

-- What drew you to Gandhi's teachings?

As my family suffered a lot during WWII in Germany, already as a child it was my desire to work for a more humane world without wars and violence. I worked as computer-programmer and had a career as semi-professional football player when I learned about Gandhi's civil disobedience and active nonviolent resistance during my involvement in the German peace movement in the early 1980's. On my first visit to India in 1983 I deepened my knowledge and understanding about Gandhi's life and work by meeting relatives and associates of Gandhi and visiting Gandhian projects all over India. Numerous visits followed, and in total I spent about 7 years in India and South Africa *in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi*. Radhakrishna, Dr. Sushila Nayar, Dr. Usha Mehta, Prabhudas and Kanu Gandhi, Narayan Desai and several others became my Gandhian mentors who allowed me a profound insight in the personality of Gandhi and the context he lived and worked in.

-- Can you give us a brief outline of the work you have done on Gandhi?

I started public work for the promotion of Gandhi's life and work in Germany and other western countries in 1984. I launched the charitable Gandhi Information Centre at Berlin and organized various exhibitions, lectures, film shows, seminars all over Europe, Israel and even India, and produced own media on Gandhi and India's independence movement. Apart of doing oral history (audio/video recorded talks with participants of India's freedom struggle) I specialized in identifying and preserving original material on and by Gandhi, mainly photographs, films and documents. My photo biography "Gandhi" was published by Phaidon, London/New York, in 2001 and I acted as tour guide to India *In the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi* a few times. In the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 I launched a relief campaign assisted by relatives of Gandhi. As consultant I worked for several productions on Gandhi such as the play "Sammy", the musical "Gandhi", Feroz Abbas Khan's movie "Gandhi, My Father" and numerous TV and broadcast programmes on Gandhi all over.

In 2002 I established the charitable GandhiServe Foundation which mainly carries out educational and research work on Gandhi. We established the international youth project *The Gandhi Bridge of Understanding* and continue doing oral history. We possess the worlds best audio visual archive on Gandhi in terms of quality and quantity. Nearly all material has been digitized and uploaded to our well-frequented website www.gandhiserve.org

-- What was the idea behind setting up GandhiTopia? How many foreign nationals are part of it?

In my 25 years work on Gandhi and meetings with numerous like-minded people all over I realized that communication within the Gandhian world and networking is lacking. As today's Web2.0 technology allows to do this comfortably I created GandhiTopia – www.gandhitopia.org – as a meeting point for Gandhian students, scholars, activists and institutions on the web. This platform provides news, views, media, events and research on Mahatma Gandhi, Peace and Nonviolence. Membership is free. I believe that jointly we can create a unique information pool to benefit the global Gandhian and peace-loving community. It is our contribution for a Gandhian utopia: a world of Peace and Nonviolence! GandhiTopia was launched on 12 January 2009 and has c. 200 members at present, of which c. 50% are foreign nationals. Amongst them are leading academics and activists. I hope that we'll have many more members soon, thus be able to create a true global Gandhian movement on the web - and ultimately also in reality!

-- What are the various international movements around Gandhi? Who are the people (backgrounds and nationalities) interested in taking Gandhi's work forward?

Unfortunately, I don't see an international Gandhian movement anywhere. Nevertheless, there have been a number of national or regional movements for liberation and human rights based on Gandhi's ideas, the latest one in Thailand a few weeks ago. Leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., HH the Dalai Lama, Michael Gorbachev, Lech Walensa and Aung San Suu Kyi call themselves students of Gandhi and are a proof that Gandhi's ideas can be applied at other places than India and in other contexts, too.

There are about 100 organizations outside India, many of them are very small, and a few thousand individuals practicing the values Gandhi stood for in personal or/and in public life but it can't be called movement for the lack of communication and coordination mentioned above. Gandhi(an) institutions are located in all bigger countries and run by people of different backgrounds. They're NRI's as well as foreign nationals. In the 1980's Attenborough's film *Gandhi* was the starting point for the establishment of several organizations. Of course, there are many more institutions, initiatives and individuals dealing with peace and nonviolence in general, without focusing on Gandhi.

-- What is the relevance of Gandhi's teachings in today's times?

Interpreted carefully and transferred intelligently to today's world scenario and our political and social environment, Gandhi's teachings are highly relevant. Just see the various forms of violence we're facing every day and everywhere: on personal, institutional and inter-state level. We have wars, violent conflicts and terrorism in many parts of the world. Gandhi has shown ways to solve these problems. Moreover, he worked for the uplift and just treatment of minorities, tolerance of religions, ecological sustainability. If we synthesize his constructive programme and reduce it to the axioms Satya (Truth) and Ahimsa (Nonviolence), and apply them in today's context in the spirit of Gandhi it can carry us successfully toward a more humane world, a world of peace and nonviolence!

Read more and photographs: <http://www.gandhiserve.org/pr.html>

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