

## **Gandhi Foundation Annual Gathering with AGM**

Saturday 10 July 2010 at 2pm  
Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, Bromley-by-Bow, London E3 3HJ  
There will be an invited speaker after the brief AGM  
Details to be announced later – see website or phone 0845 313 8419

## **Gandhi Foundation Summer Gathering**

*Charity and Responsibility*  
Saturday 24 - Saturday 31 July 2010  
at St Christopher School  
Barrington Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 3JZ  
For more information and to book contact:  
Trevor Lewis, 2 Vale Court, Otlands, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 9NN  
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# Searching Justice and Peace in Eastern Central India

*Felix Padel*

People outside India as well as inside it are becoming aware that there are thousands of local movements of people trying to save their land from being invaded and taken over by big corporations, and the contractors, sub-contractors, NGOs, media firms, biofuel and seed companies, banks, hedge fund/private equity fund investors and others who serve and finance the mining companies. Living in India, Anthony Sampson's title comes to mind from his *Anatomy of Britain* series: *Who runs this place ? The Governments or the Companies and Banks ?*

Village people (tribals and non-tribals alike) are trying not just to hold onto their land and homes, communities and age-old systems of cultivation, but also, as part of the same thing, to prevent ecocide: the long-term destruction of every aspect of the land and environment where they have lived for centuries (<http://www.thisisecocide.com/hotspots/>). If they accept displacement, even World Bank statistics show that displaced villagers' standard of living drops drastically (in India, and as a worldwide pattern), and that they hardly ever regain their standard of living, let alone improve it (which by the Bank's own standards, is meant to be a key requirement of any project). These movements are aimed at saving the people *and* their environment – “*for what future will our grandchildren have if our mountains and streams are destroyed ?*” This is the land of their ancestors over thousands of years.

It is also the heartland of tigers, leopards, bears and elephants – the whole cast of Kipling's *Jungle Book*. But the hunting mafia has taken a massive toll on all the cast, and these animals survive as best as they can, as far as they can get from Man. Even wildlife sanctuaries cause conflict, displacing yet more tribal villages from their forest. Tribal people and their forest are one: damage that bond and the culture and environment are slowly but surely killed, together: cultural genocide and ecocide.

British geologists in the 1900s named the base rock of south Orissa's bauxite-capped mountains ‘Khondalite’, after “those fine Hill men the Khonds”. These mountains are classed as one of the world's best deposits for making aluminium – prime strategic metal for the arms industry ('Mining as a Fuel for War' at War Resisters International ([www.wri-irg.org/node/3576](http://www.wri-irg.org/node/3576))). Preventing a whole series of mining projects are the movements. The war against the Maoists, ‘Operation Green Hunt’, acts as a filter that often draws attention and support away from these movements, as the situation escalates towards a classic resource war.

2,270 years ago, the “first recorded event of Indian history” was Ashoka's massive attack on the Kalinga people in Orissa. By his own

admission – was he really repentant, or was he just doing his own PR for history? – he killed 100,000, and enslaved 150,000, while many more died of disease and hunger. The Kalinga did not have kings and they put up a terrible fight to try and keep their freedom. Ashoka's two inscriptions in Orissa threaten the 'forest tribes': the Kalinga who could retreat to the mountains and forests to preserve their independence as best they could, and have lived there till today. The Kond's name for themselves is Kuwinda, and there is no doubt they are essentially the same people. So the ongoing takeover of tribal land now conjures a structural memory of Ashoka's terrible violence.

The PR now is gross. 'Kalinganagar' is the name of the steel complex with a dozen new plants in various stages of planning and operation, that has already displaced thousands of Adivasis of the Ho and Munda tribes (whose heartland is in Jharkhand), just beside the Sukinda chromite mines in Jajpur district of Orissa, characterised as "one of the ten most polluted places in the world" (by the Blacksmith Institute, USA).

Kalinganagar is where Adivasis who refuse to shift to make way for a huge new Tata steel plant have got together as the People's Platform Against Displacement. They were fired on and 14 killed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2006, when police and contractors tried to start construction of the plant. Last November, Orissa's Chief Minister conveyed his public thanks to the steel companies for constructing a new hi-tech Kalinganagar police station (making clear a collusion that was already clear, though rarely spelt out). Police with goondas started an attack on the 20 or so protesting villages on 30<sup>th</sup> March, breaking houses, stealing possessions, wounding many with a new type of rubber bullet, and taking over people's land and villages in the guise of building a big road across the area. The People's Platform Against Displacement has made it clear throughout that they are not Maoists, and have kept their movement non-violent (e.g. <http://orissamatters.com/2010/04/11/foul-play-exposed/>) The events unfolding now in Kalinganagar and the lack of cover in the media is a national disgrace and a severe blot on Tata's name.

