

Idea of India – Gandhi 150
Conclave
18th and 19th August 2018
LIBA Auditorium, Loyola College Campus, Chennai

The conclave on Idea of India – Gandhi 150 was held at LIBA Auditorium in Loyola College Campus, Chennai on 18th and 19th August 2018. Participants were jointly identified by Sewagram Collective, C.K.Prahalad Centre @ LIBA and Loyola Institute of Social Science Training and Research (LISSTAR).

Over 50 invited participants attended the conclave. In addition about 70 students participated in the conclave. These students represented Loyola College, Loyola ICAM College of Engineering and Technology, Loyola College of Education and Madras Christian College Loyola They formed the inner square, the discussants with students, the observers, occupying the outer square. The fish bowl method required flipping the roles, with students in the middle discussing the issues that came up during the first day. Student discussion was moderated post lunch on the second day.

Inaugural Session

The conclave was formally inaugurated by Fr. Christie, Director of LIBA. Fr. Christie welcomed the invited participants and students. Fr. Christie emphasised enduring relevance of Gandhian Ideas for reimagining the Idea of India. The conclave was concluded by Fr. Andrew, Principal, Loyola College, who congratulated the invitees, students and organisers for deliberating on The idea of India. Fr. Andrew felt it is a timely exercise and urged the groups continue the efforts to take it as many people as possible, specifically youth. The teams from The Media Studies and Department of History performed during the inauguration and during valedictory respectively. The fusion of classical dance Bharatha Nattiyam to the tunes of 'The Parai' the folk drums and a play on human side of Mohandas Gandhi were the highlights. The Visual Communication team projected a short film, edited clips from various documentaries, and highlighted the greatness, controversies, and relevance of Gandhiji.

The highlight of first day is Mr. Kalyanam, who assisted Mr. Gandhi over five years. Mr. Kalyanam was with Mr. Gandhi till the last day, diligently responding to various correspondences, appointments, meetings, etc. Mr. Kalayanam shared his memories of spending time with Mr. Gandhi and in the Ashram vividly. Mr. Kalyanam, 97 years old and frail, delighted the audiences with his story telling abilities and responding to various questions for over an hour.

The conclave was facilitated and moderated by Fr. Jayapathy. Dr. Bernard D Sami supported Fr. Jayapathy to effectively conduct the discussion during the two days conclave. Others who were involved in moderating the sessions were Prof. Kalam and Dr. Jeevan Kumar (Synthesising first day's deliberation) and Dr. Xavier Raj and Mr. Pradeep Kumar (Student session).

The participants attire reflected the changes in time, perspective and world view. A mix of tradition fused with western, reflected the modernisation effect be it clothes, seating arrangement, regulated temperature, food that is served or ideas that were exchanged. Change, development and transformation is expected with passing of time, advancement in technology, global connectivity, educational standards, health care access or better governance. The room has a mix of people from various walks of life representing diverse demographic background. This was pretty evident as each one introduced themselves, identified issues and shared their expectations of what should be the outcome of such a conclave. The issues identified ranged from radical to moderate to practical to sustaining statuesque to bewilderment. For example issues identified included consumptive / non-capitalist environment; development: target segment and benefits; conundrum of improvisation and corporatisation for securing wealth for few; various of hues of bondage that withstood the times and persisting in the modern times; food fascism; polarisation of common man; exploitation of women – as mother, working woman and even in religious houses; alternative form of response; vilification of

founding principles of the nation; enduring caste based leadership; crony media; indifferent common man; continuing privatisation of public sector; plight of refugees; how one can reconcile the phenomena of creating wealth from capital and diminishing return on labour, economic dictum that consumption leads to growth, jobless growth, urbanisation, demographic dividend, AI and automation, erosion of liberal space, political and corporate collusion, and financialisation of etc.

The conclave utilised this diversity in perspective, expertise, experience, and world view to discuss the "Idea of India" in 21st Century and relevance of Gandhi, The Phenomena, be it ideas, methods, tools, actions or dreams.

