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For their humanitarian work in very difficult circumstances and for bringing people together through that work for the betterment of all.

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The House of Lords on Wednesday 14 November 2012  
from 6 – 8.30 pm in Committee Room 4a

Please allow 20 minutes for security at the House of Lords

Read more about the Hospital on page 10

It is expected that there will be a **Multifaith Celebration** on or near  
30 January 2013 in central London

Check for final arrangements at [contact@gandhifoundation.org](mailto:contact@gandhifoundation.org)  
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# AUNG SAN SUU KYI: THE GANDHI WAY

*Anupma Kaushik*

## INTRODUCTION: HER LIFE AND FAMILY

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on 19 June 1945 in Rangoon. She derives her name from three relatives. Aung San from her father, Suu from her paternal grandmother and Kyi from her mother Khin Kyi. She is frequently called Daw Suu by the Burmese or Amay Suu, i.e. Mother Suu by some followers. (Gandhi was called Bapu by his followers.) Suu Kyi is the third child and only daughter of Aung San considered to be the father of modern-day Burma. Her father founded the modern Burmese army and negotiated Burma's independence from the British Empire in 1947 but was assassinated by his rival in the same year. She grew up with her mother, Khin Kyi and two brothers, Aung San Lin and Aung San Oo, in Rangoon. Aung San Lin died at age eight when he drowned in an ornamental lake on the grounds of the house. Her elder brother immigrated to San Diego, California, becoming a United States citizen. After Aung San Lin's death, the family moved to a house by Inya Lake where Suu Kyi met people of very different backgrounds, political views and religions. She was educated in Methodist English High School for much of her childhood in Burma, where she was noted as having a talent for learning languages.

Suu Kyi's mother gained prominence as a political figure in the newly formed Burmese government. She was appointed Burmese ambassador to India in 1960, and Aung San Suu Kyi followed her there, she studied in the Convent of Jesus and Mary School, New Delhi and graduated from Lady Shri Ram college in New Delhi with a degree in politics in 1964. Suu Kyi continued her education at St Hugh's college, Oxford obtaining a B.A. degree. After graduating, she lived in New York City and worked at the United Nations primarily on budget matters for three years. In late 1971, Aung San Suu Kyi married Michael Aris, a scholar of Tibetan culture living in Bhutan. The following year she gave birth to their first son, Alexander Aris in London; their second son, Kim, was born in 1977. Subsequently, she earned a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1985. She was elected as an Honorary Fellow in 1990. For two years she was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Shimla, India. She also worked for the government of the Union of Burma.

In 1988 Suu Kyi returned to Burma, at first to tend for her ailing mother but later had to lead the pro-democracy movement. Aris' visit in

Christmas 1995 turned out to be the last time that he and Suu Kyi met, as Suu Kyi remained in Burma and the Burmese dictatorship denied him any further entry visas. Aris was diagnosed with cancer in 1997 which was later found to be terminal. Despite appeals from prominent figures and organizations, including the United States, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Pope John Paul II, the Burmese government would not grant Aris a visa saying that they did not have the facilities to care for him, and instead urged Aung San Suu Kyi to leave the country to visit him. She was at that time temporarily free from house arrest but was unwilling to depart, fearing that she would be refused re-entry if she left, as she did not trust the military junta's assurance that she could return. Aris died on his 53rd birthday on 27 March 1999. Since 1989, when Aung San Suu Kyi was first placed under house arrest, she had seen her husband only five times, the last of which was for Christmas in 1995. She was also separated from her children, who live in the United Kingdom, but starting in 2011, they have visited her in Burma.

#### POLITICAL LIFE, VISION AND INFLUENCES

Coincident with Aung San Suu Kyi's return to Burma in 1988, the long-time military leader of Burma and head of the ruling party General Ne Win, stepped down. Mass demonstrations for democracy followed that event on 8 August 1988 (8-8-88, a day seen as auspicious), which were violently suppressed in what came to be known as the 8888 Uprising. On 26 August 1988, she addressed half a million people at a mass rally in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda in the capital, calling for a democratic government. However in September, a new military junta took power.<sup>1</sup>

Aung San Suu Kyi founded her party National League for Democracy (NLD) on 27 September 1988. She serves as its General Secretary.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990 general elections, the NLD won 59% of the national votes and 81% (392 of 485) of the seats in Parliament, although she herself was not allowed to stand as a candidate in the elections and was detained under house arrest before the elections. Some claim that Aung San Suu Kyi would have assumed the office of Prime Minister, however, the results were nullified and the military refused to hand over power, resulting in an international outcry.

She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her nonviolent struggle for democracy and human rights. She used the Nobel Peace Prize's 1.3 million USD prize money to establish a health and education trust for the Burmese people. Around this time, Suu Kyi chose nonviolence as an expedient political tactic. To quote her: "I do not hold to nonviolence for

moral reasons, but for political and practical reasons". However, nonviolent action as well as civil resistance in lieu of armed conflict is also political tactics in keeping with the overall philosophy of her Theravada Buddhist religion. She is influenced by both Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and also by Buddhist concepts. Her aim in politics is to work for democratization of Burmese political system.<sup>3</sup> She believes that democratic institutions and practices are necessary for the guarantee of human rights and for a free, secure and just society where Burmese people are able to realize their full potential.<sup>4</sup>

One of her most famous speeches is "Freedom from Fear", which began: "It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it. She also believes fear spurs many world leaders to lose sight of their purpose. She once said: "Government leaders are amazing, so often it seems they are the last to know what the people want."