Who made proper mention at the Copenhagen summit on Climate Change about Orissa's 40 new steel plants and the carbon emissions from making 60 million tonnes of steel per year – Orissa's stated target? Or are these essential for 'India's development'? How can it be 'development' to destroy ecosystems and communities of people whose lives are based on long-term sustainability – who have sustained in the face of assaults from Ashoka to the EIC to now, and who are fighting these projects with everything they gave?

Knowing one's Indian history, what we witness is a return of the East India Company. It took power here on the east side of India in Bengal and Madras in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, taking over Orissa from 1803 onwards. And the subsidiary company it formed was called the Government of India, based around collecting tribute, and implementing the laws being made to facilitate

this all over the country. The senior administrator of a District in India is still called the Collector or District Magistrate.

Analysing the causes of the current conflict, and the reasons why many tribal people join the Maoists, the following are some of the main ones:

1. The system of endemic exploitation of tribal people, coupled with ingrained disrespect for tribal culture.

2. The escalating dispossession of tribal people from their land and resources – by numerous industrial projects but also by the war itself. No one disputes the figures of 644 tribal villages burnt by Salwa Judum and an estimated 200,000 tribal refugees from these burnt villages.

3. The atrocities perpetrated on tribal villages by the Salwa Judum (a tribal militia created by a section of the government) and security forces, and the impossibility of getting justice through the courts. The case of Sodhi (she was one of a dozen villagers lined up and shot by the police – she survived, but as witness to the case at India's Supreme Court, has been kept under 'police protection') and the villagers killed at Gompad has highlighted this impossibility of bringing security men responsible for atrocities to account, and the appeal of Maoists arises directly out of this impunity to prosecution.

Numerous human rights reports and courageous journalism have highlighted a definite pattern of attacks on tribal villages, in which most of the village flees, and the women, old and young who don't get away are raped, killed, tortured or taken away. The best aspect of Arundhati Roy's recent article *Walking with the Comrades* is that she brings out the voices of young Maoist women and men. These voices need to be heard. All of them witnessed close friends and family raped and killed, and were motivated to join the Maoists by these atrocities. Having suffered such loss and witnessed such horror, if there is no chance of bringing the perpetrators to account, and the Maoists are there, offering comradeship and guns – who wouldn't go with them ?

4. However, the Maoist ideology and leadership believes in war, exactly as many do in the mainstream and military. War has an attraction, and we all need to fight internal as well as external battles to resist this attraction. What is happening is a polarisation into two sides who both believe in war, leaving no space for neutrality, truth and peace.

The recent attack is a deliberate escalation of war. We should not blame the individual Maoist fighters, any more than the individual CRPF men: both are pawns in a game where leaders actually believe in sacrificing people's lives, on a huge scale.

Mao himself was one of the worst tyrants: during his rise to power as well as his 'great leap forward' (upping steel production, causing a massive famine) and cultural revolution, he was responsible for millions of deaths of innocent people and even loyal party supporters. He was a superb propagandist though, and in that, very similar to mining companies' PR machine, turning truth on its head. The ideology he created promotes war, and promotes an escalation of war. We must not let this happen. Maoist attacks instigate huge-scale counterinsurgency attacks on villages. This pattern must stop.

5. In other words, the attack on tribal communities as a strategy to wipe out Maoists is paradoxically a principal cause of the growing strength of the Maoists. This mirrors the worldwide 'war on terror' (in Afghanistan, Iraq etc), where everyone can see that attacks on 'terrorists' – and the 'collateral damage' on countless civilians whose outrage has no outlet through judicial process – have increased the number of 'terrorists' exponentially. In Dantewara, the systematic attacks on tribal villages are a campaign of terror. In other words, the primary perpetrators of terror are the security forces rather than the Maoists.

In the recent attack, the Central Reserve Police Force people killed are human beings too and their death is very sad. Police in the area live in fear of attack. The difference is – armed policemen have signed up for a job that involves high risk of killing or being killed. Tribal villagers have signed up for no such thing. Current news portrays this Maoist attack as an outrage, and the CRPF armed policemen killed by the Maoists as 'martyrs'. What of the countless villagers who have been killed and terrorised by the CRPF and other 'security forces' ?

