

The Gandhi Way



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Gandhi Foundation Annual Lecture

Wednesday 23 October 2013

6.30 - 8pm

Rt Hon Vince Cable MP

Secretary of State for Business, Innovation & Skills
at the Inner Temple, London

*Invitations will be sent out and applications for tickets
will be accepted once Mr Cable has decided upon
the title of his talk. This will be in early September.*

*Details will appear on the website www.gandhifoundation.org
or contact John Rowley 0207 249 4471
or the Gandhi Foundation 0845 313 8419*

The Annual Lecture 2014

will be delivered by Karen Armstrong,
author of many books on the history of religion.

Details to follow

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Photos – Thanks to Jane Sill and Prem Prakash for the photos in this issue.

Gandhi: A Feminist

Twisha Chandra

“Gang rape of a 23 year old medical student”, “5 year old raped by her neighbour”, “Supreme Court instructs families to treat daughter in laws as family members, not domestic help”, “Foreign women tourists attacked in India” – these headlines are appalling but unfortunately, a regular and frequent feature of news of 21st century India.

Now let’s rewind time and go back to the 19th century when India was a British Colony. George Bernard Shaw famously remarked that “a conquered nation is like a man with cancer; he can think of nothing else”. The position of women in conquered India was much worse. They were victims of double subjugation; first, subjugation at home by menfolk and second, by a repressive imperialist government which cared little for social reform in the country. The British were afraid of attracting any opposition from the religious groups of India and they were not only sufficiently irritated by the increasing demand for freedom but also were busy playing the communal card for their advantage. Dogmatic and obscurantist religious leaders and groups formed a good support system for them. This does not mean that no good decisions were taken with regard to abolishment of practices detrimental to women by our then rulers; Sati (widow immolated alive on her husband’s funeral pyre) was banned in 1829, Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 (raising the minimum marriageable age to 14 years) are remarkable pieces of legislation but the will to enforce them was sadly lacking. More than legislation what the country and its women needed was a jolt, which would shake them from their slumber, make them rise, stand and walk erect and straight, with their heads high and hope pumped into their bodies and souls. Their long depressed and crushed spirits at last found reprieve and relief in a name, a man, a great soul called Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi understood the pulse of India, no man can love India as much as he did and his love for the country was not blind, he was in fact one of the biggest critics of India and its antiquated, primitive and often pernicious practices, which included barbaric treatment of women in the name of tradition and customs. He was like a breath of fresh air especially for the Indian women who had lived in isolation and within the confinement of their homes. They were suddenly drawn to this ‘Mahatma’ (holy man) who like a Pied Piper drew millions to his tune of nonviolence, peace and love. In fact one of the finest examples of Gandhi's magnetic hold on Indian society was his ability to draw out thousands of women in the mass movement for Indian freedom.

The freedom granted to women then, was all because of the effective leadership of this little, brown man distinguished from vast crowds by his unique dress or lack of it ! Apart from attire, what distinguished Mahatma Gandhi from the rest of the leaders and from vast crowds was his keen intellect, impeccable sense of judgement and far sighted vision. He was certainly a feminist. His statement that “women have come to look upon me as one of themselves” is a powerful reflection of his liberal ideas.

M K Gandhi was himself a victim of child marriage and this pained him throughout his life and made him oppose the custom tooth and nail. He once commented in *Young India*, “A man who has no thought of the tender age of a girl has none of God”. He called the dowry system “hateful”, promoted remarriage of widows, “If widowhood is to remain pure men will have to gain attain greater purity”, encouraged equal economic independence for women, “I shall work for an India ... where women will enjoy the same rights as men”.

M K Gandhi in a letter written to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in 1936 states, “If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved a willing slave till the slaves and slave holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say has been to make woman realize her dignity. I was once a slave holder myself but Ba (Gandhi’s wife Kasturba Gandhi was fondly called ‘Ba’) proved an unwilling slave and thus opened my eyes to my mission. Her task was finished. Now I am in search of a woman who would realise her mission”. This statement also reflects on the relationship that Gandhi had with his wife Kasturba Gandhi. She was a strong and determined woman and has been recalled by many as managing her part of the Ashram (Hermitage) with an iron hand. He used to readily participate with his wife in all household chores and personally assisted in the delivery of his last child when they were living in South Africa, even today a modern day wife craves for such attention and understanding from her husband, which Gandhi displayed many decades ago. Kasturba Gandhi along -side M K Gandhi became the face of the Indian movement and took his place at the forefront during his periods of incarceration which were often long and frequent.

The civil disobedience movement drew thousands of women from the security of their homes to the streets. In fact active participation of women and their marching side by side with their male counterparts had its beginning in South Africa, especially when Gandhi was campaigning against the government legislation which in effect declared all Hindu and Muslim marriages void. Women played a foremost role in picketing of foreign cloth, peaceful demonstrations, fasting, marching, wearing, spinning and promoting khadi, squatting and other forms of protest. Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,

Muthulakshmi Reddy, Laxmi Menon, Kamala Nehru emerged as strong and powerful leaders and left an indelible mark on the minds of Indian people and its women. In fact during the Salt March in 1930, Sarojini Naidu took the lead when Gandhi was arrested. Had it not been for him, India would have never witnessed the awakening, bravery and valour of her daughters.

Even the vow of celibacy taken by Gandhi demonstrates in a way how much he valued a woman's first and primary right over her own body.

