

# The Gandhi Way

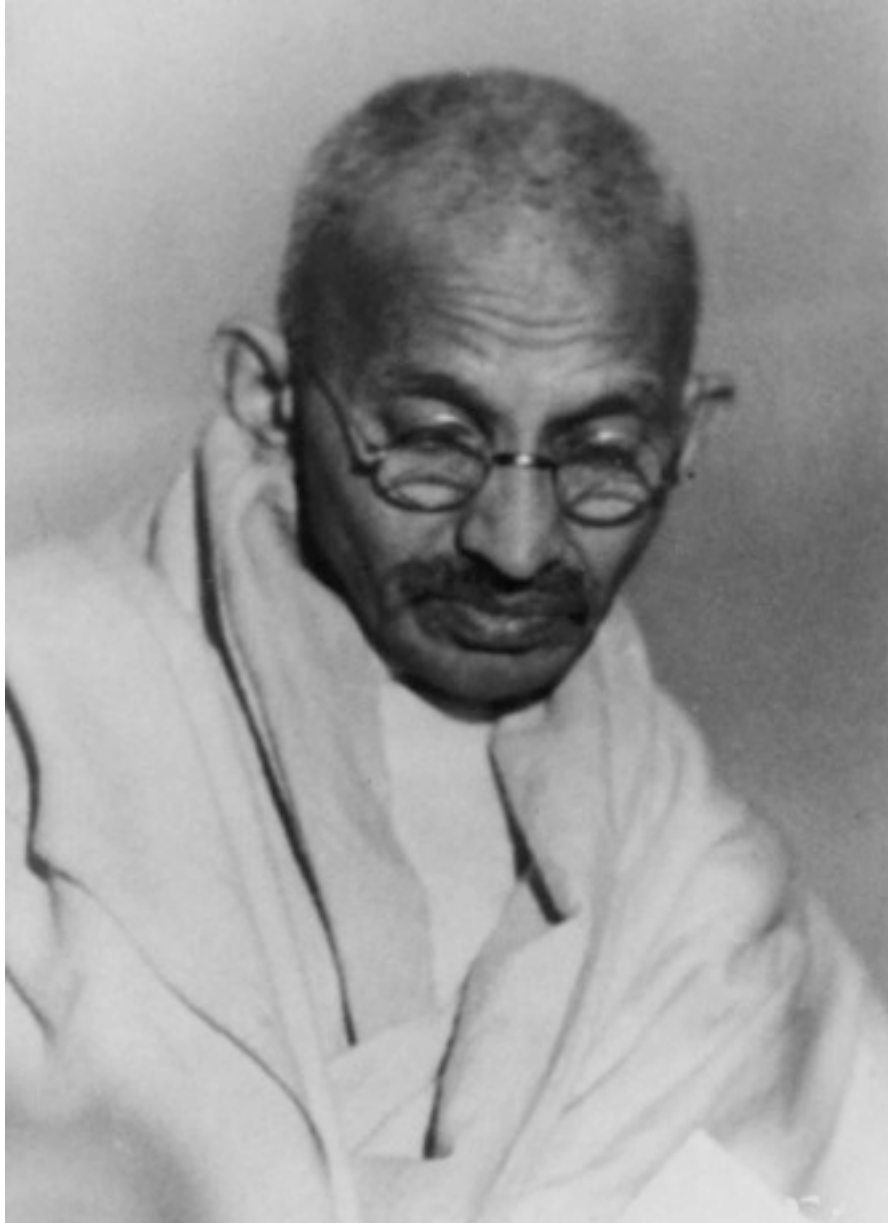


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Newsletter of the Gandhi Foundation

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## **The Gandhi Foundation's Annual Lecture**

on Saturday 1 October 2016, 11am-1pm  
at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ  
by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams

***Empathy, Ethics and Peacemaking:  
reflections on preserving our humanity***

Please register if possible at [contact@gandhifoundation.org](mailto:contact@gandhifoundation.org)

See also pages 9-10

## **Jeevika Trust Annual Lecture and Indian Bazaar**

Thursday 24 November 2016, 18.30-21.00

*India and China: modern travels in ancient civilisations*

by Michael Wood (BBC historian)

at the Royal Geographical Society

Register at [melissa@jeevika.org.uk](mailto:melissa@jeevika.org.uk)

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# It Takes A Global Village To Be The Change Of Peace

by ***Ella Matheson***

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.  
When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense.

**Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi**



The current paradigm shift is this: we are beginning to understand our commonality and the connections that bind us together in our world more than ever before, so much so that peace on earth embraces infinite possibilities towards the cultivation of peace. This vision transcends national boundaries of politics, language, religion, culture and spirituality, we are one race. We are human Beings.

However, one of the greatest challenges to contemporary society remains the perceived sense of futility or insignificance in the face of economic, environmental and social injustice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. taking his inspiration from Gandhi's Satyagraha said that you must have courage to love. Satyagraha is essentially about awakening to personal power, power to effect meaningful change in communities, societies, the world; it is a process of accessing inner strength, a "soul power" empowering people to explore how to take action to be the change and co-create a more beautiful world.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy is as relevant today as it was in the last century. It is profound, that we must create a new narrative by setting the intention

to do what is right, to choose love. It takes a level of strength to stand in the not knowing to transcend societal and cultural conditioning. This is the space in which we enter into meditation, prayer and other contemplative practices.

*“It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated.”* In a sermon on peace in 1967 Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, *“We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”*

Peace must be created at multidimensional levels, a simultaneous story played out on a microcosmic and macrocosmic world stage.

The contemporary parallels to the challenges of the last century include, at the time of writing, the second anniversary of Eric Garner’s death on July 17, 2014; Eric Garner died in Staten Island, New York City, after a New York City Police Department (NYPD) officer put him in what has been described as a chokehold for around fifteen to nineteen seconds while arresting him. The New York City Medical Examiner’s Office attributed Garner’s death to a combination of a chokehold, compression of his chest, and poor health. NYPD policy prohibits the use of chokeholds.

