

Annual Gathering including AGM

This is provisionally set for
Saturday 5 June 2010 at the Nehru Centre
Final arrangements can be found by contacting
the GF using contacts on back cover

Gandhi Foundation Summer Gathering *Charity and Responsibility*

Saturday 24 - Saturday 31 July 2010
at St Christopher School

Barrington Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 3JZ

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Tibet:the Gandhi Way

Anupma Kaushik

Tibet represents one of the unresolved problems of the world. On the one hand are the Tibetans led by the Dalai Lama who claim that Tibet was an independent country which was annexed by a stronger neighbour, i.e. China. They also claim that their efforts for finding a solution through peaceful negotiations are not reciprocated by China. They fear that China is pursuing the policy of total assimilation of the Tibetan people and their culture ruthlessly suppressing any opposition and waiting for the demise of the Dalai Lama. They also claim that the Autonomous Tibetan Region (TAR) in China does not enjoy any real autonomy. The Chinese on the other hand claim that Tibet has always been an integral part of China and TAR enjoys real autonomy and the Tibetan people have been benefiting from modern education and economic development since 1950. Any resistance to Chinese authority by Tibetans is termed by Chinese as a revolt by traditional forces.

The strategy of the Tibetans led by the Dalai Lama so far has been to pressurize the Chinese government through the international community to respect human rights of Tibetans and to negotiate with the Dalai Lama on granting meaningful autonomy to TAR. This strategy has failed to produce any positive results. So the question is: how can the Chinese side be persuaded to negotiate a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution which in this case is achievement of meaningful territorial autonomy ? Can China be convinced that a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution will earn it legitimacy and respect in the world ? This is highly unlikely. Can the issue be left to the future with the hope that by some chance China may turn into a democratic country and the new democratic leadership will realize that a peaceful approach is the best way forward to the solution of the problem. This too is quite unlikely.

The Tibetan leadership claims that they are pursuing a nonviolent struggle to gain meaningful autonomy but their efforts are clearly not bearing the desired results. Can the Gandhian method show the way forward ? The question then is what would Gandhi have done in such a scenario. Truth and nonviolence were the main planks of Gandhi's method. A person who resolves to adhere to truth cannot remain silent at the sight of violence and injustice. While the lover of truth ought to oppose violence and injustice such an opposition would mean 'fight the evil' but 'love the evil doer'. The lovers of truth or *satyagrahis* will base their actions on self-suffering using soul force. What form would it take ? What steps can *satyagrahis* take ? Can Tibetan *satyagrahis* and their friends resort to a boycott of Chinese goods ? Will that persuade China to rethink the whole issue or should the Tibetan *satyagrahis* and their friends try and convince the whole world that only a total boycott of Chinese goods by the whole world can persuade China to rethink the whole issue. But the big question is: will the world listen to *satyagrahis* ? It seems

to be a very difficult task taking into consideration the popularity of cheap Chinese products; the large size of the Chinese market; the economic strength of China; the ruthlessness of the Chinese regime and selfishness of human beings and governments. However, almost the same scenario existed in pre-independence India. When Gandhi talked about these tactics he was ridiculed and criticized by Indians themselves. People doubted his methods and were convinced that they cannot work. However Gandhi walked his talk. He led by example and lived his talk through simple life style; his readiness to face police batons; endure imprisonment and hardships and even face death for his conviction. This inspired a whole nation; people started using Indian goods instead of cheap foreign goods; joined the protest marches; left their jobs and studies; went to jail and even courted death. This included men as well as women; young as well as old; rich as well as poor; urban as well as rural people; and educated as well as illiterate. This inspired Martin Luther King Jr in USA and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Can it also inspire the Tibetan leadership to engage in *satyagraha* with single mindedness and then ask their followers and friends inside and outside Tibet to follow.

In the Tibetan case this is the most feasible method as the Gandhian method does not aim at defeating the opponent but forging unity out of division. This is very important as Tibetans will have to live with the Chinese even after they have achieved their aim. The issue then is whether the Tibetans are ready to put their heart and soul in their cause. Are they ready to make the sacrifice and then convince the world to make the smaller sacrifice ?

Dr. Anupma Kaushik is a Reader at Banasthali University, Rajasthan, India. She worked for three and half years at the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath.



Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, Tibetan Prime Minister in exile.

“THE VISION: Tales from Ockenden”

Whilst pondering on the question of whether what I wanted to share was ‘suitable’ for *The Gandhi Way*, I began to think about what we sometimes call Gandhian and what that might mean. As Negeen Sai Zinovieff’s beautiful article, *Reflections of God*, in Issue 102, said, Gandhi believed Truth is God and God is Truth. Yes, but what has always held me spellbound in awe of Gandhi was his understanding that our *knowledge* of absolute Truth can change – or grow – as fresh insights come to light within us. Gandhi was never afraid of the changes, merely re-stating earlier concepts, as new light dawned.

So, after all, I decided this story is Gandhian! But please, dear reader, you be the judge of that. It is a little different, perhaps, to most articles in this Newsletter.

The Woking Play Association, who specialise in producing Community Plays, have decided their next one will be about the story of Ockenden, and that it will be called “**The Vision**”. For those who might not be acquainted with the work of Ockenden (from 1951-2007) it was founded by 3 schoolteachers – remarkable for their ordinariness – in answer to the desperate need and plight of refugees and those who needed to leave their countries through no fault of their own.