There were some instances however where Gandhi's remarks bear a tone of patriarchy. He did sometimes insist that women only play a supportive role in the freedom struggle. He once remarked "Whilst both (man and woman) are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence the vocations of the two must be different, the duty of motherhood which the vast majority of women always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her social and sole prerogative". He also upheld the Hindu God Rama and his wife Sita as a model couple but Rama was not an ideal husband and as per the popular legend and mythology, had disowned his pregnant wife for the sake of false pride and ego. Though he cannot be classified 'radical' enough by today's standard of feminism but yet his actions spoke louder than his words (which were often self-contradictory) and he never did openly discriminate, ill treat or in any way consider women as inferior, he rather looked up to them in many ways.

Leadership plays a big role in shaping the basic character and philosophy of a nation. The fact that India had universal franchise from the very day of her independence, the Indian constitution on paper enshrined equal status and rights to all women, numerous legislations, conventions and bodies were set up to safeguard rights of women is commendable. Just as we give George Washington credit for laying firm the foundation of democracy in independent America, we have to similarly acknowledge and be grateful to Gandhi for the role he played in helping India not degenerate into a barbaric, misogynist, autocratic society like many of her neighbours, nevertheless steadily over the years it has become the second most unsafe place for women, ahead of even Saudi Arabia.

India's face has changed beyond recognition, the country which was once shaped by and which revered with religious fervour Gandhian philosophy has now to our misfortune degenerated into a lawless, most unequal society for women. India's men have not evolved into rational, humane, logical beings; they get educated in the best institutions, work and earn big bucks in multinationals but when it comes to marriage they want a convent educated, pretty, fair and docile wife accompanied by great wealth in the form

of dowry. Then when their insatiable greed remains unfulfilled, brides are burned or physically tortured; after all why else would the highest court of the land intervene and instruct families to treat their daughters-in-law as family members and not domestic helps. Greed in this country is not limited to money, it is also the all powerful desire to gain control over a woman's body, if not by consent then by force, brutally, leaving lifelong mental and physical scars. Child marriage continues unabated in many villages of Western and Northern Indian states. Brothers and husbands go to schools and offices whereas their sisters and wives are confined to the kitchen. I think female infanticide is a lesser evil as the poor girl child is killed in infancy or the foetus itself is aborted, forever liberating her from the cruel fate which awaits her. Women act as accomplices in these crimes, sometimes with aggression, at other times through submission by projecting themselves as helpless and hapless victims. Gandhi had immense faith that Indians more than any other nationality have the courage to imbibe and live up to the tenets of nonviolence but this is what we have reduced his beliefs to. When I visit my country India today I feel I am treading on an unfamiliar territory, the land and people seem strange to me. I look at Gandhi's picture on a shining, new, crisp Indian currency note and even through his picture I can feel the power of his infectious laugh and piercing eyes and I hang my head down in shame.

Twisha Chandra is an Indian who has lived and worked in India and Dubai before moving to London one and half years ago. She is currently employed as a Compliance Officer with Royal Bank of Canada.



A World of Limited Resources

Gandhi Foundation Summer Gathering 2013

Natasha Lewis

The Abbey, in the little village of Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire, was again the setting for this year's Gathering, a week of attempting to live in the style of one of Gandhi's ashrams whilst allowing a space for discussion into applying his principles to issues faced in the modern world. The building itself is a perfect facilitator for this event, providing several cosy sitting rooms, a kitchen and dining room dating to the 13th century, and a large Great Hall which has windows that open out into the main garden. The grounds give ample space for camping and sports including badminton, as well as a large kitchen garden which provides much of the delicious food for the week! The surrounding countryside also provides several beautiful walks along the river Thames.



Although some rooms are available in the Abbey itself, most Gatherers stay in the guest house annexe, which has the advantage of 20th rather than 13th century plumbing and heating! The braver amongst us, mostly families, camped and this year a camper van was also used for accommodation. 37

people attended over the first weekend, with people coming and going over the next week.

The premise of Gandhi's ashram means that a great communal spirit is built up throughout the week, with teams taking turns to help prepare meals and keep communal spaces clean. The kitchen is usually the focal point, where children's (and adult's!) baking and craft takes place, as well as some of the most interesting discussions about the year's theme.



After a help-yourself breakfast, the morning session begins with a brief meditation and sharing of information, then continues into the main discussion topic for the day. There is normally a short introductory presentation followed by discussion in small groups and then feedback. This leads into Shramdana, meaning 'sharing of one's time, thought and energy for the welfare of all' in accordance with the way Gandhi's ashrams were run. Lunch is eaten and, after a digestion break, craft activities begin later in the afternoon. It was Gandhi's belief that time should be spent on useful tasks, and this period is used to follow his guidance. Crafts available this year were varied, including collage making, art using dried flowers, crochet and watercolour painting. One particularly interesting activity was spinning thread from a sheep's fleece: we set up a production line including carding the wool, using the spinning wheel to turn the wool into thread and winding the finished wool into balls (and untangling it!). The spinning wheel was a bit trickier to use than I expected and unfortunately my wool alternated between being much too thick and snapping because it was too thin! After supper Gatherers

are invited to contribute to the evening's entertainment which included animal noises, poetry readings, slideshows and circle dancing. Then meditation and time for sleep before it all begins again in the morning!

