INTRODUCTION

Gandhi is a vast ocean and represents the essence of his great spiritual predecessors in contemporary times. And there are in the world a few inspired ones whose worth always remain beyond price. To his contemporaries, Gandhi was an unbelievable reality. To his posterity, Gandhi remain somewhat a legend, woven into the fabric of India's modern nationalism. Some considered him a saint, and politics a wrong place for him. Others believed him as Godsent to be a political saviour for India at a time when the country badly needed such a one. Yet others found in him a leader proper, in whom they could trust with confidence and follow his foot steps. But many felt Gandhi was all these and more—a personality and a philosophy clubbed into one, capable of inspiring not only his contemporary generations, but every Indian, living and yet to be born, belonging to whatever shades—political or social, regional or religious. In India one may be able to contest or criticise Gandhi, or dissent or even deplore him, yet it may not sound true if one is to say there is no Gandhi impact in the country. Even those who disagree with the premises of Gandhi will have to concede that his
presence is felt in India one way or other in every field of activity—education or economics, industry or environment, politics or statecraft. But it is in politics one feels the Gandhi touch most, making Gandhi, in fact, a measuring rode or a criterion, a yardstick or a touchstone to pass judgement on men and matters. It is here that Gandhi lives still, as a never dying factor in the politics and public life of India, but leaving at the same time his imprint also in the lives of the people abroad.

Gandhi remains an interesting theme in what he did than in what he said. He makes himself a wonder for those who came after him because the cleavage between what he said and what he did remained surprisingly small. It was because of this uncontestable truth he could boldly and effortlessly assert "my life is my message". All great men seems to have one quality in common namely the calibre and capacity to inspire others, not by their acquaintance alone but more by the model they leave behind.1

The importance and the impact of Gandhi was that he could fundamentally change people and their habits, their ideology and their very style of living. The Gandhi magic

had no parallel in contemporary history. Words will have force only when they are backed by one's character and integrity. What Gandhi said and wrote, did and demonstrate proved having an inseparable link to his character and conviction, making his presence unique and singularly effective in India's public life net for almost three and a half decades. But Gandhi's martyrdom was not marking an end to the relevance of the ideals he tried to hold high and so dear to his heart, till his last breath.

For Gandhi, politics was not a profession but a Vocation, a mission he believed Divinely destined. Hence he declared that, that which is morally wrong can never be politically right. Gandhi had seen politics and morality as just two sides of the same coin, making its worth in its combine. Gandhi rightly symbolised honesty and truthfulness, courage and compassion; sanctity and sacrifice. He turned his contemporary Indian political society upside down with his new vision and techniques which seemed surprisingly novel to most of his own colleagues. His political command over his followers was so steely and steady but his concern for them remained inspiringly soft and human. It is said great men live and die, but alive or dead, they keep their immortal importance constantly relevant. Gandhi made himself belong to that category by living his philosophy at every moment of his life.
Gandhi was one of the most clear headed men of his age—the Gandhi era as it is known in India's recent political history.

A man who drastically changed the very thinking and the life style of the people around, Gandhi was an object of academic enquiry for others—his admirers and detractors alike. This was largely possible since Gandhi could revolutionise the politics in India to a dimension unknown till then, posing not only a great challenge to the English but also compelling his own followers to toe the hard line of truth even at the cost of one's life.

India's national politics have, indeed, undergone a metamorphosis under Gandhi, a fact conceded by even his severest of critics. But the probing question faced by an academic is whether Gandhian values survived the test of time, outliving Gandhi in Indian politics. Having completed almost half a century of political independence, Indian scenario leaves no satisfactory testimonial to show that the 'Gandhi touch' was in tact in the national political horizon. Yet any academic probe worth its name, analysing and assessing the political culture of the post-independent period in India could prove decisively that the Gandhi relevance remains, if not as the bright light of sun, at least as the cool shade of the moon.
There is no mincing of words while saying that the 'Gandhi magic' was slowly on the decline due to the absence of its takers in subsequent years. Still, however, every successful leader in the country took meticulous care to retain a Gandhi outfit in India's national politics as that was considered one of the best bets for ensuring a political and electoral mandate for him. No part of India could dare ignore Gandhi or his essence—spiritual and political—and hence there always had been a constant conflict—often more subtle than open-between the pro-Gandhists and those otherwise. While some flattered him and even raised him an object of political worship, others took him to task for most of the ills pervading the post-Gandhi politics in India.