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Her party advocates a nonviolent movement towards multi-party democracy in Burma, which has been under military rule from 1962. Her party also supports human rights (including broad-based freedom of speech), the rule of law, and national reconciliation. In a speech of 13 March 2012, Suu Kyi demanded, in addition to the above, independence of the judiciary, full freedom for the media, and increasing social benefits to include legal aid. She also demanded amendments to the constitution of 2008, drafted with the input of the armed forces. She stated that its mandatory granting of 25 per cent of seats in parliament to appointed military representatives is undemocratic.<sup>6</sup> She also favors safeguarding the rights of ethnic minorities in a real democratic union based on equality, mutual respect and trust.<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, the Burmese government permitted NLD office branches to re-open throughout Burma and freed some imprisoned members. In May 2002, NLD's General Secretary, Aung San Suu Kyi was again released from house arrest. She and other NLD members made numerous trips throughout the country and received support from the public. However, on their trip to Depayin township in May 2003, dozens of NLD members were shot and killed in a government sponsored massacre. Its General Secretary, Aung San Suu Kyi and her deputy, U Tin Oo were again arrested. From 2004, the government prohibited the activities of the party. In 2006, many members resigned from NLD, citing harassment and pressure from the Armed Forces. The NLD boycotted the general elections held in November

2010 because many of its most prominent members including Suu Kyi were barred from standing. The laws were written in such a way that the party would have had to expel these members in order to be allowed to run. This decision, taken in May, led to the party being officially banned. The election was won in a landslide by the military-backed Union Solidarity and development Association (USDP) and was described by US President Barack Obama as "stolen".

Discussions were held between Suu Kyi and the Burmese government during 2011, which led to a number of official gestures to meet her demands. In October, around a tenth of Burma's political prisoners were freed in an amnesty and trade unions were legalized. On 18 November 2011, following a meeting of its leaders, the NLD announced its intention to re-register as a political party in order to contest 48 by-elections necessitated by the promotion of parliamentarians to ministerial rank.<sup>8</sup> In April 2012 she was elected to the Pyithu Hluttaw, the lower house of the Burmese parliament, representing the constituency of Kawhmu. Her party also won 43 of the 45 vacant seats in the lower house and she became the leader of opposition in the lower house.

#### FEARLESS NON VIOLENCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

Aung San Suu Kyi had to face an opposition which was much stronger in comparison to her in brute force, as it consisted of the might of the government of Burma. They tried to scare her and her supporters in all possible ways. On 9 November 1996, the motorcade that she was traveling in with other leaders of her party National League for Democracy like Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung, was attacked in Yangon. About 200 men swooped down on the motorcade, wielding metal chains, metal batons, stones and other weapons. The car that Aung San Suu Kyi was in had its rear window smashed, and the car with Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung had its rear window and two backdoor windows shattered. It is believed the offenders were members of the USDA who were allegedly paid 500 kyats (@ USD \$0.5) each to participate. The NLD lodged an official complaint with the police, and according to reports the government launched an investigation, but no action was taken. On 30 May 2003 in an incident similar to the 1996 attack on her, a government-sponsored mob attacked her caravan in the northern village of Depayin, murdering and wounding many of her supporters. Aung San Suu Kyi fled the scene with the help of her driver, Ko Kyaw Soe Lin, but was arrested upon reaching Ye-U. The government imprisoned her at Insein prison in Rangoon. After she underwent a hysterectomy in

September 2003, the government again placed her under house arrest in Rangoon.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been placed under house arrest for 15 of the past 21 years, on different occasions, since she began her political career, during which time she was prevented from meeting her party supporters and international visitors. The Burmese government detained and kept Suu Kyi imprisoned because it viewed her as someone "likely to undermine the community peace and stability" of the country, and used both Article 10 (a) and 10(b) of the 1975 State Protection Act (granting the government the power to imprison people for up to five years without a trial), and Section 22 of the "Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts" as legal tools against her. She continuously appealed her detention, and many nations and figures continued to call for her release and that of 2100 other political prisoners in the country. Suu Kyi was also accused of tax evasion for spending her Nobel Prize money outside of the country. In an interview, Suu Kyi said that while under house arrest she spent her time reading philosophy, politics and biographies that her husband had sent her. The media were also prevented from visiting Suu Kyi, as occurred in 1998 when journalist Maurizio Giuliano, after photographing her, was stopped by customs officials who then confiscated all his films, tapes and some notes. In contrast, Suu Kyi did have visits from government representatives and foreign dignitaries and her physician. She had periods of poor health and as a result was hospitalized. On second May 2008, after cyclone Nargis hit Burma, Suu Kyi lost the roof of her house and lived in virtual darkness after losing electricity in her dilapidated lakeside residence. She used candles at night as she was not provided with any generator set.

