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ART

The Mahatma's universe



Kunal Ray

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Ideas for preserving Bapu - Ravikummar Kashi

The month-long exhibition 'Phir Gandhi' in Goa is a creative exploration of his ideas

When Subodh Kerkar was six, his father was commissioned by the Goa Assembly to paint a portrait of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The portrait served as Subodh's first encounter with Gandhi. It was not a life changing moment by any stretch of imagination for this artist of conceptual art, sculpture, large installations, among other things. This exposure, however, left him curious and he gained an entry point into the universe called Gandhi, whose ideas and thoughts have sustained his interest over the years.

'Phir Gandhi' (Museum of Goa, Oct 2-30), therefore is a small yet significant conversation with the 'idea' of Gandhi – the much revered father of the nation, his past and the present. It could also be called an interrogation into the 'idea' of Gandhi in a largely distressed, strife-ridden society that we are today in. And this dialogue is further extended by the participation of various artists, who harbour similar concerns in their art practice and seek an active engagement with the 'idea' of Gandhi and his contemporary relevance.



Interesting analogy

In his sculptures, Kerkar draws an analogy between Gandhi and Christ – both persecuted and misunderstood but saviours nonetheless. Cartoonist E. P. Unny feels that Gandhi has a knack of walking into his cartoons, but his presence is always foreboding. In Unny's cartoons, Gandhi is being asked for his Aadhaar card, he is also seen wondering about India

post-demonetisation and hailed as the poster boy of the art of living. These cartoons document foremost moments in the country's political as well as social landscape.

In 'Grinding Food for Thought', Shamala B. uses the humble grinding stone to emphasise upon the need to revisit the creed of self-sustenance as shown in Gandhi's path of economic freedom. The medals by Nandsha S. expose us to a world seen through the eyes of the Mahatma which may be entirely different from ours but in this process of understanding, many new fictions are birthed.

Chandra Bhattacharjee's painting confronts us with a lonely Gandhi miniature figure which could be construed as a harsh comment on his diminishing utility in our context. Though diminutive, his resilience seems steadfast. Similarly, Ravikumar Kashi is concerned about the preservation of Gandhi's legacy. In 'Ideas for Preserving Bapu', a set of twenty images in one panel, Kashi probes multifarious engagements with Gandhi and wonders if we have relegated him to a mere ritual?

In July 2011, Chaitanya Guttikar along with three friends retraced the steps of Mahatma Gandhi, walking from Sabarmati Ashram to the village of Dandi, documenting the surrounding villages and people on the way. His photographs unravel many stories of people and places encountered on this historic trail.

Sweety Joshi's abstract painting using burnt/charred remains of books written by/on Gandhi is a forthright comment on our treatment of Gandhi. Her work provokes compelling questions about what is Gandhi to us and where is he to be found? That perhaps is our question too.

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<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/art/phir-gandhi-exhibition-is-on-in-goa/article19801650.ece>

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