

About the Organisers

CoHaB IDC, University of Mumbai

The CoHaB IDC is the second phase of the Diasporic Construction of Home and Belonging (CoHaB) programme at the University of Mumbai. CoHaB was initiated in 2012 as a Multidisciplinary International research programme under the auspices of the European Union's Marie Curie Innovative Training Networks. The CoHaB project also has three associate partners the Centre for Advanced Studies in India (CASII), India, The Migration Policy Group, Belgium and the Cabinet d'Avocats, France. Three international researchers have completed their doctoral degrees as CoHaB Early Stage Researchers.

CoHaB IDC functions as a Resource Centre and has initiated the publication of a Diaspora Studies Series. Its objective is to promote studies on the Indian Diaspora through the organization of lecture series, conferences workshops and publications. Research scholars from around the world are welcomed to the centre and their projects are facilitated through contacts with scholars, writers and activists in diverse fields of Diaspora Studies.

Eminent Speakers

Pheroze Nowrojee

Human Rights Lawyer and Author, Nairobi, Kenya

Goolam Vahed

Historian, School of Social Sciences, University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa

Ashwin Desai

Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Vibhuti Patel

Director, PGSR, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

Renu Modi

Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai

Mala Pandurang

BMN College, Matunga, Mumbai

Vijaya Ramaswamy

Centre of Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Kanya Padayachee

ECD Project Coordinator, Gandhi Development Trust, South Africa

Sushilla Gopaul

Open University, Mauritius

Roxanna Marinescu

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Nishikant Kolge

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Siby Joseph

Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha

Tushar Gandhi

Managing Trustee, Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, Mumbai



University of Mumbai



INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

"A Mahatma in Waiting: The Diasporic Gandhi Re-visited on his 150th Birth Anniversary"

Date: 5 – 6 February 2019

**Venue: University of Mumbai
Kalina Campus**

Conference Directors

Professor Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha
Director and Scientist-in-Charge, CoHaB IDC,
University of Mumbai

Professor Dr. Sridhar Rajeswaran
Member, CoHaB IDC Advisory Board

About the Conference

In 2015 India celebrated the centenary of one of the most influential Indian diasporic's return to India. It was on 9 January, 1915 that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had returned to India after 21 years in the South African diaspora. Gandhi was born in Porbandar in India on 2nd October 1869, so the sesquicentennial of his birth is being celebrated in 2019-20. On this 150th anniversary of the birth of the man who is remembered as the Mahatma, it is essential to also recall to life the Diasporic Gandhi, for it was in his South African diaspora that he had evolved the techniques of satyagraha and ahimsa, that he had then used with such passion and integrity to lead India to freedom from British rule.

This conference seeks to traverse the time and space in which Gandhi attained his life experiences and in which he practiced and perfected his political and personal philosophies that contributed not just to his own growth, but to the evolution of India from a colony into an independent nation. His South African diaspora of 21 long years and the lessons he learnt there in the political and spiritual fields, shaped this man's later life and is hence crucial to an understanding of how a man became a Mahatma.

Gandhi had left India for London in 1888 to study law. Upon the completion of his studies he had returned to India in 1891 as a Bar-at-Law. He began to practice law in Rajkot but was soon disappointed with the greed and dishonesty he found in the courts there. So when an offer came from an Indian firm in South Africa to take up a case there he accepted it readily and sailed once again for foreign lands.

Gandhi was then very much a product of the British Empire. The realization that he was in spite of his studies in England only a subject and not a citizen of that empire, was brought home to him one chilly winter's night in 1893, at the Pietermaritzburg railway station. He had a first class ticket for his journey but the ticket checker asked him to move to the third class carriage in which all 'coolies' were supposed to travel. Lawyerly

arguments got him nowhere and he was thrown out of the train. This made him realise the difference between a colonial subject and an imperial citizen. This turning moment also marked the birth of Gandhi the Political Man. He soon became immersed in the political activities of the Indians there and was in 1894 the first secretary of the Natal Indian Congress which was founded to counter the move to disenfranchise the Indians there through the Indian Disenfranchisement Bill. It was in South Africa that Mohandas Gandhi the man, slowly became the Mahatma (i.e., 'the evolved soul'). It was here that he also developed and honed the tool of passive resistance or soul power – Satyagraha. This tool which he took back with him to India in 1915 eventually brought the British Empire to its knees and was instrumental in the gaining of independence by India.

Gandhi had during his time in South Africa briefly returned to India in 1901, but then had been called back to Natal by the Indians there in 1902. Inspired by the *Gita*, the *Bible*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within you*, he embraced a life of increasing self-abnegation. Tolstoy was a major influence on Gandhi's adoption of non-violence resistance – Satyagraha. On Phoenix Farm and then Tolstoy Farm Gandhi got together a community of like-minded thinkers, who were committed to not just fighting the unjust laws of the colonial regime, but also combating the inner contradictions of the Hindu religion, such as the caste system and untouchability.

This period was also the heyday of the Indian Nationalist movement and Gandhi and his relentless campaign against unjust South African laws brought him and the Indian diasporics there to the notice of the Nationalists in India. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, one of the leaders of the Indian National Congress, visited Gandhi at the Tolstoy Farm in 1912. The Indian National Congress (INC) at its annual sessions in 1911, 1912 and 1913 expressed empathy with the Indians in South Africa. Gokhale in fact had become Gandhi's mentor after his visit to him in

South Africa, and like C.F. Andrews who had become a friend of Gandhi's, urged him to return to India. Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and his induction into the Indian national movement is then history that culminated in the end of the British Raj and the beginning of the end of the British Empire too.

Gandhi left Africa in 1914 but his philosophy of non-violence and resultant modes of resisting the colonisers continued to resonate not just in South Africa but also in other parts of the African continent. As observed by Anil Nauriya "African leaders like Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, among others, have in some form or another, acknowledged Gandhiji as an inspiration. Even a leader like Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe, who found Gandhiji's methods —not appropriate to the —special national situation in his country, nevertheless observes that Gandhiji's movements were —an inspiration to us..." (2005).

In spite of these accolades often showered on Gandhi by African leaders there are many today in Africa as there are in India who are very critical of the man and his methods. There are many critics in Africa who feel that Gandhi was a racist as there are in India who criticize him for being condescending towards the 'untouchables', who he called 'Harijans', but who today reject this tag and call themselves 'Dalits'. Gandhi had in Africa as in India pulled women out into the mainstream of resistance movements to the colonisers. Yet feminists today are often critical of his unilateral decision to become celibate at the age of 38 and his later experiments in maintaining his celibacy.

There is today not just a distance in time from Gandhi's birth, but India and Africa are today not the same places that they were in his lifetime. A postcolonial and now global world has taken the place of the former Imperial spaces.

This conference hopes to analyse these various aspects of Gandhi in this year of the 150th anniversary of his birth.