

**Gandhi Foundation
International Peace Award for 2010**

*will be presented to representatives from Israel and Palestine
of the **Parents Circle Families Forum***

*This is a community of Palestinians and Israelis who have lost family
members during the conflict and promote reconciliation*

Wednesday 3 November in Room 4A House of Lords

6 – 8pm please be seated by 5.45pm

There will also be a panel discussion on nonviolent solutions to the
situation in the Middle East. Panel members:

Denis Halliday –

who was on the recent flotilla bringing goods to Gaza

Huw Irranca-Davis MP

Professor Lord Bhikhu Parekh

Places are limited and need to be booked through
omarhayat@chemecol.net

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Tribes and Tribulations

Graham Davey

How do we bring peace and justice to the dispossessed and who is responsible ?

Those who came to the Annual General Meeting at Kingsley Hall on 10 July were privileged to hear two presentations on the plight of the indigenous peoples of East India. The Adivasis are the tribal people of Orissa and Jharkhand state (formerly South Bengal). They live mainly in the forests and small villages preserving a culture that goes back for several thousand years and maintaining a balance between meeting basic human needs and preserving the natural environment. The Adivasis worship Nature and the spirits of their ancestors. Their megaliths and wall paintings are evidence of an ancient and sustainable civilisation.

The tragedy is that the land they occupy has been found to contain 40% of all India's mineral wealth. Multinational companies have moved in to exploit huge reserves of coal, bauxite and other metal ores with scant regard for the needs of the Adivasi people. Photographer Robert Wallis showed a sequence of pictures which hinted at the rich culture of the past but vividly portrayed the depths to which the Adivasis have sunk. A people who lived sustainably on the land have been driven from their villages, seen their sacred spaces destroyed, had their water polluted and been forced to scavenge for bits of coal in the spoil heaps of the mines so that they have something to sell and obtain money for food.

The second talk was given by Felix Padel who emphasised the scale of the mining operations – open-cast coal mines, for example, several miles across and moving relentlessly across the landscape, destroying everything in their path. Felix recalled how Gandhi had seen the improvement of the villages of India as being the key to the welfare of the people. He warned Nehru that an industrialised India would never be independent. Nehru saw it differently. For him, the villages were concentrations of poverty and ignorance and therefore providing employment through industrialisation was necessary for the country to advance.

Nehru's view prevailed and gradually more and more of the countryside has been given over to industry with few benefits trickling down to the poorest people. Roads and ports have been constructed to ship the minerals (and the profits) away to China and the West. In recent years the process has accelerated, driven by increasing costs for mining companies in other parts of the world and futures trading on the London Metal Exchange. The demand for steel is a major problem with firms like Tata and S R Steel exploiting a situation of rampant capitalism and being given support from the World Bank.

Since 1947 some 30 million people have been displaced, about a third of them tribal people. Compensation or help with resettlement is rarely given. Inevitably, opposition has grown and the term 'Maoists' is used to refer to a range of disparate groups who are seeking to restrict the operations of the mining companies and the government that supports them. Most of the Maoists come from outside the area and have little knowledge or respect for the Adivasi culture. Some groups are well organised and ideologically driven while others are bent only on violence, attacking the police and committing atrocities against innocent people. The mining industry uses other militia gangs to protect their installations and control the population.

Felix saw little scope for effective action in relation to this dangerous and volatile situation. A new minister for environmental affairs in the Indian government showed promise and there was increasing opposition in Britain to British-based mining firms that are active in India. But the overall picture was depressing as a major part of one of the largest countries in the world appears to be sliding into a state of civil war.

For further reading:

Out of this Earth: the East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel by Felix Padel

Listening to Grasshoppers by Arundhati Roy

Graham Davey is Treasurer of the Gandhi Foundation and has also organised many Gandhi Foundation Summer Gatherings.

The Gandhi Foundation's AGM preceded the above talks. The Annual Report of the GF can be found on the website www.gandhifoundation.org
If you would like a printed version please contact the Editor (details on back cover of this newsletter).

Drone Wars Conference

Saturday 18 September 2010

10am-4pm at University of London Union, Malet Street

A day exploring the growing use of armed, unmanned aerial vehicles
in warfare and surveillance

Contact: Mary Dobbing, Fellowship of Reconciliation

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Gandhi on Gender Violence and Gender Equality

Anupma Kaushik

In traditional patriarchal societies it is generally believed that women should remain confined to their families and under legal and customary subjection of their husbands or other male family members. This was also the situation in pre-independent India. In fact gender equality was never in existence in India, although in the Vedic period women enjoyed more rights and better status than in post Vedic, medieval and British periods. During pre-Gandhian times gender inequality and gender violence were all pervasive. Women were regarded as the root cause of all evil and responsible for the downfall of men. Women had a decidedly inferior status and were totally dependent on men. Women were confined to the family and remained under legal and customary subjection of their husbands or other male family members. Customs and practices like female infanticide, child marriage, purdah (veil), dowry, polygamy, sati, repeated pregnancies, permanent and pathetic widowhood, illiteracy, wife beating and verbal abuse made the life of common women very hard. Although some social reformers, missionaries and government had made efforts to remove some of the hardships of women and to provide them some opportunities like education very few women benefited from these. In such an atmosphere Gandhi gave a totally new perspective regarding gender equality and non violence. He not only opposed the harmful practices and encouraged regeneration of women but gave the ideal that women are not just equal and different but superior to men.

