

## The Gandhi Foundation Multifaith Celebration

Afternoon of Sunday 30 January **or** 6 February 2011

Date and time to be confirmed

at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG

(Near Liverpool Street Rail Station, closest underground Aldgate)

*Theme: Religious Perspectives on the Environment*

Please confirm details nearer the time

from General Inquiries or website

as given on back cover of this newsletter

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Gandhi Foundation News

# A Non-Tourist Indian Experience

Leh, Ladakh & Dehra Dun

*Denise Moll*

Heading back for India, after a 3-year gap, I was unexpectedly filled with dread – wasn't I now *too old* for this kind of lark?? Then, equally unexpectedly, and with great thankfulness, a calm descended two days before flying .... and remained with me throughout the entire 2 weeks ..... I remained healthy, happy and enabled to live every moment in a way which made me feel very much alive. I was conscious, too, of the great privilege to share in other cultures, religions and be treated as 'one of the family'. I could only be deeply thankful to the One behind it all.

Leh, 11,000 ft high, had suffered a dreadful calamity on 5th August, when, following the worst torrential rain, thunder and lightening ever experienced or remembered in Ladakhi memory, a *cloudburst* hit the area, with water so violent and ferocious that it swept away everything in its wake .... buildings (including the hospital), people (about 150 died) and animals. Water, I learned, finds its own pathways, and therefore, it almost seemed like a miracle that some buildings remained, untouched, in the midst of devastation around them. I later learned that one of the teachers at Sacred New Era School, Reno Beno whom I had known previously, was one such person: her neighbours either side of her, were swept away in their houses, whilst her house – and husband and children – were left unharmed. As she told me of this horror, her face showed the strain of what she had been through, and the great shock she had suffered.

Leh, in fact, was in shock. No-one knew how to prevent such an occurrence – especially since it had struck out of the blue with no warning. Some felt it was 'global warming' in dire action; others were not so sure. But all were suffering from the after-effects. I was taken to see the areas worst affected, and tents set up for the homeless to live in. The rest of India, I gathered, had responded quickly and generously, and much money had been raised to help in the great re-building and re-settling programmes, which were under way. The West, too, had contributed – but the dreadful floods of Pakistan had understandably dominated the scene.

This gave Shabir Banday, Director of SNE School, an idea. He wanted to set up a fund to sponsor children made homeless or orphaned from the tragedy, and give them an education at SNE. This is in the process of being done, permission sought, etc. There was another little miracle that occurred for the School itself: the day before the cloudburst, Shabir's father had decided to repair leaks in the roof of one of the buildings. Had he not done so, many classrooms would have been irreparably damaged by the vicious rain. As it was, the school remained intact, and children could return there as soon as all the schools re-opened.



Devastation caused by cloudburst

Once again I was the guest of Shabir's parents in Leh – GM and Zubeida Bandy, in their typical and lovely Ladakhi home. Shabir arrived the day after me, having been to visit his bride-to-be who is studying in Bangalore. They are to be married next year and this year there was to be a traditional Engagement party. Shabir and I wasted no time in going to visit the school – about a 20 minute car ride away on the outskirts of Leh, towards the Airport, in a rapidly expanding development area. In fact, I was amazed at the proliferation of buildings all over Leh from 3 years ago – and the great increase in hotels & guest houses – although, sadly, the tourist industry was hit this year due to the cloudburst, and the September annual Festival cancelled.

I made almost daily visits to the school, and had a wonderful welcome from the children who insisted on giving me their precious sweets, and practised a few English sentences to our mutual amusement ! I noticed there was a greater healthy discipline in the school now for the 151 pupils, and teachers were more settled and confident, ably led by the Head, Pema Yudon. The main classroom building had been re-named: the GANDHI BLOCK, in recognition of Gandhi Foundation assistance, and the children were taught about Gandhi. I accompanied the upper classes on an Exposure trip to the Hall of Fame, which turned out to be a fascinating display of Ladakh's cultural and natural history, as well as a military record. One day the children stayed behind after Assembly, which is taken outside in the playground, for weekly Exercises (we might call it PE). A quite vigorous routine for them, and

I was told many of them have stiff limbs. I visited classrooms too, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, and absorbing different teaching methods.

Denise Moll with some of the younger children



Current needs for the school, and what teachers would like are: a Library; a



science lab for older children; a volunteer to teach English next year; and ....

the more immediate need .... a new school bus. The current one certainly leaves something to be desired (I thought) as we jolted over potholes, and swung round corners .... this bus would *not* be allowed to operate in the UK .... but our road rules are very different! A new bus will now be bought next Spring – put back because of road damage due to the cloudburst – and I am proud to say we have raised enough money to put down a deposit of £5,000, so the bank will lend the rest; the old bus will be part-exchanged.

Although Shabir and his mother are not invited to the Engagement party (tradition, I was told), the wider family are, and I was also included. It is called “Taking the Tea” as the bridegroom’s family provide



urns of butter tea and plates of sweetmeats. We sat on rugs round the floor, from 11am to 5pm, and were constantly served with snacks, drinks and food, and the beautiful bride arrived, with a handmaiden, and they sat, as is tradition, in silence (“the bride-to-be is shy” I was told) – and it was fascinating to experience this tradition, so very new to me. I came away with a sore bottom (!) but very glad to have been part of the proceedings.

