

Foreword by Namrata S. Kumar, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Republic of Slovenia

Born in a humble family on 2nd October 1869 in the coastal city of Porbandar in the State of Gujarat in India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi – Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of peace and nonviolence, is India's eternal gift to mankind. A freedom fighter, a philosopher, a moralist, a spiritualist, and a practitioner of truth, Mahatma Gandhi lived what he spoke and believed in. He believed that nonviolence and tolerance required more courage than violent ways; that patience, truth, and peaceful means are never wasted. The principles by which he lived his life touched the souls of people across borders, nations, and continents. As rightly said by Martin Luther King, Jr., “Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation.”

Gripped by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic health crisis, the globally connected world suddenly got disconnected, with each country living like an island. The well-oiled interdependence was challenged in the face of prolonged lockdowns and abrupt breaks in our intertwined lives. The ray of light for survival was to be found nowhere but within. These times showed us once again that Gandhi Ji's principles and practices of '*Localization*', '*Swadesh*', '*Self-reliance*', and '*Make-locally*' were not just relevant at the times of freedom struggle but were the solutions for all times to come, for all to adopt by introspecting and looking inwards, to assess the 'truth' of the situation searching ourselves for our own strengths and to empower ourselves with 'Self-reliance' taking pride in ourselves.

On 12th May 2020, when the countries across the globe encounter the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a vision to make India '*Aatma Nirbhar* (Self-reliant)' by '*Making in India*' and supporting the production of local goods under '*Vocal for Local*' mission. The roots of '*Vocal for Local*' lie in Mahatma Gandhi's 1905 '*Swadeshi movement*' when Gandhi Ji, along with many prominent freedom fighters of the country, promoted the '*Swadeshi movement*' to instill feelings of pride for the country among the people of India. And he encouraged the people of India to produce and use locally made goods to achieve self-reliance. '*Localization*' here does not mean closing doors or creating boundaries. Essentially, it emphasises strengthening the '**Economy of self-reliance**' and the '**Economy of Neighbourhood**' where the goods are produced from locally available material, with local manpower and local techniques under local/national brands for both, the domestic and global market. '*Localization*' here does not stop us from using goods/products from other countries. It means that the nation should produce and use at least that which can be easily produced with locally

available materials and strengths. This '*Localization*' became '*Vocal*' with Prime Minister's Narendra Modi special appeal made to the people of India during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns when every country had no choice but to look inwards and empower itself with its inherent strengths – particularly with respect to addressing the most basic needs concerning the key sectors including IT and e-governance, smart cities, urban development, housing, industries, micro-, small and medium enterprises, transport, railways, health, water and sanitation, education and skill development, etc. – as a means to ensure self-reliance and to protect the rights and interests of local work-force, which depended for their livelihood only on the state support. The '*Vocal for Local*' mission not only helped India surf through the pandemic challenges but it empowered several vulnerable sections of the country that were most hit by the pandemic helping them become '*Aatma Nirbhar* (self-reliant)'. At the same time, they became a crucial driver for the country to emerge strongly with solutions for the world connecting '*Local with Global*'. '*Vocal for Local*' based on Gandhi Ji's import's tenet of '*Swadeshi movement*' once again emerged as a people's movement in India in the present times with an emphasis on '*Aatma Nirbhar Individual, Aatma Nirbhar Society, and Aatma Nirbhar Nation*' for the global good, for the mankind at large.

While the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the relevance of Gandhi Ji's time-tested principles in more than one way, his principles of peace and nonviolence are the foundation on which the stability of global order rests today and will rest forever. In a world that witnesses violence, Gandhi's principles of peace and nonviolence are as relevant today, perhaps even more than they were when first originated and put into practice for India's freedom struggle against colonial rule and attaining independence from it. Violence today is not conventional anymore. From domestic violence to the military offensive, cyber wars to terrorism, social media attacks to ethnic, racial, gender, and communal violence, and more ... It finds any and many ways of realising itself. In times so troubled, Gandhi's principles become more meaningful and unquestionably relevant, for there is no option and no substitute for peace and dialogue.

Between 1937 and 1948 Gandhi Ji was nominated five times for the Nobel Peace Prize. At the time when 14th Dalai Lama was awarded the Peace Prize in 1989, the Nobel Peace Prize committee said that this was "in part a tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi". Declaration of his birth date 2nd October to be observed as the "**International Day of Nonviolence**" is also the most meaningful tribute by the global community to him, which has been so beautifully put together by Professor Nina Petek, from the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana in the compilation of the papers presented by the Gandhian Scholars from India, Slovenia and the United States of America who gathered in the hybrid format of a meticulously designed seminar by Professor Petek, remembering Gandhi Ji collectively. The Seminar organised in September 2020 as the grand finale of Gandhi Ji's 150th birth anniversary celebrations,

in the times when we were collectively fighting the COVID-19 pandemic reminded us about our collective strength to achieve our aspirations for the well-being of the global community through collective peaceful, tolerant, and nonviolent ways.

I express my special gratitude to Professor Nina Petek for her tireless effort to bring this compilation to fruition, to all the contributors for their insightful papers and presentations, to the Department of Philosophy, the Faculty of Arts, and the University of Ljubljana for their support and the External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, for supporting this publication. I wish our association continues and we carry on following and spreading the message of Gandhi Ji's teachings on peace and nonviolence for a better, peaceful, and happy world and future.

Namrata S. Kumar
Ambassador of the Republic of India
to the Republic of Slovenia