Opposition to Harmful Practices

Gandhi opposed practices which were injurious to women and girls even if such practices had the sanction of Dharma Shasta, law and tradition.

Female infanticide: He was against the practice of female infanticide. He discovered that the birth of a girl was generally unwelcome as she was to be married off and had to live and work in her marital home. Another reason was the custom of dowry which made the girl child liability for her parents.¹ Gandhi was clearly of the view that people should rejoice at the birth of boy as well as girl as the world needs both. People should make no distinction between a son and a daughter and both should be welcomed alike. He also opposed the custom of dowry which was one of the reasons behind female infanticide.

Female illiteracy: Gandhi believed that lack of education and information was the roots cause of all the evils against women.² He believed that education is therefore necessary for women as it is for men. He believed that education is essential for enabling women to assert their natural right, to exercise them wisely and to work for their expansion. He thought that low level of literacy among women had deprived them of socio-political power and also the power of knowledge. He stood for proper

education for women as he believed that after receiving education they become sensitive to the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.³

Child marriage: Gandhi objected to child marriages, for they were devoid of the element of consent on the part of the concerned boy as well as the girl.⁴ He believed that both the boy and the girl should be developed physically and mentally at the time of marriage and that they should have a voice in the choice of their life partner. He looked at the practice of child marriage as a moral and physical evil. Child marriage to him was an immoral inhuman act which made innocent girls objects of man's lust; ruined the health of many a child mother and converted tender age girls into widows.⁵ He also believed that the practice of child marriage came in the way of the progress of women. They were married off and expected to bear and rear children at an age in which they themselves should be in schools. He said women cannot make any progress so long as there are child marriages, as it results in denial of educational opportunities and deprivation of joys of girlhood. Moreover it causes physical, mental and emotional cruelty as girls are rushed into adulthood prematurely and made subservient to their husbands. He advocated mobilization of strong public opinion and supported agitations by the local people against such happenings. He fully supported the child marriage restraint bill.

Dowry: Gandhi believed that the custom of dowry turned young girls into mere chattels to be bought and sold. He called this custom pernicious as it lowered the status of women; destroyed their sense of equality with men and defiled the institution of marriage.⁶ To curb the venomous dowry system he advised every parent to educate their daughters so that they refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying and would remain a spinster than to be party to the degrading terms. He suggested that a strong public opinion needs to be formulated against dowry and such young men who soil their fingers with such ill gotten gold should be excommunicated from society. He advocated change in education and also stressed the need of taking recourse to radical measures like organizing youth movements and offering satyagraha against those perpetuating the custom.⁷

Purdah (Veil): Gandhi regarded purdah as inhuman and immoral, for it impeded the march towards swaraj (self rule) by restricting women.⁸ It denied women freedom as well as free gift of God like light and fresh air. It also crippled the free movement of women; interfered with their advancement and their capacity for doing useful work for the society. It weakened instead of strengthening morality for it did not help in preserving chastity as chastity is not a hot-house growth and cannot be superimposed.⁹ It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of purdah. It must grow from within and must be capable of withstanding every temptation. Men must be able to trust womenfolk as the latter are compelled to trust them. He believed that the veil generates the feeling of insecurity in women and results in deterioration of their health. He appealed to public in general and women in particular to tear down purdah.¹⁰ He was sure that abolition of purdah would lead to mass education for both men and women and would help women in gaining strength and becoming an active participant in the struggle for swaraj.

Pathetic widowhood: Gandhi was deeply concerned about the condition of child widows who were denied the rights to re-marry and also suffered other social and

legal disabilities. He advised the parents to see that the child widows are duly and well married for he believed that they were never really married.¹¹ Regarding adult widows, he felt that the decision to re-marry should rest with the widow, but he was against the wrong done to the widows. He protested against the prevalent belief that a widow crossing one's path is a bad omen. He considered it to be his good fortune to see a widow in the early hours of the day. He regarded her blessing to be a great boon.¹² He regarded enforced widowhood as an unbearable yoke that defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion.¹³ He advised every family to treat a widow with utmost respect and to give her facilities to expand her knowledge.¹⁴ The ultimate remedy suggested by Gandhi was to consider the widow and the widower on a par so far as re-marriage was concerned.