And so .... my adventures continued in Dehra Dun, staying with a Tibetan family, but enough for now. For the truly brave-hearted, I have written a 20-page diary from start to finish ..... and a cheque for £3.50 will cover the costs and provide a surplus for the school: to me at 21 Fleetwood Court, Madeira Road, West Byfleet, Surrey KT14 6BE. Thank you for your patience – it has been fun to share, and Shabir and I are so grateful to the Gandhi Foundation for their moral and practical support. Δ

## An Hour With Bapu

Keshwar Jahan

India attains Independence. She was only eight years old. Awareness of the horrors of war came at an early age, as she sat beside her parents and listened to the radio bulletins of the Second World War. Everyday the piteous cry “Could I have some rice water, please” from beggar women rang in her ears. The nights bought little respite. They lived in a single storied house in a middle class locality. There would be mighty knocks on the door. Her father would shout that this was a family residence. Around them women waited all night as they sought to abate the hunger in the minds and bodies of foreign soldiers and in the process sought to mitigate the raw hunger gnawing in their bowels. At that age she learnt that a woman’s body was a commodity as well. There was more. Calcutta was witness to horrific riots, among the worst in human history. Terrified and panic stricken, families fled from one locality to another. Gory and gruesome details of this frenzied mass murder reached her ears.

In the midst of all this came the much awaited and aspired for Independence. Friends and relatives left the country of their forefathers to start a new life in a new country, Pakistan. Many vowed never to leave their homeland, only to change their minds later. At this young age, the departure of so many loved ones left her with a heavy heart.

She was born to a politically aware family. Her father was an active congressman. An uncle was a founder member of the Communist Party. Another uncle was the regional chairman of the Muslim League.

Amidst many anxieties and the pain of separation, Independence was welcomed with many hopes and aspirations. Many freedom fighters gathered at her house from the early morning. The rising sun of this new dawn was witness to the pledge of building up this new country.

At this time Gandhiji was in Calcutta, residing at a house in Beliaghata. For those who visited this house and for those who gathered there, it was a place of pilgrimage. The young girl would attend Gandhiji’s prayer meeting at this house, along with her parents. She understood little, but would listen respectfully and be charmed by it all. At her home Gandhiji was referred to as ‘Bapu’.

Even after Independence, the riots continued, leading to confusion and uncertainty in the Indian Muslim community. Muslim Nationalist leaders were worried by this. They arranged to meet Bapu in August-September 1947 to discuss issues regarding the Muslim community, how they should work within the community and what the Congress’s stand was. The young girl’s father was a member of the group that met Bapu.

The girl took for granted that she would be included in the visiting group and would thereby get an opportunity to meet Bapu. At that age, emotions lose out to reason. At home the spinning wheel was used to make thread that was

woven into cloth called Khadi. At the appointed time, she was ready wearing her homespun Khadi dress. On hearing that there was no way that she could accompany the adults, she employed her only weapon, tears. The tears began to flow, ceaseless and uncontrollable. Finally she was taken along. It was decided that she would wait outside during the meeting.

At the venue, no one stopped her from entering. Bapu, in his familiar style, was seated on a wooden cot. The delegates took their seats in front of him. The girl however moved to the wooden cot and sat quietly in a corner. After the introduction and greetings, the meeting began. The girl seemed to go unnoticed by Gandhiji.

Regardless of the fifteen minutes time limit, the discussion continued for an hour. Finally, the representatives got up to take their leave. Gandhiji then beckoned the girl to him. She went forward and touched his feet, he gestured her to sit beside him. After enquiring her name, school, class, he asked her if she had anything to say to him. She did not know any Hindi. But she had attended many of his prayer meetings with her parents. She knew the two Suras (verses) of the Holy Quran that were recited at his meetings. She recited the two verses in Arabic. Gandhiji then asked her if she knew the meaning of these verses. She told him the meaning in Bengali. Bapu was very pleased. He said to the girl's father: "So many people recite Slokas without knowing their meaning. I am very happy to see that this little girl knows the meaning of the beautiful Arabic verses she recited."

The little girl has come a long way in life. On many occasions she had had to shed tears. But the tears she shed on the autumn morning of 1947 were rewarded with a priceless treasure. Everyday she carries cherished memories of that meeting with Bapu.

A translation of the Suras of the Quran, which were recited at Gandhiji's prayers, is given here for the curious reader.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

The Beneficent, the Merciful

Master of the Day of Judgment.

Thee (alone) we worship, Thee (alone) we ask for help.

Show us the straight path.

The Path of those whom Thou has favoured;

Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger, nor of those who stray.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Say: He is Allah, The One

He begoteth not, nor was he begotten.

And there is no one comparable unto Him.



Keshwar Jahan was born in Calcutta to a Bengali Muslim family. She had the privilege to start her schooling under the tutelage of Mother Teresa at Loreto Convent, Calcutta. She then attended Victoria Institution and later Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta. Her education was interrupted by marriage at the age of 18. However, with strong encouragement and support, especially from her father-in-law she finished her formal education a few years after marriage. In her formative years she closely witnessed the Indian Independence struggle and the horrors of the partition of the country that left an everlasting impression on her. Also, her family was politically and socially aware and she was exposed to discussions on socio-political issues with many stalwarts of that time. These factors may have contributed to her involvement in social welfare, such that now even at the age of 72, she is intimately associated with the All Bengal Women's Union, a voluntary organization for rehabilitation and welfare of destitute women. She is also involved with many other organizations and the print and visual media on issues relating to gender and social discriminations.