Equally poignant is the second anniversary of Siam Nowarah’s visit to Ferguson, St. Louis, to mourn with Michael Brown’s family. Siam’s 17-year-old son, Nadeem Nowarah, was killed by an Israeli soldier in Palestine during a protest organized in commemoration of the 66th anniversary of the 1948 Nakba. These are just two of many examples of the true power of the beloved community connecting in heartbreak and seeking a path of peace and justice. We live in a world where on a global stage anachronistic historical perceptions, too frequently determine the fate of people usually considered “other” treated differently, where their lives may exist at the intersection of race, sex and class; black people, women, differently abled people, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans people, and intersex people are the “players” and often kept from their full rights of citizenship by systemic social and economic injustice.

We must choose to be pioneers of the possible with practical effective tools which can illuminate contemporary approaches and perspectives of contemplative inner work for developing infrastructures of peace.

Hand in Hand Schools promote Jewish-Arab co-existence in Israel. Parents who choose this type of school are part of the solution to ensure equality and inclusivity for their children, for their communities. The Hand in Hand curriculum includes bilingual (Arabic and Hebrew) education for its Arab and Jewish students, each classroom is facilitated by two teachers, one Arab and the other Jewish. It celebrates all the Christian, Jewish and Islamic holidays.

They learn each other’s culture, and value each other’s differences. The Hand in Hand faculty and administrators are committed to providing the children with essential peace building tools such as mutual understanding, and compassion. In the First Narayever Congregation on May 30 this year, participants enquired how does the school deal with Yom Ha’atzmaut, and the Nakba. Mohamad Marzouk, Director Community Department Hand in Hand responded. “We talk about it, when people experience difficulty, we talk about it.”

Hand in Hand began in 1998 with 50 students. Today there are 1,320 students attending schools in Wadi Ara, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa and Tira-Kfar Saba, as well as the first two schools in Jerusalem and Galilee.

In a month where I have lived with my own personal grief, heartache, sadness, and loss, as well as experiencing friends and family in equal amounts of emotional and physical pain, I emerge only to bear witness to the continued cultural trauma. . . Trauma, of centuries past, almost embedded into our DNA, trauma still yet to be healed. My perceptual shift occurred in the images below, please take a look. What do you notice?



Ma'at



Ancient Wisdom for Modern Lives

[www.PeaceInTheCity.me](http://www.PeaceInTheCity.me)

The first image, a symbol of Ma'at from Ancient Kemet is powerfully inviting balance, to reveal a new equilibrium, yet it is also symbolic of demonstrations we've seen across the world in recent years... Are we being called to a deeper knowledge of ancient wisdom at this time in our planetary history ? Frequently in my talks, I suggest that in critical moments of decision our destiny is shaped; that there is an additional response to fight, flight, or freeze – which is flow. To flow into forgiveness, grace, love, and compassion, is the art of being; allowing an expanded awareness of what would need to happen next for healing to emerge. Would healing look like the legacy of Muhammad Ali floating like a butterfly, or Leisha Evans standing elegantly in stillness in front of police officers in Dallas ?





### **What would healing look like ?**

When the fires are raging, it can be hard to see anything beyond them, or beyond the hope of simply putting them out...

But there is great power in the larger vision beyond the flames and the ashes...

In striving to live into that vision now, even as we pick up our hoses and buckets and take up our place in the line.

### **Belvie Rooks and Dedan Gills**

Now more than ever Belvie Rooks writes:

As we navigate

A continuous river of tears

And heartache and sadness

And madness

in Dallas, in Minneapolis, in Baton Rouge,

in Turkey, in Charleston,

in Bangladesh,

in Orlando,

in Ferguson, in Iraq, in Nairobi

All different! All the same!

For our children,

Future generations,

And the planet!

Whose question is it to hold ?

And how ?

**In Nice, In Munich, In Kabul**

What could healing look like for the families of Sandra Bland, Kindra Chapman, Joyce Curnell, Ralkina Jones, and Raynette Turner (in USA); Joy Gardner, Sheku Bayoh and Sarah Reed (in UK)? In the UK there have been around 1,500 deaths in police custody since 1990. That total includes more than 500 victims from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, despite only making up 14% of the UK population.

Martin Luther King assured us that we have cosmic companionship and it is with the love and support of family, of friends; of our ancestors, and with the wisdom of the ancients that we may hold the space of our collective grief in the knowledge that we are co-creating a more beautiful world. . . A world which recognises, that all life is interrelated. What is done to one, is done to all. . . What is becoming crystal clear, is this, it is our responsibility as a community of conscious beings to be, to sit, to stand in stillness and then take action revealing what healing looks like in this world, at this time.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a great proponent of the Ubuntu philosophy, when translated, the idea of using compassion and our shared humanity to challenge environments of violence, drugs and gangs which proliferate inner city areas is Satyagraha. This creates the space for a new conversation among those responsible for policing our cities. Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, “A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed”.

Following a successful pilot of the Ubuntu Youth-Police project in Southwark by the Tutu Foundation UK, the London Mayor’s Office has given the go-ahead for ten other London boroughs. The youth-led pilot project introduced the use of Ubuntu, the African concept of encouraging reciprocity, respect, and forgiveness, formed part of the restorative justice process in post-Apartheid South Africa. When experienced in a group process it eliminates fear and violence of gang culture; recently evaluated it is now widely held that Ubuntu in practice may significantly transform the way groups of people in conflict interact with each other.

The project has the backing of top officers at Scotland Yard and Police Chiefs in Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire. A key issue has been tension between the police and young people particularly those from black and ethnic minority communities arising from historical and cultural mistrust with complex negative perceptions on both sides.