The story is well documented and I won’t repeat it here. My own involvement with Ockenden was to become PA to the main founder, Joyce Pearce OBE, for her last 5 years, before she died of cancer in 1985. She was an impossible, endearing boss, and was instrumental in turning my life upside down and inside out – just by her demonstration of a living faith in a greater power that could – and did – make what we call ‘miracles’ happen, as Jesus had done in his short life span some 2,000 years ago. Her Christianity had to be a living reality or it was no use to her. Indeed, had she been born a Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or whatever, I verily believe she would have had no time for any Religion that did not “work”. For her it was not an outward ‘show’ but an inner reality.

Let me try and illustrate: in the 1970s, at the time of the Vietnam War, the *Daily Mail* decided to send a plane to Saigon to pick up all the babies in orphanages they could find. The Government was behind the plan but insisted that they should all be brought back to one central point before many of them were adopted into families in the UK. So Ockenden was asked if it would be that receiving point. Joyce Pearce was told there could be as many as 300 babies and toddlers, who would be arriving in about a week. Now – Joyce had nothing ready for *five* such babies, let alone 300.... so she took a deep breath and said “Yes!” Ockenden would take them. Her response was made knowing deep within her that when a humanitarian need is great enough, the Universe will provide all that is needed.

And how it did! Following a radio appeal, all that was necessary came pouring in – even including another whole house, vital – cots, baby bottles, baby food, bedding, and people in their hundreds Joyce called it an “energy of compassion”. By the skin of her teeth, all was ready and waiting when she went to meet the plane at Heathrow – little ones came tumbling out, and were received with love and warmth and care by a huge team of willing volunteers. ‘Mission accomplished’ and Joyce laughed to herself that it seemed as though she had “done it all herself”..... when in reality, what she *had* done herself was to say “yes” in faith, against all the odds. This enabled the energy of compassion to build. Of course a lot of work went into the preparations, but the outcome was assured.

And so, with many similar kinds of stories happening throughout Ockenden’s history – and bearing in mind that, very sadly, the refugee problem has not gone away today – it will be made into a Community Play with music and songs, in 2010 – performed at the **Winston Churchill School** in Woking, on **April 27, 29, 30, May 1 (matinee & evg), 2, 4, 6, 7, 8.**

Tickets can be purchased from the Ambassadors Theatre, in Woking for £8.50 or £5 concessions. Some of you may like to come and see it – we do hope so! Please get in touch and I will try to answer any questions on 01932 343614 or denise.newleaf@phonecoop.coop. The website to look at is www.thevision.org.uk

Denise Moll

PS: If you would like to read more about the story, Denise has copies of *Joyce’s Ockenden* by Pamela Watkin, (180 pages), which she can send to you, for a small donation – cheques made out to **Woking Play Association**, and sent to Denise at 21 Fleetwood Court, Madeira Rd, West Byfleet, Surrey KT14 6BE.

Meat eating and climate change

In an interview with *The Times* (27/10/09) Lord Stern of Brentford, author of the 2006 Stern Review on the cost of tacking global warming said, “Meat is a wasteful use of water and creates a lot of greenhouse gases. It puts enormous pressure on the world’s resources. A vegetarian diet is better”. He predicted that people’s attitudes would evolve until meat eating became unacceptable. (This was taken from the report in *New Leaves*, newsletter of the Movement for Compassionate Living. www.mclveganway.org.uk)



Western thinkers who influenced Gandhi

Annie Besant (1847-1933), John Ruskin (1819-1900), Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Henry Salt (1851-1939), in centre Henry Thoreau (1817-1862)

Indian Secularism Revisited

Antony Copley

A very distinctive Indian version of secularism has underpinned India since independence and is the critical guarantee in the continuing existence of its multi-cultural pluralist society. Were it to weaken then terrifying forces of communal violence are always at risk of breaking out. These thoughts are prompted by the Olympian lecture on this theme by Justice Aftan Alam, the 2009 Annual Gandhi lecture, *The Idea of Secularism and the Supreme Court of India*, delivered in the Temple Church of The Inner Temple, 14 October, and a short text by the Jawaharlal Nehru University historians, Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mookerjee and Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi* (Sage: 2008). It is a theme I have myself looked at in the past, in a long article in *Contemporary South Asia* Volume 2 Number 1 1993, entitled Indian Secularism Reconsidered: from Gandhi to Ayodha, and as Editor of a collection of essays connecting Hindutva (Indianness or Hinduness) to the story of the religious reform movements, *Hinduism in Public and Private* (OUP India: 2003). I like to think that in those publications I raised the uncomfortable ambiguities of this debate though probably at the expense of clarity. There is a certain virtue in oversimplification. How do the lecture and the text by the JNU historians reopen the debate on Indian secularism ?

The event that put this issue at the centre of Indian politics was the truly shocking vandalism 6 December 1992 of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodha. As my article tracking this outrage was long in the making, (in fact I wrote my piece some months before the final outrage), and it has left uncomfortable questions about who was responsible. Justice Alam refers to a decision of the Supreme Court which validated the dismissal of the popularly elected governments of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh for aiding and abetting the demolition of the mosque. The presidential decree has been seen as an attack on democracy. But on this occasion the Court was certain that the dictates of secularism justified their dismissal. Interestingly, it is only now that a commission on the event headed by Manmohan Singh Liberhan has published its findings and they are pretty explosive. For the first time the former prime-minister, Vajpayee, together with the other leading politician of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Advani, are seen as “culpable of taking the country to the brink of communal discord”. According to the report the demolition was “neither spontaneous nor unpreventable” and was the “zenith of a concerted and well laid out plan”. Responsibility ultimately lay with the Rashtriya Swayasevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological source of the Hindutva programme (See *The Guardian* 25 November 2009). How the current Congress government will now react is just as provocative a question as to how any future government here will react to the findings of the Chilcot Commission.