# Hope in Israel-Palestine

## GF International Peace Award

*Trevor Lewis*

This year the Gandhi Foundation's Annual Lecture and Peace Award took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November in the House of Lords, in a session chaired by Lord Bhikhu Parekh, Vice President of the Gandhi Foundation. Bhikhu welcomed the guests and introduced Omar Hayat, a Trustee of the Gandhi Foundation who then explained why the Parents Circle – Family Forum (PCFF) had been chosen as recipients of the 2010 International Peace Award. Omar described how when researching the PCFF after they had been nominated he began to feel both hope and sorrow: hope in that such initiatives were taking place, and sorrow that there is need for such an organisation.

The PCFF is a grassroots organization of bereaved Palestinians and Israelis, families who have lost loved ones to violence in the conflict. It promotes reconciliation as an alternative to hatred and revenge. Each year they arrange hundreds of dialogue encounters between Israelis and Palestinians, to promote mutual understanding.



In 2009 the Peace Award had been received by the Children's Legal Centre (CLC) in recognition of their work representing young and vulnerable children worldwide. In that ceremony Denis Halliday had presented the award to Professor Carolyn Regan, the Director of the CLC. Professor Regan gave an outline of some of the work that the CLC does: providing individual legal advice, telephone helplines and upholding children's rights in many countries across the world, including some of the poorest. Then Carolyn presented this year's award jointly to Robi Damelin and Ali Abu Awwad, who are Public Relations officer and Programme manager of PCFF respectively.

Both Robi and Ali each gave a short acceptance speech. Robi mentioned that she had a family connection to Gandhi in that one of her relatives was Hermann Kallenbach who gave Gandhi the land for the ashram known as Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and was one of Gandhi's closest friends. Robi said that for her joining the PCFF was a way of making a difference by understanding the shared pain that Israelis and Palestinians both experience, and that she chooses to prevent other families from experiencing this pain.

Ali talked about some of his history as a prisoner of the Israelis, and reading about Gandhi on hunger strike. He said that the next generation will be the evidence for our movement today. Ali said he hoped that our vision will be shared and joined in a structure of making peace in the Middle East and everywhere.

Ali Abu Awwad and Robi Damelin holding the Gandhi statuette

Following on from the Peace Award, the Annual Lecture took the form of a panel discussion, looking at the Middle East conflict from the point of view of non-violence. The members of the panel were: Robi Damelin, Israeli representative from the PCFF; Ali Abu Awwad, Palestinian representative from the PCFF; Denis Halliday, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, Humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, and Patron of the Gandhi Foundation; Huw Irranca-Davies, MP and Patron of the PCFF. Lord Parekh asked the members of the panel to each speak for a few minutes before the session would be opened to speakers from the floor.



Robi started by stating that the long-term goal of the PCFF was to create a framework for a reconciliation process to be in place for when political agreements are signed. She outlined various initiatives that the PCFF is currently engaged in, including lobbying of politicians.

Ali posed the question – what could lead to freedom as a nation ? His answer was that there were two ways: one to work on themselves, to create this structure, the other is reconciliation. To leave the occupation and the memories of the occupation behind. Ali expressed his belief that they would one day be free. Perhaps not in his lifetime, but it would happen.

Denis Halliday started by saying he was concerned firstly by the violations of human rights in respect of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem, on the West Bank, and in Gaza. His second concern is with the people of Israel itself: while Israel persists in aggressive military occupation, sets aside the human rights of the Palestinians, and until she shows respect for her neighbours and all of her own people and understands the importance of living together in dignity without humiliation then the future of Israeli wellbeing is in doubt.

Denis cast doubt on the rôle of the United States as a broker of peace in the region, and called for the other nations of the region such as Turkey and Egypt to become more involved in finding solutions to the conflict. He referred to the US and Israel as rogue states. Having mentioned that the United States channels billions of dollars annually to Israel, which is mostly used for military purposes, Denis called for a massive injection of cash to

help the Palestinians. He also said he wanted to encourage the Palestinians and the Israelis to imbue in their children love and understanding for peace.

Huw Irranca-Davies spoke next, referring to himself as a hopeless naïve. Huw said he had first come across the PCFF in Palestine when he was visiting there with the Labour Friends of Israel and the Labour Middle East Council. In the back room of a bar they listened to stories where individuals were faced with tragedy and bereavement but chose not to hurtle towards anger but to go in the other direction, and indeed to encourage others to go along with them. Huw said he is a Patron of the PCFF because there is something transformative about the idea that summer camps, telephone lines between the different sides, and working in schools can make a difference.

Bhikhu Parekh then invited contributions from the floor. The first speaker expressed the view that peace and security are two sides of the same coin: there can be no peace without security and there can be no security without peace. The second said that he felt that ‘the Irish gentleman’ (Denis Halliday) made a diatribe against Israel and that it was unhelpful in the situation, and it made it difficult to move forward.

Following the next two speakers from the floor, Robi spoke and said that they all had made statements, not questions. She asked that if you care about the Israelis and the Palestinians, then help us to find a way to reconcile, do not create another conflict by making people be on the defensive – it doesn’t help. Robi said that she would appreciate questions that have to do with the human side, not politics.

Ali appealed for people not to be part of the problem, but to be part of the solution. He also said that the Palestinians cannot live like they do forever – something has to change.

There were some further contributions from the floor, commented upon by the panelists, before Lord Parekh summed up by referring back to the conflicts that Gandhi was concerned with: between Muslims and Hindus; the British rulers and the Indian people; the orthodox Hindus and the untouchables. Gandhi did not face anything quite like the current conflict in the Middle East, but the principles by which he lived are relevant today. Δ

## Peace – A Teenager’s View

*Safia Ahmed*

Murder.