Sati: Gandhi found the roots of the sati custom in the blind egoism of men. He argued that if a wife must prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband, then the husband must also prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife.¹⁵ To prove her sati-hood or loyalty she must not mount the funeral pyre of her dead husband but prove it through utilization of every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for cultivating renunciation and self discipline. To him sati was a futile exercise as instead of restoring the dead husband to life, it takes away one more life. Purity cannot be attained or realized by dying but can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of spirit from day to day.¹⁶

Polygamy and subjugation of wives: To Gandhi a wife was not the slave of the husband but his comrade, better half, colleague and friend. The wife is a co-sharer of the husband with equal rights and duties. Their obligation towards each other and towards the world must therefore be the same and reciprocal. He believed that a wife is not bound to be an accomplice in her husband's crimes and when she holds anything to be wrong she must dare to do the right. If a husband is unjust to his wife, she has the right to live separately.¹⁷ Married life, he believed, is intended to promote mutual good here and hereafter. It is meant to serve humanity. When one partner breaks the law of discipline, the right accrues to the other of breaking the bond. The wife or the husband may separate to serve the end for which they had united.

Molestation: He wanted girls to learn the art of protecting themselves against indecent behaviour of unchivalrous youth. If a woman is assaulted she should not stop to think in terms of ahimsa (non violence) as her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that comes to her mind in order to defend herself with all her strength and if need be die in the effort.

Prostitution: He regarded prostitution as a social disease or moral leprosy promoted by men who lack morality. He felt it to be a matter of bitter shame, sorrow and humiliation that a number of women have to sell their chastity for men's lust.¹⁸ He denounced prostitution as well as cabaret but realized that men were responsible for driving women into the flesh trade. He advised women to give up this profession and take up living by spinning khadi. He believed that such women can be rehabilitated by getting social acceptance by involvement in a noble cause and by extending opportunities of education and employment.

Support to Empowerment of Women

Gandhi did not stop at opposing the practices which were harmful to women but also forcefully advocated in favour of various rights of women.

Education: He believed that education was needed to awaken in the minds of women a consciousness of their present condition. He believed that education will enable women to assert their natural right and to exercise them wisely and to work for their expansion. However he also believed the since home life is entirely the sphere of women, they ought to have knowledge regarding domestic affairs and upbringing of children. Hence courses of instruction should be based on an appreciation of basic roles of men and women.

Property: Gandhi realised that property laws in British India were against women. However he felt that married women are co-sharers in their husband's power and privileges in spite of the law being against them. He also emphasized character and education as the real property that parents can transmit equally to their children.

Economic independence: He was not against economic independence of women. Some people feared that economic independence of women may lead to spread of immorality among them and disrupt domestic life. To that his answer was that morality should not depend upon the helplessness of a man or woman. It should be rooted in the purity of hearts. He wanted women to take up some work so as to supplement the earning of the family. He recommended work like spinning which will not disturb the home as he regarded their duties at home to be as important as men's duty to earn. He recommended equal payment to women.¹⁹

Franchise: He wanted women to have voting rights and equal status as men.²⁰

No legal bar: He did not want women to be restricted from any activity.

Equal treatment to a daughter: He believed that as both men and women are necessary for the world, the parents should treat their sons and daughters as equal and rejoice at the birth of both.

Wives as equal to husband: He wanted every husband to treat his wife as an 'ardhangini' and 'sahdharmini'.²¹ The wife is a comrade with same freedom which the husband sees for himself. She should have the right to participate in the very minutest details in the activities of men.

Women as equal to men: He believed that men and women are equal as the same atma (soul) dwells in the women's body. Since soul is sexless men and women are perfectly equal in the eyes of God.²² He believed that women have equal mental capacities; have the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of men; and have same right to freedom and liberty as men.²³

Women as individuals: He asked women to cease to consider themselves the object of men's lust.²⁴ They should stop adorning themselves to please their husbands and others. He believed it will save women from subordination to men and wives would be saved from beating by their husbands.²⁵ He thought jewellery to be a source of subordination as well as intimidation.²⁶ He believed that women of India had strength, ability, character and determination to stand on her own and work shoulder to shoulder with men in every walk of life. He had full faith in their sincerity and was sure that they would not lag behind in producing perfect performance.²⁷

Women in economic sphere: He believed that the loss of the spinning wheel brought about India's slavery and its voluntary revival will lead to freedom. In his view

women were best suited to take up spinning and the propagation of khadi and swadeshi.²⁸ To him for middle class it should supplement the income and for very poor women it could be the means of livelihood. He believed that it would mean a few coppers in hand where none existed before.²⁹ Besides it will bring about metamorphosis in the lives of women.³⁰

Women in the political arena: He called upon women to join the Indian National Congress and participate in the freedom struggle. There was a breath-taking abruptness about the entry of women into political life due to his influence. One moment they were not there, the next they were in the forefront of the scene.³¹ Women participated in political meetings and protest marches; bore lathi charge; courted arrest and even got shot.³² They could do so because Gandhi choose a particular form of struggle which suited women. Women did not feel limited or unequal to men. He mobilized women politically through his speeches, writings and personal example. Due to him women participation in the freedom movement and the presence of women in public sphere gained acceptability in India. It was made possible because men knew that the honour of their women was safe in a nonviolent struggle guided by Gandhi.³³

Women in constructive programme: Women were at the forefront of the constructive programme. They organised themselves; manufactured contraband salt; sold it from house to house; picketed wine, ganja, opium, toddy and foreign goods shop; spun and wore khadi; participated in prabhat pheries, demonstrations, prayers, meetings, marches; worked for Hindu-Muslim unity; and removal of untouchability. They also provided support to families when men were away.