Varieties of Secularism

Secularism is not self-defining and comes in several versions. In post-revolutionary France it took the form of an aggressive rationalism, hostile to all clerical power and to religion itself, inspired in the 19th century by the republican ideology of positivism, and it led in time to the separation of church and state in 1905. In all state schools children were inculcated with a doctrine of *laicite*. A similar anti-clerical version of secularism briefly dominated Germany in Bismarck's so-called *kulturkampf* and Italy has always been subject to strong anti-clerical, anti-papal protest. If here we have been spared a similar political expression of anti-clericalism, for we still have an established church, in the writing of Richard Dawkins and his like we are now exposed to an equally aggressive rationalism and atheism. Probably Indians were more aware of the draconian assault on all things religious in the Soviet Union. But in India secularism took a very different shape. It was not anti-religious but driven instead by seeking a way of securing a mutual tolerance of faiths. Both sources under view try to exemplify what Gandhi and Nehru meant by secularism. The JNU historians who see Gandhi as "perhaps the greatest person to walk the earth in the 20th century" (p43), come at it largely in terms of how Gandhi challenged communalism in the name of a secular nationalism, Justice Alam by reference to Gandhi's concept of *sarva dharma samabhava*, an equal treatment and respect for all religions. However, his quotation from Gandhi in 1939 disputing the idea of a separate Muslim nation and a speech days before his death on how all religious faiths have an equal claim on India's capital Delhi, although it reveals Gandhi's deep belief that all Indians were children of Mother India, does open up a certain ambiguity as to how different cultural communities are all subsumed by an Indian identity. I prefer a quotation I used in my article:

It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which bonds one indissolubly to the truth within and which even purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself. (Quoted in S Gopal *Anatomy of a Confrontation* Viking: 1991, pp14-15)

Nehru as an agnostic was closer to a European version of secularism but he saw the vital importance of building into the constitution safeguards for the protection of religious minorities, a means of staunching the communal bloodshed that has stained India up to and during the partition. The whole debate on Indian secularism goes in two overlapping directions: there is the debate as to the nature of a secular nationalism and there is an ongoing tension between the protection of the personal laws of Indian religions and the search, one Nehru himself supported, for some personal code more in line with human rights worldwide.

Responses to Indian Pluralism

Secular nationalism was one solution to Indian pluralism. It both guaranteed multi-culturalism whilst guarding against separatism. Justice Alam wittily points out at the beginning of his lecture that there are six different ways of getting married in India. The JNU historians provide a lucid account of how a Congress secular nationalism differs from a Hindu nationalism though my instinct is that they do so by a degree of simplification and an avoidance of the inherent ambiguities in the Congress Party's attitudes. I try in my introduction to *Hinduism in Public and Private* to point to an approach to nationalism of the likes of Lajpat Rai that converge with a Hindu, and Congress were of course right to deny membership of both Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. The Congress Right continued to be a barrier to the rise of a distinctive party of Hindu nationalism. That only takes off in the late 1980s. We need to be reminded of that atmosphere of hatred towards Muslims that led to Gandhi's assassination by followers of the RSS and it is chilling to learn that at a meeting in Bombay 19 November 1995 Gopal Godse, brother of Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, still justified the murder in terms of ridding India of a "demon" and pre-empting the risk of a second partition with the breakaway of Hyderabad.

The most intriguing section of the book by the JNU historians is on the way school textbooks are being doctored to promote a Hindutva version of Indian history. With the BJP in power at the centre their education minister, Manohar Joshi, set about fashioning a communalised version as opposed to a secular one and in 2002 there was a wholesale introduction of a new set of textbooks. Initially the one on contemporary India did not even mention Gandhi's assassination though, after a public outcry, just a sentence was added. The India History Congress drew up a list of errors in the new textbooks. If it remains somewhat mysterious why self-proclaimed representatives of the Hindu majority should be so afraid of minority communities, the JNU historians make the good point that theirs is not so much a fear of 'the other' as a determination to mould Hindus to their own ideal of a correct way; they are even more hostile to liberal-minded Hindus than they are to Muslims. They also suggest it was their very isolation in 1948 that drove them out of desperation and cowardice to murder Gandhi.

And it is impossible to overlook the tension between protecting the rights of minority communities and the emergence of a progressive legal code. The thrust of Justice Alam's lecture is the slippage from a rigid adherence to the terms of India's Constitution by the Supreme Court towards both a prioritisation of individual rights and freedoms over community based rights and, more worryingly, a tendency "to take a mono-culturalist view rather than a pluralist view of secularism". He has much to say on the way in the 1950s the Supreme Court defended the rights of Christian and Muslim schools in Kerala to remain free from state intervention but in its decision of 2003 the prestigious Christian St Stephen's College would have to limit its Christian admissions to 50%. There is much here of relevance to our current debates

on faith schools. Justice Alam summarises: “for about forty or forty-five years, the Supreme Court held that the Constitution did not permit community specific political rights, it recognised community specific social rights. But in the last fifteen years the court seems to have come to the view that under the Constitution there cannot be any community specific rights either political or social.” (p15)

But is this necessarily a mono-culturalist agenda and by implication a Hindutva one ? One of the hugely controversial decisions taken by the Supreme Court was in the Shah Bano case in 1986. Here I’ll quote my own account in my article.