Ubuntu can work to challenge outdated perceptions because it is, essentially, a personal philosophy which invites people to reflect their humanity in each other. A sense of “the other” is discarded, whilst challenging unconscious bias which may lead to systemic economic and social injustice, thereby creating greater social inclusion and cohesive communities.

Peace is not simply the absence of war, peace is the presence of social justice, of environmental and economic well-being; it is the business of government. There are so many crises in the world and we all know as peace builders as well as from personal experience how challenging and debilitating it can feel to address them.

The conversation about a Ministry of Peace, therefore, could not be more timely. . . What would our-story look like with a United Kingdom Ministry of Peace? A cabinet level office to advise the Prime Minister on securing enlightened dialogue to elevate, articulate, investigate, and facilitate nonviolent strategic solutions to domestic and international conflicts. Imagine if you will, a Ministry that facilitates Peace Hubs with community organisers, or a circle of wisdom with elders to crystalise and research inclusive engagement and community-based peace building tools that alleviate suffering. . . A new narrative for peace is a conversation of compassion, our shared humanity, enhancing well-being, cultivating inner peace and establishing a foundation of contemplative inner work. ([Click here to learn more.](#))

A culture of peace has been defined by the United Nations as ‘a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations’. (See: [UN Resolution A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace](#)).

*“The people of the world have asked us to shine a light on a future of promise and opportunity. Member States have responded with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development... It is an agenda for people, to end poverty in all its forms. An agenda for the planet, our common home. An agenda for shared prosperity, peace and partnership.”*  
UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon

Peace Day is for anyone, anywhere in the world to cultivate peace. Your contribution could be a simple act such as lighting a candle at noon, sitting in silent meditation, or sharing a random act of kindness for someone you don’t know. It can evolve to engaging with your co-workers, your organisation, community or government in a collaborative peace building event. You can also share your thoughts, reflections, messages and pictures to celebrate Peace Day on social media.

Each year on International Peace Day, the United Nations invites the peoples of the world to remember our shared humanity to collaborate and build a future of peace and harmony. It calls on all of us to observe a day of global ceasefire and nonviolence, and to honour a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day.

This year’s theme, the Sustainable Development Goals: Building Blocks for Peace, highlights how ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring broadly shared prosperity all contribute to global harmony. When we all work together, we can make peace possible, starting with 24 hours of peace on September 21.

When people feel secure in their abilities to provide for their families, when they are given access to the resources they need to thrive, and when they feel truly included in their societies, then they are much less likely to participate in conflict.

The leaders of the world have given us a clear blueprint, and by embracing it, we can help build a future of peace, love, harmony and prosperity. A more beautiful world our hearts know is possible...



***On September 21st, please Stand with us. We are seeking to establish a United Kingdom Ministry of Peace, to compassionately introduce a new peace narrative, share with us using the hashtag #StandInPeace what breaks your heart, and what could healing look like for you ?***

#Peaceday

#StandInPeace

#WeAreHere

#BlackLivesMatter

#Compassion

#Ubuntu

#GYR

***Ella Matheson*** is founder and director of *Peace in the City*, a Meditation Teacher, Trustee Tutu Foundation UK for Community Inclusion and Sustainability and Author of the upcoming book *The Art of Being*.

For information on #StandInPeace, the Peace Day Meditation and Peace in the City, [click here](#).



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## **Rowan Williams – Annual GF Lecturer 2016**

Rowan Williams was born in 1950 into a Welsh speaking family. He went to state schools and then to Cambridge University to study theology, then to Oxford where he completed a DPhil in 1975. He was appointed Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford in 1986. Williams became Archbishop of Wales in 2000 and in 2002 was chosen as the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. He resigned in 2012 and became Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge the following year. In addition to his outstanding academic and church careers he is a poet and translator in several languages.

While essentially a reconciler, he has not avoided controversial social issues. In his younger days he took part in CND demonstrations and more recently has criticised Government stances on immigration. Perhaps more

controversially he suggested that sharia law could be accepted in such areas as family disputes in the UK. He has also objected to the French law banning the wearing of the hijab in French schools. He has been strongly critical of free-market economics as creating inequality and has also given support to the idea of a financial transaction tax. He led the Anglican bishops in criticism of the Iraq War and later was opposed to proposed military attacks on Syria and Iran. In April 2016 he called on Cambridge University to divest £5.8bn of investments in fossil fuels.



As Archbishop of the Church of England, Williams was disappointed that the General Synod voted against women bishops in 2012, the year that he resigned, but in 2014 the appointment of women bishops was accepted and the first woman bishop was appointed shortly afterwards.



## Letter

### More on Tolstoy

NAMU MYO HO REN GE KYO

*I made a peace pilgrimage for the abolition of war last year in June. I visited and prayed at Buchenwald concentration camp then walked to Weimer (Tolstoy visited Weimar in 1961 staying at the Elephant Hotel), then Erfurt to Gotha. Gotha crematorium keeps the urn for Bertha von Suttner. Leo Tolstoy wrote to Bertha the following letter probably on 9th October 1891.*

“Dear Madame,

I was just reading your novel *Lay Down Your Arms*, which H Boulgakoff had sent me, when I received your letter. I esteem your work highly, and it has occurred to me that publication of your novel represents a good omen for the future.

The abolition of slavery was preceded by a famous novel (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) written by a woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe. God grant that the abolition of war may follow yours.                      Leo Tolstoy”

*With Palms together in prayer,  
Rev G Nagase*

# Anwara Bahar Choudhury: Breaking Traditional Shackles

By Naznin Tithi  
(Courtesy of *The Daily Star Dhaka*)

***The Daily Star Dhaka* looks at the life of a great Bengali Muslim educationist who dedicated her whole life for the education and empowerment of women.**

"Sometimes, I think of this great woman - seeming out of time, out of rhyme, but an inexhaustible source of energy, music and enlightenment... You couldn't find such a lively soul with a heart full of love and affection for her students in the whole of Pakistan."