Is that really what we need to accomplish peace?

How many people have been slaughtered through means of violent protests?

In protests, this month alone, over 100 civilians have been murdered. How many more will have to suffer the brutal, barbaric, bestial behaviour of those who are too selfish to think about others, about what they are actually doing. That they are taking somebody’s life!

“How many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry ? And how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died ?” These words were wisely said by the Bob Dylan. No more people should have to suffer and be killed because of violence.

You and your families deserve a better life. We all deserve to live in peace with the crosses, but by killing you cannot bring peace, you only make the crosses have more reasons to discriminate and this only creates hate among us.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Did he not go down in history ? Did he not expand civil rights without violence ? Not to mention that he was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Nowadays, whenever we say “I have a dream”, we all automatically think of this iconic figure. We all want peace, but what is the use of murdering.

Mahatma Gandhi. He fought for what he wanted; he knew that he did not need to kill to accomplish this. He spent 6 years of his life in jail, but he achieved what he wanted to. Along the way he said some wise words. Maybe you know some of these famous quotes:

*"When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall — think of it, always."*

*"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." – He is talking about capital punishment and how wrong it is. For those of you who do not know what this is, it is when you kill someone for killing someone else. But doesn't that also make you a murderer ? So does that mean you should also die ? It would just go round and round until no one is left.*

*The great Mahatma said "There are many causes that I am prepared to die for but no causes that I am prepared to kill for."*

If we follow these legendary people, then we won't have to sacrifice any more of our people. We can give a better education to our children; prevent them from living like we were forced to. You know what you want. I know what I want. We both want peace.

Just imagine a world with no bombs, no wars, no discrimination, no segregation and no sadness. We can make that if we do NOT follow the violent liberation militia, who have killed a lot of people and always in the name of peace. Too many people have already suffered.

So Go. Go to your homes. Think about everything that has been said and realise that violence is not the correct path for us to choose, however long it takes. We have moved from slavery to freedom, and we will move further.

Murder.

Is that really what we need to accomplish peace?

Explanation:

This article was written with reference to a book called 'Noughts and Crosses' by Malorie Blackman. I was asked to pretend I was a nought (A white person, who in the book is considered low and is discriminated). As a nought, I wanted to bring change and have equality among blacks (crosses, the higher class) and whites (noughts), through peaceful means. The audience is all noughts for this speech. Some of you may be thinking who the liberation militia are. They are a terrorist nought group who also want change, but want it through violent protests and bombings.

Safia Ahmed is 13 year old and the daughter of a Friend of The Gandhi Foundation.

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# The Tolstoy-Gandhi Connection

## *George Paxton*

Leo Tolstoy who died 100 years ago this year was a major influence on Gandhi.

In 1928 on the centenary of Leo Tolstoy's birth Gandhi paid tribute to the great Russian: "He was the most truthful man of his age. His life was an unbroken tide of striving to seek the truth, and to practice it as he found it. He never tried to hide truth or tone it down but set it before the world in its entirety without equivocation or compromise, undeterred by the fear of the world or temporal power."

Tolstoy's religious writings were one of the major influences on the development of Gandhi's ideas. Gandhi was in a state of indecision regarding religious belief in 1894 when someone in Britain sent a copy to him in South Africa of the recently translated essay *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. Gandhi was overwhelmed by it. After deep study of the scriptures Tolstoy had discarded the supernatural element in Christianity – the miracles in the New Testament and the theology of the Church and retained the ethical teaching of Jesus as the core of Christianity. Moreover his application of love or compassion to social issues led him to reject all government and law which inevitably, he believed, were based on force and so were incompatible with Christianity. In other words he became a Christian anarchist. To his credit he tried to apply his new principles in his own life – working in the fields of his estate, freeing his serfs, establishing a school for children of the estate and teaching in it himself, becoming vegetarian, giving up rights to his own writings, renouncing ownership of his estate. This did however bring him into conflict with his family especially his wife Sonya. Gandhi experienced a similar family conflict when he began to reshape his lifestyle.

One can see the older man's influence on the younger in such things as his taking up manual labour (farming, sandal making, later spinning); in the simplification of diet and clothing; in the renunciation of wealth; in the

refusal to accept the authority of any scripture; in the idea that the wealthy and powerful are responsible for the impoverishment of the masses – although Gandhi did not go as far as Tolstoy in his denunciation of the state and took a slightly more pragmatic position.

On 1st October 1909 Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy from Westminster Palace Hotel, London, where he was staying in order to lobby politicians for the civil rights of South African Indians. Gandhi told Tolstoy something of his campaigns which at that time he called ‘passive resistance’. He also asked Tolstoy’s permission to publish a long letter that Tolstoy addressed to an Indian revolutionary, Taraknath Das, who was living in the USA. Tolstoy replied briefly but very positively to Gandhi’s letter. Gandhi then sent a copy of a biography of himself – the very first – written by the Rev Joseph Doke, a colleague in South Africa, before leaving for that country.

Some months later, having translated into English the short book *Hind Swaraj* which Gandhi had written in Gujarati on board ship on his return journey, he sent a copy to Tolstoy who, although his health was deteriorating, read with great interest. Gandhi’s colleague, Hermann Kallenbach, also wrote to Tolstoy to inform him that he had named a new ashram near Johannesburg, ‘Tolstoy Farm’. On 7th September Tolstoy wrote his last, and longest, letter to Gandhi in which he described the incompatibility of violence and Christianity, whose essence is love. On 7th November 1910 Tolstoy died.