Implications of the Shah Bano case

In 1976 one Shah Bano after 43 years of marriage to a prosperous lawyer was divorced in traditional Muslim fashion. She was to fight a case for maintenance all the way to the Supreme Court and win: in 1986 she was awarded Rs 500 a month. In the Islamic Shariat law, once the husband has returned the wife’s mehr, or dowry, responsibility for the wife’s maintenance falls on her family, so this decision was in clear breach of Muslim personal law. This was hailed as a victory for secularism and a feminist triumph to boot. Muslim women were now to enjoy the same rights as those of other religions under Indian personal law. Belatedly it looked as if the Constitution was going to fulfil its directive principle, Article 44, and introduce a uniform personal law. But Rajiv Gandhi’s government, alarmed at Muslim anger, lost its nerve and in the Muslim’s Women’s act was to reverse the decision of the Supreme Court. Here was a betrayal of secularism and of the equality of women before the law. Congress could once again be blamed for unscrupulous politics, its courting of Muslim conservative interests as a way of securing the Muslim vote-bank.

I add, more dubiously:

Significantly, progressive Muslims now see the wisdom of abandoning Muslim personal law and an assimilationist approach to independent India. After all, theirs is a population largely born after 1947 and they know no other loyalty.

Justice Alam is not hostile to the Supreme Court’s decision and points out that in a subsequent appeal against the new act the Court claimed nothing had in fact been lost: “it may look ironical that the enactment intended to reverse the decision in the *Shah Bano’s* case, actually codifies the very rationale contained therein.” What Justice Alam is looking for is a more culturally tolerant approach. In his interpretation of the Court’s new ruling, “it effectively held that the Act would be unconstitutional if interpreted to give Muslim women less than other own by way of maintenance” but did so in his view by “a different and more acceptable route”. Clearly Justice Alam sees the conflict between the possibilities of a universal code and the particular demands of community and argues that the Court “will have to find a middle ground between its two extreme positions, one where the right was held to be

absolute and not subject to any reasonable restrictions even in public interest or national interest and the other where the right stands emasculated". There is a danger, he recognises, of insulating minorities from the national mainstream and one has also to recognise that minorities anyway are divided and "that an over protection of the community specific rights was of little if hardly any use to weaker sections within the minority groups". But minorities nevertheless remain fearful of being subsumed within the majority. And in the end Justice Alam comes down I think on the conservative side: "In India secularism cannot be seen or used as a means for doing away with all the differences of creed or caste and region and language and for developing a more homogenised society laying stress on 'Indianness'. All this is of profound relevance to European states which are having to come to terms with Muslim minorities. Just recall the public uproar that greeted Archbishop Rowan Williams when he suggested that English courts would at least have to be aware of the claims of shariat law. The recent referendum in Switzerland over minarets points to the profound fears of European majority communities. In India it seems that the move for a more progressive personal code has been seriously distorted by the intrusion of the Hindutva campaign for a uniform personal code.

And what of the future ? With the BJP led National Democratic Alliance defeated in the two recent general elections the Hindutva movement is in some disarray. The rather shadowy relationship between the RSS and the BJP, the former a socio-religious grouping, the latter, political, is once again being played out and the RSS leader Mohan Bhagwat has directly intervened in the political process and is trying to shape the BJP party leadership, marginalising the old guard under Vajpayee, though he has a soft spot for both Advani and Manohar Joshi, but his preference is for a younger leadership. There is to be no let up in the RSS ideological commitment to Hindutva. Interestingly the debate on Hindutva still goes back to the events around Gandhi's assassination and a continuing insistence on the responsibility of the RSS. However a recognised interpreter of the RSS, D R Goyal, forecasts: "I don't see any future for the party for the next ten years, at least until 2014". (See *Frontline* September 25 2009) In the meanwhile it is Congress that has to justify its own claims to a secular nationalism by being sure its reach embraces the tribal and forest populations of India, put so grotesquely at risk by India's industrialisation programme, as Arundhati Roy has recently so bitterly portrayed. (See her essay *Into the Inferno*, *New Statesman* 20 July 2009)

Antony Copley is Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Kent and a member of the Gandhi Foundation's Executive Committee.

Justice Alam's Lecture can be viewed on the Gandhi Foundation's website www.gandhifoundation.org

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Mahatma Gandhi: A Father with No Nation

Bhikhu Parekh

Mahatma Gandhi has most probably realised his ambition of attaining *moksha* and is unlikely to return to earth. However, should he do so, he would be deeply disturbed by many aspects of contemporary India. He would be shocked at the corrosive corruption that has spread to all walks of life and eroded the great moral capital that he and his colleagues left behind by exemplifying in their lives the highest norms of public life. It is not the petty corruption of a junior government officer that would have worried him, but rather the way in which the common good of the country is constantly sacrificed at the altar of sectional and individual interest and the almost total absence of embarrassment and guilt with which it is done.

Gandhiji would be even more saddened by the depth and extent of poverty. On the official criteria of earning one dollar a day, 25% of our people live below the poverty line. But if this poverty were to be defined in terms of calorie consumption and the satisfaction of basic needs, the figure would rise to 60%. Gandhiji would see this as nothing short of a national shame. He would consider it a betrayal of his legacy that no systematic movement has been mounted for the abolition of poverty and the growing economic inequality in the 60 odd years of India's Independence.

He would be equally disturbed by the country's lack of an inspiring moral vision. It has set its eyes on becoming an economic super power by 2020 on a growth rate of between 5 and 7 percent. Gandhi would want to know the point of this. Economic growth exploits nature, creates deep inequality, puts enormous pressure on social and political institutions and encourages mindless consumerism.