Gandhi had an integral view of politics and believed it could not get separated from truth or one's commitment to it. He was, indeed, a political liberator of the first order, constituting a class by himself. As a thinker, he kept himself ever evolving and ever growing. As a practical politician he was ever experimenting. As a statesman, he was ever observing and acting at the appropriate time, taking his opponents by surprise and immensely inspiring his followers with his courage of conviction. A political wonder for all times, Gandhi's influence undoubtedly ennobled the public life in India.
in every dimension, making his message ever relevant and moulding it into an essential part of India's national political culture.

As part of the subcontinent, Kerala also remained a region within the political frame and boundaries of the Gandhi spell. During the days of the heroic struggle for freedom, Gandhi and his new 'magic' had its natural impact in the region. The native princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and Malabar which constituted part of the British Indian province of Madras, witnessed tremendous political activity, creating a new awareness in the minds of the people and leading them into the Gandhi track. For the people of Kerala, committed to the cause of political freedom and responsible government, Gandhi became their hero and also their chief source of strength. Gandhi's clarion call made most of them to come out of their homes and fields to join his ranks and court the consequent challenges. In Kerala too, politics became more lively, with its renewed activities of a new dimension shown by Gandhi and kindled by his inspiring philosophy. To Keralites also Gandhi remained almost a political God during the days of the freedom struggle and for sometime henceafter and any word against him or his philosophy was considered by many as nothing less than political blasphemy. It was from this enviable position and
prominence Gandhism fell to its present plight where its
writ seems alarmingly weak in Kerala's political and
public life. However, there occasionally comes some
streaks of consolation and hope when it happens that
leaders who keep respect for Gandhian values come to the
political helm of affairs. Two striking examples were
C. Achutha Menon and A. K. Antony in whom people in Kerala
at large have had an admirably unflinching faith as far as
their integrity of character and commitment concerned.
Both did demonstrate a surprising detachment and a firm
disinclination to submit to pulls and pressures of common
place political games. But the very fact that the number
of such leaders are so meagre, proves it beyond doubt the
Gandhi impact in the post independence politics in Kerala
is conspicuous more by its absence than otherwise and an
exception than rule.

It is undeniably a fact and truth that Gandhi's
teachings fell to bad days after the Mahatma's great
martyrdom in 1948. The decline and fall of Gandhian
values in the political life of Kerala in post-independence
days does warrant a proper academic probe to find out the extent to which its relevance can still be
preserved. And any positive endeavour in that direction
will also naturally and inevitably lead one to an in-depth
enquiry into the relevance and the style of functioning of
most of the Gandhian organisations and institutions and the role they play in keeping the Gandhi impact in Kerala's contemporary society.

An academic enquiry and evaluation of the Gandhian impact in Kerala's politics is one of the major planks of this doctoral study. The chapters are divided in such a way to have a logical chain in this humble yet serious academic search for truth.

First chapter is a note and an analysis of the historical dimensions of the freedom struggle in Kerala. Chapter II concentrates on the Congress in Kerala and how far it was enlivened by the Gandhi current. While the third chapter sketches the factors in Kerala politics and the inevitable power games involved in the state's political process, Chapter IV is a rather detailed study of the Gandhian organisations and institutions in Kerala.

Chapter V, the concluding chapter contains an objective analysis of the Gandhian impact in the politics of Kerala and the contemporary challenges that warrant Gandhian solutions, emphasising the relevance of Gandhian values and the ever remaining importance of the Gandhian answer in politics.