Shaheed Janani (Mother of Martyrs) Jahanara Imam's words perhaps best describe Anwara Bahar Choudhury, one of the few women of this region to call for the awakening of Bengali women in the last century. She encouraged women to take the fate of their lives in their own hands and be the change that they wanted to see in society. Through her own struggles, Anwara Bahar Choudhury paved the way for Muslim women to understand the value and importance of education, which could subsequently lead to their emancipation. One can get a glimpse of the challenges she must have faced in the words of her son, Iqbal Bahar Choudhury, who produced a documentary on his illustrious mother, "As I look back at the long journey of my mother, I feel overwhelmed. I wonder how despite being from a traditional family in the early twentieth century, was she able to lead the educational and social movement for the liberation of women".

## **Following Rokeya's Footsteps**

The educationist, writer and cultural activist was born on February 13, 1919 in British India. Her father Abdul Huq Khan was a public servant. Her mother Kaniz Fatema Khanum passed away when she was only three years old, and she was raised by her maternal aunt, Mamlukul Fatema Khanum. When her aunt joined the Sakhawat Memorial School as a teacher at the request of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain who pioneered women's education in Bengali in the early 20th century, she enrolled Anwara Bahar Choudhury in the same school. She was the first student of the Bangla section. During her stay there, Rokeya's ideals and vision influenced Anwara to the extent that she would eventually succeed in fulfilling the dreams of her mentor.

She was one of the very few Bengali muslim women to receive higher education during her time. After completing Matriculation in first division with a scholarship in 1934, she enrolled in Bethune College of Kolkata, where she completed HSC in first division, after which she obtained a BA degree, once again in first division in 1938. In 1941, she passed BT, a graduation programme in teaching, from Scottish Church College, after which she joined Sakhawat Memorial School as an Assistant Teacher. She later went on to

become the school's Headmistress. She also taught Bangla at the Lady Brabourne College of Kolkata for sometime.

She served as the secretary of Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam or the All Bengal Muslim Women's Association, established by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, from 1938 till 1947.

### **An Educator with a Vision**

After the partition of India in 1947, she settled in East Pakistan and joined the Mymensingh Vidyamoyee School as its Headmistress. There were not many students in the school at that time but Anwara Bahar Choudhury's determined efforts brought about a big change in the social attitude towards girls' education. Professor Nasreen Shams, daughter of Anwara Bahar Choudhury, recalls in the documentary, "When my mother joined Vidyamoyee School, there was a limited number of students and teachers. My mother used to visit families of Muslim girls and urged their parents to get

their daughters enrolled in the school. Jahanara Imam, Lulu Rahman and Nazma Khan were amongst the newly recruited teachers". This was the beginning of their working life.



Later, she transferred to Kamrunnessa Government Girls' School in Dhaka in 1949. It was the best school in Dhaka at the time. She also served as the headmistress of the Bangla Bazar Government Girls' School.

For the students of Anwara Bahar Choudhury, learning became such a pleasurable experience that they did not want to go home from school. "She did not fit the dreaded stereotype of a teacher. She was full of affection for her students", reminisces Professor Asma Abbasi, an ex-student of Kamrunnessa School, in the documentary.

Anwara also worked as a Special Officer of Women's Education at the Education Department in 1955, where she stressed the importance of educating rural girls: "There is an urgent need to expand primary education all over the country. We have to remember that ours is a poor nation and its economy is primarily agricultural – the educated community resides in cities. In contrast, a huge proportion of our girls live in villages, for whom there are hardly any school facilities. Yet the future of the nation lies in their hands".

All her life, Anwara Bahar Choudhury fought to free Muslim women from the superstitions of a conservative society. She wanted them to be educated, capable of free thinking, and contribute to national development. She realised that in order to create such citizens, it was extremely important to involve young girls in all types of extracurricular activities along with regular education. Students of her school would participate in sports, physical exercises and cultural activities such as singing, dancing, drawing, reading, staging dramas, etc. In fact, on her initiative, a music school called Surobitan was established in Kamrunnessa School.

### **Of Strong Principles and Ideals**

Anwara Bahar Choudhury believed in humility. A woman of rare qualities, she never boasted of her achievements or status. Instead of taking advantage of her husband's position (who was a cabinet minister of the then East Pakistan), she lived a very simple life in Mymensingh with her four children. (Her fifth child was born later.)

“She was very reserved. No one could imagine that she was the wife of a cabinet minister. She was known on her own account as Anwara Bahar Choudhury”, Nurjahan Begum, Editor of *Weekly Begum* and an ex-student of Sakhawat Memorial School says in the documentary.

Professor Emeritus Dr. Anisuzzaman says in the documentary, “The minister’s wife was stationed far away with her children in Mymensingh, a small district town. He could have easily solved the problem, simply by securing a transfer to Dhaka. Surprisingly, Anwara Bahar did not make any effort to do so, neither did Habibullah Bahar”.

### **Tagore's Influence on Anwara**

Her life and writings were deeply influenced by Rabindranath Tagore. She believed in and followed Tagore’s philosophy on education. After the death of Tagore, she had written, “Bengali poetry, literature, song, culture, everything successively sparked with the glimmer of Rabi. The language we speak today is also Tagore’s. Rabindranath is at the base of almost all the smiles and songs, music and rhyme of our life”.

Anwara Bahar Choudhury and Bhaktimoy Dasgupta (a singer and teacher of Tagore’s music) made enormous contributions in promoting Tagore’s music in the then East Pakistan. To celebrate the birth centenary of Tagore, they organised several cultural programmes, including dance dramas, Chandalika, Shyama etc. written by the poet.

She was similarly influenced by rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who was closely associated with her family.