The topic for this year's Gathering was "A World of Limited Resources: Inspirations and Challenges in Sharing the Planet" which attracted many external speakers as well as new participants. This meant that there was often a talk in the afternoon in addition to the morning session. The first of these was given by an architect, Sandra Piesik, who is running a project reviewing renewable resources as construction materials, involving over 120 scientists and professionals. Her talk mainly focussed on developing architecture using palm leaves in the United Arab Emirates, and her efforts to rescue indigenous technology from the extinction imposed by the advent of globalisation and modern building practices. She highlighted the fact that concrete is not always the most suitable building material in every environment on Earth, and that there is a huge untapped source of building materials from the palm leaves from plants used for date production, which are currently wasted in the UAE.

The theme of the first morning session (Sunday) was Sarvodaya. This is a term coined by Gandhi to mean 'universal uplift' or 'progress of all' and was a fundamental principle of his political philosophy. We discussed some of Gandhi's other main principles: Swaraj, self-rule; Swadeshi, self-sufficiency; and Satyagraha, "truth force", Gandhi's nonviolent resistance strategy.

Monday's theme was resource depletion: examining the effects of diminishing stocks of non-renewable gas, oil, coal and minerals on the world. We discussed particular industries' impacts on the earth and its people, and possible substitutes.

Tuesday focussed on climate change and population from a biological perspective, as the talk was given by an ecologist. Human culture has gradually evolved from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle through small scale agriculture to the globalised economy we see today. However, this has occurred in a period of relatively stable climatic conditions for the past 5000 years, which has lulled us into a sense of false security. We were divided into three groups and attempted to answer three questions. The question for my group was: What attributes from our hunter gatherer and agricultural ancestors should we cultivate and which should we reject? We were also asked to talk about steps we could take to reduce our energy usage both on a personal and national/global scale.

Ruth gave a presentation originally aimed at actuaries to show that in the economic world it is vital to take into account risks of climate change and resource depletion.

The World Economic System was Wednesday's subject. Alan Sloan presented us with a thought-provoking presentation on a potential new economic system based on ecological footprints. Conventional money is not directly related to the material world, and he suggested that if the new currency were based on the resources available from the earth then this would help to solve the resource depletion crises we are currently facing, as well as relieving poverty in the developing world.

Four participants gave presentations on four 'prophets' on Thursday. John Muir was an American naturalist whose activism helped to preserve national parks such as Sequoia National Park and the Yosemite Valley. Ishpriya is a Catholic nun who founded the International Satsang Organisation. The Reverend Horace Dammers was the founder of the Lifestyle Movement. Frances Moore Lappé is the author

of the bestseller *Diet for a Small Planet*, which advocated a plant-based diet as being much more conducive to food security.

On Friday we welcomed another guest speaker, a representative of Traidcraft. He gave a presentation on



the organisation and their efforts to ensure that workers are paid a fair price for their products.

On the last evening we held a party, which was a sort of variety show with everyone offering their best party pieces. We had old home videos, games, singing, jokes, poetry, a small flute recital and some improvised circle dancing. The evening ended with a small tribute to the victims of the atom bomb in 1945, as it was Nagasaki Day. We went out into the garden and floated tea lights in little paper boats in a large baking tray filled with water, as incense smoke floated up into the night sky. It was a lovely way to end the week, which has been one of the most thought-provoking I have attended.

gandhi@socialmedia

Prem Prakash

In a study conducted at the University of Salford by non-profit Anxiety UK, about half of the survey's participants say their use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter makes their lives worse. In particular, the participants noted that their self-esteem suffers when they compare their own accomplishments with those of their online friends. There are many examples of excesses, and in particular a recent example of a British teenager committing suicide after she was targeted by trolls on a popular social media website.

In my current work, I get an opportunity to interact with young people, especially teenagers, in many parts of the world and most of them are very engaged in social media and being online is an indispensable part of their lives. At the same time, I have noted how large a part of it is having a deep seated impact on these young minds. There is absolutely no doubt that young people are getting anxious about varieties of topics, thanks to their being always connected, always aware, always observing and always being observed. The anxiety may well be from topics as shallow as looks and who got invited to what party, to deeper topics like who supports gay marriage to feminism. The constant anxiety coming from all the feedback and discussions is having a tremendous impact on the self-confidence of a lot of youngsters.

Well, internet is here to stay and to be fair, internet and social media have played many positive roles too – whether that be in terms of allowing real time information at our fingertips, better sharing of knowledge and working together or quick medical access. 'Arab Spring' is a good example here of the pull internet has over this generation, even in a relatively 'closed' society.

So, while today's generation certainly needs to make the most of the availability of internet and social media, there is also a need to build self-resilience so one does not get too worked up because of comments and views on their social media networks. There is a need for the individual to have confidence in one's abilities and philosophy, without allowing oneself to be influenced by every minute of news, updates and posts from their friends.

In talking about self-resilience, there comes to my mind no better ideal than Mahatma Gandhi. There is a lot that the current generation can learn from him in dealing with this new environment. The current ambience is so different from the times of Gandhi. There is a possibility of real time communication, right from instant chatting to mobile phones – there is no need to wait for the post to be picked, letter delivered or telegram to be dispatched. There is a possibility of immediately sharing your ideas and publishing your thoughts – there is no need to wait for the next edition of a magazine or newspaper. More often than not, whatever you are doing is for the world to see – whether it be your friends posting photos from a 'happening' party or updates from people on where they are heading for their next vacation, it is available for all your contacts, which may be a few hundreds, to see, opine and judge. Your life and activities are under scrutiny, and this leads in many cases to people getting quite competitive in making sure their social stature matches up to their friends or peers or their 'better off' cousins. Nevertheless, the whole question of the quality of social standing becomes a very subjective matter and in many cases starts taking a very shallow angle. This can create psychological pressures on people and can lead to feelings of uncertainty about oneself, diffidence and eventually undermine one's confidence. This whole piece becomes even more complex when you add economic and job related woes that have become so commonplace. In this current situation, where you are evaluating others and their views real time, and in turn being evaluated all the time, Gandhi's thoughts on self-resilience become all the more essential.

