

“Gandhi after Gandhi”: 2–3 December 2019, Turin. Conference report

Jacek SKUP

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) is a figure almost synonymous with India. From his activities in British South Africa, transforming the Indian National Congress into an all-India movement with wide popular support, to leading the non-violent struggle for Indian Independence and finally dying by the hands of a disillusioned admirer turned political opponent, he shaped India and has remained a relevant point of reference decades after his death. The year 2019 coincided with his 150 birth anniversary, which not only sparked celebrations in India and abroad, but also inspired the international conference “Gandhi after Gandhi” which took place in Turin on December 2nd and 3rd, 2019.

The organization of the conference was a joint effort by departments from the Turin University: Department of Foreign Literature and Modern Culture, Department of Law, Department of Culture Politics and Society, Department of Humanities, and the Sereno Regis Centre of Studies (Centro Studi Sereno Regis), the Turin based organization focuses on research and education in the subject of peace, environmentalism and sustainability. The conference was created to bring together not only researchers, but also social activists allowing a broader and deeper look into Gandhi’s life and legacy.

The keynote lecture *Gandhi and the Truth of Violence* was delivered by professor Shruti Kapila from the Faculty of History from the University of Cambridge, and explored the concept of violence in Gandhi’s thoughts and public activities in relation to his political and spiritual ideas. It is worth noting that the keynote lecture was originally meant to be delivered by Ramachandra Guha, author of renowned biographies of Gandhi, however due to

pending accusations regarding sedition in his native India (a result of signing an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing concern over the growing number of mob-lynchings), he was forced to cancel his appearance in Turin. Other key points of the conference were the *Lectio Magistralis* entitled *The Mahatma and the Muslims: Gandhi's role in making India's partition inevitable* delivered by professor Michelguglielmo Torri covering Gandhi's political role during the late colonial period of Indian history, and a discussion between professors Giuliano Pontara and Anna Bravo *Gandhi, nonviolence and social justice (Gandhi, nonviolenza e giustiziasociale)*. The discussion turned out to be the last major public appearance of Prof. Bravo, who suffered a fatal heart attack just a few days after the conference.

The main bulk of the conference were presentations, divided into four sections, further subdivided into parallel panels: 'Gandhian grass root movements and their experiences', 'Gandhian peace and civil rights movements in a global dimension', 'Gandhian political view, experience, legacy and influence worldwide, past and present', and 'Understanding Gandhi in today's times: legacy, philosophy, and the present'.

The first section included the presentations *Environmental and social sustainability according to the Gandhian vision as implemented by ASSEFA India* by Franco Lovisolo, *In pursuit of traditional farming, farmers and our food systems* by Vijay Singh Negi, *The Mahatma's visionary critique of industrialization / The western civilization in the light of India's globalized economy today: heading towards a devastating future?* by Jagyoseni Mandal, and *The Alternative Politics of Migrant Workers in Delhi* by Shankar Ramaswami, of which comprised the first panel. The second panel was comprised of another set of presentations: *La pratica del silenzio attivo e lo sviluppo di swaraj. Una scuola di nonviolenza (The practice of active silence and the development of swaraj. A school of non-violence)* by Elsa Bianco, Giuseppe Barbiero and Mariella Bo, *Nonviolenza e disabilità (Non-violence and disability)* by Pietro Moretti, and *The Earth as integral dimension to 'development': reflecting on the educational potentialities of Gandhi's message in a school gardening project* by Laura Colucci-Gray, Donald Gray and Elena Camino.

The section focused on Gandhian grass-root movements and their experiences included papers concerning Gandhi's activities in South Africa and their legacy: *Note sulle reti imperiali britanniche nell'Oceano Indiano (1860–1914): I "coolies" indiani in Sudafrica e la politica di Gandhi (Notes on British imperial networks on the Indian Ocean (1860–1914): The Indian "coolies"*