Awareness of rights: As women got educated and participated in the public arena they became aware of their own position and rights. As a result many associations for women sprung up.

Women as superior to men: Gandhi considered women not only equal to men but in many ways superior to men. To him bravery lay in dying and not killing. He defined bravery in the highest sense of suffering and sacrifice. Hence to him the courage of self-sacrificing women was superior to men of brute force.³⁴ He declared that to call women the weaker sex was libel and a gross injustice to women. He believed that strength means moral power hence women are immeasurably superior to men. Even as a general rule he considered that the standards observed by women in their conduct were superior to those of men. He therefore advised the latter to copy the former and not vice versa.³⁵

Women as Shakti: Gandhi believed that women have been gifted by God but their marvelous power has been lying dormant. If they realize their power they can dazzle the world.

Criticism

Critics may argue that Gandhi did not regard men and women as identical. He did not want women to neglect their families or leave the traditional role of nurturer. He wanted women to attend to the bringing up of their children; give peace to the husband when he returns home tired; minister to him; sooth him if he is angry and do any work they can staying at home. He also believed that women's education should be based on their role as nurturers and that women are co-sharers in their husband's

privileges. All the above will lead critics to argue that he in fact reinforced the gender role that traditional Indian society prescribes for women.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that Gandhi was neither a feminist nor anti-feminist. He was a great soul who was saddened by the deplorable condition of Indian women and wanted to uplift their status; rid them of suppressive customs; and wanted them to play important roles in social, political and economic life of India. He advocated and worked for gender equality and the end of gender violence from the above angle and was successful in making positive change in the lives of many women.

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The Gandhi Summer Gathering 2010

Saturday 24th July – Saturday 31st July 2010

This year the Summer School and Gathering was held at St Christopher School, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. This is a new venue for us. The school was founded in 1915 by Dr Armstrong Smith and is a long term proponent of progressive education. The aim was to create a community that would encourage the positive development of all capacities that lie within the child. The philosophy has links with our own Gandhian ideals. The building we stayed in was called ‘Arunside’, a sixth form residential block a few minutes’ walk from the school. It was a large old white brick building with several floors and staircases. It was a bit of a rabbit warren, and very exciting for small children to explore! There was a complicated security system and several of the front doors had different security codes, which took a little getting used to. Downstairs there was a ‘largish’ living area in a long rectangular shape featuring several large sofas. There was also a small kitchen and dining room. The dining room seated 10 maximum, which was a little disconcerting, but happily, we also used three tables and benches in the lovely large enclosed back garden. As if magically, we all managed to eat comfortably, even on the one rainy day, by squatting round tables in the living room. What appeared to be a potential difficulty for us really didn’t seem so bad after all.

Twenty two of us were accommodated inside either in single or double study bedrooms. These were very comfortable and an unusually high standard for summer school accommodation. A few people chose to camp. Our usual *sramdana* cleaning rota had to be abandoned as cleaners were employed daily. This had a mixed reception. Some of us thought that the work groups help us to bond and form community. Others were happy not to do domestic tasks. One thing we all agreed on, however, was that there was much too much unnecessary cleaning going on. Having been relieved of this duty our work routine was confined to food preparation and washing up.

Ken produced a menu for the week of delicious vegetarian food which we all enjoyed. On Wednesday evening we were all treated to pancakes cooked by the young people.

We hired a school hall a few minutes' walk away for our group meetings where we could all sit in a circle. The two young children played happily with playmobil in a room at the far end of the hall during our meetings, so we were all well accommodated.

Structure of the day

7.00am yoga in the school hall with Arya and Rakesh

8.00am breakfast

9.00am morning meditation and sharing

9.30am (approx) morning session in the school hall

12.30pm lunch

2-3.30pm afternoon session with Rakesh or visitor

5.00-6.00pm discussion with Arya

6.30pm supper

8.00pm evening entertainment

9.00-9.30 evening meditation



Free time

Free time was spent playing cricket, football, badminton and creative games on the lawn in the garden. We engaged in art, singing, making music and informal conversation. Much of it was spontaneous and grew out of a sense of freedom and community. The evening was spent circle dancing, singing, playing quizzes, slide shows, and watching films or presentations. Rakesh led afternoon sessions on sustainability which included foraging. One evening Krupa Patel and her sister gave a slide show about their voluntary work in Ghana.

Participants

Twenty five people attended, not including two families of four who came for the day. Many nationalities were represented. Participants came from India, Croatia, the

Netherlands, Spain and Italy. Many had attended the Summer School before and it was good to see old friends and make new ones. There was a range of ages, including pensioners, single people, young families, teenagers and small children. There was a mix of ages within all activities and work groups, including the cricket and circle dancing. We all came together as we want to live as a community. It felt a bit like a large extended family, where respect and tolerance and friendship were experienced by all.