A key part of Gandhi's philosophy was the concept of 'Swaraj'. From his perspective, it meant many things but one of the most significant aspects of Swaraj is 'the spiritual freedom of the individual' and that's where we can find the way to lead our lives with a lot of resilience and confidence in this world with constant flux. Gandhi's thoughts on the individual centered around focus on the self and constant improvement through control of the senses. His teachings also focused on keeping the confidence in the self against all odds, and to quote him –

'In matters of conscience, the law of majority has no place'.

In his own life, he went against all possible opposition, cerebral and physical mind blocks, to continue the belief in what he thought was right. His focus was also clearly on cleansing oneself from within, instead of focusing on outward appearances and the ownership of private wealth. And this is where our biggest learning lies.

In today's world of increasing popularity of material possessions and physical attributes, it's important for individuals to focus on what's of deeper importance, which in most cases is intellectual and there are numerous examples amongst us – right from Stephen Hawking to Barack Obama, from Angela Merkel to Suu Kyi and many more. These are examples of how we can lift ourselves from the ordinary to extraordinary with a focus on self-improvement and firm will power.

For Gandhi, at the individual level Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance. We need to build this deep determination, fortitude and endurance. It's important to believe that there is something extraordinary in each one of us, which may not be visible to the eye, but which is capable of tuning into something special – which may provide the world with the next ground-breaking innovation, or thought, or solution to threatening and age-old problems, either related to disease or to poverty, and which can make this world a better place to live in. The glamour and finery of the outside cannot and should not sweep away the inner world of one's conscience. These daily comments, posts and views are all transient; It is important to have faith in convictions and not lose poise, to challenge one's limits and boundaries, question the unquestionable, and never lose sight of the larger picture and aims. This spirit of inquiry, of the well-formed sense of justice and righteousness is sustainable and long lasting.

Another question that may be asked is that had Gandhi been alive would he have advocated the use of social media himself; would it have been possible to have him as a 'facebook' friend or follow him on 'twitter'. Yes, I think because the pragmatist that he was, he would have again come to terms with the reality of the situation and times first, before reforming it from within. Cautious, yes he was, but, nevertheless a revolutionary.

One of the most inspiring examples of someone who has been able to live by example is Malala Yousafzai, a 16 year old who has stood up against the Taliban to be an advocate of education and nonviolence. Indeed she is a true embodiment of the principle of 'swaraj' by going beyond and rising above the usual taboos and strictures. To quote her:

"I want education for the sons and daughters of all the Taliban and all the terrorists and extremists. I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there is a gun in my hands and he stands in front of me, I would not shoot him."

"This is the philosophy of nonviolence that I have learnt from Gandhiji, Badshah Khan and Mother Teresa," the 16-year-old said.

Source:

<http://mashable.com/2012/07/08/social-media-anxiety-study/>

<http://www.dailygood.org/view.php?sid=182>

Howard Gardner on Gandhi

Howard Gardner is an American development psychologist who is the Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education at Harvard University and the author of twenty-five books translated into over thirty languages. He is best known for his theory of multiple intelligences, as outlined in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*.

Howard Gardner was the recipient of a MacArthur Prize Fellowship in 1981 and in 1990 he became the first American to receive the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education. In 2000 he received a fellowship from the John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Four years later he was named an Honorary Professor at East China Normal University in Shanghai. He was selected by *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* magazines as one of the top 100 most influential public intellectuals in the world in the years 2005 and 2008. In 2011 he won the Prince of Asturias Award in Social Sciences. He has received honorary degrees from twenty-nine colleges and universities, including institutions in Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, and South Korea. ¹

In one of his important works, *Extraordinary Minds* Howard Gardner covers Gandhi at some length. When questioned in an interview in 1997 about inclusion of Gandhi as one of the four persons covered in the book along with Mozart, Freud and Virginia Woolf, Howard Gardner said that "I call Gandhi an influencer because Gandhi may have spent time thinking about himself, but basically what he was doing was he trying to change the beliefs and the actions of millions and millions of people, in South Africa, then in India, and ultimately he had effects all over the world and in this country in the civil rights movement, in Russia, in China." ²

In another book, *Creating minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham and Gandhi*, Howard Gardner profiles seven creative giants. Creativity, he argues, is not an all-purpose trait but instead involves distinct intelligences, as exemplified by Picasso's visual-spatial skills or by Gandhi's nonviolent approach to human conflict or Martha Graham's search for a distinctly American form of bodily expression.

In this book, Howard Gardner has dedicated an entire chapter to understanding of complexities that shaped Gandhi's mind and actions. ³

Howard Gardner therefore through his works found an interesting way of defining Gandhi's creativity. To him, an influencer belongs to the category of creative individuals who create a new field of human activity, by engaging with the minds of

¹ <http://psychology.about.com/od/profilesal/p/howard-gardner.htm>

² http://www.pbs.org/newshour/gergen/august97/gardner_8-27.html

³ <http://www.amazon.com/Creating-Minds-Creativity-Einstein-Stravinsky/dp/0465027741>

large groups of people so as to influence them in ways in which they think about themselves and the world. The influencer has a specific set of gifts – chiefly linguistic and narrative, so as to be able to reach out to large numbers of people through language and storytelling. Gandhi's specific gift as a narrator lay in revealing to individual and collective national selves the reserves of nonviolence and self-reliance latent in them.