Gandhi had already begun to build upon Tolstoy’s ‘non-resistance’ which was to develop into satyagraha, a morally acceptable method of political action that did not involve violence.

*The Letter to a Hindu* and the exchange of letters between Tolstoy and Gandhi have been published (in English as well as German) by Christian Bartolf of Gandhi-Informations-Zentrum, Postfach 210109, 10501 Berlin, Germany. <http://home.snafu.de/mkgandhi>

A feature film *The Last Station* focusing on Tolstoy’s last year was released in 2009. The film concentrates on the tempestuous relationship between Leo and Sonja as seen through the eyes of his new secretary, Valentin Bulgakov.

## Letter

### **Meeting Gandhi’s closest surviving friend**

Recently I succumbed to repeated invitations from Gandhian activist friends to visit their ashram in south Gujarat to come and share my work on aluminium and the Maoist situation. We arrived after midnight. Very basic, but lovely, in a tribal area.

The next morning I joined the prayer session at 6.30 led by the very frail Gandhian who lives there who I was meeting for the first time, who’d just been seriously ill. At 11 I gave a talk, sitting on a desk next to him. There were searching questions about the Maoist conflict as well as corporate takeovers going on. The old man next to me said little, but held my hand with

a rare warmth. The mosquitos there are among the worst I've met – we all found meal times in the open dining space an agony.

Several young women and single mothers live in the ashram, cooking the meals etc. One is a refugee from the anti-Posco movement – the movements against Posco, the south Korean steel company, and Tata at Kalinganagar are the two biggest movements in Orissa – and two of the most significant in India, especially now now that Vedanta is for the moment defeated. She described to us how police dragged her, beat her, put her in jail.

As we were about to go yesterday evening, my friends invited me to play for the old man, and with violin I sang a raga and then two of the songs that Bob Dylan and Joan Baez used to sing. The old man was spinning – a daily practice. He still spins at least 500 metres a day. After I finished he said, "Joan sang those for me, when we spent an evening together in 1969". He was then touring the world on the centenary of Gandhi's birth to bring home his message.

My host was Narayan Desai. His father Mahadev was Gandhi's personal secretary, who with Gandhi let Narayan off school to work full time in the freedom movement, which he did from the age of 12 to 22. As I left, my hosts presented me with his 4 volume biography of Gandhi, recently translated from Gujarati. Also an invitation to come and join them there whenever I can .... I felt utterly humbled by this honour, but feel too that Gandhi would be completely at one with a wide network of people working in the movements in India for justice and peace as well as for preserving its ecosystems from the corporate onslaught.

Gandhi knew that what he fought for had not been achieved. India's freedom struggle is now as much as it was then – it is the Posco movement, the Kalinganagar movement against Tata, the move to stop the rampant corporate takeover of village India going on in hundreds of places. It's up to us – many of us, to wake each other up. This isn't only for India. Gandhi's message wasn't, and the potential here goes far beyond saving local communities and ecosystems, vital as these are.

*Felix Padel, felixorisa@yahoo.com*

## Book Reviews

**Gandhi's Interpreter: A Life of Horace Alexander** Geoffrey Carnall  
Edinburgh University Press 2010 ISBN 978-0-7486-4045-4 HB pp314

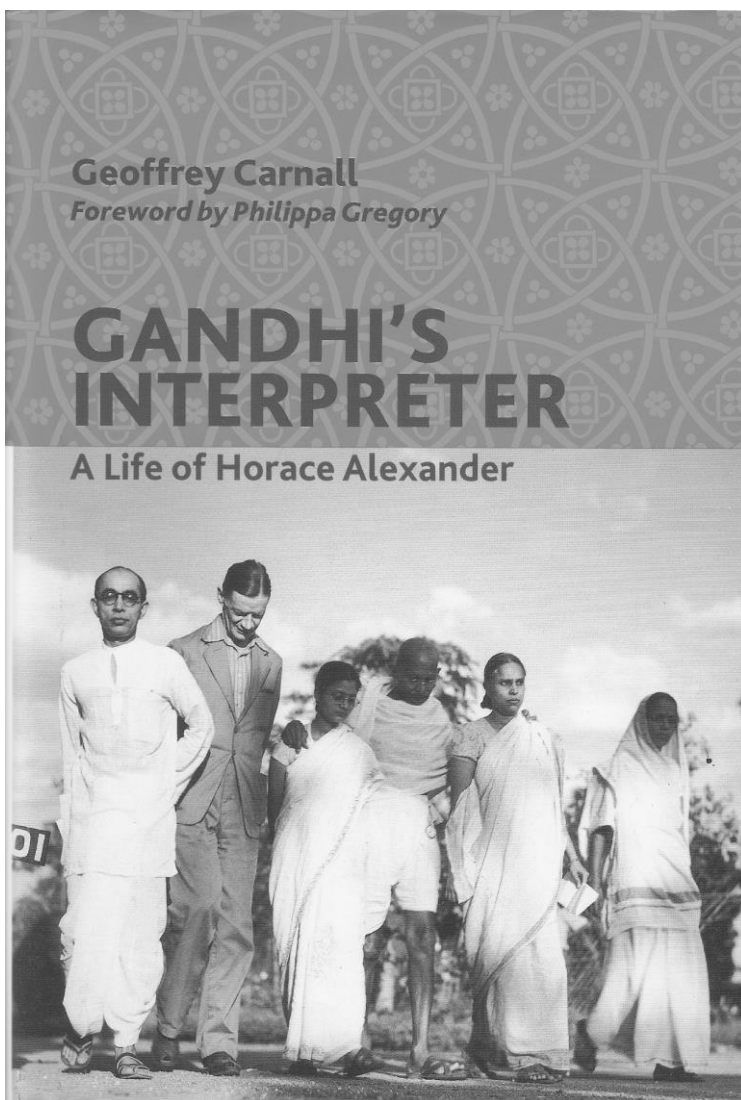
Horace Alexander was one of the most significant Quaker peacemakers of the 20th century; indeed he was active throughout most of the century living until 1989, aged 100.