Welfare and responsibility

Below is a summary of the morning sessions we participated in all week. The sessions were full and varied and generated much discussion. I will not try to reproduce them here because I will not do them justice, but I offer just snippets of their content. The sessions were led by different members of our group in turn. The first part was a presentation, followed by small group discussions on the theme and then sharing within the large group. I had much to consider, and at the end of the week left with a determination to pursue simple living, which I hold dear, but too often do not give enough attention to, or worse, forget.

The Morning sessions Sunday

Mark summarised the life of Gandhi. David gave each of us a comprehensive handout of extracts from the book *The Mind of Gandhi*. The extracts were around the theme of Welfare and Responsibility. This handout was for us to use and contemplate

all week. Having studied it as a group in some detail we concluded that Gandhi was not just a remote historical figure, but that his life and work is just as relevant today.

Monday

Trevor presented a session on the Welfare State with contributions from Barbara on being a conscientious objector, and Nat on nationalisation versus privatisation. We divided into small groups to discuss: 1) What responsibility if any does a citizen have towards society, 2) what should a national government provide universally? E.g. water, electricity and internet access. It was a lively and interesting discussion and many different views were expressed.

Tuesday

This session was about the role of the individual and individual responsibilities. Heather talked about her own family history and her subsequent involvement in the local community. Nona ran a role play workshop. Small groups discussed certain scenarios: the needs of an elderly person, the closure of a youth group and the choices to be made about how to use a gap year. The group had to decide who was responsible – the individual or the wider community. When the groups fed back it was clear that everybody had responsibility at some level. We then discussed the small scale community where everybody takes responsibility for the welfare of all and everyone participates in the community according to his or her skills and abilities.

Wednesday

Graham presented the International dimension. In GB wealth generated stays in this country. Developing countries which are victims of being former colonies see their profits flow back to the rich country investing in the development. In the 1940s the British Government accepted responsibility for poverty in former colonies and the Department of International Aid was formed. However, much aid is siphoned off by corrupt governments. In small groups we were asked to discuss one or more of the following: 1) should British overseas aid be directed towards former colonies or to areas of greatest need e.g. should aid be redirected from India to Afghanistan? 2) should bilateral aid be related to quality of governance? 3) how far should we respect the cultures of immigrants to this country with relation to: face covering, status of women, halal meat etc.? 4) what can we do to help redress the imbalance between rich countries and poor?

Thursday

Graham presented the role of the third sector in Welfare. The first sector is the public sector – local and national government; the second sector is the private sector – business, trade and profit, and the third sector are the voluntary organisations – charities, political parties and special interest groups. During the last 5-6 years an

extra 30,000 organisations have sought registration. Some of these groups bring about social change, some are about human rights, and some are the pursuit of leisure. Some seek improvement in the gap between rich and poor globally and some alleviate social isolation and loneliness. The group were then asked to list the organisations we are involved with. An extensive list included the following: The Lifestyle movement; Amnesty; Sustrans; Mind; U3A; Calcutta Reserve Fund; Interfaith Foundation; Fellowship of Reconciliation; Conflict Research Foundation; National Trust; Children's Society; YHA; Foundation for Nature (Netherlands); Scouts Association; Naturewise; WWF; Bedford Climate Change Forum; Campaign Against the Arms Trade; and others. In all Graham counted 48 organisations. The attractions of these organisations are lack of cumbersome bureaucracy, as a political pressure group and to encourage and inspire us to take action which you may not if you were not involved in a group. Following on from this we were asked in small groups to discuss how we could develop the Gandhi Foundation. The results were:

- 1) Sponsor someone from around Kingsley hall to come to the Gandhi School/ Gathering.
- 2) Taking video clips and photographs of Gandhian events and promoting them on Youtube. Making better use of our Facebook page.
- 3) Put up an exhibition at the Imperial War Museum.
- 4) A slide show or audio-visual presentation on a DVD to be given to schools. Gandhi's life is already part of the school's curriculum.
- 5) Meeting at weekends during the year.
- 6) Target interested groups of people and organise volunteers to talk to them.
- 7) Have more workshops on Gandhian philosophy and nonviolence.
- 8) Undertake practical voluntary work initiatives, either as an individual or in a group.

Friday

On Friday Mark led a session on an ideal welfare state, a Utopia. Mark said Thomas More's Christian fiction about Utopia was of a community based on love, nonviolence and possessions held in common.

In the afternoon a teacher from St Christopher's School showed us the school wormery. This a series of boxes full of worms who digest uncooked food peelings and turn them into valuable compost for growing vegetables, an example of permaculture in practice.

At supper we celebrated Ken's birthday with a cake, sang Happy Birthday in English, and Hester and Ester and Wim sang us a rousing Dutch alternative birthday song.



