

On the Significance of the India-Japan Joint Symposium

Yoichi Kawada

ON this one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. G. Ramachandran (1905–1995), the National Committee of Dr. G. Ramachandran's Centennial Anniversary and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy have joined together to hold this collaborative symposium. As one of the co-hosts, I would first like to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone involved in helping organize this magnificent event.

I have once had the distinct honor of meeting Dr. Ramachandran in person during a visit to southern India. Not only was I able to meet him and listen to his speech, but was honored to sit at a meal with him. This took place on January 7, 1988, when accompanying Soka Gakkai Vice President Hiromasa Ikeda, who traveled to India in lieu of SGI (Soka Gakkai International) President Daisaku Ikeda to receive the Dr. G. Ramachandran Award for International Understanding from the National Centre for Development Education, an organization that promotes peace education and cultural exchange.

This award was created to honor Dr. Ramachandran's steadfast commitment to actively promote non-violence over many years as a leading disciple of the late Mahatma Gandhi. Established in 1985 during the United Nation's International Year of Peace, its aim is to honor cultural figures and educators who have promoted peace and cross-cultural understanding. SGI President Ikeda was the first Japanese to receive this award.

Present at the award ceremony were a total of five-hundred citizens, academics, and students from twenty-seven universities taking part in the Non-violence Seminar for Youth, who were celebrating the award conferral upon SGI President Ikeda. Also in attendance were distinguished guests: Mr. M. M. Jacob, Minister of State for the Parliamentary Affairs, Dr. Ravindra Kumar, Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural Institute, as well as Dr. Radhakrishnan, who is also in attendance today.

After the conferral of the award, the acceptance speech from SGI President Ikeda was read, and Dr. Ramachandran gave closing words. He conveyed his unceasing desire to work for peace education and

vowed to stand together with SGI President Ikeda to create peace together. He was 82 years-old at the time, but his delivery was so powerful that his words still resound vividly in my mind. He said,

“What I am trying to do here at this small university, is to circumscribe “negative forces” with the power of nonviolence, so that a new world of peace and justice can be created. This grand experimental adventure is our life’s purpose.”

Those of you in attendance today—Dr. Radhakrishnan, Sister Mythili, and other distinguished members of the committee—are the true successors of Dr. Ramachandran’s grand experiment in creating a world of peace and justice through nonviolence.

The theme of this collaborative symposium is “Toward a Century of Nonviolence and Peace-Gandhism and SGI’s Philosophy,” and the purpose of this event is to exchange views on how to establish a road of cooperation to contribute to the peace of humankind. Gathered for this discussion are our guests from India, whom are practitioners of Gandhi’s spirit of nonviolence, and are from the land of the origin of Buddhism. From Japan, we have members of SGI who are working throughout the world under the leadership of SGI President Ikeda to interpret and apply Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in modern society.

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On August 6, 1992, the memorial day of the attack in Hiroshima, Dr. Radhakrishnan met with SGI President Ikeda in Japan. At that time, Dr. Radhakrishnan said,

“When Gandhi heard of the news of the bomb being dropped in Hiroshima, he immediately meditated, offering a moment of silence. Gandhi was opposed to all forms violence, and often asserted that ‘the power of the spirit’ is greater than any nuclear weapon. To bring forth this ‘power of the spirit’ from within each individual for the sake of peace—that is the cause which President Ikeda is advancing.”

Mahatma Gandhi in his own words in *Harijan* said,

“Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred.”¹

On September 11, 2001, the year that we entered the twenty-first century, the United States was attacked by terrorists. Following this event, in an essay entitled, *The Evil over which We Must Triumph*, SGI President Ikeda writes,

“For much of our history, humanity has been trapped in vicious cycles of hatred and reprisal.”² He concludes that the only fundamental way to

end the vicious cycles of hatred is to develop the goodness and power of the spirit—nonviolence, compassion, love, and creativity—inherent in human beings. In order for this to happen, he suggests creating multiple opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue on various levels.

Believing in humanity's capacity for nonviolence and compassion, Ikeda's thinking and Gandhism converge on the answer that open dialogue is the best way to foster development.

Using the question, "how can the power of the spirit be more fully developed?" as a starting point, I would like to point out four commonalities that I observed between Ikeda's thinking and Gandhism.

First of all, both Ikeda and Gandhi speak often about nonviolence and compassion, which are characteristic of humanity's goodness. These concepts are deeply rooted in the core of the life of the universe. As it is well-known, Gandhi's moral and ethical basis for his actions centered around his approach to grasp (*graha*) the ultimate truth of the universe (*satya*) through nonviolence (*ahimsa*). In Buddhism, the first five precepts form the ethical basis for action, and the first one is not to kill, which is identical to *ahimsa*. And Shakyamuni regarded the ultimate truth of the universe to be the Law (*Dharma*). Buddhists have attempted to realize the universal life of the *Dharma* through the compassionate practices of *ahimsa*, the five precepts, the eightfold path, or in the case of Mahayana Buddhists, the six *pāramitās*.

Gandhi, in the *Yeravda Mandir (Ashram Observances)* states, "And where there is Truth, there also is knowledge which is true... And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (*Ananda*)... And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it."³

Buddhism explains, from the universal base of the Law comes the truth of wisdom, and the appearance of this wisdom brings eternal joy.