The tribal villagers living in the eye of the conflict are essentially innocent. If they often support the Maoists, they do so because they experience an invasion and atrocities in which they lose their land, food, families, culture – everything. We get to hear of only a tiny percentage of the atrocities committed by security forces in villages, while every killing by Maoists gets high publicity. (See some excellent examples of such journalism published in the New Indian Express, at <http://moonchasing.files.wordpress.com> - e.g. 'Operation Tribal Hunt?' 11 November 2009)

Arundhati Roy's writings have come under fierce criticism, but she is not uncritical of the Maoists. While contrasting democratic features about how Maoists operate in terms of people's councils and meetings where anyone can and does speak, she also comments that the present phase may well be a honeymoon period in which Maoists are wooing the people, and history shows this honeymoon doesn't last.

The voices of tribal Maoists and accounts of atrocities need to be heard a lot more widely if a Sri Lanka situation of all-out war and genocide is to be avoided, and Roy's article has done an excellent job of bringing them out.

If there is a genuine move for peace, one essential step will be repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) – this has often been called for, especially from the Northeast and Kashmir. This has become essential for the war in Dantewara. If it can be seen that security personnel who commit atrocities are punished this will automatically take wind out of the Maoist sails.

Human rights work is a prerequisite for peace. Tribal culture places a high value on Justice and Truth. Some kind of Truth and Reconciliation process will have to take place if the escalation towards war is to be halted. Responsibility lies on both sides. Where it does not lie is with the tribal

communities, and when they know they can get Justice, Peace will prevail.

Dr Felix Padel is an anthropologist who has lived in India for 30 years. His latest book ***Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel*** by Felix Padel and Samarendra Das has just been published by Orient Black Swan. ISBN: 9788125038672

For Arundhati's Roy's article see:

[http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/old\\_03-walking-with-the-comrades-ss-12?pageDesign=new\\_Pakistan\\_Detail\\_20pages01](http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/old_03-walking-with-the-comrades-ss-12?pageDesign=new_Pakistan_Detail_20pages01)



## Bhikhu and Pramila Parekh Celebrate

On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April, I had the privilege of attending a magnificent Luncheon at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford where Gandhi Foundation Vice President Bhikhu Parekh and Pramila Parekh were celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> year. Bhikhu reminded us in his speech that Indians conceive of "life as being divided into four stages of 25 years each" and so they were honouring the moment of transition into their last quarter century.

There were 110 guests there and, judging by the intensity of conversation and the smiles and laughter all around me, everybody was delighted to be there and thrilled at seeing so many good friends.

I had the pleasure of sitting with Justin Morris, Head of Politics and International Studies at Hull (Bhikhu's successor), Tariq Modood, Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy at Bristol (who worked under Bhikhu's Chairmanship of The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain), who was there with his partner, and Dr Rajeev Raut, a single-handed GP in Hull.

Over coffee and dessert, we all listened in rapt attention to Lord Smith of Clifton, Lord Raymond Plant, and Professor Benjamin Barber, a distinguished professor and adviser to Bill Clinton, each of whom was introduced by one of the Parekh's grandchildren, as they each gave eulogies to Bhikhu's achievements. They were cracking good speeches, witty and erudite, topped, I have to say, by Bhikhu himself who analysed friendship and called it the purest of all human relationships.

*John Rowley*



# Liberating Choices

*Matthew Bain*

How can we distinguish between fatal and liberating choices ? That was the question posed by Sheikh Aly N'Daw, head of the International Sufi School. He was speaking at his book launch in Westminster, which was hosted by Ian Stewart MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Friends of Islam group. Aly N'Daw is from the Mouride school of Sufism founded by the Senegalese saint Amadou Bamba (1850-1927) who emphasised service to others as the path to God. Sheikh Aly encourages his students to study the lives of great men and women who have bridged the gap between politics and spirituality, and have demonstrated how peace within leads to peace in the world.

Sheikh Aly asked us to consider the choice that Martin Luther King made when he decided not to opt for a comfortable lifestyle in Chicago, but to take his ministry to the South and confront the spectre of racial discrimination. On the surface, it appears that Dr. King made a fatal choice, because his ministry ended with his assassination. However, in reality he made a liberating choice, because he could have suffered spiritual death by taking the easy option of remaining in Chicago, and his sacrifice contributed to the political and social liberation of millions of African-Americans.