Both sides of Alexander's family were Quakers and there were four brothers, three of whom, a little surprisingly, were deeply interested in bird-watching and Alexander became a very knowledgeable ornithologist. Their father was a barrister and a passionate internationalist. Alexander had a



successful student career at Kings College, Cambridge studying history and politics 1909-1912. There was a quite widespread belief among his contemporaries that there would never be another major war as war was simply too irrational, this in spite of the accelerating arms race. However when war came many volunteered and even among Quakers there were differing attitudes to the war. With the introduction of conscription in 1916 Alexander registered as a conscientious objector and was fortunate to be given exemption on condition he took up teaching which he accepted enthusiastically as he saw it as an opportunity to teach history in a way that would promote peace. Many COs decided to join the Friends Ambulance Unit which was formed early in the war and Alexander was to work with that organisation later in his career.

At the end of the war he was uncertain of his future path and when he was offered a post at Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham to develop an international relations course there he readily took up the challenge. It



was around this time that he married Olive Graham, also a Quaker and a teacher of history. She was a person of independent mind, for example she considered that Christianity's emphasis on belief rather than spirituality was misguided. She was to play an important role at the college editing their journal and keeping in touch with former students around the world. Sadly she showed symptoms of MS from early in their marriage.

From then on Alexander was to combine adult teaching with active work for peace in different parts of the world but pre-eminently in India. He was a supporter of the idea of the League of Nations but he did not want it to be based on military force but rather to act "by persuasion, by reason, by the publication of truth, by

agreement". One of his first projects was anti-opium work in India with the League of Nations and through that he met Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, and the latter's great friend C F Andrews. He returned to Britain a supporter



of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. He was to go back to India many times in the cause of Independence. His approach was to try and bring the two (sometimes more) sides in dispute closer together through personal contact, emphasising points of agreement and building upon that. To do this he built up many personal contacts with British politicians and civil servants such as R A Butler, who early in his career was Under-Secretary of State for India, Lord Irwin the Viceroy, Leo Amery Secretary of State for India, Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick Lawrence. On the Indian side in addition to Gandhi he got to know well the Nehru family and all the leading figures in Congress.

After Gandhi's 1931 visit to Britain for the 2nd Round Table Conference Alexander along with other Quakers, in particular Agatha Harrison, formed the India Conciliation Group to present a more moderate approach than the India League of Krishna Menon and Reginald Reynolds (a former Woodbrooke student) which antagonised too many people. In addition to negotiations Alexander at different times was active in relief work, for example during the Bengal famine of 1943, air raid preparations when Japan was threatening India, and when a cyclone hit eastern India. Nor was his work confined to India as it included a short spell in 1943 in part of China not occupied by the Japanese to bring medical supplies to hospitals. That included a hair-raising journey by truck over mountains relieved by spotting unfamiliar birds.

The book also has a slightly surprising subsidiary but parallel story. This concerns a German who came to Woodbrooke in Alexander's early days there. Fritz Berber was a Methodist from Munich who was a student of law. Back home he became a district judge and then in 1930 he joined the staff of a political institute in Berlin. But Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933. Berber came over to see Alexander in April and they discussed options – should he leave Germany or stay and try to influence events ? Berber decided on the latter. Alexander was able to see Berber on occasion and while Alexander was well aware of evil aspects of the regime he did not regard all supporters of Nazism as evil. In January 1934 Alexander gathered some people together to hear Berber speak about his situation. Some listeners thought him impossibly compromised for in order to keep his post he had to accept some of the Nazi positions and he was often to be consulted by Ribbentrop because of his knowledge of Britain.

In November 1938 Alexander went to Berlin to see Berber but it coincided with the Kristallnacht atrocities and Berber was pessimistic about the future. In May of the following year Alexander saw Berber again and information acquired (eg he thought a rapprochement between Germany and Russia was likely) was passed to Butler and the Foreign Office by Alexander. All hopes of negotiation did not die with the outbreak of war as to begin with the conflict was confined to Poland and some church leaders such as Bishop Bell, Archbishop Temple and the Norwegian Bishop of Oslo urged diplomacy. Quite a few German generals were anti-Hitler and in January 1940 the Pope

tried to mediate when he passed on a message from General Franz Halder. But the British Cabinet was not interested.

Berber managed to survive the war, although his position and perhaps his life was threatened at times. Whether his advice had any useful effect is doubtful. After the war he worked for the occupying French, then partly through Alexander's recommendation he was appointed to the Government of India as an adviser in international law; later he held a Chair in International Law in Munich. But one wonders whether Alexander's support for Berber was wise. No doubt Berber was well-meaning and he took risks that he could have avoided by staying abroad, but was not the Nazi movement so appalling that condemnation and non-cooperation was called for ?

