

Ramachandra GUHA

Gandhi, India and the World

■Date: Saturday, September. 19, 2015 (16:30-18:30)

■Venue: Main Hall, ELGALA HALL

■Participants: 200

●India/History and Sociology

〈Part 1 Keynote Speech〉

Independence Movements, Social Reform, Religious Reconciliation, and Prophecy : Four Jobs Driving Change



I began my career as an environmental historian, and in my research into environmental initiatives I became very interested in Gandhi. During the Chipko Movement in the Himalayas in the 1970s and 80s, villagers fought logging by hugging trees in a non-violent protest strongly influenced by Gandhi's teachings.

Gandhi was unique because he combined four

tasks: the independence movement, social reform, belief in religious diversity, and belief in prophecy and the future. He led initiatives in all four fields.

The large-scale civic movement to gain independence from Britain was not a violent conflict, unlike other colonies, but primarily non-violent. The salt march of 1930 is especially famous.

As a social reformer he called for the elimination of discrimination against the "untouchable" caste, and women; insisted that people of all castes should be allowed to use the same temples; and allowed women to join his effort to gain independence without violence.

Gandhi was born a Hindi, but he had many Christian friends, and worked for a world where people of all religions—Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.—could respect each other's religion and live in peace together. He created ashrams, singing the songs of various religions, reading their books, and dedicated his life toward that goal.

He also prophesied the future. In a speech given in 1920 he warned that India would deplete its energy and resources if it industrialized in the manner of the West, and in the 1930s strongly supported organic agriculture.

His thoughts were criticized at the time, and he was attacked for them. Today many wise men respect Gandhi, but there are also many who despise and belittle him. I don't think there has been anyone who stirred up as much debate as Gandhi, or will be again.

I believe that he was a superlative Indian thinker and moral prophet, perhaps the wisest philosopher since Buddha. There are many people even in India today who despise him, but I am confident that the people of the world will come to recognize his achievements.



Part 2 Panel Discussion



●Coordinator

WAKIMURA Kohei

Professor, Graduate School of Economics, Osaka City University

●Panelist

TANABE Akio

Professor, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

Gandhi's Thoughts and Movement Are of Great Significance to Modern Japan

Professor TANABE commented on the keynote speech, thanking Dr. GUHA for his clear and succinct explanation of the global historical importance of Gandhi's philosophy, and its broad appeal. He continued, "Gandhi challenged the framework of oppression in all of his activity and sought alternatives. It is crucial for Japan today to accept diversity, to sympathize with and understand its positions, and fully realize its hidden potential."

Questions from the audience were accepted in the second half, and Professor WAKIMURA asked who strongly affected Gandhi during his experience in South Africa. Dr. GUHA replied that Gandhi learned much from daily life there, such as through becoming friends with Jewish and Christian women. Dr. GUHA also touched on the relationship between modern India and Gandhi, explaining that "It is important to realize that Gandhi was not right about everything. His convictions concerning non-violence, religious diversity, and environmental preservation remain invaluable, but we must do better than he did in areas like gender equality."

School Visit

■Date: Saturday, Sep. 19, (10:10-12:15)

■Venue: Ohori Junior High School

Dr. GUHA recalled his own junior high school experiences as he discussed the diversity and history of India, incorporating so many ethnic groups, religions, and languages. He described how, after about 200 years of colonial rule and armed rebellion, Gandhi achieved independence and peace through non-violent resistance. As

the students listened quietly he repeated Gandhi's belief that hatred only breeds more hatred. He advised the audience to experience nature, and read more books.