Next we were asked to consider Muhammad Yunus, pioneer of micro-credit and founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. A professor of economics, he became disillusioned with academic life and went to live with a group of peasants. Many people would consider this a fatal choice, at least professionally, but for Muhammad Yunus it was liberating because it showed him how small sums of money loaned on trust could yield massive results if targetted at the right people, particularly women. By 2008 the Grameen Bank had loaned US\$7.8 billion to the poor.

Ian Stewart MP talked about his own difficult choice, to vote for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He explained that his motivation had been to help the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs, but now that hundreds of thousands of people had died as a result of the war, he could not be sure if he had been right. He described the whirl of conventional political life and how politicians, caught in the maelstrom, are on auto-pilot, without time or space to connect with the spiritual dimension of life. As he is not standing in the forthcoming general election, he expressed the hope that he would now have time to learn more about what Sufism describes as the spiritual heart.

The first two books in Sheikh Aly N'Daw's series are *The Initiatory Way To Peace* and *Liberation Therapy*. If you would like to buy a copy, please email: [contact\\_uk@international-sufi-school.org](mailto:contact_uk@international-sufi-school.org) . The International Sufi School's next event is a conference in Edinburgh in May entitled 'Nonviolence Within: Peace For All' (<http://www.nonviolence-edinburgh.com/>)

# East Meets West Through Rokeya

*Shaheen Choudhury Westcombe*

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein has inspired and changed the lives of many women. A muslim feminist writer and educationalist, she campaigned for equality, peace, social justice, harmony and an eco-friendly world.

Born in 1880, in colonial Victorian India in Rangpur, now in Bangladesh, she fought a lonely battle to create a better society and improve the lives of women. She was brought up under very strict purdah and denied the opportunity of education. It was sheer determination and commitment that kept her going despite all the difficulties, barriers, abuse and opposition.

For the past five years I have been trying to raise awareness and promote Rokeya in the West. Following the success of a play *Rokeya's Dream* (based on Rokeya's satire *Sultana's Dream*) staged in London last year, there was an invitation to visit West Bengal this spring. The production, a joint venture was initiated by Mahila Sangha, a Bangladeshi women's group (that I Chair) with Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance and Tara Arts as partners.



The Centenary Parade Begins – Shaheen Chaudhury Westcombe (holding flag) and teachers of the Sakhawat Memorial School

A group of three Bruford graduates (Rae Leaver, Claudia Jazz Haley and Alia Wilson) who had worked on the play, the choreographer (Showmi Das) and I went to India in response to the invitation from three Universities



and Sakhawat Memorial Government Girls' High School. The trip was possible because of the untiring efforts of a Rokeya scholar and peace activist, Mr. Prantosh Bandyopadhyay. The warm welcome with beautiful bouquets of flowers everywhere and the love, affection, hospitality and kindness of everyone touched our hearts deeply. It reflected the true spirit of Rokeya. We had travelled 6000 miles and had taken from Britain a message of goodwill, love and peace.

We attended the centenary of Sakhawat Memorial School established by Rokeya in 1911 to educate young muslim women. At the time muslim women did not have access to education and purdah was a barrier. Today, the school boasts as one of the top institutions in Kolkata and is open to students of all faiths and denominations. The march through the streets of rush hour central Kolkata with placards displaying Rokeya's slogans and the rally and cultural performances by the students were breathtaking. The chief minister of West Bengal and several other ministers were present. So were their alumni from all parts of the globe. It was quite an emotional experience for me as my mother (Anwara Bahar Choudhury) was a student of Rokeya and a former Headteacher of the school. My siblings (Iqbal Bahar Choudhury and Nasreen Shams) had also been invited and they joined me from the US and Bangladesh to attend the event.



Visva Bharati Workshop – Claudia Jazz Haley on right, Mr Tarak Sen Gupta (Head of Drama)

Our team did a workshop at the school on Rokeya's messages through dance and movements. The students enjoyed every moment of it. There are plans to link the school with Plumstead Manor School in London.

We were indeed very honoured to have the opportunity of working with the students of the Department of Drama, University of Rabindra Bharati and Visva Bharati. The latter was created by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and is situated in rural Bolpur. The ethos of Visva Bharati is based on Tagore's philosophy of learning in a natural environment and also linking up globally. It is part of Santiniketan, a unique educational centre for all age groups. The peace and tranquility of rural Bengal can be experienced here amidst the natural surroundings. Rabindra Bharati was established in Tagore's family estate in the outskirts of Kolkata by the Government of India in his honour on his birth centenary.