At best, it can be a means to a worthwhile goal but never an end in itself. Gandhiji would want to know what great moral and political ideals we intend to realise by means of economic growth and how we intend to make India a humane and compassionate society.

Gandhi would have been shocked by the increasing cultural philistinism and lack of moral idealism of the new middle class, on which he had placed his hopes for Independent India. The middle class of his time had a strong social conscience. It was bicultural and at ease with both the Indian and the Western tradition. It was both rooted and open, and took a morally serious approach to human life. It had certain standards by which it aspired to live and felt guilty when it could not.

The new middle class could not be more different. It lacks social conscience and has little regard for the worse off. It is rootless and is neither well versed in its own traditions, nor in those of the West. It is culturally and

economically insecure and prone to panic. Its primary concern is to make money and spend it in shallow pursuits.

Faced with all this, what would Gandhiji have done ? First, he would have mounted a campaign of satyagrahas against clearly identified and suitably dramatised cases of inequality and injustice. In doing so he would have offered the victims of injustices a badly needed alternative to Naxalism. Second, he would have built up a nationwide cadre (lok sevak sangh) of committed workers, dispersed them in villages and expected them to attend to local problems and act as a powerful check on the local power structure. Third, he would have set a personal example of incorruptibility and inspired his close colleagues to do the same. Fourth, he would have thrown up a political movement that would have cleared away the decaying and unprincipled political parties and created a space for the emergence of new ones. Finally, while confronting a situation like the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992, he would have explored all possible political ways of resolving the issue peacefully.

He would have put pressure on Hindu and Muslim religious leaders to work out a compromise, which was not impossible and perhaps suggested building a multi-religious complex around it to symbolise India's commitment to religious pluralism. If Hindus had still insisted on destroying the mosque, he would have seen it as a grave violation of their great tradition of tolerance and an indelible stain on the national conscience. He would have felt that he had no choice but to embark upon a fast, even perhaps a fast unto death, to save the honour of the religion and the country that he loved more than his own life.

Bhikhu Parekh is Vice President of the Gandhi Foundation and a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Democracy in the University of Westminster.



A Sculpture of Gandhi

The sculptor Clara Quien lived in India for 15 years and made a life size sculpture of Gandhi – the only one in his lifetime – which is now in the care of her daughter Rhea Quien, who is also an artist, and who lives in Cambridge. The sculpture will go on public display in this country when it has been restored. To view it see www.rq-art.com/events/claraquien/claraquien.html

Book Reviews

Meeting the Mahatma: Gandhiji's Visits to Orissa Edited by Jatindra K Nayak Rupantar 2006 pp123 ISBN 81-901759-7-1 Rs195

Gandhi visited the Indian state of Orissa seven times and this book brings together 25 short accounts of some of these visits written by mostly Oriyas but also by two European women. Most of the authors were young at the time and some were even children, and the memories were obviously of lasting significance to them.

Gandhi seems to have visited Orissa mainly as part of his campaign against untouchability and he often travelled on foot from village to village accompanied by his 'mobile office' on a cart along with his 'staff'. The expectation of his appearance in their state drew people from far and wide. For many it was simply the sight, or darshan, of the tenth incarnation of Vishnu (as many thought) that mattered, but for Gandhi it was the reform of Indian society that counted – perhaps even more than independence for his country.

He expected those who came to also donate to the campaign. One story is of a poor woman barber who came to shave him. Gandhi expressed his disapproval of her jewellery, which she had put on for the special occasion; yet after she had shaved two of his colleagues and been paid, she presented the money to Gandhiji.

We also read of Gandhi's tolerance. Although an ardent vegetarian, when asked by one of the audience whether it was right for poor Oriyas to eat fish, which are abundant, he responded that it was. Another instance concerns a fundamentalist Hindu who defended the exclusion of low-caste Hindus from his temple yet Gandhi invited him to speak from his platform.

The longest piece is by a German Swiss woman, Frieda Hauswirth, who was an artist and writer married to an Indian. She hoped to sketch Gandhi, whom she describes as ugly but with a beautiful smile, and she manages to do so although he would not pose for her. (This portrait is now in the USA.) She also observed how a group of women who had to keep purdah slipped out of their houses and went onto a roof to get a glimpse of Gandhi.

Manmohan Choudhury relates how the priests of the Puri temple planned to beat up Gandhi because he wanted lower castes to be admitted and so local politicians arranged for his protection. Gandhi was not pleased with this decision and so decided to walk rather than travel by the motorcar provided "in order to give greater opportunity to anyone who wanted to beat him up".

One small error in Choudhury's piece is "Piere Sherrysol" which should be Pierre Ceresole, the Swiss founder of Service Civil International, who joined one of Gandhi's marches for a few days after helping earthquake-affected people in Bihar.

These recollections vividly convey the extraordinary personal qualities of the man as well as his social concerns and the editor is to be warmly thanked for bringing these writings together.

George Paxton

Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas David Cortright Cambridge University Press 2008 pp376

David Cortright is a professor at the Joan B Knox Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. His commitment to peace began when he was drafted into the US army during the Vietnam War. Coming from a conservative Catholic working class family he had a crisis of conscience – “a shattering experience”, and began to speak out publicly against war, opposing the war while still on active service.