Session 1

The first session, moderated by Fr. Jayapathy, explored the context, i.e., prevailing and emerging, ecosystem straddling politics, economy, population, urbanisation, corporatisation, technology and widening inequality. The nexus between money, politics, technology, digitalisation, businesses, media are evident. Post truth society is witnessing erosion of liberal space with backing of majoritarianism, business entities and financial might. The shifting of power from constitutional authorities to business owners is apparent. While people have become non-entity or commoditised, civil society is being swayed by type of funding, who is funding or increasingly being limited in their scope of activities or actions. The group also discussed increasing role of cities, be it economy or politics or social norms, stomping on scope of development in 700,000 villages and the population that lives in rural areas, which is a majority. Urbanisation is synonymous with level of development in a state or within a state in a district. On the one hand, the cities attract the educated, skilled, unskilled, businesses, investment. On the other hand crowding is making the cities increasingly difficult to live or being affordable. The inequality, however, will continue to drive rural population in the hope of acquiring wealth and eventually found a place in slums or lower income settlements.

Session 2

The post Lunch session the group took specifics of political, economic and social situations facing the country. Current ideological vacuum provided space for political majoritarianism. 'We' vs 'Other' has become a dominate narrative, bordering on hatred towards others, specifically minority. Fundamentalism is having a free run and so are pseudo neoliberalism providing sanctity to protectionism, which has emerged as a global phenomenon. The fundamental fringe groups are asserting their presence and moving about with impunity inflicting grievous injuries with tacit silence from political body. Not only the rules are keeping their silence, citizen, media or even activists are finding increasingly difficult to voice their opinion. Dissent is no longer tolerated. Punitive measures are used to snub any dissent before even it is heard or known to others. It is this pseudo ideological groups, openly professing the right wing inclinations, taking advantage of political dominance to use effectively media, including social media, shape the collective belief. The open declaration of Hindu Rashtra grossly ignores diversity in Hinduism and diversity that Indian has been, which evolved over thousands of years adopting to local conditions. Facts and truth are twisted or distorted. History is being rewritten. New leaders are being identified, historically and in contemporary times. Experience has given way suave articulation of opinions, which are regarded as facts, typically a phenomenon of post truth society.

Labour is losing its productive value. Financial capital is valued more and regarded essential for accelerating the growth engine. Collectivism being eroded. Urbanisations has shifted the focus from plight of conditions in rural areas. Farmers demonstration in cities is no longer a news and gets very little attention from tech savvy urbanised uber people.

The groups also identified variety of possible strategies to counter some of this disturbing trends. The group agreed that youth should be focussed, who are increasingly being alienated and show little

interest in political or economic or social situations that is emerging. Sensitising youth, engaging them and enabling them to participate in larger issues, beyond their individual or group aspiration is a requirement. The strategies identified are:

- Well informed pressure group
- Potential Lobbyists
- Legal response
- Information, education and communication
- Adopting appropriate technologies
- Dealing with Industrial Revolution 4.0
- Augmenting productive capital
- Addressing environmental concerns
- Mobilize people across religion, languages, class or caste
- Set up parallel think tank to counter with appropriate strategic policy responses
- Link with Global Think Tanks
- Strengthen people to people connect
- Develop Interlocuters for creating space for dialogues
- Safeguard social media platform
- Provide reliable verified facts
- Develop value for experience based assertions (than opinions)
- Carry out peace march, discussions, and road shows to encourage participation of everyone in body politic

The group also discussed what should be an appropriate response. Should the response be individual or collective? With eroding liberal space, rule of law, and constitutional powers, whether such responses are plausible. What will unite or fire the convergence of people for collective action for reclaiming liberal space came up as questions. The participant also explored Gandhian perspective, approach and methods that are relevant.

Prof. Kalam and Prof. Jeevan Kumar summarised the discussion points for the first days afternoon session. This was followed by dividing of students into smaller groups and assigning them specific topics for discussion, the following day. The first day came to an end with screening of short documentary produced by Fr. Ignacy Arockiasamy and his team on Gandhi. The short film creatively combined various snippets from documentary films and audios and visuals to communicate various facets of Gandhi, including a few moments that impelled participants to reflect on Gandhi as an enigmatic person.

Evening Session: Special Invitee – Mr. Kalyanam

Mr. Kalyanam, Mr. Gandhi's secretary, shared his memories of working with Mr. Gandhi. Students, faculty and participants could get a glimpse of human side of Mr. Gandhi as experienced by Mr. Kalyanam. Students were curious and clarified a few aspects, which Mr. Kalayanam responded well. Despite his age his alertness, eloquence in narrating the incidents and humour kept the audience captivated.