Our aim at the workshops was to tell the participants about Rokeya's life and messages, share our experiences of producing the play, *Rokeya's Dream* and presenting the western interpretation of her story. At the end of the workshops, and after exploring the ideas, the students had to present their interpretation of the messages in short group performances. Their creativity and innovative talents were stunning. Most of them had never heard of Rokeya and the media picked this up by quoting in the headlines of The Indian Express '**Britons help Bengal students rediscover one of the early feminist icons of South Asia**'.



Conference at Burdwan University – L to R, Rae Leaver, Alia Wilson, Dr Madhu Khanna, Iqbal Bahar Choudhury (Voice of America), Shaheen Choudhury Westcombe, Dr Tanveer Nasreen, Prof Nasreen Shams, Claudia Jazz Haley, Showmi Das

Tagore and Rokeya had many common messages. In some of the performances the students had incorporated Tagore's work alongside. Rokeya had touched them all. Many of them said that they could relate with her messages when they looked at their own life experiences. The themes are all very pertinent in today's world. They were deeply moved and inspired and pledged to continue to work on Rokeya.

We left the two Universities with the request from the students and teachers to organise further collaborative work and exchange programmes between them and Bruford. With Tagore's 150 birth anniversary next year, there could not be a better opportunity. Promoting friendship, exchanging ideas and understanding different cultures through theatre can be very powerful and enriching. Theatre as an art form is visual and universal, there is no language barrier.

Our final destination was Burdwan University. We were speakers at an international conference on Women and Folk Culture. Rokeya featured in our presentations. Rae Leaver who spoke on behalf of the Bruford graduates said that '**Rokeya is a role model for British women**'. Rokeya has no boundaries.

We left Kolkata with tears. They were probably tears of joy. We had experienced so much in such a short time and had been greatly enriched. We had even seen the final resting place of Rokeya and visited a children's home in Panihati that she had initiated. We had made numerous friends, shared our ideas, raised awareness about Rokeya and her messages; established a link for future communication between the centres of learning. East had met West. There is now global interest in the work of our group – The Rokeya Project. These small steps could be the beginning of a wider peace movement that Rokeya dreamt. **Salaam Rokeya.**

Shaheen Westcombe is a member of the GF Executive. Her heritage country is Bangladesh where she trained as an architect. After working as an architect in the UK for about 10 years she moved to community development and worked in management positions in local government in London for 25 years. She was awarded the MBE in 2001 for contributions to community relations.

**25th Anniversary celebration of the London Peace Pagoda**

Saturday 19 June 2010 in Battersea Park at 2-5pm.

**Hiroshima Day**

Friday 6 August at Tavistock Square 12noon to 1pm.

**Nagasaki Day**

Monday 9 August Peace walk from Westminster Cathedral to the London Peace Pagoda followed by the Floating Lantern Ceremony at sunset.

# Nehru on Gandhi

## Views on Political Culture

*Prem Misir*

In an effort to review India's emergent move into global economic dominance I thought that it might be useful to look at a few of Gandhi's ideas of something called 'political culture' through the eyes of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. And indeed, Gandhi and Nehru did not have a monopoly over ideas to craft a new political culture. But we have to start somewhere. I present these ideas randomly, not for integrative purposes.

Nehru admired Gandhi's constant focus on the 'right way' of doing things; using the correct methods for doing things. Stress on using the right means to achieve ends was one of Gandhi's great contributions to public life. Where most people think about ends, it seems strange that Gandhi would concentrate on means; but it is an extraordinary way of thinking; thinking linked to the moral law of truth that may have hugely impacted India. Nehru endorsed the use of an ethical or moral perspective on life; and both Nehru and Gandhi sought to infuse this moral law of truth in politics.

Gandhi's moral approach to problem solving brought a significant new dimension to Indian political behaviour; Nehru observed the moral impact on politics, thus: "Politics cease to be just expediency and opportunism, as they have usually been everywhere, and there is a continuous moral tussle preceding thought and action. Expediency... can never be ignored, but it is toned down by other considerations and a longer view of more distant consequences ... Bernard Shaw has said that though he (Gandhi) may commit any number of tactical errors, his essential strategy continues to be right. Most people, however, are not much concerned with the long run; they are far more interested in the tactical advantage of the moment."

