

## Small Talk: In defence of the Mahatma

By [Lalitha Suhasini](#), Pune Mirror | Dec 24, 2017, 02:30 AM IST



Small Talk with Subodh Kerkar

*The Father of the Nation has been a recurring motif in the work of the Goan artist, who will deliver a talk on Gandhian science in the city, this week*

There have been many, including noted British author Aldous Huxley, who have argued that Mahatma Gandhi was not a man of science. Goa-based artist Subodh Kerkar will defend Gandhi possibly among a roomfull of scientists, that too, when he delivers his talk this week titled 'Gandhi and Science' at the Indian Institute of Science, Communication and Research (IISER), Pune. "Gandhi may have been critical of machines and modernisation, but he wasn't against science," says Kerkar, in a phone interview, "He was against science without humanity."

The 58-year-old artist and avid historian has been studying the life and work of Gandhi over the past two years in an effort to engage the contemporary audience. "Gandhi was more scientific than Mr Modi and many of the Prime Ministers that we have seen. I know for a fact that Deve Gowda (past PM between 1996 and 1997) had employed an inhouse astrologer. Gandhi did not believe in astrology," says Kerkar, who will also refer to Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* for his public lecture. The artist will draw upon Gandhi's food-related research, outlined in his autobiography, to point out parallels with the work of a scientist. "Who does experiments? A scientist. Gandhi conducted research on food and communication research," adds Kerkar. "At a time when few inventions of modern technology barring a phone and telegram were available to us, Gandhi would make news in New York even while he was in Sevagram. If he was arrested in Bombay, it would appear in the New York Times the next week." Gandhi also met several famous scientists including Indian physicist CV Raman in an attempt to understand their work, observes Kerkar. "Madame Curie's daughter (Eve Denise Curie) came to see him," he says, "In fact, Gandhi persuaded Sushila Nayyar (his personal physician) to read Madame Curie's biography and translate it into Hindi."

A physician-turned-artist, Kerkar's admiration for Gandhi began early. It's a story that Kerkar has told many times. It was his father, an art teacher, who inspired his love for Gandhi in him when he was commissioned to paint a portrait of the Mahatma. After practising medicine for 27 years, Kerkar turned to his true calling and set up the Museum of Goa in 2015. Earlier this year, Kerkar collaborated with Ukrainian digital artist, Dmytro Dokunov, to create Gandhi AR, an app that generates a 3D image of Gandhi when you point it at any currency. "I don't have a celebrity to promote it and it needs more work," says Kerkar, who is on a mission to pay homage to Gandhi on as many platforms as possible. He curated a month-long exhibition titled "Phir Gandhi" to commemorate Gandhi's birth anniversary at the Museum of Goa. "I'm working with Dhokra artists in West Bengal to create an army of Gandhi soldiers in metal and Patachitra artists in Odisha who will tell Gandhi's life story through their art," says Kerkar.

In 2019, Kerkar's efforts will culminate in the celebration of 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi and he hopes to be able to convince the good offices at the Aga Khan Palace too to showcase some of his work in the city. "I've been in talks about improving the state of the museum at Aga Khan Palace for a while now but nothing has materialised as yet," he says.

Also in the pipeline is an as yet untitled bronze work series. "I am casting Gandhi's shoes in different sizes in bronze," says Kerkar of the artwork, which will encourage the audience to step into Gandhi's shoes and hopefully think about the idea of compassion. Referring to the "Gandhi neuron" named so by neuroscientist VS Ramachandran that explains the concept of empathy, Kerkar says that to him, Einstein and Gandhi stand as equals. "Except that in Gandhi's equation for  $e=mc^2$ , e stands for energy, m stands for masses and c stands for compassion." Kerkar believes that Gandhi has never been more relevant. "It is in these times when politics of hate is the norm that we need Gandhi's politics of love."

**Gandhi and Science will be held at IISER Pune on December 27 at 5 pm.**