After the war Alexander was much involved in the tragic communal conflicts leading up to Independence in Bengal and Delhi, Kashmir and the Punjab. It was slightly later 1948-50 that the author of this book worked with Alexander in Bengal to try to avoid war between the two new states. The World Pacifist Meeting that had been planned for India before Gandhi's assassination took place in December 1949 at Tagore's Santiniketan and then Gandhi's Sevagram and with a large open-air gathering in Calcutta. A little earlier Alexander had initiated in Britain an interfaith organisation called Fellowship of the Friends of Truth which while it never attracted large numbers represented Gandhi's non-dogmatic approach to religion.

Independent India was to an extent a disappointment to Alexander although Nehru's promotion of non-alignment in the era of the Cold War was something he approved of. In his later years he gave his support to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the opposition to the war in Vietnam, and to the International Peace Brigade. In 1984 he was awarded by the Government of India the Padma Bhushan Medal which is the highest award given to a non-Indian citizen.

Geoffrey Carnall's biography of Horace Alexander is a substantial and scholarly work of a man he admires. It is to be hoped that it will revive interest in this indomitable man of peace.

*George Paxton*

**Choice, Liberty and Love: Consciousness in Action** Sheikh Aly N'Daw  
ISBN 978-0-9565577-0-4 £6.99

**Vision for a Peace Society: economy, equality and justice** Sheikh Aly N'Daw  
ISBN 978-0-9565577-2-8 £7.99

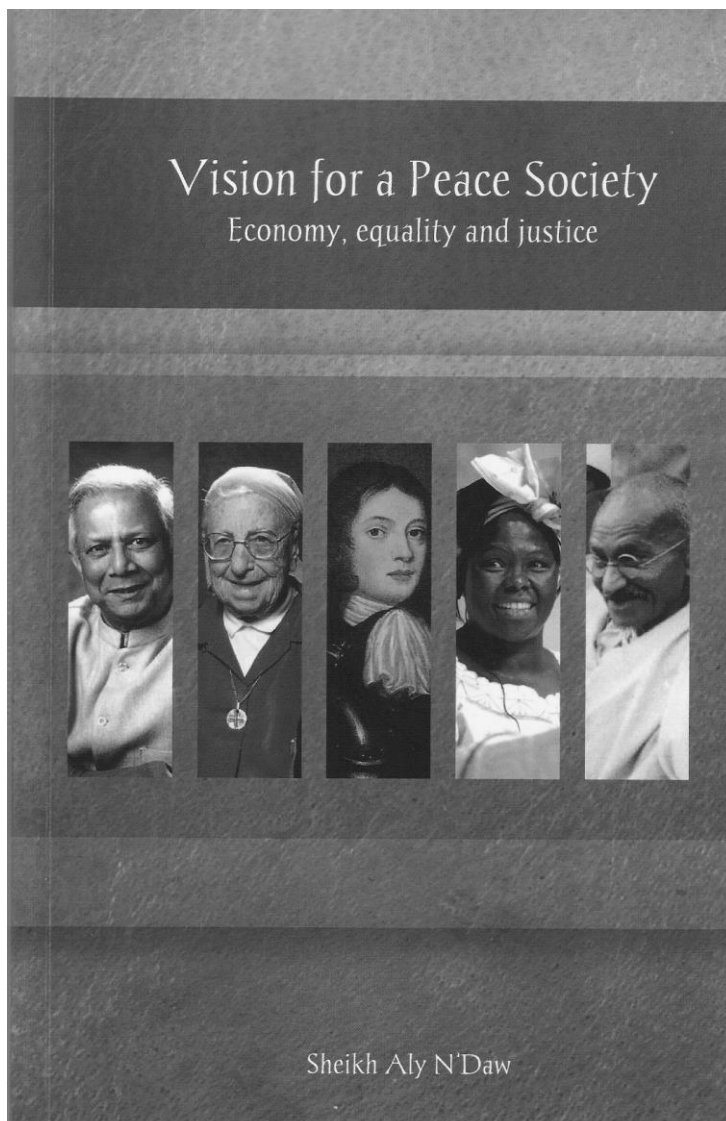
These two books are part of a set of half-a-dozen published by the International Sufi School, a movement which grew out of the teachings and work of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927) in Senegal. The School now has centres in Paris, London, Mauritius and other countries as well as Senegal. In May this year the School held a three day conference in Edinburgh to which the Gandhi Foundation was invited.

The author, Sheik Aly N'Daw, a Sufi master, is the spiritual and administrative head of the International Sufi School. The book shows the way that will lead to a more just and peaceful society by examining the lives of men and women from different cultures and times who are positive role models for all of us. Some are well known throughout the world such as Mandela, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King; others somewhat less so such as Bamba, Baha'u'llah, Abdel Kader; a significant number are women such as Wangari Maathai, Eleanor Roosevelt, Shirin Edabi, Mother Teresa.

The stories of these peacemakers is told using an analytical framework under 12 headings. The first influence on an individual is the historical legacy of the country in which they grew up. Next is the family legacy shaping the individual and the necessity for each person to liberate themselves as they

mature so that they can make free choices. The author says that relationships are too often established through 'reaction' where we may judge and condemn whereas we need to choose 'action' which enables us to halt an escalation of conflict and find solutions satisfactory to everyone. A true awareness – what he calls an Intelligence of the Real – will prevent us from falling into the way of reaction. It will make us conscious of the truth that there is only one country, Earth, and one religion, love. Thought is perceived as a force that will direct our actions and free us from selfishness, anger and pride. Our emotions should not be allowed to overwhelm us and we should remain impartial. We also need to become aware that no one is superior to any other – we should reject the Inferiority/Superiority complex.

