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## Mahatma Gandhi and Global Diplomacy: Reflections on India's G20 Presidency

**Athokpam Marconi Singh\***

PhD Scholar (UGC-SRF), Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Canchipur  
marcoathokpam@gmail.com

**Prof. S. Mangi Singh (Retd.)**

Department of Political Science, Manipur University, Canchipur

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### ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, is not merely a historical figure but a constant source of inspiration. His principles of non-violence, Satyagraha, world peace, justice, equality, and welfare of all have enduring relevance in contemporary society. In an era characterised by intricate political dynamics, environmental degradation and social inequalities, Gandhi's principles and values offer valuable insights and solutions to a variety of dilemmas. His ideals left an indelible mark on global diplomacy as well. One such notable testament is the 2023 G20 summit, which gathers together world leaders to discuss and collaborate on issues pertinent to the global economy. In the light of this framework, the study aims to highlight how closely Gandhi's ideologies correspond to India's G20 Presidency. It also intends to highlight the symbolic gesture of commemoration of Gandhi's life and teachings by the G20 leaders' during the Summit.

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### 1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is widely regarded as one of the most influential and well-known figures in twentieth-century history. He is best known for his non-violent philosophy. He believed that truth and non-violence could bring about social and political transformation. His efforts eventually led to India

gaining independence in 1947. His ideas and methods of non-violent resistance transcended national boundaries and had a worldwide impact. His belief that peaceful or non-violent means could lead to effective results, even in the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges, contributed to a more constructive and cooperative approach to global diplomacy, as leaders are inspired to seek non-violent solutions to complex global problems. His emphasis on non-violence acted as a moral compass, reminding global leaders of the significance of non-violent discourse in conflict resolution. His legacy serves as a reminder of the effectiveness of peaceful dispute resolution rather than violence. This influenced a more diplomatic and collaborative approach to addressing issues at various international summits and conferences.

## 2. Gandhi's Core Principles

Mahatma Gandhi is often seen as a symbol of moral leadership and an inspiration for positive change in the world. He advocated many philosophies, such as non-violence, *Satyagraha*, religion, *Sarvodaya*, world peace justice, equality, democracy and humanism. The study, however, focuses on his three concepts, which are still very significant in understanding global diplomacy.

### 2.1. The Philosophy of Non-Violence, World Peace and Humanism

Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps best known for his philosophy of non-violence, or "*ahimsa*," which he used as a powerful tool to oppose the repressive British colonial rule in India. His non-violence is not merely a tactical approach, but rather a deeply rooted principle that guided all aspects of human life, including politics and international affairs. His *Ahimsa* implies non-violence in thought, word, and deed. In the contemporary world marked by political strife, terrorism, and violence, his message of non-violence is more relevant than ever. It offers a powerful alternative to the prevailing culture of violence and revenge. Non-violence, as Gandhi practiced it, is not passive submission but active resistance to fight against oppression and injustice. It promotes dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution through peaceful means. In international politics, where nations are accelerating their armament, embracing Gandhian non-violence can lead to greater cooperation and harmony.

Gandhi was typically opposed to war. War, according to him, is an unmitigated evil because it violates the principles of truth and non-violence. Peace, as Gandhi envisioned it, is much more than the absence of war and violence. It denotes a positive and constructive world order. It is a state of affairs in which men resolve their conflicts through dialogue or negotiation rather than violence. He stated that

peace and non-violence cannot coexist. Peace achieved through violence and deception should be discouraged. Such peace cannot last long. To him, peace based on non-violence and truth is durable and promotes man's internal spiritual growth and progress.

Gandhi's concept of peace is an integrated vision based on his philosophy of life. His concern for peace leads to the realization of the oneness of humanity. Gandhi viewed humanity as a whole and advocated for universal brotherhood. A spiritual unity unites all humans, and pervades human consciousness transcending nationality, culture, and race. To Gandhi, mutual goodwill and friendship among all are required for peace. No one could degrade or brutalise another man because humanity is indivisible.

### **3. The G20 Summit: Evolution and Objectives**

The Group of Twenty, or G20, is the premier forum for international cooperation on crucial aspects of the global economic and financial agenda. It unites the world's leading developed and developing economies. Following the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, the G20 was established in 1999 as an informal forum for the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of the most significant industrialized and developing economies to discuss international economic and financial stability. It was upgraded to the level of Heads of State or Government in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis of 2007, and again in 2009, when it became apparent that the necessary crisis coordination could only be possible at the highest political level. Since then, the G20 Leaders have met on a regular basis, and the G20 has become the premier forum for international economic cooperation.