Gardner has acknowledged Gandhi as one of the famous creators because he saw Gandhi as a master of his domain "I don't think creativity is something you're born with, I think what you are born with are different talents but talents are not the same as being creative... being creative really has more to do with personality and temperament than how fast you master things".⁴

Howard Gardner in an interview aired in February 2011 made some remarkable comments on Gandhi's influence on his life and works. Here is an extract from the same "I happen to think that Gandhi was the most important human being of the last thousand years... There's no way anybody could ever have predicted a Gandhi or made him happen. You know, this was a guy who was born in India in 1860-something and he came from a family with some political knowledge. He went to England and became a dandy ... you know, dressed to the T ... fooled around with all sort of vegetarian and spiritual things. Then went to South Africa, was thrown off a train and that's when it all started. Why do I think Gandhi is the most important person of the millennium ... And I say 'millennium' because I don't want to step on Christ's toes. Because Gandhi realized that in this world we are not going to survive unless we can disagree and dispute without killing one another. And going beyond Christ's turning the other cheek, he actually worked out what my teacher Erik Erikson called 'the algebra' of how you can protest. And the influence he had in India we could debate about. But the influence he had in America, in the civil rights movements, in South Africa with Nelson Mandela, in China with Tiananmen Square and now with the Middle East spring ... where in Tahrir Square in Egypt, people are standing without guns. This is Gandhi, but it will take long, to know whether Gandhi's message has been, has been heard. But I really do think that ... as Einstein said of Gandhi, "it will be difficult for people to believe that a man like this could have walked the earth". And this doesn't mean that he was a saint in every way. But what we learned from people is that they all have flaws, but what they are at their best are the things which can inspire us, and I've already listed the inspiration that Gandhi had which in my view dwarfs the inspiration of any other figure in the last millennia."⁵

When asked to suggest an essential, must read book for Harvard graduates in 2011, Howard Gardner was quoted in the *Harvard Gazette* as recommending *My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi's autobiography. This is what he had to say about it:

⁴ <http://www.teacherplus.org/2007/october-2007/learning-from-gandhi> and <http://www.fredonialeader.com/news/howard-gardner-appeals-to-the-creative-mind-1.1640823>

⁵ <http://www.thirteen.org/openmind/media/howard-gardner-on-truth-beauty-and-goodness/2310/>

“I consider Mohandas [Mahatma] Gandhi to be the most important human being of the last millennium. He not only realized that individuals of different backgrounds, religions, and values had to be able to confront one another nonviolently; going beyond Christ’s example, he worked out the methods, ‘the algebra,’ whereby such confrontations would be staged and resolved, ultimately strengthening each of the struggling parties. In addition to his indispensable role in the Indian independence movement, he inspired activists in South Africa, China, Egypt, and the America of Martin Luther King. The autobiography is neither artfully worded nor elegantly composed, but it describes in remarkably informative detail the ways in which Gandhi developed his own persona, learned from his mistakes, and inspired others. If one wants to understand the difference that one person can make, and how he went about his mission, there is no better source.”⁶

Howard Gardner very kindly agreed to share his thoughts on Gandhi with *The Gandhi Way*. This piece is an acknowledgement to a man who not only writes extensively and powerfully, but teaches today’s generations the relevance of values of Gandhi, born miles away, in another century, in a far away continent and country. We need more mentors, thinkers and human beings like Gardner. Δ

Letter

Thanks so much for the Summer issue making each issue alive and interesting. Jane Thomas wrote movingly about the plight of animals, and how Gandhi would have abhorred it and gave some very helpful information. As I have grey squirrels running about our garden, I am ‘with her’ in not wanting these little creatures harmed in any way. It is strange how some animals hit a ‘hate’ list with us humans, for no reason that makes sense in a world where most of us deep down desire peace. Professor Margaret Chatterjee reminds us how “Gandhi’s life must be seen in the round” and that many lopsided judgements are violence against a nonviolent man. And a new word in my vocabulary: Geosheelitic! Wow! really enjoyed and learned a lot from the article by Ram Nandan P Sinha. I liked it all, but particularly standing out was his comment that “Gandhi did not insist that everything he said should be accepted as a dogma. Situations change. Priorities may change....” Every time we try to make something static and unchangeable, we are brought up sharply with the realisation that change happens. The only unchangeable thing is change itself. We might as well get used to it? Mario Molinari was interesting about “Food Jobs & Wars” – thoughtful points about growth, harvesting and generating energy – thanks for that. So very good to have an update on Kingsley Hall. I have never known a time when KH didn’t need more funding, and feel this Centre should be a priority for local fund-givers: it is simple, straightforward, Gandhian and a blessing to its community. What more can you want? Everything else was worth reading too – and I take Mark Tully’s point that Gandhi has been attributed with saying many things which he probably didn’t say! Is this the fate of someone as famous as Gandhi? But, as Gandhi himself would have said, we must always pursue the truth.
Denise Moll, West Byfleet

⁶ <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/05/the-one-indispensable-book/>

A Finnish Education

Blanca Juti

Finland again tops the best education charts in the world. There is a lot of discussion about why. In reality, it all starts even before the school system begins. Before 7, kids are kids at daycare, where the emphasis is not in school style learning. At 6 not all kids may read fluently but they sure know how to tell a story, play with others and explore the world around them. Take **Vironniemen päiväkoti**, a daycare, with staff so committed and inspired that activities sometimes continue after normal working hours involving parents and the community at large. A place as special as this requires vision and leadership. Who is behind this?