Then we went over to the hall for our Friday night party of home-made entertainment hosted by Michael. This is real old fashioned light hearted fun, a variety show. Individually or in groups we perform for our friends. This could be a dance, a song, a joke, a game, a poem, a reading, a musical recital, or even something athletic or magical. Sometimes audience participation is requested, but never compulsory. We always have lots of fun, without the need for any inebriation!

*Annaliese (age 8) sang a solo song. * Clara (16+) read an "Interview with God". *Vanessa, Ken and Mark, under the title of "A Human Orchestra" led us into singing a round in harmony. * Graham, Nona and Ester provided a recorder group. *Hester invited each of us to compliment each other. * Chris read a poem full of pathos for a sick seagull. * Brian read short poems he had written for waitresses in coffee shops, and then serenaded us with a song from the musical, South Pacific. *Barbara read a letter written in the 1820s by her great grandmother, about her experiences as a missionary arriving in New Zealand. Wim described his family self-build house with sedum grass roof and Ester provided her drawing of the house. *Nona read a story.* Heather read an essay on loneliness from Nat's son's book, Hiraeth.* Ester and Annaliese taught us the Dutch ring games "Billy Bopp" and "Sounds". David for a second year led us in a circle dance to parts of Beethoven's Ode to Joy in his 9th Symphony. Finally Michael offered us a Celtic blessing for travellers.

Conclusion

I haven't been able to mention everyone by name but it would be wrong to get the impression that only a few people did most of the organisation and preparation. Everyone on the camp contributed, some in ways too small to mention, but critical none the less to the success of the whole camp. Deep bonding took place during the week and for some of us who have known each other from previous years it felt like returning home to our spiritual family. We look forward to many future gatherings. Please enjoy these photos of our week together. *Trudy Lewis*



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What Would a Gandhian Society Look Like?

George Paxton

Much of Gandhi's constructive programme was based on village India where the majority of Indians lived (and I believe still do). However, in the West, and increasingly throughout the world, most people live in urban centres. This, along with changes in society brought about by rapid technological developments perhaps require some adaptation of Gandhi's ideas. Gandhi at times severely criticised modern civilisation, most especially

in *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule) written in 1909, but at other times he was more accepting of technological developments. If Gandhi's broad principles were applied to modern society what would it look like ?

Among the liberal democracies a tolerance of the diverse religious and ideological traditions has taken root, indeed increasingly going beyond tolerance to embracing a real interest in both the different and the common elements of traditions other than ones own. Gandhi, although calling himself a Hindu, went further and adopted elements from Jainism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Humanism. British society has gone some way to catching up with Gandhi in this respect. While some intolerance persists, and indeed in some quarters has increased, an acceptance of a pluralistic society is widespread.

How different is the picture when we turn to the political and economic sphere, especially the latter. A basically free market system operates which admittedly has its worse features mitigated by social security in the developed states. But even in these communities there is gross inequality with outrageously high incomes for a small minority who are so oblivious to the injustice that they take their millions without embarrassment (and even when they have done their job badly). Gandhi was a great egalitarian, something which we badly need both between nations and within them (Wilkinson and Pickett have demonstrated this in *The Spirit Level* – see *The Gandhi Way* no. 104). One of Gandhi's major ideas, however, has, I believed, not proven a practical way forward and that is Trusteeship – that the wealthy should retain their wealth but not for their own use. Such is human nature that few will use their wealth only for the good of others. A more realistic way forward is to have common ownership of companies by those who work in them with decisions taken collectively. Private ownership, except for very small businesses, should disappear so that profits do not accrue to one individual or a small elite. This would also mean a healthy empowerment of the workers in the company. But if Trusteeship is interpreted in a wider sense, that is that everyone has a responsibility to use their income and wealth wisely then there is value in the concept.

Another aspect of our economic world is the vast size of multi-national companies, some exceeding the wealth of smaller countries. The power yielded by the few who control these corporations is anti-democratic and sometimes dangerous. International agreements to limit the size and sphere of operations of these giants is desirable. Gandhi's preference was always for small scale, whether in political or economic structures. Another relevant aspect is what Gandhi called *swadeshi* – a preference for local products, whether in agricultural products or in manufactured goods. This ties in with small scale activities and is also highly relevant to reducing impact on the environment. Trade where price only matters results in goods being transported from one side of the world to the other without consideration of wider impacts. Where international trade does take place it is important that it should be done on a fair trade basis. As individuals we can make

purchasing decisions that have an impact and if we are not on very low incomes we have options. Today there is also too much travel by too many people who are using up limited oil reserves and polluting the atmosphere. Gandhi travelled a good deal (although he was never on an aeroplane) but that was at a time when world population was much smaller than today and many fewer people travelled.

A fundamental principle of current economic ideology is that one must have growth – something that runs counter to our knowledge of the finite resources of the planet. Gandhi's advocacy of restraint and a more static society fits the facts in a way that conventional economics doesn't. It is important, Gandhi believed, that everyone who is fit to work should – there is an obligation on the individual to seek work, but the corollary is that the state has an obligation to provide employment if necessary.