The member countries comprise Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. In November 2008, the First G20 Summit was convened by the US President in Washington. The India's G20 Summit 2023 includes the African Union as a permanent member.

### **4. India's G20 Summit and Gandhi's Legacy**

The 18<sup>th</sup> G20 Leaders' Summit was held in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi from September 9 to 10, 2023. 20 member states, nine invitee nations, and 14 international organizations attended the Summit. There is no direct relation between the G20 Summit and Mahatma Gandhi, as Gandhi's life and activism occurred in the early twentieth century, long before the formation of the G20. However, some

of his ideas resonate with the theme and key declarations of India's G20 Presidency. It is important to recall that during the G20 Summit 2022 held at Bali, the Prime Minister (PM) of India stated that in the next year, when the G20 convenes in the holy land of Buddha and Gandhi, there will be a collective consensus to convey a strong message of peace to the world community. Again, at the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting on March 2, 2023, he called on world leaders to be inspired by India's civilisational ethos to focus on what unites rather than divides them in the land of Gandhi and the Buddha.

The PM underscored the inclusive, ambitious, decisive, and action-oriented nature of India's G20 Presidency, which has effectively addressed the developmental concerns faced by the Global South. He stressed the importance of following Gandhi's vision of serving the underprivileged and that India values human-centric prosperity. The Prime Minister of India stated on X (formerly known as Twitter) a day before the Summit that India's G20 Summit will advance human-centric and inclusive development.

#### **4.1. G20 Logo and Theme: A Message of Universal Brotherhood**

Gandhi emphasised the intrinsic value and dignity of humans, regardless of their social, religious, or national affiliations. He espoused a holistic perspective on humanity and promoted universal brotherhood. His idea of humanism aligns with the theme and logo of the India's G20 Summit. During the virtual ceremony of the official unveiling of the logo, theme, and website of India's G20 Summit, the PM of India said that the logo and theme reflect the mantra of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" or "*the world is one family*" or universal brotherhood. He said that the logo is not merely a symbol, but rather conveys a message. The lotus in the G20 logo symbolises a sense of hope and aspiration amid challenging times. The earth is also depicted on a lotus in the G20 logo. It reflects India's pro-planet approach to life which is in perfect harmony with nature. Its seven petals represent the seven continents. The idea of harmony is also conveyed through the seven notes of music. The Earth reflects India's pro-planet approach to life, which is in harmonious relationship with nature. He considered that a message is being sent through this logo and theme to make this philosophy a medium for resolving today's global issues. The PM said that through the G20, India is revitalising the global recognition of Buddha's message for freedom from war and Mahatma Gandhi's solution in resistance to violence.

#### **4.2. The African Union as a Permanent Member: The idea of Inclusiveness and Compassion**

Gandhi is committed to the principle of inclusivity. His dedication to non-violence and respect for diversity through inclusive means continues to inspire people and world leaders today. India's G20

Presidency welcomes the African Union as a permanent member. The Prime Minister of India took a noteworthy initiative to enhance Africa's representation in international stage and shape the future of international affairs. The G20 nations extended a warm welcome to the African Union as a new member, honouring the Indian Prime Minister's commitment to uplift the Global South. They firmly believed that the inclusion of the African Union will substantially contribute to address the global concerns.

Preceding the Summit, the Prime Minister of India wrote to his G20 counterparts, proposing the inclusion of the African Union. He stressed the necessity of promoting Global South voices, particularly African nations, on international forums. India has prioritised African countries in the G20 agenda due to their historical and cultural ties. Gandhi's non-violent struggle, which began in South Africa, and Nelson Mandela's legacy have had a major impact. India realised the need for a strong Global South voice to influence geo-politics and foster inclusive economic growth. India's decision to grant the African Union full G20 membership shows its commitment to enhancing Africa's representation and partnership in global affairs.

#### **4.3. Gender Equality and Empowering of Women and Girls**

Gandhi believed that women and men are equal and complement each other. He made an effort to incorporate women into the mainstream socio-political life. He said that they should be empowered to raise the future generation of the nation. His views of gender equality and women empowerment align with the declarations of the India's G20 Summit. The Summit reiterated the significance of gender equality and acknowledged that allocating resources towards the empowerment of women and girls promotes multiple benefits in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The G20 nations reaffirmed their commitment to advancing women-led development and ensuring women's comprehensive, equitable, efficient, and meaningful participation in inclusive global problem-solving. They believed that this commitment includes active participation in all elements of society, across sectors, and at all economic levels. They hoped that such engagement is essential for achieving gender equality and for the growth of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth.