She is equal parts slender, small, energetic and enthusiastic. Her life revolves around children. Seeing her work, you sense love and dedication. It is clearly a life mission. She is one of my great heroes. Meet **Kiti Hakkola**, the woman who has led Vironniemi daycare for the last 30 years and inspired generations of children, including my own.

Kiti, please tell me the story of Vironniemi...

Vironniemi is a place where all children learn that the world is full of opportunities and possibilities. We grown-ups in Vironniemi have a wish: that the kids become wise and in that way strong so that they can fly beautifully when they leave from here.

I can always see Vironniemi kids are self confident...

Yes, they are. But that kind of self confidence that is friendly to others.

How long has Vironniemi existed?

50 years this year. I have been here 40 years. We have always been in this same building. The first years it was a day care for kids with hearing difficulties. Then it opened to all kids 30 years ago and I have been leading it since.

This is a special building...

It is. It is like a fairy tale castle. The world is a little bit different here. Here we can see the world with different eyes. There can be fantasy and reality too. Imagination is very important here.

You have flying carpets that the kids make themselves and use for story time...

Yes, everyday we have flying carpet time. We also use a lot of drama. We grown-ups perform for the kids and present things that way to them. All the arts are important. We dance a lot, sing a lot, paint a lot and we also do theatre with the kids. In the back garden we have an atelier. We don't believe in education where kids simply sit and are taught by someone else. Kids should be encouraged to explore and discover with all their senses. Kids can learn by themselves.

There is always time to play....

Yes. Games are part of learning too. Play and learning get mixed.

The Vironniemi kids are often exploring Helsinki, the countryside and even once a year you go abroad with the 6 year olds...

Yes we do. All important things cannot simply be found here. And there is no point to just learn from books. We have to go to see these things too. Sometimes I wish the walls would be glass, so we could see everything. The world is not inside 4 walls. It's important to observe, smell, feel, sense the world. This way your life inside becomes very rich.

You play a lot outdoors even in very harsh weather...

Yes this is Finland! It's important to live and enjoy all the seasons, including the rain and sleet of Autumn and snow of Winter. The kids get all dirty but they are prepared with appropriate clothing. It is important to feel hot and cold as well.

How do you get the parents to agree to all these activities, including letting their kids travel without them, abroad at age 6?

We want to send parents the message that it is a privilege to be part of their kids lives. Parents are always part of Vironniemi from when the kids are very small. It's important parents get to share experiences from their kids lives. So we include parents in activities music evenings, or cooking events where they make porridge and soups with the kids. That way the kids learn to enjoy their parents in their daycare and to do things together with them here. Our trips are such that they are voluntary, but the parents really want the kids to explore things. We often think of great experiences to have in life as grown ups. But great experiences can happen at 5 or 6 and that is what those trips are about. We want the kids to be open to the world, to its opportunities, to be tolerant. Kids get stronger when they experience these things at a young age. They understand the world is open to lots of opportunities for them.

I often see you all working well after normal working hours and it always seems natural and desired. How is this?

Well we all have our own lives too, but this is such an important job that it is important to do it well. We may go after hours sometimes but we also share the chores well so if someone needs to come late the next day that it is OK. When we do extra hours, people want to do them. It is not forced. Love is important here. We want the kids to feel loved during the day. We love our day.

I can see that. Some of you grown ups, like Eero, have been here as kids!

Yes and there are many kids whose parents have been here too!

Where do you get your energy?

I want to do things that have an effect in the world. I want for people to be together even if they are different. I would like to see kids develop not according to one pre-established model, but because they find themselves. It is a bit of a cliché I know, but I like **Gandhi's** quote "you must be the change you want to see in the world." That is what I am. Children are dependent on grown ups. I hope there are enough grow-ups in the world who have a huge heart and want to give children what they need. The world would be great if every child had a great childhood.

Kiti, I don't picture you ever retiring!

I am soon that age I have to go by law to retirement. In my view people should stay in work if they are fit and well and I still love to work.

How do you relax?

I go to the theatre, the cinema, to exhibitions and meet my friends. Many of my friends I have met here.

Three words that describe you...

I am a thinker, outgoing and slow. I like to think things and I want to take time to decide important things. I like that things are in a process, you can still have an effect when they are in a process and the process is enjoyable too.

What is perfect happiness?

It is peace of mind, when your soul rests and you enjoy being and looking at this wonderful world!

What is your life motto?

Be the change you want to see in the world, as Gandhi said!