On third May 2009, an American man, identified as John Yettaw, swam across Inya Lake to her house uninvited and was arrested when he made his return trip three days later. On thirteenth May, Suu Kyi was arrested for violating the terms of her house arrest because the swimmer, who pleaded exhaustion, was allowed to stay in her house for two days before he attempted the swim back. Suu Kyi was later taken to Insein prison, where she could have faced up to five years confinement for the intrusion. The trial of Suu Kyi and her two maids began. During the ongoing defense case, Suu Kyi said she was innocent. The defense was allowed to call only one witness (out of four), while the prosecution was permitted to call fourteen witnesses. The court rejected two character

witnesses, NLD members Tin Oo and Win Tin, and permitted the defense to call only a legal expert.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all of the horrors she has been through, she is neither a bitter nor an angry person. She acknowledges that the teachings of Buddhism do affect the way she thinks and clarifies that when she started out in politics, in the movement for democracy, she started out with the idea that this should be a process that would bring greater happiness, greater harmony and greater peace to her nation. And this cannot be done if she was going to be bound by anger and by desire for revenge. So she never thought that the way to go forward was through anger and bitterness, but through understanding, trying to understand the other side, and through the ability to negotiate with people who think quite differently from you and to agree to disagree if necessary and to somehow bring harmony out of different ways of thinking.<sup>10</sup>

#### NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Suu Kyi's and her party's massive victories in all the elections have shown how popular she is in her multi-ethnic country. One remarkable feature of her political campaign has been the appeal she had for the country's various ethnic groups, traditionally at odds with each other.<sup>11</sup>

Suu Kyi received immense support from the international community. She was given the Rafto Prize by Norway; the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by European Parliament; the Nobel Peace Prize; the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding by India; the International Simon Bolivar Prize by Venezuela; Honorary Citizenship by Canada; and the Wallenberg Medal by University of Michigan.

The United Nations (UN) has attempted to facilitate dialogue between the government and Suu Kyi. However the results from the UN facilitation have been mixed. Razali Ismail, UN special envoy to Burma, met with Aung San Suu Kyi but resigned from his post the following year, partly because he was denied re-entry to Burma on several occasions.

The UN has called upon the Burmese government to release Suu Kyi many a times along with other world leaders, nations and organizations. United Nations Working Group for Arbitrary Detention published an opinion that Aung San Suu Kyi's deprivation of liberty was arbitrary and in contravention of Article 9 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights 1948, and requested that the authorities in Burma set her free, but the authorities ignored the request.

There have been demonstrations in support in various places in the world and she has received vocal support from the world like the European Union, USA, Australia, India, Israel, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Nobel laureates like Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Shirin Ebadi, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Mairead Corrigan, Rigobert Menchu, Elie Wiesel, Barrack Obama, Betty Williams, Jody Williams, and Jimmy Carter have supported her.

The Burmese Government could resist the pressure of the international community due to the support from China. To illustrate, the US-sponsored United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Burma as a threat to international security was defeated because of strong opposition from China, which has strong ties with the military junta. China later voted against the resolution, along with Russia and South Africa.

Burma's relaxing stance, in recent times, such as releasing political prisoners, was influenced in the wake of successful recent diplomatic visits by the US and other democratic governments, urging or encouraging the Burmese towards democratic reform. The Japanese Government which spent 2.82 billion yen in 2008 and has promised more Japanese foreign aid to encourage Burma to release Aung San Suu Kyi in time for the elections; and to continue moving towards democracy and the rule of law. *The New York Times* suggested that the military government may have released Suu Kyi because it felt it was in a confident position to control her supporters after the election.<sup>12</sup>

### SUU KYI AND GANDHI

Suu Kyi has herself clearly indicated the sources of her inspiration: principally Mahatma Gandhi but also her father and her religion. Her father too was an admirer of Gandhi although she was not always uncritical of Gandhi.<sup>13</sup> There are striking similarities between Suu Kyi and Gandhi. Both loved their country and countrymen so much that they dedicated their lives to their respective countries. Both had to sacrifice their family and professional lives for their cause. Both were imprisoned for long periods by their opposition. Their opposition in both cases were/are militarily much stronger but morally much weaker. However in both cases the opposition had respect for the two individuals. Both were educated in India and UK and could communicate well in English. Both are revered by their countrymen and respected by the international community. However they are much more similar in their thinking as both share belief in positive energy of courage, peace and nonviolence by overcoming negative energies such as fear and anger. Both inspire a sense of confidence and hope in the



fight for peace and justice. Both symbolize what humankind is seeking and mobilize the best in their followers. They unite deep commitment and tenacity with a vision in which the end and the means form a single unit. Its most important elements are: democracy, respect for human rights, reconciliation between groups, nonviolence, and personal and collective discipline. Both believe in human dignity and went a long way towards showing how such a doctrine can be translated into practical politics. Both practiced what they preached: fearlessness. There are many examples of fearlessness shown by Gandhi and Suu Kyi. Gandhi had said that a satyagrahi bids goodbye to fear and practiced it all his life.<sup>14</sup> One such occasion, where Suu Kyi, showed remarkable fearlessness was in 1988, when despite opposition by the government, Aung San Suu Kyi went on a speechmaking tour throughout the country. She was walking with her associates along a street, when soldiers lined up in front of the group, threatening to shoot if they did not halt. Suu Kyi asked her supporters to step aside, and she walked on. At the last moment the major in command ordered the soldiers not to fire. Both also stand for a positive hope and give humanity confidence and faith in the power of good.<sup>15</sup> Gandhi has inspired Suu Kyi and many others all over the world<sup>16</sup> and Suu Kyi is doing the same – inspiring many all over the world.