Anwara Bahar Choudhury felt the need to establish a strong institution to develop the tradition of Bangla music and dance. She played a pioneering role in establishing the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA), named after the famous dancer Bulbul Chowdhury, of which she was the treasurer. “Anwara Bahar Choudhury felt the need to train girls in cultural activities. It is because



of this awareness on her part that BAFA was established”, observes Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Chowdhury in the documentary.

After her marriage with Habibullah Bahar Choudhury in 1938, she became even more engaged with the progressive social movement of her time. She was intensely influenced by the company of Begam Shamsunnahar Mahmud MBE, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury's enlightened sister. They jointly wrote a textbook for children titled *Shabuj Path* (Green Reader in 1939). *Kishore Shathi* (Young People's Companion) was another joint venture by them. Children liked these books for their simple and attractive language and style. Besides, Anwara Bahar Choudhury wrote several books which include biographies, school textbooks, children's books. She was also a poet, her collection of poems, *Amar Chetonar Rang* (*The Colours of My Consciousness*) was published just before she passed away .

### **Establishing Habibullah Bahar College**

In 1971, when the War of Liberation broke, Anwara Bahar Choudhury decided not to work under the military government and opted for early retirement. She had established Habibullah Bahar College, named after her husband, in 1969. After her retirement she devoted her time to building the institution dedicated to higher education. She spent all her personal savings in order to buy the furniture and other necessary items for the college.

“She was an extraordinary human being. She helped people in need in countless ways. Many have received shelter from her, and many built their lives with her direct support and help. She would do philanthropic work often in secret, so that there was no publicity involved”, reminisces Prof Anisuzzaman, in the documentary.

After fighting a long battle with cancer, she breathed her last on October 27, 1987. Professor Kazi Madina, who wrote the biography of Anwara Bahar Choudhury, is fascinated by the strength of her character. “Anwara Bahar Choudhury was secular in her thoughts and full of compassion. She was a capable mother at home. She had engaged herself in creative literary works. She genuinely practised plain living and high thinking, leading a simple and austere life. She was committed to building an enlightened society, dedicating her intelligence, energy and resources for societal development.”

### **Footnotes**

\* Shahid Janani (Mother of Martyrs) Jahanara Imam (1928-1994) was an educationist and writer and is remembered for her untiring campaign to bring to justice those accused of committing war crimes during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Sadly, her young son Rumi, a freedom fighter was killed.

\* *Weekly Begum* – Bengal's first illustrated Women's weekly launched in 1947. It was widely read and promoted Bengali women writers.

The editor of *The Gandhi Way* thanks Shaheen Choudhury-Westcombe for arranging the reproduction of this article about her mother.

# Indira Goswami's Giribala – the True Door to Swaraj

Shyno Baby Paul

Indira Goswami (14 November 1942 – 29 November 2011), known by her pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami otherwise known as Mamoni Baideo was an Assamese writer, poet and Professor at University of Delhi. She was the winner of many awards: such as the Sahitya Akademi Award (1983), the Jnanpith Award (2001) and Principal Prince Claus Laureate (2008). A celebrated writer of contemporary Indian literature, many of her Assamese works have been translated into English which include *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, *Pages Stained With Blood* and *The Man from Chinnamasta*.

Goswami was known for her attempts to create social change, both through her writings and through her active role as peace-maker between the armed militant group United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Government of India. Her involvement in the social activities led her to the People's Consultative Group, a peace committee.

Indira Goswami's legendary Assamese novel *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* (in the Assamese version it is known as *datal hatir une khowa howdah*) depicts the infirmities women faced in the *sattras* (Vaishnavite monasteries) of Assam. Goswami depicts the cruelty of a patriarchal society which takes the form of violent behaviour. Having set the novel in 1948, which coincides with the year in which Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated soon after Independence, Giribala, the protagonist in this novel depicts the superiority of the feminine notion of struggle, which emerges stronger and purer when compared to the brute force of patriarchal power.

## **Giribala the true door to swaraj—complete independence**

In *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* Indira Goswami starkly depicts the vulnerable position of women owing to their widowhood and suppression. Indira Goswami tries to communicate to her readers that there were stages in life when individuals have to take their own decisions which may be against the norms of the society. It is the inner voice within oneself that raises such issues of morality. It cannot be controlled or defined because it is formless. The inner voice is a formless voice that guides an individual to conclude what is right and what is wrong, in other words it is the final arbiter of who guides the individual in situations of crisis and conflict. Listening to and understanding that inner voice which is so small or the act of self-realization is the first stage of attaining a fluid state. Determination to suffer the pain as prescribed by the patriarchal society is the extreme stage of a fluid state of mind – which Giribala possesses, and this makes Giribala different from the other characters in the plot.

In the novel Giribala is seen being encouraged by her elder brother Indranath to pursue education. She felt privileged when she was chosen by her brother to help Mark Sahib, a German Scholar, who wants to write the history of Assamese *sattras*. She was now hopeful that she would not be confined within four walls like Durga, her aunt. Over time Giribala developed a passion for 'Mark Sahib'. His selfless devotion towards the needy, poor and marginalized, touched her deeply and she began to believe that Mark would liberate her from her garb of widowhood. But he would not touch her as he knew his restrictions and boundaries. But in the end, she entered Mark Sahib's house, forcefully, during a stormy night. She says "I will not go back to that graveyard ! I don't want to be buried alive. I'd rather die" (Goswami 2004: 295). She had crossed all boundaries that society had set for a widow and wanted Mark Sahib to accept her. But Mark was not as brave as Giribala. When she was spotted at Mark's house by villagers they dragged her out and prepared to purify her as she had committed a sin by entering into an 'illicit relationship' with a foreigner. But Giribala, emerged a 'liberated woman' after she sacrificed her life in the same thatched hut that was set on fire to purify her.

