

ADDRESS TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
PRIORITISING CARIBBEAN SECURITY IN THE
21ST CENTURY: PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT
EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM.

on

October 2, 2019 at the University of Southern Caribbean (USC
) Auditorium, Maracas, St Joseph.

on

Mahatma Gandhi and World Peace

by

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Protocols

The High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago, Your Excellency, Arun Kumar Sahu.

Other members of the Indian High Commission

Excellences and representatives of other Embassies and High Commissions

Organisers and host of this conference

Paper presenters; other distinguished guests,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I congratulate the sponsors and the organisers of this conference who have brought leading international academic scientists, researchers and scholars to deliberate on such pertinent and interlocking themes as : Preventing Violent Extremism (Pve) and The Role Of The State, International Organizations, NGOs and the Private Sector In Preventing And Countering Violent Extremism And Terrorism.

The conference subthemes have also provided ample space for discussing the contributions of youth, the role of the community, including community policing; the engagement of women and critically, the role and influence of the media and all of the ramifications inherent in the Human Rights impact in this deliberation. One certainly cannot omit the role and influence, and indeed current impact of cyber space in this matter.

The discerning world, and to bring it nearer at home, this region and more so, Trinidad and Tobago has to be concerned with current patterns of evolving radicalisation and extremism in propagating and promoting terrorism. Its growth had been caused by actions and reactions of people, organisations and even religious creeds which the State either allows or passively encourages, or is seemingly powerless to control. This may have

stemmed from misinterpretations of the founding philosophies and principles of the STATE; liberty, equality, democracy and control. This is being distorted to promote different types of statecraft. These include the acquisition and control of power; the protection of the State even if it involves dying for it. Inherent in this principle is the concept of killing for a cause. In the middle ages it was the Christian concept of imperial expansion through the crusades. There is also the concept of an eye for an eye or interpreted rightly or wrongly by others, is the case for Islamic jihad. The world today has become reactionary. For every action there is an equal and resultant reaction. It is an aggression that stirs violence born of our basic instincts; flight or fight.

If we are to follow our current behaviour pattern, we recognise that we are exhibiting violence to ourselves, our peoples, our society, and to all living things and hence our environment. Eventually we arrive at the world's destiny; mass murders, rapes, war and wanton destruction, environmental degradation and rapid climate changes. Change the thought and the chain reaction results in a changed destiny. But how do we change the thought?

In every period these problems have arisen, each with a different face. In the 20th century it was socio-economic and political control and imperialistic expansion. At that time one learned man and professional thinker, small in physical appearance but with a towering personality, was to change the then existing course of history, using two methods; the methods of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. This man was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, born in 1869, in India's western state of Gujerat. Coming from a business or trader community he studied Law at The University of Bombay and at University College London, England, graduating in 1891. As a practicing attorney he was invited to south Africa in 1893 to represent Indian business interests. In fighting discrimination of many kinds, he chose the ideologies of Ahimsa and Satyagraha to campaign for the right to be heard.

What is Ahimsa? Ahimsa is basically a spiritual doctrine of non-injury and non-killing. It implies the total avoidance of harm to any kind of living creatures by ones actions; whether by deeds, by words and in thoughts. It is nonviolence at its highest manifestation. Ahimsa therefore is not the path of a coward but rather a very brave and courageous stance which carries its concurrent actions.

The second principle employed by Mahatma Gandhi was that of Satyagraha. The term Satyagraha is a Sanskrit/ Hindi word that loosely translates into 'adherence to truth'. The end purpose of this new ideology was to conquer ones detractors through conversion and which ultimately results neither in victory nor defeat but rather in the establishment of a new harmonic relationship. Initiating this ideology of passive political resistance against the State first in south Africa, he later perfected it in India.

It was a novel method of mass agitation based on the 3 principles; truth, nonviolence, tolerance and peaceful protest. While the resistance was identified as passive, it was indeed an active, dynamic method of resistance against the laws and actions of the ruling hierarchy. Gandhiji used it as a unique weapon of fighting injustice. Having already initiated and successfully implemented it in South Africa, Gandhiji continued it on a much larger scale in India against the ruling British Raj to agitate for India's independence. One of the most important examples was his famous 'salt march' in 1930. The British rulers had levied a tax on salt, a commodity that was freely obtained on the sea coast. This tax was harsh on the poor

Indians' pockets. Gandhiji mustered the Indian rank and file to march with him to collect salt from the sea coast of Dandi. It began with 80 people, amassed thousands, and took 24 days (March 12 to April 6 1930) to complete. This significant symbolic gesture of the Indian masses, marching with their leader, achieved its purpose of shaming the British. On other occasions the Indian freedom fighters subjected themselves to wave after wave of physical beatings instead of violent retaliations to British injustices. Gandhiji's inspiration and actions emboldened others to follow him.

