



## MS. SONIA DEOTTO

**Recipient of the International Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India - 2019**

Born: August 4, 1971

Born and trained in Italy as a social artist, in 1999 Sonia Deotto travelled to India to research, under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on the Mandala concept, universal archetype for peace and harmony. The result of the participatory research developed with different religious communities of India and afterwards (in 2001) with indigenous people of Mexico was the OraWorldMandala (OWM), an art project to visualize the planet as a “World Mandala” and connect its different continents through creative expressions. In 2004, Sonia Deotto undertook training in *Ahimsa* under the guidance of Ravindra Varma, former Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith. As a research fellow she integrated *Ahimsa* in the art project. This was the turning point to incorporate action into the OraWorldMandala and transform it into a global movement for creative *Ahimsa* (non-violence).

OWM is a peace movement to promote the practice of creative *Ahimsa* through the ‘ArtScience of Mandala’ with a vision and mission of *Sarvodaya* - The ultimate goal, *Ahimsa* - The practice, Reconciliation - The first step, ArtScience of Mandala - The medium and Truth - The first vow.

The action started in Ahmedabad, India, through a series of creative programmes developed with various religious communities of Ahmedabad as part of a reconciliation process. Her aim was to connect India with Mexico – while experimenting at the antipodes with the tenets of Gandhian philosophy, truth, non-violence and interdependence, that also reflect the nature of Mandala. Thus, her journey of self-discovery continued and another teacher, the Wixárika Marakame Dionicio Manukaweiwa de la Rosa Cosío, introduced her to the indigenous cultures of Mexico.

The outcome was a “world participatory theatre for unity in diversity” inspired by Gandhi’s thought. Guidance of eminent Gandhians like Narayan Desai, Radha Bhatt, Dr Subba Rao, Chunibhai Vaidya and Dr. Ela Bhatt to name a few, have inspired Sonia Deotto to walk this path with a mission.

OWM experiments with a series of engagements which are based on creative *Ahimsa* for the implementation of: peace through education, sustainable economy and social development; human rights and gender equality, democratic participation; advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity; participatory communication, information and knowledge; international peace and security. It works as a world participatory theatre for peace and *Ahimsa*, building bridges of reconciliation between divided realities and their differences.

Sonia Deotto’s involvement in various activities seeks to promote cohesion among people through creative peace local actions for community unity, constructive works and *satyagraha*. The activities also generate interchange programmes across Mexico, Italy and India.

**Peace Action:** Sonia Deotto has trained ‘Artists of *Ahimsa*’ volunteers to form ‘participative theatre representations’ called ‘Mandala Peace Actions’. She and OWM associates have been exploring and implementing these actions and carrying out constructive works and *satyagraha* in sensitive rural and urban areas of Mexico. The community, including participation of farmers and indigenous people are making a sincere effort to overcome their problems through dialogue. Sonia Deotto is extensively

creating awareness on Ahimsa and bringing art with a sense of love and compassion against the backdrop of intense violence like natural resource destruction, narcotic trafficking or missing women. With courage and steadfastness in this process, her contributions have served to build a peace bridge among different sectors and regions.

In light of the increase in violence due to the dispute of the city of San Luis Potosi by two Mexican cartels, a multi-disciplinary volunteer group was formed in 2012 to work in jails and rebuild a social fabric following the culture of peace and Ahimsa. The most recent peace experiment has been the one at the US-Mexico border. This is the first trans-border Ahimsa initiative promoted by Sonia Deotto and carried out jointly with institutions, organizations, original people, artists and citizens for propagating peace and nonviolence in Tijuana-San Diego, with a particular focus on Tijuana which is considered one of the most violent cities in the world.

**Education:** Sonia Deotto's comprehensive educational initiatives for the systematization of the OraWorldMandala method at various levels has been published in the book OraWorldMandala - A Practice for *Ahimsa* through the Art Science of Mandala. She has formed linkages with a variety of universities in Mexico. Sonia Deotto is involved in research and programme development to effectively adapt to the rural and urban models of education and promotion of *Ahimsa*. Since 2004, OraWorldMandala Research/Action Lab located at the Peace Research Centre of Gujarat Vidyapith has created an extension program in collaboration with various educational institutions located in Mexico. Participative theatre actions, workshops, round tables, seminars, online academic courses are organized in schools, universities and different communities in sensitive areas of Mexico to propagate the power of *Ahimsa*. These activities have been an inspiring learning process for students and representatives of social movements.

Local schools are integrating classical pedagogy shared by the villagers on traditional medicine, local history, music, tree planting, values and principles for the preservation of the local identity, in its curriculum. Also new skills as yoga and art and craft work with recycled materials have been included in this experiment of basic education.

Sonia Deotto has also facilitated different learning tools in Spanish language. For the benefit of the Mexican commoner, she is involved in translating Gandhian literature into Spanish, starting from the Gandhi Katha by Narayan Desai. In 2016, the launch of the Gandhi Library Mexico project was published in Spanish with the title Constructive Programme: It's Meaning and Place by M.K. Gandhi and in 2018 the OraWorldMandala started its dissemination work in Italy through the translation of the same book titled Italian Programma Costruttivo. Il suo significato e luogo.

She has also directed the documentary Gandhi in México. Una mirada a la Noviolencia (Gandhi en México. A Look At Nonviolence). Sonia Deotto elaborated the concept of *khadi* art in collaboration with her art teacher, the international textile designer Wanda Casaril. A programme titled Musical *safai* (cleaning) is used as a medium to encourage a collective action. A-HOPE (Ahmedabad Harmonic Orchestra for Peace Everywhere) has been created with different religious communities of Ahmedabad associated with the OraWorldMandala Lab.

She is the co-creator of the world mapping for *Sarvodaya*, a digital platform developed to systematize an exhaustive data on Gandhian constructive works carried out worldwide.

Sonia Deotto has deepened the work of Gandhi by bringing people together across regions and religions by using her artistic skills to create and represent the common-ness of humanity.

Sonia Deotto uses art and activism to spread the practice of *Ahimsa*. Problem affects every corner of the world, but the mechanisms are adapted according to the needs of each locality. The basis of violence arises from the division that has been generated between different sectors. So Mahatma Gandhi's ideals start from regenerating humanitarian thinking. Addressing to these factors and concerns, Sonia Deotto strives to carry out innovative work by awakening moral conscience, fostering community self-reliance and bringing harmony of human life with nature.

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