In this way, Gandhism and Ikeda's thinking, which is based in Buddhist traditions, share a very similar view of nonviolence and compassion, which derives from humanity's goodness, which is in turn deeply rooted in the universal truth. Therefore, no matter what obstacles appear to hinder the traveler on the quest for truth, he overcomes them and continues to the source which is eternally flowing with boundless wisdom, joy and love.

Secondly, the two have in common a very wide viewpoint of nonviolence which is not limited to direct violence such as terrorist attacks, armed conflicts, or wars, but one that encompasses underlying causes such as structural and cultural violence. Examples of this kind of violence include oppression of human rights, especially in cases of gender

equality, the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, and discrimination or violence carried out in the name of certain cultures, civilizations, or religions. In all of these situations, the guarantee of basic security is compromised. In addition, violence toward nature destroys the earth and threatens humanity on a massive scale. The fight for nonviolence includes taking comprehensive action based on love and compassion in a myriad of fields and must be sustained at all levels of society.

The third point of similarity in the application of nonviolence and compassion to establish justice is the approach that is based in change which begins on the individual level. As more and more individuals change positively in their personal lives, a lasting collective change in society and the rest of the world begins to take effect. Nichiren Daishonin calls this process, “securing the peace of the land through establishing the correct teaching.”

There are two vectors that arise when life transforms on the individual and societal levels. One vector starts out from society to the individual, allowing individual transformations to take place within a society with conducive conditions. The other vector approaches from the opposite direction from the individual toward society. Both Gandhism and Ikeda’s thinking take the latter approach, starting with changes in the individual. From the perspective of nonviolence and peace, the development of the individual’s mind of peace becomes the spring from which the power to challenge violent forces in society wells forth, leading ultimately to peace in society.

A philosophical orientation to create peace in society naturally aligns itself with an orientation for environmental peace. Therefore, both philosophies support a deep and wide connection between human society and the natural environment.

Both Gandhi and Ikeda value peace education, but also within that, they both pay particular attention to human rights and environmental issues. For example, at Gandhigram Rural University founded by Dr. Ramachandran, freshman students are organized into a *Shanti Sena* and they carry out activities in society to learn peace education by experiencing it first-hand. At both Soka University in Japan and Soka University of America, founded by SGI President Ikeda for the purpose of fostering global citizens, the students actively engage themselves in the community.

Through cultural and peace-promoting activities, the SGI likewise participates actively in society. For example the Youth and Women’s Peace Committee members who are here today carry out activities revolving around peace education, publishing materials on human

rights, the environment, and opposing war. Furthermore, to overcome discrimination against people of a particular culture, background, or religion, members actively engage in dialogues with various social and religious groups and organizations to promote understanding in the same spirit of Gandhism. The SGI is a group of people carrying out the practice of the bodhisattva way in Mahayana Buddhism. Their activities in society and in the world are a modern expression of nonviolence and compassion.

The final commonality shared by Gandhi and Ikeda is an idea that pulsates as an undercurrent through the previous three points. It is the concept of mentor and disciple. In both philosophies, the mentor passes on their spirit to the disciples through the struggles that they share together. The ideals and mission of the mentor are inherited by the disciple. The spirit and principles of Gandhi have been passed down in exactly this way. Since his first meeting with Gandhi in the famous morning interview, Dr. Ramachandran has carried his mentor's spirit to fight against the British Empire through their struggles together, and instilled this spirit into Gandhigram Rural University. Likewise, that same fighting spirit has been passed down to you, the committee members present today, and is very much a part of your being. It is this bond of mentor and disciple that allows Gandhi's spirit and actions to not only stay relevant, but to evolve with the times as well.

As for the SGI, the tradition of mentor and disciple is exemplified by the bond between the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, respectively. Makiguchi, who is a contemporary of Gandhi, was sent to prison for opposing the militaristic government of Japan during World War II. Toda followed him to prison in the spiritual battle against the authorities, and succeeded his mentor's spirit. This spirit was then passed down to the third president of the Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda during his struggles together with Toda to strengthen the organization. The bond between mentor and disciple is literally the spirit, the most important link, in carrying out nonviolence and compassion to arrive at the truth and the Law.

Lastly, I would like to share with you a few more words by Dr. Ramachandran that have stayed very close to my heart. He exclaimed, "Why do people have to kill one another? The amount of blood that has been shed during World War II flows more vastly than the Ganges River. We must never allow this sad history to be repeated ever again. We are not beasts. We are humans."

Today, I pray that we, the participants of this symposium, can succeed Dr. Ramachandran's sublime spirit so we can take this modern world, ruled by the beastly nature of violence, and make it shine with the light of humanity through nonviolence and compassion. Following the path of sharing the mentor's struggles, let's forge new territory and create a century of peace and nonviolence together.

References

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- ² Ikeda, D. *The Evil over which We Must Triumph* in *From the Ashes* (Rodale Press, 2001), collected by editors of Beliefnet, p. 106.
- ³ Gandhi, M. "Truth" First Chapter of the *Yeravda Mandir*, <http://www.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?id=9&link=bg&book=bg0010&lang=en&cat=books> translated from the Original Gujarati by Valji Govindji Desai (accessed 7 September 2006), The Official Mahatma Gandhi eArchive & Reference Library, Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, Jan., 2001.