

The GandhiServe Foundation in Berlin

Peter Rühle, a computer programmer, came to India in 1983. He saw Lord R. Attenborough's Film Gandhi, he talked to eye-witnesses of India's independence movement, he visited institutions connected with Mahatma Gandhi, and he studied Gandhi's autobiography My Experiments with Truth - all these impressions had a lasting effect on him and were to change his life drastically. He became convinced that in this violence-stricken world the application of the eternal values of love, truth and non-violence, as formulated by Gandhi, is necessary for the survival of humanity. Since then, Peter Rühle has been coming to India regularly, to deepen the contacts to groups, institutions and individuals connected with the Mahatma. Finally, in 1998 Peter Rühle gave up his job in the Dept for Theoretical Chemistry at the Technical University of Berlin, and founded GandhiServe Foundation in Germany with the aim to promote Gandhi's thoughts and ideas through various forms of the media. In fall 2001 a book by Peter Rühle Gandhi: A Photo Biography, which gives a brilliant visual account of Gandhi's life as well as India's independence movement, was published.

In an interview Peter Rühle talks about his life and work:

Q.: You have devoted much of your time to educating people on Gandhi, what started this interest and how has this affected you?

A.: It was during a period of personal reform that I became acquainted with Gandhi's ideas. This was in 1983. His thoughts and, moreover, his deeds about the voluntary simplicity, truthfulness, non-violence, protection of the environment, uplift of women and untouchables, decentralised village industry and tolerance of religions left

a deep and lasting impression on me. Ever since, I share my own fascination for the Mahatma, resp. the values he stood for with the public by organising exhibitions, lectures and film shows. I have established the Berlin-based charitable GandhiServe Foundation which also maintains a comprehensive web archive on Gandhi at <http://gandhiserve.org>.

Q: How does Gandhi's message fit into the present-day where technology is such an integral part of our lives and international conflict?

A.: Translated into today's world intelligently we can learn a lot from Gandhi's life and work. He was a visionary who could foresee the problems we are facing today and provided excellent solutions for them. It is very encouraging to see that his thoughts are being implemented by hundreds of institutions, initiatives and individuals around the globe. Many of the eminent personalities of the 20th century called themselves students of Gandhian thoughts. They have implemented Gandhi's ideas in their own ways in their respective countries successfully. To name only a few: Martin Luther King Jr., Albert



Peter Rühle (b. 1957) is founder of the non-profit organisation GandhiServe, which advocates greater knowledge about Gandhi's life, ideas and actions

Schweitzer, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Mother Teresa. Having been a great communicator Gandhi would probably have made intelligent use of today's technology, especially the internet. He had great fascination for machinery as long as it was not used for exploitation but for enabling people to live a better life - especially the poorest of the poor. He stood for production of the masses, but not for mass production.

Q. What are some things about Gandhi that people don't normally know about?

A: In the West often his deep religiosity is neglected in favour of an analytical academic understanding of his ideas and deeds. Moreover, often I find people surprised when they come to know Gandhi's profound humour and also his interest in Hatha Yoga. But, as said earlier, Gandhi's life needs to be studied more thoroughly in order to understand, thus interpret, him properly. Many wrong interpretations are the result of insufficient studies. □

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Cover of the book "Gandhi", by Peter Rühle