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The power of non-violence

By K Kannan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 15. While more and more people the world over are realising the power of non-violent action, India — the birthplace of Gandhi — has strayed away from his ideals. Probably because the Indian approach to Gandhi is personality-based and not rooted in an appreciation of his ideas.

"Indians are so close to the man that they cannot see his theory, his methods and his insights into the nature of non-violent action," says Ms. Mary King, an associate of Martin Luther King and winner of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award for her book "Freedom Song" which she wrote in 1998.

After analysing seven case studies of non-violent action including the Czech and Slovak "Velvet Revolution" and the Pastors' Movement in East Germany, Ms. King — who was recently in the Capital — says, "I think we can dare to imagine a world without major wars because more and more people are realising that there is an alternate way of waging wars without bloodshed".

Elaborating on the role Gandhi has played in her life, Ms. King says: "I first learnt about Gandhi through the trainers who were active in the civil rights movement. The same people who trained Martin Luther King also trained me in non-violent action. I was very young then and was part of the Student's Non-Violent Co-Ordination Committee," she recalls.

Arguing that Gandhi and King have had a profound influence on her life, Ms. King, who has been an active member of the Peace Corps in the Carter Administration, says some of Gandhi's insights have helped her fashion the course of her life. "It was Gandhi who realised that conflict will be



Ms. Mary King, 'Indebted to Gandhi'. — Photo: S.

always with us and all that can be done is to manage it effectively. He also realised that passivity and subjugation should be transformed into resistance and action". Ms. King, who teaches a course called "Building Peace" in the University of Grenada, says she is indebted to Gandhi for making her think strategically and arrive at an understanding of how bloodshed creates a thirst for revenge that then becomes a never-ending cycle. "Non-violent action pierces through the psychological defences of the opponent by appealing to their heart and psyche."

Revolutions all over the world starting from the Civil Rights Movement of the United States to

the Solidarity Movement of Poland and the on-going struggle in Burma reflect the growing power and influence of non-violent action. "In all these movements, there is someone who is studying or translating Gandhi. Trainers hold workshops with groups teaching them the rudiments of non-violent discipline."

Admitting that there have been non-violent movements which have failed like in China's Tiananmen Square, Ms. King, author of "Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King : The Power of Non-Violent Action", asserts: "It is, nevertheless, important to keep the channels of communication open with the adversary so that he understands the grievance."