He begins his study by referring to the term ‘pacifism’ and the problems of the word. The word ‘pacifism’ probably dates from the tenth Universal Peace Congress held in Glasgow in 1901. The story goes that it was spoken during the tram ride from the hotel to the Congress building although it was the French President of the League International de la Paix, Emile Arnaud, who introduced it in public. Cortright speaks of ‘realistic pacifism’ but concludes that the use of this terminology can no longer be defended and proposes the terms ‘peace-making’ and ‘peace-building’ although he admits they are still rather vague. The aim was to develop political ideas and procedures which would lead to peace. There should be a distinction between those who just hope or pray for peace and the practical path to it.

The author describes the various peace movements that arose from the beginning of the 19th century. Initially they were private organisations but later there arose bodies supported by states such as the League of Nations and the United Nations. The first, unofficial, peace organisations were much influenced by world religions and here he also mentions influential individuals such as Gandhi and Niebuhr.

To Cortright the concept of democracy is very important and he stresses the direct relationship between democracy and the noble aim of attaining peace. He observes that human beings are responsible for social justice and the protection of the individual leading to human solidarity.

He mentions the American philosopher William James who wrote about the moral equivalent of war. James wrote: “The proponents of peace have not paid sufficient attention to the underlying psychological and emotional factors that sustain the culture of war.” Cortright says we must aim for the higher ideals of social discipline and mutual service.

This book is one of the most penetrating and authoritative studies of peace movements.

Piet Dijkstra

Letters

Gandhi and Economics

I have read Eirwen Harbottle's short but vitally interesting article bringing money into the equation of nonviolence, which I had never thought of doing before. As the world is at the moment, she has put her finger on a key point.

She mentions monetary reform. That may yet burst upon the scene sooner than we expect, but as a non-expert in financial matters, I would like to stress the necessity of reforming our own attitudes towards money, because we all have to handle it. Whatever reforms take place in the financial market, they will avail little if morality is not underlined and if we cannot radically change the present attitude of "I must have it, as much as I can get".

When I was a kid, if I wanted a torch I saved my pennies in my piggy bank till I had enough. Then I bought my torch. There was no offer of being given a torch by Mum or Dad and being told to pay back later (which of course would have been avoided !) Could we re-educate ourselves to behave as we used to behave, honourably and sensibly ?

Along with my thinking goes honesty. We work to receive money. We cannot afford to cheat by asking for double wages if we do something special. Doing something special immediately bends the corner too fast into the risk-taking lane. Honesty is quickly wrecked.

My plea is for fair and responsible behaviour in the world of economics. Would this not advance all the facets of security, law, and everything else ? Gandhi was concerned about the poor but I don't think he ever recommended a different approach to finance.

Where there was injustice he spoke out fearlessly however. If we follow Gandhi's lead, we recognise that the wicked injustices of money grabbing and irresponsible self-aggrandisement (which I'm afraid includes some sport as well as bankers) requires us all to cry out loud. I think Gandhi's concept of nonviolence was really taking corporate action for the good of the underdog. It was his interpretation of "fighting for our rights". Let us by all means eliminate the overloaded word "fighting" and turn it into nonviolent action for advancement of peace, security and fair economics. But how ? !

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A Unique Prison?

Friends of The Gandhi Foundation:

I have written this letter from Mexico, a country that bleeds problems of poverty, violence, egoism, hopelessness and lacks values. Instead there's a light in middle of the darkness, a place that changes people. That place is Islas Marias. This place is an island-prison!!!

Islas Marias is located in the Mexican pacific coast, near Puerto Vallarta. Islas Marias is an archipelago formed by four islands. It has tropical weather, emerald-green waters and white sand beaches, it's really a paradise ! Since 1905, the *Isla Maria Madre* (Mother Mary Island) supports the prison, formally *Colonia Penal Federal Islas Marias* (Islas Marias Federal Settlement Penitentiary). There's more: it is a Biosphere Reserve (similar to a National Park) and also an UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site "*Islands and Protected Areas of Gulf of California*". For these reasons the prison has to preserve the natural resources, specially the oceanic ecosystem.

Islas Marias has a dark history: it was known as "*The Pacific Tomb*" a tough prison like Alcatraz or *Papillon* Devil's Island. At Islas Marias psychotics and political prisoners against the government were jailed. It is the oldest Mexican prison and the only one still in operation in Latin America. Moreover it is the second oldest island-prison working in the Americas after Riker Island in New York.

Now the Islas Marias has low criminal profiles like burglars, drug sellers or raiders. Here drugs and alcohol are prohibited. It is an island of hope, change and opportunity. It is not a four-walled prison like others. Here aren't cells or bars. Prisoners can live with their families in nature, in little towns, not jails. All these conditions can reach the target of the penitentiary system: to rehabilitate the prisoner as a citizen. This alternative model is called "*Bioprison*" or "*Sustainable Social Rehabilitation*". It's difficult to believe this, but it is true.

As an island inhabitant, I steadily believe that each person can change their lives or behavior, even if they failed as criminals. The prisoners are persons, not numbers or statistics. This change of life in a spiritual manner is called *metanoia*. The Islas Marias' prisoners are experiencing *metanoia*. But this change is only possible with nature: it teaches us that money accumulation, consumerism or stealing persons isn't the way, only nature brings the resources to live and we have to use it responsibly. Wildlife is the best school of liberty and hope. As evidence of the success of this model prison, since the mid 1950s riots haven't occurred, and since 1978 there have been no murders and there has been no jailbreak since 2005. There are proven cases of less recidivism of prisoners that left the island. Which prison in world can reach this ? Only Islas Marias, because it is not a walled prison. However the most evidence of success is the spiritual change, the *metanoia's* island. There is another evidence of change that is unbelievable: since October 2008 until this month of July, there have been no reported cases of drugs in the island. Specialists are puzzled by this human reaction; they talk about the internal surveyor, communication with the prisoners and the like. But I have another answer for them: the lack of stress, nature and a spiritual belief is producing changes in former addicts. We don't have formal facilities like drug clinics, only nature, our best therapist.