Session 3

The second day started with capturing salient aspects of first day proceedings. Post this short exchanges, the fish bowl was flipped with students occupying the inner square with faculty and others assuming the position of listener and observer. This session was moderated by Prof. Xavier Raj and Mr. Pradeep Khelurkar. The students choose three topics for their discussion. They are:

1. Claiming Liberal Space
2. Jobless Growth
3. All the facilities in 700,000 villages

Students' voiced, discussed and debated various social, economic, political and market factors contributing to the current prevailing situation with regard to liberal space, unemployment and villages. The students also voiced gender dimension of these persisting / emerging problems. They questioned circumspectness of politicians, mobocracy, indifferent elite, ideology of silence, hypocrite intellectuals, and nonchalant educated. They also voiced their apprehension over totalitarian structure leading to autocratic disposition alienating people from the state. It is state vs people, with people rendered powerless. How to restore authority vested in people by constitution by enforcing rule of law respecting federal structure supporting co-existence, diversity and tolerance. Importance of strengthening federal structure, procedural compliance and inclusive belief system. There is an urgent need to restore freedom for compliances, rectification, expression, respect, tolerance, religious practice, dissent and participation.

The students also touched upon 'Market Mobocracy' role of large businesses in influencing budgeting, policies and implementation. They also discussed power of global capital, value of work, importance of cultivable land, and **"Roti, Kapada and Makkan"**

The moderators steered the discussion to specifically identify a few

1. Minimum Non Negotiables (MNN)
2. Minimum Viable Options (to realise MNN)
3. Key Actors (Stakeholders)
4. Possible ways of collaboration (among the stakeholders)

Non Negotiables: Ranged from micro to macro; specifics to general; and individual to collective. Consensus was on elimination of corruption, increasing employment opportunities, free education, safety and security of women, children and marginalised, freedom for media, non-violence, inclusive decisions and diversifying participation in politics & economy.

Viable Options: The Students were precise in articulating the options. Youth participation in national politics, economics, media and society. Participation youth will improve self awareness, well informed decision making, responsible behaviours and practice the change everyone wants to see. Violence in mind, words and action should be avoided and weeded out. Professionalising informal sector, freedom to pursue one's dream, focus on creating something tangible and securing a means of living for Good Comfortable Life. They emphasised a requirement of common education across the country, non-discrimination in education, options for skill development, and opportunities for entrepreneurship are required to bring about profound changes required for 21st Century Existence.

Key Actors: Students identified youth, specifically millennial who have open mind, broader framework and assertive, should be given the place they deserve. Interestingly they identified parents. They also proposed a conclave for parents to sensitise them, engage them and enable their participation in larger issues. Subaltern, minorities, marginalised communities, and women will have to play an active role in the transformation.

Collaboration: The students proposed inclusive development, financial literacy digitalisation, engineer mind set of using technology, encouraging handicrafts / machine assisted human effort, campaign for changing the mindset, raising the voice, cooperative transaction, access to credit, involve everyone as means for fostering collaboration.

Session 4

The fourth session took the cues from students discussion points to firm up on Non Negotiables, Effective Implementation, Viable Options, and Actors. The group among them covered all dimensions, i.e., social, economic, political, finance, governance, market and global. Presented below are key insights, a synthesis of the discussion:

Non-Negotiables: Liberal Space, Secularism, Pluralism, Dissent, Rule of the Law, Truth, Equality, Participatory Governance, characteristics of welfare state, respect for diversity and upholding democratic values.

Effective Implementation: Freedom of Press, Directive Principles, Respect for Others, Nationalisation of land and Resources, Women Empowerment, Conservation of Environment, Intraparty governments, Skill Development, Public Distribution System, Judiciary Independence, Anti-Corruption measures, and state funded Education and Healthcare.

Viable Options: Universal Basic Income, Common Minimum Facilities, Economic Reform that facilitates employment / engagement options, textbooks that reflect local, national and global perspective, support for producing products in villages, promotion of innovation, fostering entrepreneurship and inclusive investment options.

Actors: Mass contact programme to instil, inculcate, and encourage truth, commitment, courage and action. Specific programme to people living in villages. Strengthening grassroots institutions. Identify 100 like minded youth in each district to spearhead movements in colleges and educational institutions. Responsible media, judiciary, activists and civil society.

The group resolved, as an outcome of the conclave to set up a Think Tank inviting participants with a specific operational framework.

Valedictory Session

This was followed by a play by students and faculty of Department of History on Mohandas Gandhi, an episode from his earlier life.

The valedictory address was provided by Fr. Andrew Francis, The Principal, Loyola College, stating his expectation for this forum continuing its work on the framework evolved.

Mr. Ramesh Oza and Prof. Xavier Raj thanked the participants and valuable contributions. The conclave came to an end with National Anthem.