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Dr Anupma Kaushik is an Associate Professor at Banasthali University, Rajasthan, India

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## **The St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital**

The hospital was first established in Jerusalem in 1882. Research shows that blindness causes poverty, and that recovering lost vision raises the economic status of individuals and families. With the main hospital in Jerusalem and satellite centres in Hebron, Anabta and Gaza – as well as Mobile Outreach Clinics operating throughout the West Bank – it is their mission to ensure that patients are able to access poverty-relieving ophthalmic services regardless of where they live.

The St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group is the only charitable provider of crucial eye care to the people of the occupied Palestinian territory. Access to specialist healthcare in the region is limited. Many ordinary people are unable to move freely and nearly half live below the poverty line. The rate of blindness is ten times higher than in developed countries. 30% of the population is under the age of ten and the incidence of conditions particularly affecting children – such as squint, infantile glaucoma, cataract and trauma – is high.

Representatives of the Hospital will talk of their work at the Peace Award ceremony announced on page 1.

## **The Gandhi Summer School and Gathering 2012**

This year our annual weeklong ashram type experience took place at the Abbey (Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> July – Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> August) a beautiful and unique Grade 1 medieval listed building with an inner courtyard. It is tucked away in the small village of Sutton Courtenay, 10 miles south of Oxford. The Abbey's architectural heritage dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and has a peaceful environment with a meditative atmosphere, perfect for us. The Abbey is surrounded by four acres of beautiful grounds that include mature trees, a woodland path, a labyrinth and places to sit. Sutton Courtenay itself is a sleepy and charming traditional English village with spectacular river walks that we were all able to enjoy. The Abbey is run by a small resident lay community of four and it was very rewarding for us to be able to share the meals we had prepared with them and their volunteers.

Most of us were accommodated in the Guest House, a small modern building in the grounds in either single or double rooms. Some of us were resident in the Abbey and some of us camped. Most of our activities took place in the Great Hall, a unique and flexible space with a timber vaulted ceiling, wooden floor and wall panelling with exquisite and intriguing carvings, an enormous fireplace and french windows opening onto the garden. In one corner sat a grand piano and occasionally throughout the week when passing through we were lucky enough to hear it being played. There was also a country style kitchen with a large table and chairs, excellent for food preparation (and playing board games!) and an ample sized dining room where we could all eat together on one long table.

Without access to either TV or computers and with the nearest shop some walk away we were Olympic free for the week but no one felt deprived, being together and taking part in our own shared activities was enough. There was no competition here, only cooperation and mutual appreciation. Twenty of us shared in an inspirational week which included serious exploration of the issues of non-violence both for ourselves and our global family, reflection, sharing, living as one community and having fun. As a group and as individuals we were able to bond in a special way as both the setting and the rhythm of the week were conducive to personal growth and authentic sharing.

### **Participants**

Twenty people took part, aged 7 to 75+ including pensioners, single people and families with young children and teenagers. There was a mix of ages within all activities and small groups with each person sharing what they could and appreciated for their contribution. It felt a bit like a large extended family where respect, tolerance and friendship were experienced by us all whatever our age, sex, ethnicity or background – an ideal Gandhian society perhaps?

## **Rhythm of the day**

The week and each day followed a rhythm which has been tried and tested over the years and found to work very well. However there was flexibility and sometimes other activities were added in depending on the wishes and needs of us all.

7.00am yoga

8.00am breakfast

9.00am morning meditation and sharing. To begin we sat in a circle. A short meditation was followed by words of thanks, sharing of information, problems shared and resolved and hopes for the day.

9.30am presentation and sharing about themes of non-violence.

11.00am shramdana. Four teams rotated daily in their tasks lasting for about half an hour including preparing lunch, cleaning the Abbey building, preparing supper and cleaning the guest house. An important part of the week was preparing food for each other. Our cook for the week – Lizz, who wowed us with her creative and delicious vegetarian food – had a team to help her prepare soups, salads, crumbles, cakes, cookies and tarts. Most mornings there was freshly made bread straight from the oven.

1.00pm lunch

3.00pm creative activity consisting of art/craft, crochet, gardening, badminton, baking, Bananagrams, a word game played by up to six people which proved to be very popular during the week, reading or walks by the river. Fortunately there was lots of room at the Abbey both inside and out for our activities. Activities were done either individually or in groups, everyone was welcome to participate but nothing was compulsory. Some of us spent the afternoon sleeping or relaxing.