Extreme level of suffering leads to self-purification. Self-purification completes only when an individual undergoes self-suffering. Self-suffering is possible only when he/she obediently accepts the penance with utmost courage and freedom from fear. Not many people could withstand this kind of self-suffering. It could be achieved only if an individual has the power to act under divine inspiration, which is otherwise called the power of the inner voice. In such a state the 'body' is a barrier as it is structured by society. During the attainment of a fluid state the individual may think beyond the limits of the body which chained them and in some instances they may even destroy their body and soul in order to accept the penance which is welcomed due to their self-suffering. Gandhiji's concept of Ahimsa and Nonviolence communicates and teaches *swaraj*, which means freedom in its complete totality. This kind of *swaraj* is what he is striving and pining for throughout his life. Giribala emphasizes the moral dimensions of freedom which seeks to radically alter human nature, an idea that is enmeshed in a wider exploration for human freedom and liberty.

Giribala, like a liberated woman, does not have the remotest intention of injuring her opponents or even trying to resist society's inflictions. She does not depend on the perishable body, but fights with the strength drawn from the unconquerable and immortal soul – the fire – through which she conquers her adversaries by suffering in one's own person. In the final act of the novel where she is asked to pass through a thatched hut set on fire, a ritual for purification, Giribala chooses to remain inside and gets immolated, showing her infinite capacity to suffer – an act of *ahimsa*. In the end she does not permit resorting to falsehood. Her sacrifice is received as an unshakable adherence to truth. It is seen as Giribala's resolve to show those intoxicated

with power in the patriarchal society, where they fail to see their errors. The society discovers that they cannot command her obedience. Giribala accepts death instead of a life of repression and disgrace. Her sacrifice is her final act of rebelliousness against a system which grants no freedom to her and many like her who have suffered through the ages. Unlike other widows she disobeys the rules that are construed against the natural law of human freedom, the true *swaraj* for a new woman in an independent nation. She willingly submits to the penalties of such disobedience thus exposing the society to its own violence and pain which were imposed on humanity in patriarchy.

The story is set in 1948, when the true meaning of freedom is being realised by Indians. The idea of freedom or *swaraj* according to Mahatma Gandhi was not just restricted to a political mechanism but it also articulated a wide range of moral issues, which were intricately linked with India's freedom struggle. Gandhi believed that an understanding of nonviolence can be achieved through knowledge about violence. In Bapu's view, violence was the product of illusion and was devoid of truth and that violence dehumanizes an individual. The idea of nonviolence as a superior moral power is the key point that Gandhi sought to demonstrate in theory and practice in 1909, in South Africa and then in India. He countered Aurobindo Ghose's assertion that "we do not want to develop a nation of women" in gender terms, arguing that it was precisely the 'feminine' nature of nonviolence that proved superior to the 'brute force' associated with the 'male aggression'. In Satyagraha, there is always unflinching obedience to truth. It is never to be forsaken on any account. Even for the sake of the country, it does not permit resort to falsehood.

Indira Goswami, through Giribala emphasizes the moral dimension of freedom which seeks to radically alter human nature, an idea that is enmeshed in a wider exploration for human freedom and liberty. Giribala, like a liberated woman, does not have the remotest intention of injuring her opponents or even trying to resist society's inflictions. She does not depend on the perishable body, but fights with the strength drawn from the unconquerable and immortal soul – the fire – through which she conquers her adversaries by suffering in one's own person. Through Giribala, Indira Goswami tries to exhibit the extreme level of self-suffering, which is an act of conscious suffering.

For Mahatma Gandhi, self-suffering is a positive course of action. He says self-suffering is not a weapon of the weak because it requires utmost courage and freedom from fear. The consequence of this self-suffering lies in its efficiency as an instrument of social persuasion<sup>1</sup>. It does not mean meek submission to destiny or to the act of the tyranny, but it means putting one's

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<sup>1</sup> Chakrabarty, Bidyut, Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 13.

whole soul against the will of the tyrant<sup>2</sup>. Goswami tries to show her readers that it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire, for instance the patriarchal society, by realizing their extreme individual strength. Her writing does not mean to provide violence for violence as the ultimate solution to explore 'self' but instead expresses self-sacrifice against the patriarchal violence. Their characters were portrayed with sharp awareness of the inner reality and also described as sensitive souls undergoing mental conflict of varying intensity. Amidst this conflict and complex situations in a novel, some of the characters were lost while some others gain. Those who gained come out with new realization and hope.

In the novel due to her strong determination and unusual courage, Giribala sheds the concept of 'body' and frees herself from its bondages and enslavement and forms a fluid state which is disobedient in nature. In such a state the body is free from all man-made laws and forms a new law which is spontaneous and which is formless and thus become liberated. Liberation in its truest sense would mean spiritual liberation through fundamental change in each individual's perception<sup>3</sup>. This could hardly be achieved through political liberation. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, liberation means *swaraj* that means freedom in its complete totality<sup>4</sup>. What is required is a continuous process of self-churning leading to self-actualisation. Through Giribala, Indira Goswami communicated with her readers a positive liberation through the process of a spiritual and moral path against the act of violence and immorality.

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<sup>2</sup> Prabhu, R. K., & Rao. U. R, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 2010, no pg number.

<sup>3</sup> Chakrabarty, Bidyut, *Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 16.