Finally there another fact that happens one day in the year: "*Calerazo*". This event is the only allowed day that the prisoners visit the beach "*Caleras*"

with their families and that happens at Holy Saturday. On that day, there's not any social or other distinction between prisoners, guards, workers and officials, they coexist peacefully as a normal beach. It doesn't matter distinctions like sex, religion, birthplace, political opinion, race and the like. All island families join together as one big family. It's unbelievable but it happens in a prison. This is not a utopia, social theory or idealism, its real!!! We are living the John Lennon song *Imagine*!!! It is exciting to write this letter because we enjoyed that day. Many people in history thought that the only path to reach a "Calerazo" day could possible only by guns, bloody revolutions or books, but all the Islas Marias inhabitants prove that is possible here only with will.

I like to transmit the feeling of change and liberty in the island. In a new life nature can help us. That the reason to change the wrong repressive model of four-walled prisons: repression, cells, bars, video surveillance; it's time for a human and ecological model. Islas Marias is demonstrating the way, is another option to the current economical, social, spiritual crisis that humankind suffers. The prisoners are first changing themselves and then changing the world ! A new world of hope !

Armando Real

Islas Marias Penitentiary Director.
1818 Puerto Balleto, Nayarit, Mexico

The state of the human race

The *New Scientist* of 12 September 2009 took a look at how the human race is faring at the present time and compared with a few decades ago. One conclusion was that bad as life is for millions of people it was nevertheless moving in the right direction.

Between 1960 and 2007 infant mortality rates had dropped from 140 deaths in first year per 1000 live births to 45 deaths average in developing countries. Maternal mortality rates are dropping more slowly and are still around 400 per 100,000 live births compared with a tiny rate in developed countries. Life expectancy differences are narrowing in spite of still increasing life expectancy in developed countries. Food supply, access to clean water, access to education, and deaths from infectious diseases are all improving. However there are more than a billion people living in extreme poverty defined as an income of less than \$1.25 per day. Sub-Saharan Africa has the worst statistics.

On the environmental front things are bleaker. Deforestation is increasing, carbon dioxide emissions are increasing, ecological footprints are increasing. There is a ten-fold difference between the ecological footprint of the average American compared to the average Indian. Military spending is also rising after a dip following the ending of the Cold War, and the number of conflicts is increasing.

The resources implied by a figure of \$1.5 trillion spent on military hardware and armies every year could be so much better directed. Ω

Rediscovered speech by Martin Luther King Jr

A talk given by King on the radio in India in 1959 has been recently rediscovered and it is reproduced below. Both Martin and his wife Coretta visited India that year. The actual broadcast can be heard at www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-185345

Leaders in and out of government, organizations, particularly the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Quaker Center, and many homes and families have done their utmost to make our short stay both pleasant and instructive. We have learned a lot. We are not rash enough to presume that we know India, vast subcontinent with all of its people, problems, contrasts and achievements; however, since we have been asked about our impressions, we venture one or two generalizations.



First we think that the spirit of Gandhi is much stronger today than some people believe. That is not only the direct and indirect influence of his comrades and associates, but also the organized efforts that are being made to preserve the Mahatma's letters and other writings, the pictures, monuments, the work of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the movement led by the sainted Vinoba Bhave. These are but a few examples of the way Gandhiji will be permanently enshrined in the hearts of the people of India. Moreover, many governmental officials who do not follow Gandhi literally apply his spirit to domestic and international problems.

Secondly, I wish to make a plea to the people and government of India. The issue of world peace is so critical, that I feel compelled to offer a suggestion that came to me during the course of our conversations with Vinoba Bhave. The peace-loving peoples of the world have not yet succeeded in persuading my own country, America, and Soviet Russia to eliminate fear and disarm themselves. Unfortunately, as yet America and the Soviet Union have not shown the faith and moral courage to do this. Vinobaji has said that India, or any other nation that has the faith and moral courage, could disarm itself tomorrow, even unilaterally. It may be that, just as India had to take the lead and show the world that national independence could be achieved non-violently, so India may have to take the lead and call for universal disarmament. And if no other nation will join her immediately, India may declare itself for disarmament unilaterally. Such an act of courage would be a great demonstration of the spirit of the Mahatma, and would be the greatest

stimulus to the rest of the world to do likewise. Moreover, any nation that would take such a brave step would automatically draw to itself the support of the multitudes of the earth, so that any would-be aggressor would be discouraged from risking the wrath of mankind.

