

Building a ‘Culture of Peace’ through Museum-Tourism Activity on Freedom Circuit on Mahatma Gandhi’s Path in West Bengal

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Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi’s life, activities, thoughts and programmes and their successful applications by him in our lives, in different states, situations and times, have been found to provide us a new direction for experimentation. Gandhiji is physically no more. But the life he led, the ways he showed to fulfill the true humane existence in a peaceful and lovable world will remain enshrined in the hearts of generations to come and remain a beacon light for further flowering.

Peace is an intangible attribute that is difficult to quantify or otherwise measure. Defined passively it entails the absence of war, acts of terrorism, and random violence. Defined actively peace requires the presence of justice. A broad definition of peace refers to peaceful relationships not only between nations, but also between groups or communities, between individuals and between people and nature.

Culture of Peace through Gandhian Philosophy through Museum-Tourism Activity:

Both museum and tourism are actively supported by a multi-layered global service organisation. To some both tourism and museum can contribute to knowledge of foreign places, empathy with other people and tolerance that stems out from seeing the place of one’s own society in the world. There are many good examples of alternative forms of tourism contributing to conflict resolution, greater intercultural understanding and even global social justice.

International Council of Museums (ICOM) and World Federation of Friends of Museum (WFFM) unveiled a joint effort to showcase ethical tourism on International Museum Day (18 May), 2009 and they suggested that museums can foster a new relationship between visitors and the local communities which have a chance to meet to promote sustainable development. For setting up a culture of peace in this critical situation of the society museums and tourism need to come forward today. As museums have played a great role for the society development and as they have a relationship with tourism, so jointly they can take a great responsibility for building up a non-violent, peaceful, happy society instead of a violent, peaceless society. The United Nations has declared the 21st Century as the Century of Peace and Non-violence. Gandhiji had been called the “Apostle of Peace” and one of the greatest Peace Activists. He believed that ultimate happiness lies in peace and the peace is not a static concept but a dynamic, positive entity.

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Concept of Gandhi Museums and Gandhi Circuits in India:

In the year 1949 Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Gandhi National Memorial Trust) decided to establish a Memorial Museum at the National level to collect, preserve and display materials connected with the memory of the Mahatma and the first Gandhi Memorial Museum was inaugurated in New Delhi. Later on, in consonance with Mahatma's ideas to reach everybody, it was decided to establish Regional Museums Board and under it several regional Gandhi Museums came up at Sabarmati Ashram, (Ahmedabad), Sevagram Ashram, (Wardha), Mani Bhaban, (Mumbai), Madurai (Tamil Nadu) and also Gandhi Memorial Museum, Barrackpore (Kolkata).

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, constituted a Panel for identifying and documenting sites associated with Mahatma Gandhi in April 2006. The State Governments of various States were ready for a synergy between tourism and Gandhi circuit. The Gujarat State Government has decided to have a Gandhi Tourism Circuit and the Circuit includes Porbandar, Rajkot, Ahmedabad and Dandi. The Bihar Government plans to develop the state's Champaran district, where Mahatma Gandhi launched his first Satyagraha Movement in India against the British rule 93 years ago, as a 'Gandhi-Circuit' to attract the tourists.

Gandhi Circuit in West Bengal:

West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation is developing an Indian Freedom Circuit on Mahatma Gandhi's Path in West Bengal. The project includes restoration of Gandhiji's room and museum at Beliaghata, Gandhi Ashram at Sodepur, Gandhighat and Gandhi Memorial Museum at Barrackpore in Kolkata.

- **Hyderi Mansion, Beliaghata (Plate – 1a) :** The tourism ministry of West Bengal has launched a project to restore the building, formerly Hyderi Mansion, where Gandhiji had spent 25 days (August 13 to September 7, 1947). The situation of Kolkata was in danger due to the communal riot at that time. His move stopped the violence temporarily, and both Muslims and Hindus celebrated Independence Day together. They are restoring Gandhiji's room and setting up a museum at Beliaghata (**Plate – 1b**). Presently, this building is referred to as Beliaghata Gandhi Bhaban. In future, this site may be an ideal place for building up a 'Culture of Peace' through Gandhi Circuit in West Bengal.



Plate 1a



Plate 1b

- Gandhi Ashram, Sodepur (Plate 2):** During the early twenties of this Century ‘Khadi Pratisthan’ at Sodepur, grew under the leadership of Satish Chandra Dasgupta, a renowned Chemist. It was an institution which worked to fulfill the Mahatma’s dream. Gandhiji came and stayed there on several occasions. He used to call Sodepur his second home and this Khadi Pratisthan served as the main link between Gandhiji and Bengal. West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation have already started their project for restoring the existing building, landscaping and construction of a boundary wall and building of offices, library and class rooms and they are also planning to develop a tourist spot in there through Gandhi Circuit in West Bengal.



Plate 2

Gandhighat, Barrackpore (Plate 3a): Located at Barrackpore, it attracts people to come and pay homage to the ‘Father of the Nation’. Gandhiji’s ashes were also immersed here in the river Ganga (Plate 3b). The Tourism Department is trying to develop a tourist spot there through their Gandhi-Circuit programme in West Bengal.