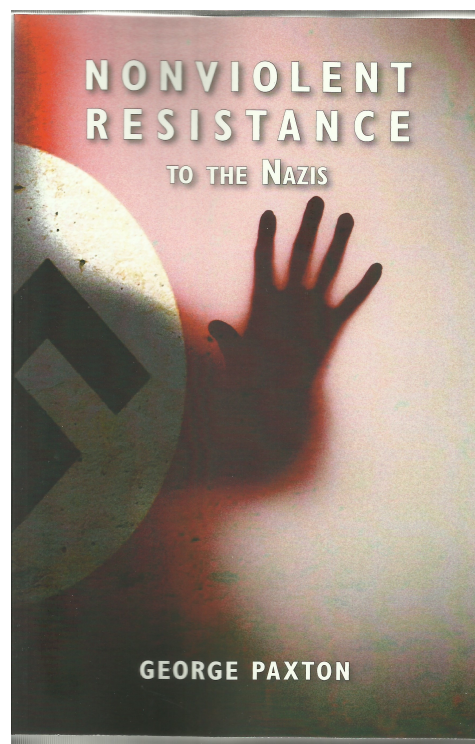
## Book Review

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**Nonviolent Resistance to the Nazis** George Paxton YouCaxton Publications 2016 pp244 ISBN 978-1-911175-18-6 £10

Here is a proverbial labour of love. Over many years, I suspect, George Paxton has compiled information on nonviolent resistance to Nazi occupied Europe. There are many stories of individual resistance, hard here to summarise in the review, and indeed I think the best way we can demonstrate this exceptional courage is to tell as many of these stories as possible. I think it should be said at the outset if the emphasis is on nonviolence a specifically Gandhian approach featured very little in European resistance. Maybe the fundamental difference lay in the way Occupation enforced a largely underground movement whereas a Gandhian struggle is above all open and transparent. What might have happened if this approach had been more often adopted? This is a very rich piece of comparative history. Paxton covers the continent and in so doing tells us about lesser known but often even more courageous resistance in countries we are less familiar with. The story has always tended to be dominated by Germany and France. Inevitably, this is a history overshadowed by the Holocaust and again Paxton has a wide-ranging comparative approach on the attempt to rescue the Jews. I greatly admire his refusal to be daunted by the huge literature on the Shoah. In between in his methodology there are some very specific chapters such as on conscientious objectors. My favourite was on children caught up in resistance. All in all, this is an invaluable addition to the literature on European resistance. It is a formidable work of synthesis.

Paxton favours a positivist history and the book in many ways becomes ever stronger as it begins to focus on case studies of resistance. But there is an alternative more ideological approach and I think we do need to have some insight into the nature of Nazi ideology and why it was belatedly seen as a threat by many of the powerful interest groups across Europe. Could you safely collaborate with a movement which stood in its programme of *gleichschaltung* for such total and extreme control of power and enforced unqualified surrender to the *führer princip*, absolute loyalty to Hitler? Paxton brings out well in his book how in fact the Nazis were flexible in the way they tried to impose control and were ready for compromise. This socio-



cultural approach probably works best for explaining German resistance but it is a model worth having in mind for Europe as a whole.

Initially in Germany many powerful interest groups stood aside as the Nazi movement crushed its left wing opponents, above all the Communists but also other democratic Weimar parties and cleverly set up through the Enabling Act a one party state. Could you do a deal ? The Catholic Church was the first to recognise how wholly incompatible their belief systems were and through their Papal Nuncio, the future Pius XII drew up a Concordat, to protect the activities of the church under this new totalitarian state. Here is the best example in fact of how a major institution could pursue a policy of self-interest. The Nazis were always wary of pushing the Catholic Church too far. But the greater worry of the Nazis was the army. Very cleverly the Nazis tricked the army into an oath of loyalty to the regime, a kind of feudal gesture that largely bound a very conservative institution. But the Army High Command began to realise that the Wehrmacht were under ever greater threat from the rise of an SS elite army and it became one of the main centres of resistance all the way to the July bomb plot of 1944. It took longer for the civil service to realise that here was a regime that blatantly ignored the claims of law and the *rechtsstaat*, a state based on rights, and this led, if but a few, into resistance such as the Foreign Office official Adam von Trott. He was much loved and admired by his friends at Oxford. He was drawn into the July bomb plot and paid for it with his life – hung from a meat hook in Plötzensee prison. Hitler enjoyed watching the film of the slow death of the conspirators. The readiness of the majority of civil servants to try and make law and order operate under Nazi occupied Europe does much to explain how it worked. The Junker Prussian aristocracy again took time to see that the Nazi system would wipe out their privileged social status and there was to be a nonviolent resistance group under Count Helmut von Moltke in the Kreisau circle. They stood for an alternative conservative Germany after surrender. My favourite of all resisters in Germany is the Protestant pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, another victim of the July plot hung in Flossenbürg camp, rightly recognised in Canterbury Cathedral as a martyr of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Intriguingly, his father, Carl Bonhoeffer, a leading psychiatrist, was one of the first to oppose the Nazi euthanasia programme. But of course Bonhoeffer in the end accepted the need to assassinate Hitler and this rules him out as an example of nonviolent resistance. My analysis here is a fairly traditional one and there has been considerable revisionist history which disturbingly argues for a greater role of consent in the German population and also the way ideas were fed to Hitler as to how he was all supreme.

No doubt a parallel study of Nazi racism would clarify the ideological forces behind the Holocaust and there are various brands of anti-semitism. But I'll rely here on Paxton's more pragmatic approach.

So there is an element of ambiguity in resistance as to whether or not it is nonviolent. Anything which favours sabotage and assassination has to be ranked as violent and in many ways the kinds of resistance that the Nazi SS state provoked, be it from the familiar forces of the left or the kind of privileged groups just described, resorted to violence. Of course resistance in Occupied Europe was a new phenomenon and a new set of values are being tested. I find it very interesting that Simone Weil saw one of the gravest threats to the emergence of these new forms of resistance in the resurrection in the course of the war of the old political parties. There is always the risk that the influence of the resistance is exaggerated. De Gaulle tried very hard to give the impression that France was united behind resistance and at the least he has a case for the Free French liberating Paris. (Or did the Germans just leave?) It has to be stressed that till a late hour most French people practised a policy of *attentisme*, sitting on the fence, wait and see, and in France resistance was a minority movement despite Gaullist mythology. But Paxton does state at one point of Europe as whole “self-preservation became the overwhelming aim”.(p 174) So how does Paxton go about this story ?