6.30pm supper

8.00pm evening entertainment – a different activity each evening

9.00pm evening meditation

## **The Theme – The Power of Non-violence**

This year our theme for the week was the Power of Non-Violence. Each day was slightly different as described below. Many of the morning presentations were in depth and raised many fascinating and contentious issues for us all to grapple with. I scribbled like mad making notes of each session for my own interest but

my brief summaries below cannot begin to do justice to the depth of research, preparation and discussion. I aim to give just a flavour of the experience. I have also included our evening activities in order to give an idea of our daily experience.

### Sunday

In the morning Graham gave a short summary of Gandhi's life. After lunch some of us participated in creative listening. For evening entertainment we played games with a beach ball coaxing it around the outside of the Gandhi Foundation parachute. We all had a lot of fun.

### Monday

We looked at the ideas and people who had influenced Gandhi. Gandhi's ideas evolved over time and later he was very good at putting them into practice. The Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, John Ruskin, Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau were discussed. We then looked more closely at the lives of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela who were themselves influenced by Gandhi. In small groups we studied a handout detailing the life of Nelson Mandela and attempted to find similarities and differences. The comparison was very interesting and generated much discussion.

In the evening Hester led a group of us in circle dancing.

### Tuesday

Graham gave a brief presentation on the different Arab states and the recent Arab spring, illustrating that the methods used in their revolutions against oppressive regimes had not all been nonviolent. We discussed the ideas of the eccentric American academic Gene Sharp, the principles outlined in his book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, and how these ideas have been put into practice. We watched on DVD a recent documentary about him titled 'How to start a Revolution' and learnt about the 198 nonviolent ways in which he suggests an oppressed group of people can bring about significant change. These methods included nonviolent action, economic and political non-cooperation and nonviolent intervention. One of the key issues is strategic planning. Unplanned struggles have rarely been successful. Having never heard about Gene Sharp before many of us found it both gripping and illuminating.

That evening Denise ran a creative writing group for all ages. Linnet, age 9, in particular enthralled us with her creative and perceptive ideas. Many of us chose the theme 'polite and rude' which caused some giggles.

## Wednesday

Trevor gave a presentation based on a report called *War Prevention Works* by the Oxford Research Group formed in 1982. One of the things they study is how people can resolve conflict by nonviolent means. Out of 50 case studies detailed in the report Trevor selected six of them – Nigeria, Assam in India, Romania, El Salvador, Liberia and Guatemala. During our discussion time several of us expressed surprise that there were so many instances of successful resolution of conflict by nonviolent means.

At 2.00pm, some of us met Nona to discuss the article in *The Gandhi Way*, Spring 2009 about Te Whiti o Rongomai, 'A forerunner of Gandhi' by Helena Nielson. He was a Maori leader who practiced nonviolent resistance against the British Empire two generations before Gandhi. With reference to episodes in New Zealand we discussed how Te Whiti reacted to oppression and predicted how Gandhi might have reacted in the same situation.

At 3.00pm some of us joined in parachute games in the garden, a lot of fun was enjoyed by all. This was followed by our usual choice of creative activity and extended Bananagrams. In the evening there was another session of circle dancing with Hester followed by a bonfire. It was an action packed and great day. "Days don't get much better than this", I heard someone say. I agreed.

## Thursday

The theme for the morning discussion was 'The Violent Alternative.' In pairs we created two lists, one list for the good things about war, and a second for the bad things. Back together in the large group there was a lively discussion. We then discussed the definition of a just war and the six conditions which must be satisfied for a war to be considered just.

After lunch we gathered on the lawn for our annual group photo.

In the evening we joined together in the hall for our annual party of homemade entertainment. This is real old-fashioned light-hearted fun, a do-it-yourself variety show hosted by our MC, Natasha who had been gathering ideas from us all week and planning an order of events. As is the tradition of the Gandhi Summer School and Gathering individually or in groups we perform for our friends. Sometimes audience participation is requested but not compulsory. We had the usual mix of games, jokes, poems, music, drama and stories. It was a particularly lively party by our standards and everyone had a lot of fun.

## Friday

Lizz gave a presentation about living in harmony with the planet. We discussed the different ways people view planet earth and our relationship with it. Research

has shown that social change movements are very long haul and each one of us has an impact by the way we view and use energy, food, transport and waste. Land use, soil erosion, population and climate change are all critical for humanity's future on planet earth. The issues are broad and include economics, politics, culture, community, legal and social infrastructure. Research has shown that behaviour change is not easy. It takes three weeks of conscious effort to change behaviour and three months for the desired change to become established. Changes in policy can also lead, surprisingly, to changes in behaviour.

In the afternoon a small group of us painted a super large picture of the Abbey. After supper we all came together in The Hearth – an Abbey sitting room – and watched the film *Gandhi* as if in a cinema. Chai was served in the interval – thanks Lizz!!!

### Saturday

After packing to leave and the general clear up Lizz led a 'wash up' session. We discussed what we found 'new', 'inspiring', 'challenging' and 'interesting' and what we would like to follow up next year. Next year's theme will be about limits to growth and using resources more sustainably.