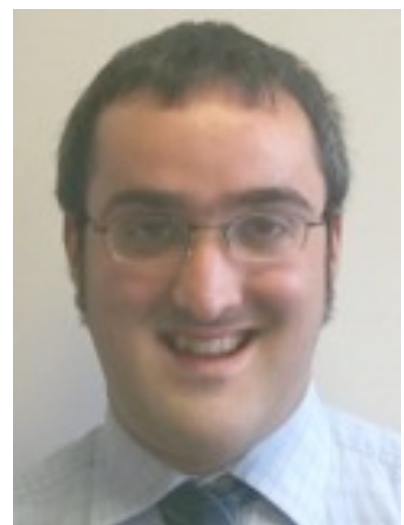
May I also say that, since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation. Many years ago, when Abraham Lincoln was shot – and incidentally, he was shot for the same reason that Mahatma Gandhi was shot for; namely, for committing the crime of wanting to heal the wounds of a divided nation. And when he was shot, Secretary Stanton stood by the dead body of the great leader and said these words: “now, he belongs to the ages.” And in a real sense, we can say the same thing about Mahatma Gandhi, and even in stronger terms: “now, he belongs to the ages.” And if this age is to survive, it must follow the way of love and non-violence that he so nobly illustrated in his life. Mahatma Gandhi may well be God’s appeal to this generation, a generation drifting again to its doom. And this eternal appeal is in the form of a warning: they that live by the sword shall perish by the sword. We must come to see in the world today that what he taught, and his method throughout, reveals to us that there is an alternative to violence, and that if we fail to follow this we will perish in our individual and in our collective lives. For in a day when Sputniks and explorers dash through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can win a war. Today we no longer have a choice between violence and nonviolence; it is either nonviolence, or non-existence.

New Chairperson of the GF

Following Susan Denton-Brown’s resignation as Chairperson of the Executive Committee due to health concerns **Mark Hoda** has taken over the post. Mark has a long association with the GF and at present is working, with Susan, on the Surur Hoda Memorial Project which is an exhibition and materials on Gandhi for use in schools in the vicinity of Kingsley Hall.

Mark is also Secretary of the Jeevika Trust which runs projects to address rural poverty in India.

Mark is a graduate in politics and has worked in the public, private and voluntary sector.



The GF trustees have decided to give a donation of £1000 to the **Jeevika Trust** whose 14 projects in India are mainly in Orissa. Andrew Redpath, the Executive Director, says, "Access to safe water has become our leading priority, and of course through water issues of sanitation, nutrition and health are also addressed; the role and empowerment of women through income-generation training, self-help groups and microcredit is integral with these other issues". Jeevika, founded as the India Development Group in 1970 is Gandhian inspired. Unfortunately funding is tight at present and new supporters and donors are urgently needed. More information can be found at their website www.jeevika.co.uk or from Jeevika Trust, Navigator House, 60 High Street, Hampton Wick, Surrey KT1 4DB

The GF is cooperating with the International Sufi School who are organising a weekend event in **Edinburgh 21-23 May 2010**. There will be the British Library exhibition on Gandhi, accompanied by Gandhi literature, and a talk by Ellen Moxley, a recipient of the Gandhi Peace Award in 2004. The venue is the Barcelo Carlton Hotel, which is in the centre of Edinburgh. *Nonviolence Within: Peace for All* is the theme.

Mary Mather 1926-2009

Mary Mather was a tireless campaigner for the rights of women and disadvantaged people in Britain and abroad.

Born in Blackburn, Lancashire, she attended Folkstone county school for girls in Kent and went to study English at Girton College, Cambridge in 1944. She edited the Cambridge University socialist club bulletin. During the holidays she worked as a volunteer at Kingsley Hall in Bromley-by-Bow where she fell under the spell of the Lester sisters, Muriel and Doris, who had founded the community settlement with the aim of bringing people together regardless of class, race or religion.

In 1949 she was appointed lecturer in English at the University of Hong Kong. She had wanted to go to China from a young age, particularly having heard Muriel Lester's travel stories. Her plans to travel into mainland China were thwarted by the communist revolution. The friendships she formed with her Chinese students and the writer Han Suyin did not endear her to the university authorities. She returned to London in 1953 to live in Canning Town women's settlement in Plaistow, working in a sugar factory and teaching at the Keir Hardie primary school.

Active in the West Ham Labour Party during the 1950s and 60s, she got to know Elwyn Jones, who was appointed attorney general by Harold Wilson in 1964, and wrote speeches for him.

She also ran equal opportunities courses for magistrates, but was turned down as a magistrate herself because MI5 had a file about her left-wing activities in Hong Kong.

In 1960, after another failed attempt to get into China during the Hundred Flowers campaign, she travelled in India with her father and joined Vinoba Bhave and other Gandhians trying to persuade landowners to give some of their land to those who had none (Bhoodan movement).



From 1966 to 1994 she lectured at the South Bank Polytechnic. In West Ham she established the first community relations council in the country, and for many years she ran a club which met twice a week for girls whose parents had recently arrived from the Indian subcontinent. Their crowning glory was a famine lunch where their meeting place, Durning Hall in Forest Gate, was transformed into an Indian Village complete with sand and saris.

John Rowley remembers her: "I met Mary first at a Summer School in the Abbey in the mid 90s. Thereafter, we had a few words at many Gandhi Foundation events and each time I felt an instant rapport with her. She was always quick to smile, ready to banter and very perceptive. I thought of her as a dedicated, radical, academic, practical, social reformer."

Mary became actively involved with the Gandhi Foundation at the beginning of the new millennium when she suggested we might like to support a group of five villages in Orissa whose inhabitants had been displaced by a dam. She had come across them when she inquired of Bhoodan villages from Vinoba's time. The GF gave financial support until 2005 when Mary felt that sufficient progress had been made by the villagers for them to no longer need outside help.

Her nephew Ian Mather (whose obituary of Mary in *The Guardian* supplied much of this appreciation) said of her: "Constantly fascinated by what was going on in the world, yet frequently absent-minded when it came to day-to-day practicalities, she had a unique ability to make people feel special and was adored by family and friends alike".

