

Gandhigiri has no takers in Karnataka

As India geared up to celebrate the 139th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a group of students fanned out in Karnataka to look for people who lead their lives according to the principles laid down by the apostle of peace. And they failed to find any in a state still recovering from communal clashes in its most peaceful pockets.

D. Jeevan Kumar, director of the Centre for Gandhian Studies in [Bangalore](#) University, said simply: 'Not a single village in Karnataka is following any Gandhian principle.'

'I won't blame the villagers alone,' Kumar told IANS. 'The effect of globalisation and the changing socio-political reality of India have led all of us to slowly forget Gandhi's great teachings.'

The 21 students from the centre, who went to different villages in Karnataka as part of their dissertation project to find out how many people follow the core Gandhian philosophies, found Gandhian thought almost missing -- be it gram swaraj (village self-sufficiency), women's emancipation, ahimsa (non-violence), satyagraha (the urge for truth), sarvodaya (trusteeship) or fighting untouchability.

Chaitrya Prasad, 23, a student at the centre who researched on women's emancipation for his dissertation paper in various villages of Bangalore Rural district, within 60 km of this IT hub of India, found that women's empowerment was a far cry in these villages.

'Most of the women of the villages are school dropouts and work as agricultural labourers. The men of the villages feel that women are weaker than them and are better suited for household chores. The idea of women empowerment is yet to reach the villages,' lamented Prasad, who plans to become a social worker and adopt Gandhian philosophy.

Almost similar was the finding of fellow student Mubarak, 22, whose subject was gram swaraj. Mubarak found that many villagers in Chikmagalur district, about 250 km from Bangalore, have no access to health facilities or higher education. He found even agriculture, the main source of livelihood, is in a shambles.

'Villages are poor and lack basic amenities. The villages are yet to have their own self-sustainable economy. Thus, once again the very concept of Gram Swaraj has failed to make any impact on the villages,' rued Mubarak.

The 'stark reality' of slow and steady erosion of Gandhian philosophy in society was evident some time back in the centre itself. Inaugurated by former president S. Radhakrishnan in 1965, the centre had no student for five consecutive years till 2007.

In 2007, the centre revised its postgraduate diploma course in Gandhian studies, and now has 21 students. It is a one-year course, an add-on for students of other departments of the university.

Some of the subjects taught under the course are Gandhian Religion and Philosophy, Gandhian Polity and Economy and Gandhian Strategy for Social Transformation.

'We have already started getting applications for the next academic year,' said Kumar. 'Now we are

also planning to start a few short-term certificate courses.'

The head of the centre feels that schools too should add Gandhian studies in their curriculum to popularise the messages of the Mahatma.

'Gandhi's philosophy holds tremendous importance today, when we are fighting violence in our daily lives,' he said.

Although the 2006 Bollywood blockbuster 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' popularised the concept of Gandhigiri (to follow Gandhi's teaching of peace and harmony), experts feel it was a temporary trend that faded away quickly.

Karnataka, generally a communally peaceful state, is still reeling from the shock of last month's attack on churches widely blamed on rightwing Hindu groups. This is the first time that Karnataka saw such largescale assault on churches and prayer halls, including in cosmopolitan Bangalore and in the coastal city of Mangalore that bore the brunt of the vandalism.

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