Plate 3a



Plate 3b

- **Gandhi Memorial Museum, Barrackpore (Plate 4a):** This museum came up at Barrackpore in 1961 and the actual work was subsequently started to make it a zonal museum for the Eastern States of West Bengal, Assam and Orissa. The museum has a very rich collection of originally used articles of Mahatma Gandhi, his original letters, a huge number of photographs concerning Gandhiji and different phases of Indian Freedom Movement, sculptures, paintings, films, disc-records of patriotic and devotional songs and a rare collection of tape-recorded reminiscences of illustrious personalities who came in contact with Gandhiji. The museum has a good library which has almost 11,000 books on various subjects with a few rare books. The museum has also an auditorium for 400

persons and arrangements for screening of films. The Tourism Ministry has also launched a project for restoration of the auditorium and an amphitheatre in the museum's compound, besides landscaping and upgrading the existing display techniques (Plate 4b).

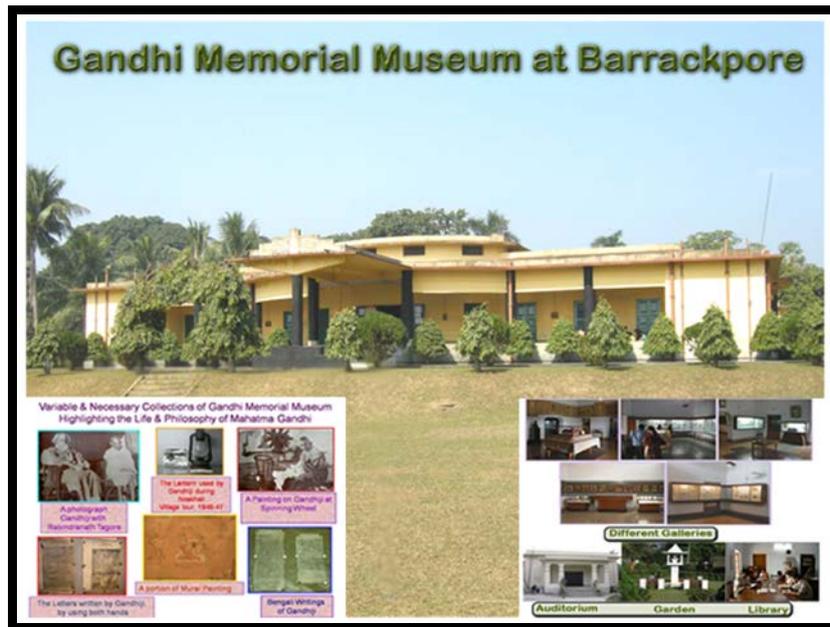


Plate 4a



Plate 4b

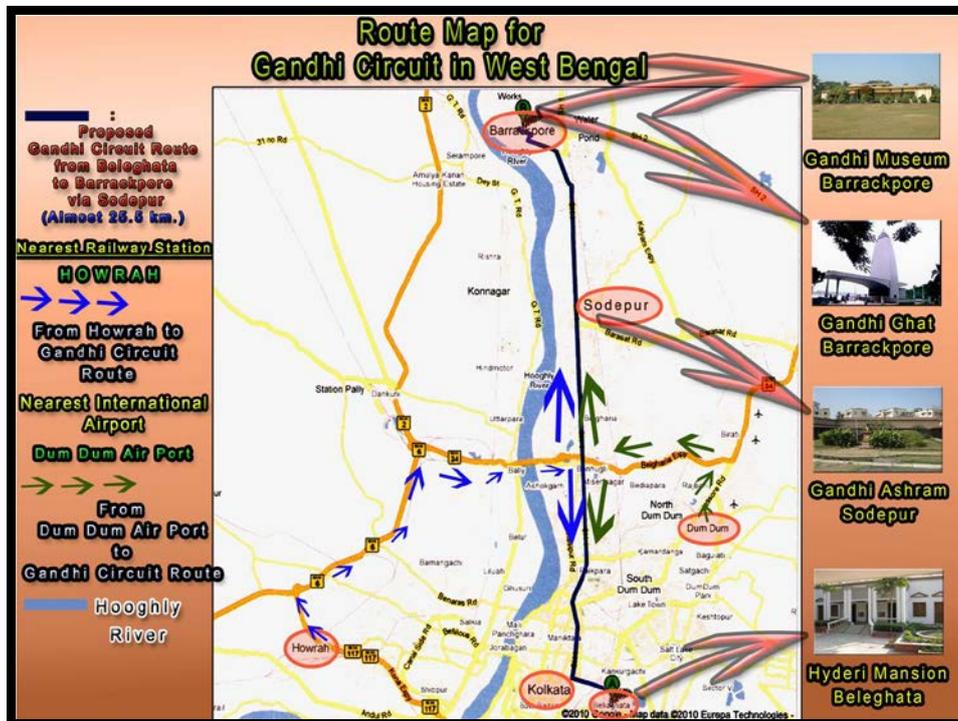


Plate 5 – Proposed route map for Gandhi Circuit in West Bengal

Conclusion:

Gandhi Circuit through all over India is just an experiment to set up a peaceful, happy society. Its success lies depends upon the co-operation between the museum and tourism personnel. In order to build culture of peace in the present society seriously, issues of social injustice and other types of conflict within the country must be taken into account. So considering this, both museums and tourism personnel need to take more positive approaches for creating non-violent, peaceful, balanced growth of society.

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