Comparing nation states reveals fascinating insights. I’d no idea working class resistance was so strong in Belgium, forcing the German administration in 1943 to withdraw forced labour in Germany. The Dutch alternatively more actively collaborated and even if the railwaymen came into line with strikes in 1943 they still insisted on full pay. But in both countries the civil service tried to work the system. Where countries have a more homogenous population resistance appears to have been strongest (though Belgium was divided between Fleming and Walloon). School teachers in Norway refused to endorse Quisling’s new plan for a corporate state and some 10,000 out of 14,000 wrote letters of protest: “they broke the feeling of individual isolation, the dread of remaining alone, which was the main weapon of Nazi terror”. (p145) The same homogeneity is seen as doing much to explain Danish resistance, above all the rescue of the Jewish population. In the west the Germans tended to rely on a collaborationist class who were not committed to the Nazi agenda. In the east they despised the Slav populations and instead imposed ruthless regimes of occupation. In Poland this led to an underground resistance state, a model for the later postwar anti-Soviet resistance.

In some ways the best of the book lies in its microstudies. I’ll mention just three. Paxton has a good account of the White Rose group. Here was one family, the Scholls, brother Hans, sister Sophie above all, who in the end could not combine their work of saving lives through medicine and the appalling slaughter of the war. A visit to the eastern front drove them to ever greater measures of resistance, mainly through clandestine literature. There was a rather strange relationship with Dr Kurt Huber a philosopher at the University of Munich with whom Hans was never fully honest. Huber contributed a leaflet only to withdraw it. In the end they were caught red-handed and Hans and Sophie were indicted before Freisler’s People’s Court

and guillotined. It would have been intriguing to compare their story to Fallada's story *Alone in Berlin*, a story of two bereaved parents who have lost their son on the Eastern Front and embark on dropping postcards over the city attacking the uselessness of the war. Another fascinating story is of Swedish businessman and diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. It seems it was seeing Leslie Howard (in fact a Hungarian Jew) in *Pimpernel Smith* that inspired in him a wish to save Jews and he found himself in Budapest on a mission to do so. He even met Eichmann and later protested at his lorry being rammed. To quote Paxton: Wallenberg was "always on the spot personally, radiating self-confidence and he was fearless".(p 120) Yet the Soviets arrested him in 1945 as a German spy and he died in the Lubyanka in 1947. Then there is the remarkable story recently described by Caroline Moorehead of the refuge offered to Jewish children in the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon up on the plateau above Lyon.

Saving Jews became uppermost in resistance. In the East the murder machine initially took the form of fanatical and anarchic Einsatzgruppen, SS militia, aided by local anti-semites, and only later does this give way to the bureaucratised industrial scale murder machine organised by the likes of Eichmann. I'm not sure if this necessitated alternative forms of resistance. One of the morally grey areas of the story is the way the Jewish Councils worked with the Nazis in the running of the ghettos and Jewish labour. Might more of those periodic rebellions in the death camps, however suicidal, have achieved more ? As it is historians, like the late Martin Gilbert, have tried to redress the balance between Jewish passivity and their active participation in the partisan movement. It is important to be clear as to the extent the Vichy regime breached its promise to save French Jews at the expense of foreign, with some 20,000 being murdered. Certainly French Jews endured the full force of the Statut des Juifs. Paxton explores the various ways Jews were saved, most movingly Jewish children.

To what extent was resistance inspired by Christian belief and can we generalise on the role of the churches ? Have the Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany been given sufficient credit for their total resistance ? Many perished in the camps. I am struck by Paxton's generalisation on Germany: : "the majority of Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, either supported the regime or didn't actively oppose it."(p 62) The debate still continues on the role of Pius XII and the Catholic Church in confronting Nazism. The brutal fact is that the Church saw Communism as the greater enemy and this certainly coloured the attitude of the French hierarchy. They were basically Pétainist. Paxton picks up on the Pope in Croatia: "the failure of Pius XII to condemn and take action against the genocidal actions of the Catholic Ustashe is astounding."(p 53) But he saved Jews in Rome. I think again all you can do is narrate individual Christian acts of bravery.

So we come back to the debate as to whether a Gandhian satyagraha style resistance might have worked. Bhikhu Parekh raises this question in his recent *Debating India* and certainly he believes that in the early days of the Nazi regime it might well have worked. Paxton states of resistance membership that “the great majority of participants were not believers in nonviolent action as a morally superior way of acting but simply used methods that ‘came to hand’ ”.(p 199) One way a Gandhian approach could have been expressed is by looking on the occupier as a person and not a functionary. Paxton draws on recent research, by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, which discovers of some 323 campaigns between 1900 and 2006, one third nonviolent, two thirds violent, is “that nonviolent campaigns are twice as often successful as those using violence”.(p 183) For Gandhi it was a time of huge moral anguish as to whether his belief in nonviolence could stand up to the exceptional threats posed by Nazism, war and the possible invasion of India by Japan in 1942. The plight of the Jews must in some way have been connected in his mind by that of the Palestinian. But all the quotations Paxton makes from Gandhi’s writings at the time leave one with a sense that Gandhi had no real answer to the Nazi threat to the Jews. All he seems in the end to be saying is that to maintain a sense of community pride the Jews should be ready for collective suicide. We forget that when Gandhi took up the satyagraha oath against the Transvaal pass law in 1906 he also took a vow unto death. Gandhi in his last years showed absolutely no fear of death. But then he was a human being out of the ordinary. Even so, as Paxton’s book proves, the role of nonviolent resistance could work. The withdrawal of the euthanasia campaign in Germany, possibly just because there was a threat to extend it to wounded soldiers and the elderly, is a classic example.

Paxton has done us a great service in writing this book.

**Antony Copley,**

*Honorary Professor of Modern European & Indian History, University of Kent*

The book is available from the author (contact addresses on back cover of *The Gandhi Way*) for £12, or from Amazon. Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London also stocks it.

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