European culture's distinction between animals we keep as pets or companions and those we eat is not one Gandhi would recognise. A population that was vegetarian in diet, or vegan even more so, would be more consistent ethically. Furthermore the greatly reduced animal population that would result would help reduce global warming through reduced methane and carbon dioxide emissions. It would also save large areas of land which could be used for edible vegetation or trees, and savings in water usage, something which is appearing in many parts of the world. On economic, ecological and humane grounds a widespread move away from a flesh diet towards *ahimsa* would be an advantage.

Gandhi had a great belief in 'nature cure' to deal with health problems as well as advocating a health style conducive to good health. The latter is readily accepted in the West – in principle, although in a rather indulgent culture the practice often does not match up. Most people however would doubt the efficacy of natural cures when it comes to many illnesses. Gandhi himself was deeply grateful to have an appendectomy by a British army surgeon when in prison in 1924 so his belief in nature cure was qualified.

One area where Western culture has more than caught up with Gandhi is gender equality. Gandhi showed support for women wanting to enter careers when he encouraged his secretary in South Africa, Sonja Schlesin, to apply for training as an advocate. The application in 1909 was rejected as no woman had been envisaged in such a role. In India many of his staunchest colleagues were women and many women participated in *satyagraha* campaigns.

Perhaps the least useful idea and the least likely to be accepted in general in the desirability of celibacy. It is an issue difficult to ignore because it was so important to Gandhi, but he also universalised it and thought that everyone should follow the path of restraint or *brahmacharya*. This is also how excessive population size was to be avoided. He believed his control of the sex drive enabled him to achieve what he could not otherwise achieve. Gandhi was generally ascetic and while few would follow him all the way a less hedonistic lifestyle than we have today has something to be said for it.

Last, but no means least, is the issue of war and peace, violence and nonviolence. While Gandhi admired courage (as a child he had been timid) which might be displayed by a soldier, better still was the courage of a nonviolent soldier or *satyagrahi*. He believed it was possible to defend a country, or community or an individual, by nonviolent means and it is necessary to develop methods for this. Alas, many states are more heavily armed than ever before, including India. Most politicians still have a misguided faith in the efficacy of the threat of destruction and death. It should be obvious that a world that had destroyed its nuclear weapons, abolished trade in weapons, and greatly reduced armaments in general would be a safer world, and in fact the countries of the world have agreed that general disarmament should be an achievable goal. It would also release vast resources for life-enhancing purposes. As inequalities between and within states diminish conflicts would too. Conflicts would still occur but they would be amenable to nonviolent solutions including those pioneered by Gandhi.

A Gandhian society would exhibit a tolerance of diversity, a fairer economic system, a change in diet, a greater awareness of impacts on the environment, and a new concept of defence. To reach such a society we require a new attitude of mind and there will be vested interests to overcome but, I suggest, none of these things are impossible. Δ

Letters

Immigration and human rights

Arizona's new immigration law makes being an illegal immigrant a felony and gives law enforcement permission to interrogate anyone who causes "reasonable suspicion." Let me begin by saying that we should not vilify supporters of this strategy. It should also be acknowledged that our country has experimented with similar laws in the past. John Adams authorized the Alien & Sedition Act making every French man, woman, and child living in the New Republic a potential enemy combatant. Franklin Roosevelt incarcerated Japanese-Americans during WWII and the Patriot Act makes Arab profiling a significant focus of homeland security after 9-11.

Arizonians have legitimate grounds for concern. Juarez, Mexico, reported over 1,600 murders in 2009. There is widespread panic that this unadulterated slaughter will continue to seep across the border. This year Phoenix will have the most kidnappings in North America. On a far more mundane level, many worry about the emasculation of jobs. If 10 million Mexicans were declared citizens overnight, how would America's fragile economy respond? And from an international perspective, amnesty seems to violate the expressed wishes of the Mexican government. These concerns should be acknowledged and respected.

Proponents of amnesty contend that in order to remain a nation of laws we must provide a way to get every undocumented resident on the books. The

Arizona response is shortsighted and will fail to stem the tide of border crossings. Likely it will promote unmitigated vigilantism. Furthermore, the Arizona immigration bill endangers the lives of children and drives vulnerable populations away from the path to legalization and further into the abyss of the black market. This bill turns ordinary civilians into criminals. So rather than capitalize on 10 million new taxpaying citizens and actually creating a new job infrastructure centered on public and citizenship education, green energy construction and urban agriculture, our nation continues to play a viciously unwinnable game of cat and mouse.

Perhaps the best place to turn for moral guidance is the life experiences and teachings of Mohandas Gandhi. In 1906 the Transvaal Government in South Africa passed an ordinance which demanded that every Indian, man, woman or child register with the Office of Asiatics and take out a certificate of identification. Failure to apply would be an offense for which the defaulter could be deported or arrested. This blatant act of hegemonic racism came after the General Pass Regulations Bill (1905), which denied blacks the vote, limited them to fixed areas and before the South Africa Act (1910) that enfranchised whites, giving them complete political control over all other race groups.