Book Reviews

Gradido: Natural Economy of Life Bernd Huckstadt

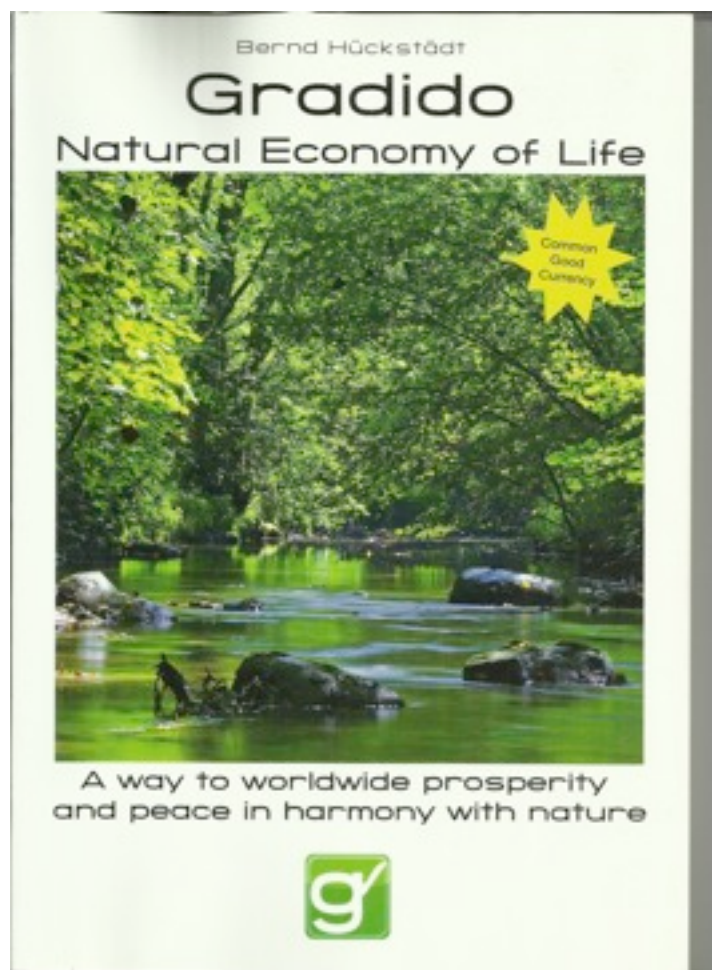
Publisher: Gradido Academy 2012 165pp ISBN 978 1 291 00461 8

We do not need reminding of how we became aware of the disgraceful way some of the world's largest banks had been behaving in recent years. But the banking system is just part of an ill-functioning general economic system. Berndt Huckstadt tells us that 24,000 people die of starvation every day while, I would add, the number of billionaires escalates. The question is: can the system be reformed or do we need a radically different system ? His answer is very definitely, the latter.

The system we have is based on competition which increases inequality, growth which damages the environment, and debt is central to it. Continuous growth is impossible in nature which embraces decay also. This is the Natural Economy of Life. He quotes Edward Abbey : "Growth for growth's sake is the ideology of the cancer cell". The alternative economy proposed is a world wide system – as it needs to be.

The author suggests we start to examine both personal and political actions by asking three questions:

- Does it contribute to the personal good of the individuals involved ?
- Does it contribute to the good of the family and the wider community ?
- Does it contribute to the good of all people and the environment ?



This will sharpen our judgement of what serves life and what harms it.

It is most important that everyone should have the opportunity to work – for the good of themselves as well as the community.

The most original part of the proposal is the creation of ‘living money’ called here the ‘gradido’ (meaning ‘thanks’). Every month 3,000 gradidos would be created without debts being created, unlike existing currency. Three amounts of 1,000 gradidos would be created every month per person to include

- a basic income for every person
- a national income for every country proportional to the number of citizens
- an Equalisation and Environmental Fund for decontaminating the environment.

The national income will enable government to provide health and social services. The EE Fund is to protect the environment with eco-friendly products and services being subsidised. Differences between current rich and poor countries will also be eliminated since the basic income is equal for all people.

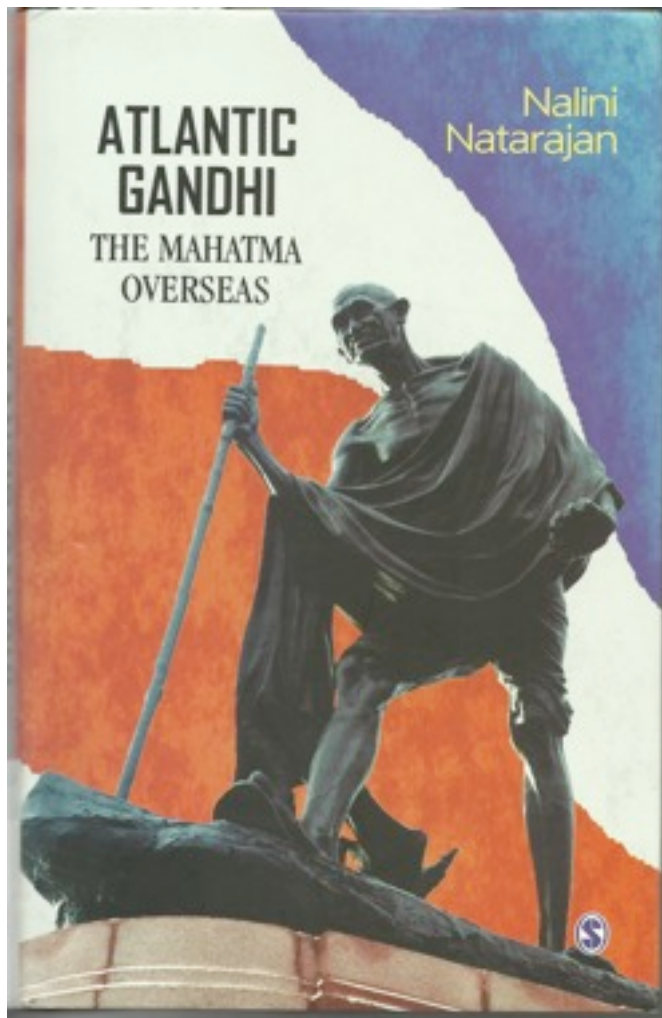
The natural cycle of growth and decay which enables nature to give birth to new living beings and make new products with the total mass staying constant can be provided in the gradido system by having the gradido decay in value by 50% each year. This enables the decay of gradidos to equal their creation with a credit balance of 60,000 gradidos.