### **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 contributed, some in ways too small to mention, but critical none the less to the success of the whole experience. I met old and made new friends. Over the years I have found the week provides the perfect balance of thoughtful and relevant discussion about the pressing issues in today's world, reflection, relaxation, sharing and fun. My heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who participated in making this yet another very special and important week which is so difficult to replicate in the outside world. I feel nurtured yet again and ready to try to make small changes in my life. These changes feel like a very small effort but like a mosaic where changing the colour of just one square changes the whole, if everyone does this maybe we can change the future for the better for all living beings on our fragile planet.

We welcome new people, if you would like to take part and attend next year's Summer School and Gathering please contact me at [tplewis1@gmail.com](mailto:tplewis1@gmail.com)

**Trudy Lewis**



# Book Review

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**Understanding Gandhi** – Gandhians in Conversation with Fred J Blum  
Edited by Usha Thakkar and Jayshree Mehta, 2011 – Sage Publications Ltd,  
Delhi and London ISBN: 978-81-321-0557-2 (PB)

This is another book, quite distinctive in its unusual approach based on insightful 1970s interviews with elderly Indian Gandhians, to add to the long and impressive list of books by and about Gandhi. As our Gandhi Foundation's Vice-President says: "*This excellent volume fills a gap in the extensive literature on Gandhi*". I was honoured to be given a copy by friend Arna Blum, Fred Blum's widow, who still lives in the vicinity of The Abbey, Sutton Courtenay where Fred Blum and Stephen Verney set up their New Era Centre in 1980, with a huge Gandhian section in the library.

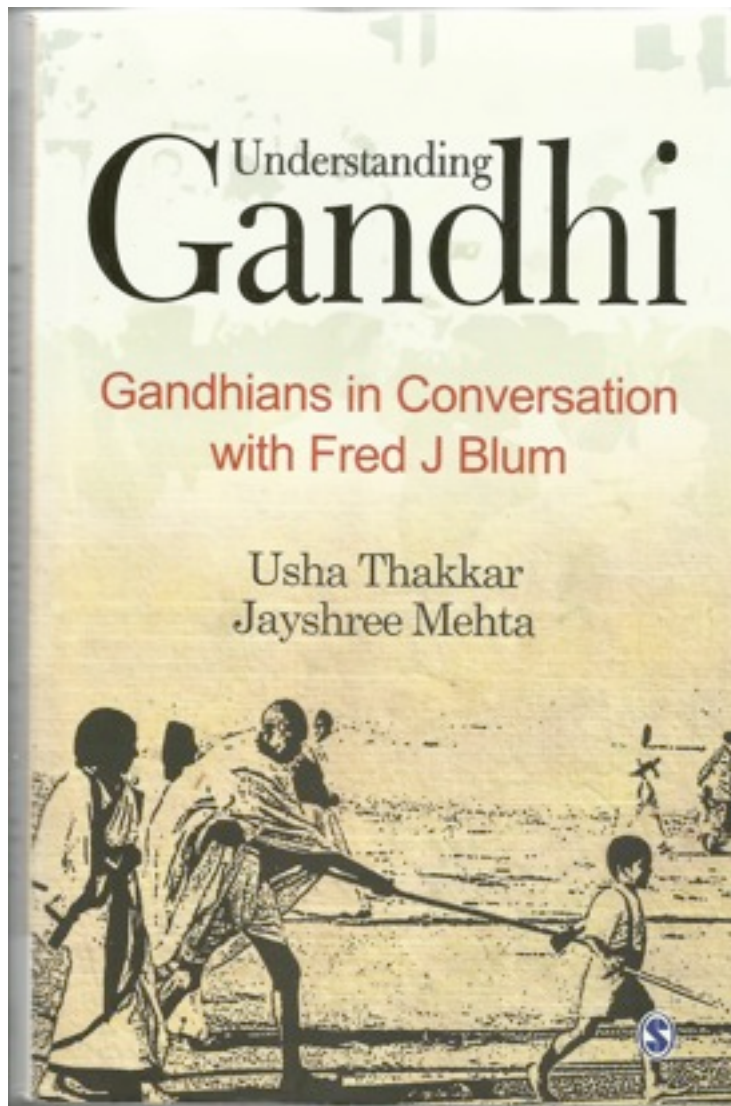
Professor Lord Bhikhu Parekh, decided, with others, that the many tape recorded interviews undertaken by Fred Blum in the 1970s in India should be explored and the best interviews published. It was a long project, finally come to fruition with a fine book of some 550 pages.

Professor Parekh found two excellent academic women editors in **Usha Thakkar** and **Jayshree Mehta** in India, who with him shared the difficult but rewarding task of reviewing the 24 taped interviews of those who had been close to Gandhi. They together finally selected 6 for this book: **J B Kripalani** (m), a colleague of Gandhi's and an important figure in public life; **Raihana Tyabji** (f), belonging to an elite Muslim family whose life was a saga of transition from the life of luxury to simplicity and austerity; **Dada Dharmadhikari** (m), an independent thinker and much respected freedom fighter, commentator, writer and orator; **Sushila Nayar** (f), close associate, veteran politician and personal physician to Gandhi; **Jhaver Patel** (m), whose concerted efforts to change the life of the rural poor were founded on Gandhian norms and who developed an international perspective of planning and development on Gandhian ideals; **Sucheta Kripalani** (wife of J B Kripalani), was the first woman Chief Minister in India and important political figure in the post-Independence India, who never wavered from Gandhian principles.

