

Techniques for conflict resolution in modernity depend either solely upon external sanctions; or else, upon compromise, which involves a bartering of viewpoints and advantages till some sort of balance is reached. Would Gandhi be comfortable with such techniques? How can we locate Gandhian Ahimsa in this context?

Gandhian approach to conflict resolution is derived from his philosophy of truth and ahimsa. Everyone perceives truth according to, his or her, own understanding. It is thus given to human beings to claim relative (and not absolute) truth. This means that while it is everyone's duty to oppose injustice, evil and exploitation, by insisting upon one's perceived truth about a situation, one's opposition must remain non violent and be based on self suffering and one must try to understand the opponents view. While there should be no compromise on what one considers to be the fundamental principles one must be ready to compromise on other points to resolve the conflict. Gandhi therefore laid stress on 'compromise'. He used the term "beauty of compromise" as much as he used non-cooperation and civil disobedience where no compromise was possible.

Would you agree that bread labour and doing things with one's hands are promotive of inner peace and hence, in that context, one can understand Gandhi's insistence upon it?

Gandhi's insistence on 'bread labour' has many aspects. It means that none has a right to 'eat' unless one has contributed in some way, which is socially beneficial by manual labour. In its extended application it also means that every one has a basic right to bread labour i.e. employment, and even to undergo Satyagraha for it, if the state and society does not ensure this basic right. Thus Gandhiji's 'bread labour' denotes both the duty and the right to work. It also meant ensuring dignity of labour. This was particularly relevant in the Indian context where those who did manual or menial work were socially looked down upon. Gandhiji also linked it to the teaching of the Gita, where 'bread labour' meant consuming only what remains as a residue in the 'yajna'. i.e. 'sacrifice', which to Gandhiji meant service of others. Thus Gandhiji's concept of 'bread labour' denotes an attitude of service and sacrifice and work, which to one who practices it must obviously bring inner satisfaction, and, hence peace.

Is any part of the Gandhian legacy crucial for moderns to reconstruct and understand?

We moderns need to deeply study, analyze and reconstruct the whole of the Gandhian legacy in order to clearly define the basic principles of his philosophy of public life and action and see how these are best applied to contemporary issues. These cover a vast gamut of human conduct particularly in the areas of peace and conflict resolution, basic equality of human beings, universality, and brotherhood; how to bring about an egalitarian, non exploitative, sustainable, ethical and prosperous social order. We need to study Gandhiji's concepts of swaraj, swadeshi, bread labour, sarvodaya, truth, non-violence, Satyagraha, social justice and decentralization of political-economic-social empowerment.

Do you feel that Gandhian Institutions like the Gandhi Museum have been sidelined and need to be brought into the mainstream of national consciousness? If so, can you suggest any ways to make such institutions more relevant today?

A host of circumstances and reasons have resulted in the various Gandhian institutions not remaining, so important in different areas of public life. Different categories of institutions have different roles. A comprehensive study is needed to review the status and potential of each of these institutions, based on which an overall line of action can be drawn. The matter to be especially considered would be the role of the government, in institutional affairs, and, aims and objects of each institution.

Gandhi was a master artist and creator of powerful symbols. How would you react to that as some one who has spent so many years amidst Gandhian symbols yourself?

Gandhi was a master artist in the sense that he was a master “practical idealist” who could feel the pulse of the people as well as lead and inspire them through the righteous path of dharma. His use of symbols, such as the stress on the use of terms like Ram Rajya acted as powerful communicators of his instinctive understanding of a sense of right. This gave a direction, which his disciples too could try to follow.

Is there any role that can be played by a moral exemplar like Gandhi, in helping people who are not decidedly good or bad make moral choices?

Humans are all interested in maximizing their own individual good. Faith in the inherent goodness of each human being is therefore naivety and worse a positive error of judgment. Where does this leave Gandhi?

Humans are also social beings. The rise and advance of human civilization and growth of human settlements, societies and institutions itself proves this. Hence the Gandhian dictum that, ‘the good of the individual is contained in the good of the society’ (the first of the three conclusions drawn by Gandhiji after he had read ‘*Ruskin’s Unto This Last*’ in 1903 in South Africa and which he paraphrased into Gujarati under the title ‘*Sarvodaya*’, the good of all). While maximizing their own individual good, humans may enhance the collective social good. Figures like Mahatma Gandhi serve to act as role models for human beings so that they, in their conduct, will tend to enhance social good even at some sacrifice of the individual good. Gandhiji’s leadership of India’s freedom movement and his practice of truth, non-violence and Satyagraha, was precisely meant to motivate millions of Indians towards such conduct. His life, work and thought serve to establish a set of ethics or morals for human conduct in all its aspects – personal and public. The very fact that he could have millions of people in all walks of life following him, and that he has become an international role model, for greatness, shows that the good element has been preponderant in human beings. Even though the bad element too, does exist.