This and much else is expanded upon by Huckstadt. Assuming that this would all work and provide a sustainable economic system that would produce a much more just outcome for the world’s people, the issue with all radical schemes is how does one get from where we are to where we want to be ? If you are sufficiently interested and want to explore this plan further you can go to the website <http://gradido.net/en/book> or contribute to the development of the concept at <http://gradido.net/academy> The reviewer (your editor) also has one printed copy of the book which he will send for the cost of postage (4 x 50p stamps) to the first person requesting it.

George Paxton

Atlantic Gandhi: The Mahatma Overseas Nalini Natarajan
SAGE Publications 2013 HB pp248 ISBN 978 81 321 0968 6

The most surprising thing about this book is its title – for Gandhi never crossed the Atlantic Ocean and never travelled to any of the Americas. He did however travel to South Africa and indeed spent some 20 years there and the author, Nalini Natarajan, Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico, focuses on the Indian diaspora not just in South Africa, and how it shaped Gandhi, but in the Caribbean and in Fiji and Mauritius in the belief that this throws light on Gandhi’s development.



What took Gandhi to Africa was a year's contract with a Muslim merchant, like himself from Gujarat, who had a business in South Africa. But the majority of Indians travelling to South Africa were going as indentured labourers and were mostly Tamil speakers from the south of India.

The society that Gandhi moved into was a divided one: whites, blacks, Indians, mixed race; but also the community of Indians was not united: there was Muslim merchant prejudice against Hindu 'coolies', and North Indian against darker skinned South Indian 'Madraseses', as well as caste differences. When Gandhi first involved himself with civil rights it was the merchant class that he represented. These Muslims

called themselves 'Arabs', and the Parsis were 'Persians'. To the whites all Indians were coolies. The famous train journey from Durban to Pretoria during which he was ejected from the train because of his colour brought home to him that this was a different world from England.

When Gandhi formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 (the year after he arrived aged 23) the fees were too high for most Indians so it was limited to an elite. He also at first displayed some ethnic and caste prejudice which he fairly quickly overcame. Before long a Tamil labourer came to him because he had been attacked by his employer. Gandhi took up his case and his employer was found guilty, knowledge of which spread among the Tamils. Legal representation for Muslim merchants, then Christian Natal-born youths, then indentured labourers, began to create a more united community which culminated many years later in the Great March of 1913 against official discrimination. Gandhi's letters to and meetings with editors of the press and politicians, in South Africa and London, shaped him as a cosmopolitan figure. The author devotes a chapter to the particular problem of women in this society, and another to the role of Charles Freer Andrews in the abolition of the indenture system.

When indenture began in the various colonies of the British Empire men greatly outnumbered women. This led to irregular liaisons and prostitution and thus Indian women acquired a 'loose' reputation which persisted for decades. The author also believes that Gandhi's observance of white overseers' exploitation of Indian women influenced his view of sexuality as predatory. By the time Gandhi came to South Africa the ratio of women to men had improved to 40:60. Gandhi tried to change the old reputation and emphasised women as wives and mothers. After 1906 with the development of satyagraha women began to have a more independent status. In 1909 a group of Tamil women formed the Indian Women's Association. They opposed the new legislation which did not give recognition to Hindu and Muslim marriages, and women participated in the Great March across the Natal/Transvaal border and suffered imprisonment. One young woman, Valliamma Mudaliar, died shortly after release, while two babies died on the march.

C F Andrews did not meet Gandhi until the beginning of 1914, the final year of Gandhi's long period in South Africa, and they immediately became great friends. Andrews, who had come to India as an Anglican missionary, had become the leading campaigner against the system of indenture. Gandhi and Andrews had certain things in common: they could both be considered outsiders in relation to the societies they came from; they also travelled a great deal, each location bringing an expansion of consciousness. Andrews operated in Fiji and Mauritius; Kenya, Uganda and South Africa; Guyana and Trinidad. So Andrews did cross the Atlantic. Andrews didn't just seek the abolition of indenture through campaigns directed at both planters and the government, he also attempted to improve conditions on the plantations in many ways. In South Africa he lived in the Indian section of Pretoria which was squalid but he found the people were kind and generous. He was less sympathetic to the Indian merchants whom he regarded as compromisers. When indenture was abolished throughout the Empire in 1920 he continued his campaigning for repatriated Indians who sadly often lived in worse conditions than before. Andrews also introduced the radical Trinidadian, C R L James, to Gandhi and his ideas through the book *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story* thus opening his eyes to the qualities of the Caribbean Indians to which he had been oblivious.

The author claims that Gandhi developed his political outlook and techniques in the context of indenture in the Indian diaspora. He developed an anti-colonial perspective, an anti-modern ideology (modern in method, anti-modern in content), and conducted original methods of protest. Interestingly the idea of promotion of khadi (homespun cloth) originated in his South African period, before he had even seen a spinning wheel. It was his exposure to world economics that gave rise to the idea of home-based cloth production as a solution to the poverty in India.

George Paxton

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Charity number 292629

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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.

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Floating Lantern ceremony at the London Peace Pagoda on Nagasaki Day