One may ask the question, quite pertinently, does Gandhi possess endurance as a precursor of change, or is he just a bygone enigma? I shall illustrate a few of Gandhi's teachings, writings, interviews, and responses to questions which have relevance to us in the 21 century and have the potential to bring about peace and goodwill, using the concept of Ahimsa and Satyagraha.

Teaching # 1: Power is of two kinds. The first type is that it is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other is that it is acquired by acts of love.

Today, we are experiencing an increasing extremism and violence; sheer terror unleashed on people causing chaos and turmoil. Internet technology transports it directly into our living rooms and bedrooms. We cannot escape it. And what is worse is the fact that we notice that this terror is being counteracted by more weapons of annihilation and actions of violence. It is all aimed at achieving dominance and control... really the acquisition of more power. But power can also be acquired by another kind of force... a force of love and tolerance for all. This force lies within our individual hearts. The Mahatma (great soul) dedicated his life and actions to fighting against the power of force; the force that controlled his homeland, Hindustan. He transformed the minds of millions of Indians to wield power through peaceful means; making it significantly more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear and punishment

His message was as transparent to his enemy as it was to his followers. If one fought for the cause of humanity and justice, it should include and influence even those who do not conform to that cause. While his actions and attention were on liberating India its message was not only for India. It was universal. So once the seemingly hard shell of colonial dominance that encapsulated India was cracked open, with the repercussions of their gaining independence in 1947, then all other countries under British rule, including our country, Trinidad and Tobago were liberated in quick succession; all without the use of arms. We learnt that one can resolve the greatest of our differences if we dared to have a constructive conversation with our enemy.

Teaching # 2: What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy names of liberty and democracy?

War only inflicts pain, suffering, sorrow and displacement on everyone. The pages of history are strewn with vicious dictators, and even in current times, those who continue to inflict chaos and discord, creating sorrow and mayhem on our world. In the blink of an eyelid children are made into orphans, homes rendered devoid of parents, and whole communities and regions homeless through wanton damage caused by wars and constant strife. Today there is evidence of it in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America. Violence plagues our twin island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. None of us are outside of its stranglehold.

Through his writings, teaching and actual living, Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated to the world that man and even nations can achieve the noble causes of liberty, justice, and democracy without the need for killing anyone. A world of peace can be achieved if we learn the power of true love, and non-violent actions..

Teaching # 3: There are many causes that I am prepared to die for, but no cause that I am prepared to kill for.

Gandhi-ji, through his life and writings, constantly espoused the greatest noble cause; man's desire to bring about peace in this world by our own sacrifice and not that of those who oppose our views. The strength of cowardice is in using power to cause death and destruction for others. The strength of courage is in self-sacrifice for the benefit of all. For this he was despised by the ruling classes, beaten, thrown in jail and even charged for sedition.

Sacrificing his own domestic wellbeing, his family development and his legal career, Gandhi led a simple life, identifying with the pain of the powerless and destitute. This won him the hearts of millions without even achieving formal political power over anyone; just with the power of altruism. We can also sow seeds of altruism and cultivate peace for our world by demonstrating our willingness to sacrifice our egotistical desires to serve causes greater than ourselves.

Teaching # 4: An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind

More and more technologically superior arsenal is supplied by the rich, advanced nations of the world whose economies are structured on the creation and manufacture of weapons of destruction. Technology has no discriminating power. Man has that power, using the technology. But no matter where we live, what religion we practice, or what culture we cultivate, at the heart of everything, we are all humans looking for peaceful existence. Our cultural, religious and political differences should not be used as the backbone for invoking and perpetuating conflicts. Our leaders must understand and be willing to recognise that all disputes can be resolved by showing a willingness to engage opponents with diplomacy and compassion. So when we use destructive technology to fight terror, remember Gandhiji's injunction 'Know and understand God and his role for his greatest creation, 'Man'. If we can heed this injunction our history would turn out for the better

Teaching #5: We must become the change we want to see in the world.