in *South Africa and Gandhi's politics*) by Massimiliano Vaghi, *Gandhi and South Africa* by Carmen Concilio and *Gandhi e il movimento panafricanista (1919–1945)* (*Gandhi and the panafricanist movement 1919–1945*) by Chiara Corazza. The panel was concluded by Ritu Gairola Khanduri's paper *Gandhi Going Global: Nation, community, diaspora in the US and South Africa* which focused on the Mahatma as a contemporary “brand” in connection with the national and ethnical identity of Indians and their descendants living abroad. The other panel offered a look at Gandhi in an international context, ranging from American Civil Rights movements (*“Stride Toward Freedom”*: *Martin Luther King, the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Gandhian Lesson* by Andrea Carosso), contemporary politics (*Revisiting ‘ahimsa’ in a divided world* by Nishant Bhardwaj), and comparisons between the ideas found both in Ancient Chinese philosophy (*Non-violence as Universal Love in Gandhi and Mozi* by Hyun Höchsmann) and XIX century European nationalism (*Mazzini's Influence and Gandhi's legacy on Family Duties against Corruption* by Franco Manni).

The session *Understanding Gandhi in today's times: legacy, philosophy, and the present* focused on representations in various media (*Understanding Gandhi in today's times: legacy, philosophy, and the present Gandhi in contemporary Hindi writing* by Kamila Junik-Łuniewska, *From political icon to Mahatma: the visual turn in portrayal of Gandhi in Indian cinema* by Roshni Sengupta) and contemporary interpretations of Gandhi's life and activity (*Hindu Nationalists and Mahatma Gandhi* by Pralay Kanungo, *Rethinking Gandhi and Non-Violence Today* by Rohit Wanchoo, and *Gandhi and Adivasis: Post-Independence re-imaginings* by Sanjukta Das Gupta).

The last section of the presentations was not only the most numerous, but also touched the widest array of topics, ranging from Gandhi's political thoughts and practice (*Rethinking Gandhi's “Secularism”*: *How Gandhi's Brahmacarya Related to His Last Political Vision* by Eijiro Hazama, *Deconstructing “Swaraj” as the Mahatma Gandhi's political idealist* by Punsara Amarsinghe, *Gandhi's model of decentralisation* by Marzia Casolari, *Partitions and beyond: Gandhi's views on India's and Palestine's partitions* by Farooq Ahmad Dar, *Non violenza: chi, come, verso che? (Non-violence: who, how, against what?)* by Antonino Drago), relations between Gandhi and other political figures, both historical and contemporary (*Modi and Gandhi* by Alessandra Consolaro and Tommaso Bobbio, *Loving Oneself through Others. The Political Philosophies of Savarkar and Gandhi* by Ahyaan Raghuvanshi, *Gandhi and Bose* by



Jacek Skup), to economy (*Gandhi's Economic Thought: Is It Still Relevant?* by Dezső Szenkovics), education (*Nai Taleem* by Pallavi Varma Patil and Roshni Ravi), legal thought (*Gandhi's Law* by Pratyush Kumar), religion (*L'eredità di Gandhi nell' "esperienza religiosa" di Aldo Capitini* (*Gandhi's legacy in Aldo Capitini's "religious experience"*) by Lisa Bitossi and Angela Sagnella), ecology (*L'importanza del pensiero di Gandhi per la sopravvivenza del pianeta e dell'uomo* (*The importance of Gandhi's thought for the survival of the planet of men*) by Gloria Germani), literary accounts of his influence (*Gandhi in Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938)* by Alessandro Vescovi), Gandhi and problem of “muscular nationalism” (*The sensual Gandhi* by Annie Devenish), and the ways Gandhi communicated his ideas to the public (*Gandhi versus Gandhi: A comparative study of his thoughts in his English and Vernacular Newspapers* by Parmeet Kajal).

The wide scope and variety of subjects, combined with the high quality of papers presented proves that even one hundred and fifty years after his birth, Gandhi remains a fascinating subject for scholars in various fields. There can be little doubt, for many years to come, Gandhi will continue to be the subject of many thought-provoking papers and books. The “Gandhi after Gandhi” conference serves as convincing proof in this regard, it was an interesting opportunity for discussing the many interpretations of his influence and legacy. The organizers managed to include a variety of different approaches and points of view on the subject. From a participant's perspective it offered a valuable opportunity for presenting my own research and discussing them with my peers.

Note about the author

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