A peacemaker will also transform competition into cooperation. Forgiveness is another essential quality of the peacemaker, enabling relationships to change for the better. A great influence on all of us is economic relationships – a social hierarchy of rich and poor, weak and powerful, destroys solidarity and must be replaced by non-exploitative relationships. A true democracy will accommodate everyone irrespective of race, culture, gender or socio-



economic status. Finally the individual will serve humanity according to the examples of the prophets given here.

“Such people, who at first seem no different from others, have been able to attain the higher dimensions of the self through events in their lives. This means that every one of us can attain these dimensions.”

These studies truly show how all boundaries of race, gender, culture or time are transcended by the enlightened consciousness.

The first title above deals with Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and the Dalai Lama, the second with Muhammad Yunus, Sister Emmanuelle, William Penn, Wangari Maathai, and Gandhi. The full range of titles in the series can be obtained from The International Sufi School, 5G River View Heights, 27 Bermondsey Wall West, London SE16 4TN, or [Sufi\\_school@yahoo.com](mailto:Sufi_school@yahoo.com)

*George Paxton*

Would you like to review a book? If you would like to do an occasional book review for *The Gandhi Way* please let me (the Editor) know and one will be sent to you. The conditions are that you write about 500-1000 words within two months of receiving it. You can let me know what subject area appeals to you.

At the moment we could do with reviewers for –

*From Pacification to Peacebuilding: A Call to Global Transformation* by Diana Francis. Diana Francis is an experienced practitioner as well as respected writer on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

*Contemporary Society: A Gandhian Appraisal* by J S Mathur. This is a collection of essays written over a period of 50 years. Professor Mathur gives a particular emphasis to Gandhian economics.

*Timeless Inspirator: Reliving Gandhi* is a collection of nearly 50 short essays, almost all by contemporary Indians. It is unusual in that many of the writers are scientists, technologists or business people. One is by Dr Narinder Kapur, a Friend of the GF who is a neuropsychologist.

## **Gandhi Foundation News**

### **Reaching Out to the Diverse Bow Community in Partnership with Mosaic**

The Gandhi Foundation and Mosaic, an organisation founded by HRH The Prince of Wales have had discussions recently to embark on a partnership project. A meeting was held with Jonathan Freeman, National Operational Director of Mosaic and our Trustees and Executive Members.

Mosaic was formed in 2007 to challenge the growing concern around the issues facing young Muslims living in deprived areas of Britain. The key priorities of Mosaic's founder are

- creating opportunities for young people of all backgrounds who do not have them
- creating opportunities for understanding between different people and groups.

The organisation's areas of interest are **education, enterprise and understanding**.

Mosaic works closely with schools and supports young girls and their mothers. They also provide volunteer mentors for young people to raise their aspirations and opportunities. Their Muslim young offenders' scheme offers support to the young people during the vulnerable period of transition back into society.

Among their other programmes are Media Network, that brings together media professionals to inspire young Muslims and Speakers' Bureau to provide role models who are able to speak on a variety of subjects..

Mosaic is already working in the borough of Tower Hamlets. The current links will be extremely valuable. A one-off grant of £3,000 has been offered by the Gandhi Foundation for Mosaic's initial work in the area. They will be using the Foundation's office at Kingsley Hall as their base. Mosaic plans to use the office once a month. The initial liaison work has already started and a meeting was held with Mosaic and the Board of Trustees of Kingsley Hall.

Kingsley Hall is used by a range of local community organisations reflecting the diverse composition of the Bow population. A significant number of the users work with the youth who are involved with educational, health and well-being, sports, music and leisure activities. At the meeting, the user representatives were keen to engage with Mosaic.

The user groups of Kingsley Hall work as independent organisations. It was felt that through Mosaic they could work together and promote greater understanding and friendship. The Somali group was particularly interested in mentorship for improving the quality of life of the young people. Some of the Trustees of Kingsley Hall felt that the young offenders' scheme could make valuable contributions. Promoting opportunities for media work for young people was also suggested.

The partnership between Kingsley Hall and Mosaic will be very important. By working in the true Gandhian spirit it is hoped that there will be valuable outcomes. The project will offer opportunities and possibilities of empowering the young people of Bow, enhancing their quality of life, meeting their aspirations and creating a cohesive community.

It will reflect Mosaic's motto of creating opportunities for young people, championed by Muslims, harnessing the power of positive thinking.

*Shaheen Choudhury Westcombe*

## **A New Society**

A new society has formed at the Inner Temple in London where Gandhi studied for the bar. It is the Inner Temple Gandhi Society which among other activities is launching an essay competition which will be open to students and barristers. Antony Copley will represent the GF on the panel which will judge the essays. The Society was inaugurated on 2 October 2010 at the Temple Church with a performance of a play by Tara Arts about Gandhi in London.

### **Pakistan Disaster**

Over £2,500 has been sent on behalf of the GF to Islamic Relief to help those affected by the severe flooding in Pakistan. This came from donations specifically for this purpose.

### **A New Art Book**

Artist Shailendra Khairnar, a long standing Friend of The Gandhi Foundation, has published a new book *Portraits of Gandhi* in which he reproduces both popular and less well known pictures of Gandhi using his unique style of dots. Shailendra only uses dots to recreate these images. He is beginning to be well known in India for this style and has also reproduced many well known celebrities using this technique. The book also gives a brief history of Gandhi's struggle to free India. The book is available through the Gandhi Foundation at £30.

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