None of these interviewees is alive today. All were independent thinkers who also expressed their differences with Gandhi within the interviews.



Fred Blum's own lifelong commitment to nonviolence, grounded in his traumatic experiences growing up in Nazi Germany, made him an admirer of Gandhi, keen to discover how/whether his teachings and the demonstration of his life had affected post-Independent India. And so he decided to take his bulky, ex-BBC journalist's reel-to-reel tape recorder on his back, and travel around India to meet and converse with the relatively few still-surviving activists from Gandhi's own times. In the way he asks questions and solicits information, he draws out a wealth of interesting stories, facts and opinions on all the main areas of importance to Gandhi – in a 'chatty' way for us, the readers.



I read the book with fascination. Some phrases stood out for me as being sometimes startling and significant and I will share a few of them from the interviewees:

*My contacts with Gandhi brought me a complete change of consciousness. His (Gandhi's) irrepressible wit, razor-sharp mind....put him in a class by himself. (p62)*

*If there is anybody about whom I can say is my idea of a human being, it is Bapu. (p162)*

*Gandhiji was never a man of ideas and ideals; I felt attracted to him because he was the most uncommitted human being I have met. He was committed to no ideology, philosophy or outlook. His only commitment was to truth.*

*His devotion to truth was his attempt to translate that truth as he knew it into actual life. (p257)*

*He had no other business than life; life was his only business, integrated life". (p257)*

*Did Gandhiji have a sense of humour? Oh yes, otherwise he couldn't have lived. (p259)*

*I thought there should be a living memorial for Mahatma Gandhi where we can train workers who can understand the spirit and the principles and try to implement them. (p313)*

*He was a very understanding father figure. (p320)*

*....yet something of Gandhi's teachings has become a part and parcel of India's being. (p321)*

*There were angry people. Gandhi went into their midst and asked them all to sit down. Then he started addressing them. And when he spoke they could feel the sincerity, the love, the honesty that the man really felt for them. (p324)*

*He could talk to Jawaharlal Nehru or to a villager at their own levels – that was his capacity.*

*The non-violent suffering is simply related to the concept of trying to bring out the divine spark in the opponent. (p338)*

*Gandhiji's political order was self-sufficiency at the village level... maximum decentralisation of power, decision-making, producing for themselves, having the life that they want, the political system that they want. (p346)*

*The essence of satyagraha is that people should develop their consciousness. (p368)*

*What I feel is that Gandhi knew India better than most people, the real India, India of the poor, and the villagers.*

*He never allowed his thinking to be clouded over with non-essential things. (p465)*

*He was a very fascinating man to know, really, a very interesting man. (p522)*

Gandhi's ideals were so high that those around him often found it difficult to live up to them. All this comes out in the interviews.

And now I am wondering whether the remaining 18 interviews could be condensed and published as well, as this way of getting to know a somewhat different Gandhi, I find particularly helpful and hope I am not alone. This is a recommended read.

***Denise Moll***

# Letters

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## **The Gandhi Foundation and India**

The Gandhi Foundation does sterling work in promoting Gandhian values. The foundation aims to promote five core values:

- 1 Nonviolence to replace war and aggression
- 2 Egalitarian economics, emphasising self reliance and simple lifestyle
- 3 Grassroots democracy
- 4 Tolerance and pluralism
- 5 Respect for animals.

These are indeed laudable values and they apply to all countries and cultures. There is however an increasing tendency to concentrate only on India and I get the uneasy feeling that the Foundation might unwittingly have become a mouth piece for those who have a vested interest in promoting their own personal agendas. I was particularly concerned with the articles published in the last issue of *The Gandhi Way*. Both the Peace Award recipients Dr Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam make serious criticisms of India and its political establishment. Dr Sen claims that 20% of the 70 million Adivasis and other minorities have been purposely starved, dispossessed, physically violated with impunity, falsely imprisoned and barred from fair judicial process. These are serious allegations and the Foundation should have given an opportunity for someone from the Indian High Commission to answer these allegations. Bulu Imam a 'committed Gandhian' is sceptical about a Gandhian solution to the Adivasi problem. Satyagraha, he believes, works only if the opponent has a moral susceptibility to injustice like Christian Lord Irwin. The inference here is that if you are a Christian even an imperialist one who has forcibly occupied your land, you are better than the heathens in charge now ! Dr Felix Padel in his piece wants an investigation into the links between corporate elites, politicians, armed forces, bankers, big philanthropists and media owners. This is a conspiracy theory which is baseless and nonsensical. The armed forces for one are completely apolitical in India. Antony Copley in his article titled, Gloomy Thoughts on India Today is beside himself in what he sees as an apocalyptic vision of India's rampant capitalism and its economic self destruction. In the absence of any other global model what is India supposed to do ? Does Antony seriously believe that India can step back from the world economic order ? Where will the jobs for tens of millions of people come from ? Change is a fact of life and like all people of the world

Adivasis will also have to accept change. There is no question that their interests should be safeguarded.