A great leader always leads through a life that reflects his ideals. Today, our leaders cajole the masses with promises that they never intend to keep – let alone practicing what they preach in their own lives. One cannot bring world peace unless a leader demonstrates acts of kindness, compassion and genuine love. Mahatma Gandhi adopted a simple spartan existence, living in an Ashram, and using his Charka or spinning wheel to spin his own cotton for fabric. He lived among the poor millions in their villages during his freedom struggle. But he preached a forceful message, not discriminating amongst ourselves based on faith, caste, creed or any other differences.

With his mantra, Gandhi influenced many leaders. Civil rights leader, the late Martin Luther King, successfully applied Gandhiji's principles to bring change, albeit on a limited scale, for the black man in The United States of America; that was the term commonly used then. King's untimely death did not end his movement.

In, south Africa, where Gandhi begun his experiments with truth, Nelson Mandela (Madiba) successfully applied Gandhi's actions and writings to bring down a regime change, where approx. 20% white persons had controlled more than 80% native blacks and

coloureds. But more than that, Mandela used Ahimsa, call it by whatever term you wish, re-tailored it and applied it to get a then totally racially divided South Africa to resolve their differences and live side by side, peacefully, with one another without bloodshed.

In the Caribbean Gandhi's teachings, writings and actions were followed with religious zeal. He entered the pantheon of Gods, with his photo hanging in the prayer rooms of his distant disciples in Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Martinique, Suriname and Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Caribbean thinker and new world agitator, Marcus Garvey agitating for a Caribbean free from colonialism, extensively quoted Gandhi's work and actions.

What better opportunity do we have to consider Mahatma Gandhi's messages of peace, love and goodwill in the resolution of many of our existing problems? We can begin today, it being the 151st year of the birth of that great soul. So conference sponsors and discussants, in your deliberations, do factor in the ideas that the current state of the world is the consequence of thoughts and actions of its' leaders; be they political, social, religious or community. These thoughts and actions are the result of the working of their minds. In a world that is facing troubling matters, all hell-bent on promoting international discord, radicalism and terrorism, be advised that we can change our world by changing our way of thinking and hence acting. Also, be cognisant of the fact that the practice of peaceful coexistence is a prerequisite for systematic and sustained socio-economic, cultural, national and our regional development.

Society therefore needs to guard against those who have built up an industry of terrorism and used ignorance, apathy and other weapons of destruction to perpetuate this industry of hate for their sinister and ulterior motives. The Mahatma fought tooth and nail with the weapon of peace and love that had been built up by an Indian civilisation over the millinia, a recorded heritage stretching from Emperor Asoka's active promotion, from around c. 265–238 bce (also given as c. 273–232 bce) of non- interference, pluralism and tolerance;.. the concept of *Dhamma*. The messenger of Peace in the 20th century, over 2,000 years later, reenergised this heritage to agitate for love in its purest, pristine sense as a virtue. In the words of Gandhi ji, 'Love born out of the universal truth, of the oneness of human life, and indeed the oneness of all life is a fundamental principle of the universal law of love and truth. It is a universal message. It exists in all religions. Nay it transcends all religions. Its adherents, including the Mahatma, called it Sanatan Dharma, an eternal law of righteous living designed to promote individual peace and a collective world peace.

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Profile : Satnarine Balkaransingh

Author, economist, part time lecturer. producer-director and international performing artist.

Works featured in the media (Radio/TV) in, USA, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, India and on BBC's Caribbean Programme.

A published author, with works in numerous journals and books, on topics ranging from development economics and commerce to folk performative traditions and the arts.

Co-edited; *Reigniting the Ancestral Fires: Heritage, Traditions and Legacies of the First Peoples* (2017); Co-authored *KUNUWATON: the Culture and Cuisine of the Santa Rosa First Peoples of Arima, Kairi* (2014); and authored *THE SHAPING OF A CULTURE: Rituals and Festivals in Trinidad compared with selected counterparts in India; 1990-2014*, (Hansib,2016).

Former senior public servant in the government of Trinidad and Tobago, he consults and Advises on policy, strategic, and project planning for socio-economic development.

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