Gandhi realized that these “laws” carried no moral authority. They stampeded on the natural rights of colored people living in South Africa and shamed every British subject from Johannesburg to Lancashire. As a trained barrister Gandhi argued that there is no reason to believe there is one law for the families and another for nations. “It is quite proper to resist and attack a system” he instructed, “but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and harms not only that being, but with him or her, the whole world.”

As American citizens we have no choice but to repeal this insidious bill. It jeopardizes not only the civil liberties of every person of color living in Arizona but corrupts the spirit of openness and humanness that should define us as Americans.

George Payne, M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, Rochester, NY

A Gandhi moon crater

I extend warm greetings to you from the Executive Council of the International Luna Society in New York.

On Monday of this week, our council acted upon the petition of more than 500 members from around the world and voted unanimously to designate a large crater on the Moon to honor Mohandas K Gandhi.

The honorary designation of the crater, which is located in the Moon’s Bay of Rainbows, pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi for his significant

contributions to the people of India, and his role in fostering nonviolent resistance to advance civil rights around the world.

The Luna Society has created an informational page regarding the Gandhi Peace Crater at: <http://www.lunasociety.org/gandhi/>

The designation of the crater becomes effective on Wednesday 16 June 2010. We would appreciate your comments and advice regarding this, and hope that you will extend this news to your communities.

David F Jackson, Executive Director, Luna Society International

News Items

B R Nanda

The leading historian Bal Ram Nanda who died in May 2010 was the founder and first director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. He built up impressive archives of the Indian Freedom Movement which included writings from different perspectives. His 1958 biography of Gandhi established itself as a standard text. Among his other books are *The Nehrus*; *Gokhale*, *Indian Moderates and the British Raj*; *Gandhi and His Critics*; *In Search of Gandhi*.

Donation to Ladakh school

The GF executive committee has decided to donate £2,500 to the Sacred New Era School in Ladakh in the Himalayas which now has over 150 pupils from Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu families. Since this decision Ladakh has been badly affected by torrential rain as in Pakistan although all the pupils and staff are safe and only some damage to one classroom occurred. Communications in the country have been severely affected. For further information contact Denise Moll, Tel: 01932 343614 or denise.newleaf@phonecoop.coop

Common Sense

Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins wrote on 5 June:

“We are safer than at any time since the Norman conquest. Yet £45bn is spent defending Britain against fantasy enemies ...

There are many evils that threaten the British people at present, but I cannot think of one that absolutely demands £45bn to deter it. Soldiers, sailors and air crews are no protection against terrorists, who anyway are not that much of a threat. No country is an aggressor against the British state. No country would attack us were the government to put its troops into reserve and mothball its ships, tanks and planes. Let us get real.”

Book review

GreenSpirit – Path to a New Consciousness Edited by Marian Van Eyk McCain O Books 2010 pp282 ISBN: 978 1 84694 290 7 Price: £11.99

Rupert Sheldrake says of this book: *“Never before have so many important ideas on these subjects been assembled between the covers of a single book”*

So, as a member of GreenSpirit, I opened it with keen anticipation. I was not disappointed and I venture to think you, dear reader, will not be either. Satish Kumar wrote the Foreword and Jenny Johnson illustrated with delicacy and beauty.

The book is in Four Parts: *Understanding the World and our Place in it & Understanding Ourselves; Spiritual Pathways; Greening our Culture; and Walking our Talk.* Each section is introduced sensitively, with acute observation, by the Editor.

Chapters are either written for the book or taken from the **GreenSpirit** quarterly Journal or from conferences held over the last few years. Contributors include Brian Swimme, Chris and Isabel Clarke, Matthew Fox, Neil Douglas-Klotz and David Korten as well as authors direct from the GreenSpirit family – and of course there is information about how you can become a member should you feel drawn to this active, dynamic group.

Subject matter covers topics such as *“What are humans for?”*, *“Seeing things differently”*, the psychology of humans and the newer, important Ecopsychology. It includes explorations of different Religions (including paganism), the education crisis, law, economics, permaculture – and their relationship to all things “green”. Finally, a history of GreenSpirit in the UK and GreenSpirit today – and on living more simply. So many Gandhian ideas in these pages.....see for yourself!

See what Satish Kumar says about Nature: *“I go in Nature as a pilgrim for the renewal of my spirit.....as a pilgrim I can observe Nature, learn from her and connect with her on a deeply spiritual level. I am not separate. I feel myself to be a part of the natural world.....life is sacred and (that) humans need to hold a deep reverence for all life.....Nature does not belong to humans, humans belong to Nature, humans are Nature, there is no distinction. The essays brought together in this book represent many shapes, colours, forms; they are like beautiful flowers, beautifully composed.”*

So be happy dipping into the “beautiful flowers” of this book.....there is so much in it, you are bound to find *something* you resonate with. Enjoy!

Denise Moll

