

M. K. Gandhi's 150th Birth Anniversary Symposium

“Reconsidering Gandhi's charisma: The role of ‘conscience’ in Indian politics”

Organized by TINDAS and Institute for Advanced Global Studies (IAGS)

Date: 7 March, 2020

Place: Collaboration Room 3, 4th Floor, The building No.18, Komaba Campus of the University of Tokyo

Symposium's topic:

Why did Gandhi gain enormous popularity as a charismatic leader of anticolonial struggle in India? Contemporaneously, why was he exposed to a firestorm of criticism and eventually assassinated? In this Anniversary Symposium, we aim to explore these questions by highlighting Gandhi's bedrock concept of “conscience/*antarātmā*” in his political thought.

When Gandhi inaugurated his first *satyāgraha* campaign (non-violent struggle) to combat abysmally deep-rooted racism in South Africa, he already made a reference to the concept of “(a voice of) conscience”. Since then, the concept was articulated by Gandhi in English, Gujarati, and Hindi correlated with various religio-philosophical traditions. After his return to India, Gandhi was overwhelmed by difficult and complex circumstances, yet he consistently insisted to be “obedient only to [his] conscience”. Gandhi unwaveringly stood on his unique political position distinct both from his contemporary liberals and conservatives. Gandhi's politics of conscience eventually touched the heartstrings of Indian people. Unprecedentedly, Gandhi earned enthusiastic supports from almost all parts of the subcontinent.

However, Gandhi's uncompromising politics of conscience had also been a target of public criticism. During his all-India nationalist campaigns, Gandhi's frequent confessions on “a voice of conscience” more often than not puzzled people. The best-known incidents are Gandhi's abrupt decision on the suspension of the first non-cooperation movement in 1922, his public “fast-unto-death” in 1932, and his anarchist speech on “Do or Die” during the Quit India Movement; all these political actions are professedly undertaken by Gandhi under the irresistible dictatorship of “a voice of conscience.” (Conjointly, one cannot, perchance, overestimate a hypothesis that the politics of nationalism was intimately associated with the politics of household; Gandhi's unpredictable life path was seen cruelest to his family, let alone his eldest son.)

Although highly controvertible, the concept of “conscience” is the key to understand Gandhi's political actions. The concept was at one time paraphrased with the expressions of “a voice of God/*īśvar*” and “(*param*)*ātmā*”, and at other times, explained as an “inspiration/*prerṇā*” or the “universal ethics” that everyone can recognize even if s/he is an atheist.

What was the nature of Gandhi's conscience? Was the concept “religious” or “secular”? Was it originated from the culture of modern west or derived from any classical South Asian traditions? How was Gandhi's concept of conscience formed or invented during his life? What sort of analytic frameworks are required to understand this subject?

In this Anniversary Symposium, we invite internationally distinguished scholars from abroad. We hope you to join this lively discussion regarding the genealogy of Gandhi's political charisma with a keen focus on his concept of conscience.

Symposium's program:

1. Eijiro Hazama [including Opening remarks] (13:00~13:45)
Title: “Conscience or *Antarātmā*? An Ineffable Nature of Gandhi’s Trilingual Politics”
Qs and As (13:45~13:50)
Break (13:50~14:00)
2. Professor Ajay Skaria (14:00~15:00)
Title: “Political Friendship: Thinking with Gandhi”
Qs and As (15:00~15:05)
Break (15:05~15:15)
3. Professor Vinay Lal (15:15~16:15)
Title: “Gandhi's Inner Voice: The State, Regimes of Rights, and Moral Responsibility”
Qs and As (16:15~16:20)
Break (16:20~16:30)
4. Comment by Professor Crispin Bates (16:30~16:45)
5. Comment by Professor Akio Tanabe (16:45~17:00)
6. General Discussion (17:00~18:00)

※Chair: Professor Riho Isaka