#### **4.4. Unveiling Statues and Tributes: Honouring Timeless Legacy**

New monuments commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's life and teachings were constructed during India's G20 renovations. On September 4, 2023, before the Summit, the President of India unveiled a 12-foot statue of the Father of the Nation at the Gandhi Darshan in Rajghat. She also inaugurated the Gandhi Vatika which features monuments of Gandhi spinning the charkha, riding a bicycle, and sitting on a bench at Gandhi Darshan near the Rajghat memorial. Flags of G20 nations adorned the new gate of Gandhi Darshan. The Vice-Chairman of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti told the *Times of India* that this artistic endeavour aims to attract more tourists, especially young people, by giving them the opportunity to capture memorable moments while imbibing the teaching of the iconic leader.

During her speech at the gathering, the President of India highlighted Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent approach to global development by prominent figures such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and former United States President Barack Obama. She claimed that Gandhi saw the entire world as a family, and that India is actively working to cultivate a sense of universal brotherhood, cooperation and peace, as evidenced by its leadership role in the G20 Summit. She also expressed that people from other countries attending the G20 Summit would learn about Gandhi's ideals. She asserted that Gandhi is an invaluable gift to the world community and that his internal ideals gave the world a new direction. Furthermore, she stated that the goal of world peace can be achieved by pursuing his path. She urged every person, particularly the youth and children, read as much as possible about Gandhi and imbibe his ideals.

On the final day of the Summit, the G20 leaders visited the Mahatma Gandhi memorial at Rajghat in New Delhi to pay their respects. A musical tribute featuring Gandhi's favourite hymns performed at the venue. The Prime Minister of India welcomed the dignitaries with an '*Angvastram*' (a shawl made of khadi) while standing in front of a picture of '*BapuKuti*' (Bapu Cottage). The presentation of Khadi, a hand-spun fabric, is highly symbolic since Gandhi promoted it during India's independence movement against the British. He had an inclination towards abstract asceticism, and he was a firm believer in complete self-reliance as well as the dignity of labour. Gandhi viewed the spinning and wearing of self-woven khadi as a means of self-reliance. The world leaders stood before wreaths that had been set around the memorial, which featured an eternal flame and marigold garlands in orange and yellow. They paid homage to Gandhi by observing a minute of silence. The Prime Minister of India posted on X that at the iconic Rajghat, the G20 family paid tribute to Gandhi, who is regarded as the beacon of peace, service, compassion and non-violence. He wrote that as diverse nations

converge, Gandhi's timeless ideals and principles serve as a guiding force for a harmonious, inclusive and prosperous global future.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi is known for his unwavering dedication to non-violence and world peace. In pursuit of global diplomacy, his ideas continue to offer a guiding light. In this regard, India's G20 Presidency which embody the essence of Gandhi's ideology holds significance, addressing a wide range of global challenges. India employs Gandhi's image and philosophies in G20 Summit to emphasise its cultural heritage and commitment to ethical leadership and moral authority in global discourse. The Summit leverages Gandhi's legacy to promote global unity, inclusivity and gender equality. India's proposal to incorporate the African Union reflects the nation's efforts to create one world without first or third worlds. India has a unique and significant position in global politics. It maintains close ties with developed countries, and also comprehends and articulates the perspective of developing nations effectively. This dual capability helps India contribute to more balanced and inclusive global decision-making. The nation is determined to unify the world for a brighter future. The theme of the Summit "*One Earth, One Family, One Future*" serves as a catalyst to promote the collective well-being. India's endeavours to mediate geopolitical tensions and promote dialogue among nations are consistent with Gandhi's principles of peaceful coexistence. The Summit further emphasises the need for empowering women and girls, which Gandhi had always urged. By aligning G20 priorities with Gandhi's enduring principles, India seeks to positioning itself as a bridge-builder in a divided world, with the objective of fostering a harmonious and equitable future for all. The tribute to Gandhi on the final day of the Summit is also not just a nod to history, but a strategic reminder of the values that can guide a fractured world toward greater unity and progress. It represents a significant gesture to inspire world leaders to strive towards a more peaceful and sustainable world.

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