Has Antony questioned the rampant capitalism here in the UK ? Did he raise his voice at the drilling of oil in the North Sea ? It is all very well for us to sit here in our comfortable homes and idealise life styles of people far away. Building of dams, harnessing of water from rivers, mining, the destruction of rain forests in South America, these are all ecologically damaging methods of wealth creation but which country is not guilty of these activities ? Antony claims that the Raj set aside protected areas and sought to shore up the way of life of the forest people. Really ? Two hundred years of colonial rule striped India of its fabulous wealth and reduced it to penury.

With all its faults India is the world's largest democracy. This is a country which started with nothing in 1947. Many prophets of doom did not expect India to last very long. Today India has a population of over a billion, it is not a country but a subcontinent and it remains free and united with its immense diversity. India is a role model to many of its neighbours and many other countries. It is a living proof that people, despite all their differences can live together. The Hindu majority of the country are inheritors of a civilisation in which freedom of thought and pluralism has deep roots, well before western democracy arrived. Mahatma Gandhi was a son of that ancient civilisation and he told boldly what Hindus have always said that all religions are valid and Ahimsa or non-violence is the supreme principal on which to live by. India will always prefer negotiations to violence. Adivasis do have genuine grievances but they need to be wary of who represents them. What Indians will not accept any more is moral lectures by individuals or countries especially when they are agenda driven. Neither will India tolerate secessionist movements. The unity of India will not be negotiable. India is a land where persecuted Zoroastrians, Baha'is and many others have found a safe home. The Jewish people have lived in India for centuries without any issues at all. The Gandhi Foundation needs to focus its attention on countries where there is no freedom, democracy or right to practise one's religion. It needs to look at the horrific violence mankind unleashes on the animal kingdom, it needs to promote vegetarianism. Above all the Gandhi Foundation needs to be vigilant in how it is represented.

Nitin Mehta MBE [animalahimsa@gmail.com](mailto:animalahimsa@gmail.com)

## **Gloomy Thoughts on India**

The write ups in *The Gandhi Way* No.113 brought much depression and sadness. Antony Copley's paper is titled Gloomy Thoughts on India Today. Well, one could only perceive gloom in the present situation in India.

I have been wondering about the possibility of Gandhian resistance in the context of the political violence prevailing in India. According to K.S. Subramanian (*Political Violence and Police in India*) "The rule of law is a civilizing factor, but it often subserves the use of violence in governance. Terms such as 'law and order', 'public order', and 'security of the state' are often used in India to deploy state violence with impunity ... State violence is defined as legitimate, but violence of the oppressed is regarded as illegitimate".

People who have some sympathy and concern for the oppressed dalits and the tribals are afraid of coming out in the open. Few persons like Medha Patkar have taken up the cause of the tribals evicted by the Narmada dam project but not the Maoists. Only one Gandhian, Himankshu Kumar is living with the tribals in the Maoist area of Dantewada. Surprisingly, he is still alive and has not yet been jailed.

Antony Copley's observation "a satyagraha can only impact if your opponent has a moral susceptibility to injustice ... one that existed in the likes of Lord Irwin of the British Raj or a Smuts in South Africa", touched a raw nerve in me. Yes, those who are ruling India now are worshippers of Mammon and are devoid of moral sympathy either for the poor or for those who take up their cause.

My congratulations to Dr Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam for winning their well deserved awards.

M R Rajagopalan

Managing Trustee, Gandhigram Trust, Tamil Nadu [ggmtrust@sify.com](mailto:ggmtrust@sify.com)

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*I have not pictured a poverty-stricken India containing ignorant millions. I have pictured to myself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to her genius. I do not, however, picture it as a third-class or even a first-class copy of the dying civilisation of the West.*

M K Gandhi

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# The Gandhi Foundation

Charity number 292629

The Foundation exists to spread knowledge and understanding of the life and work of Mohandas K Gandhi (1869-1948). Our most important aim is to demonstrate the continuing relevance of his insights and actions for all of us.

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**General inquiries to**  
**[contact@gandhifoundation.org](mailto:contact@gandhifoundation.org)**

**or Tel: 0845 313 8419**

**[www.gandhifoundation.org](http://www.gandhifoundation.org)**

Registered office: Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, Bromley-By-Bow, London E3 3HJ

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## The Gandhi Way

Articles, book reviews and letters of a specifically or broadly Gandhian nature will gladly be received by the Editor. Maximum length 2000 words.

**George Paxton, 87 Barrington Drive, Glasgow G4 9ES**

**Tel: 0141 339 6917; email: [gpaxton@phoncoop.coop](mailto:gpaxton@phoncoop.coop)**

**The deadline for the next issue is the end of January 2013**

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Printed on recycled paper by Clydeside Press, 37 High Street, Glasgow G1  
[clydesidepress@btinternet.com](mailto:clydesidepress@btinternet.com)

