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OPINION - INDIA

Beyond the Garland: The Gandhi We Never Understood

Authored by: Acharya Prashant | Updated: Oct 2, 2026, 18:17 IST

On Gandhi Jayanti, the concepts of truth and ahimsa are often superficially acknowledged, yet many fail to grasp their deeper meanings and misinterpretations of Gandhi's teachings have led to polarised views of him.



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Every Gandhi Jayanti, two words are spoken everywhere: truth and ahimsa. Schoolchildren recite them, ministers lay wreaths beneath them, and by evening both words are folded away for another year. This 2nd October marks Gandhiji's 157th birth anniversary, which the United Nations observes as the International Day of Non-Violence. His image is on currency notes and classroom walls. And yet the country is not so much forgetting him as never having quite understood him, and the misunderstanding begins with those very two words.

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Truth does not mean that if someone asks how much money I have in my pocket, and I have 500 rupees, I tell him 500. Ahimsa does not mean that someone slaps me and I say, never mind, I will not hit back, please sit, have some jaggery, drink some water. Neither word is a rule of behaviour, and neither began with Gandhi. At one end of every duality sits the ego, the one who says "I". When that ego turns and looks at itself, the duality it was holding up is seen to have no ground. That seeing is truth; it is immediate, and it has to happen afresh each time.

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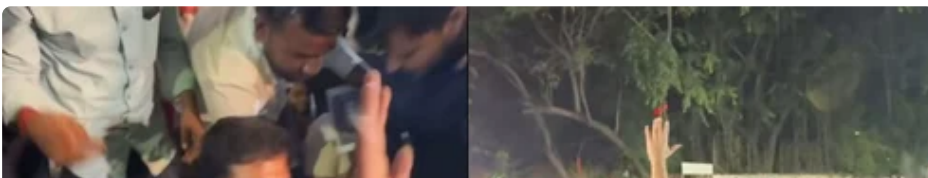
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