Nehru noted too the cultural impact on India of a Turkish invasion, an Afghan invasion, and a Turco-Mongol or Mughal invasion; and highlighted 'purdah' (seclusion of women) as one new cultural development, among others; 'purdah' possibly emerged during the Mughal times. Isolating women in both public and private life was noticeable in Delhi, the United Provinces, Rajputana, Bihar, and Bengal. Gandhi spoke out against 'purdah'; through the Indian Congress Party and with the help of thousands of middle-class women, Gandhi advocated that women should have the same freedom and opportunity for self-development as males; and an end to domestic slavery. Note the constitutional provision in Guyana for the Women and Gender Equality Commission; still on paper, as the PNCR withdrew its parliamentary services on the day the item was put to the vote. Guyana is poorer with this loser mentality.

At the beginning of World War I, Pandit Nehru asked "How could we pull India out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism...?" Nehru captured

Gandhi's answer and teaching, thus: "... He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition. Get off the backs of these peasants and workers ... all you who live by their exploitation; get rid of the system that produces this poverty and misery."

For Gandhi, the squalor of poverty and the great divide between the rich and the poor owed their existence to foreign rule and foreign exploitation, and capitalism through introduction of technology; Gandhi was not opposed to technology per se, but believed that it should be applied to absorb labour and not produce new unemployment.

To alleviate some poverty, Gandhi devised a programme of the spinning wheel and village industry to address the problem of India – scarcity of capital and abundance of labour. Gandhi believed that the ends, such as profitability from technology, cannot justify the means, as unemployment to attain prosperity; he understood that moral values must first triumph, as the ends cannot substantiate disreputable means, no matter how good the ends are.

But Nehru believed that the real meaning of Gandhi's teaching was fearlessness and truth with allied action, at all times upholding the welfare of the masses. This was the period of British rule of India, at a time when deep-seated fear stalked the land; fear of British institutions. Gandhi's voice on truth and fearlessness brought some change and a psychological reaction that enabled people to feel ashamed about their long capitulation to foreign rule; and indeed the desire to do something about it. And this is true, too, of his nationalism, inevitable for the freedom of India.

It always has been the norm that a country will first protect its national interests before it considers the international community interests. And Nehru noted that Gandhi's nationalism deviated from that norm; for the longevity of foreign rule and exploitation in India became an irritant to the mind and distorted all thought and action; producing frustration and bitterness. But Gandhi's nationalism had a world outlook, where he visualized a world federation of interdependent states; and Gandhi created a nationalist movement that reduced irritation and animosity that Indians felt against the British. Nehru remarked that he had not seen any other nationalist movement like Gandhi's, largely devoid of hatred. Incidentally, Dr. Cheddi Jagan also spoke about interdependence between the North and South in his New Global Human Order proposal.

Through Nehru's eyes, we saw how Gandhi's passion for democracy transformed the Congress Party into a mass movement; becoming an agrarian organisation; how the success of anything was premised on the quantity and quality of benefits the masses receive; a unique and quiet kind of democracy for the masses, definitively linked to the freedom of India.

Prem Misir is Pro-Chancellor of the University of Guyana

# Signatures of a Saint

*Anil Chandra*

It was a July evening in Jhansi in 1945. A strong wind was blowing. A vast throng of town people, the peasants, and their families were moving towards an open piece of land near a hill. The men were dressed simply in kurta, dhoti or pyjamas while the spare figures of women were wrapped in white cotton sarees, and their heads with a bun of hair behind it, were generally covered. My mother too was walking briskly towards the open land with me besides her. I was then 6 years old.

The closer we reached the hill, the thicker became the crowds. My mother wanted us to be in front, so we had to push a little. The closer we moved to the front, the more somber became the atmosphere. I saw people standing or sitting quietly on the ground. Even if they had to talk, they spoke in whispers. Some were munching peanuts.

Suddenly, we were in front. We squeezed ourselves and sat down quietly with the others. I saw a dark skinned, naked man with a loin cloth sitting on a elevation at the hillside, mumbling some words. He was sitting on a small wooden platform and there was a mike in front of him. All round him were people with reverential faces. Some sat next to him, others stood on the hillside.

“Who is he?” I asked.

“Hush,” whispered my mother. “He is a saint. Listen to him carefully.”

I tried but could follow nothing. I was very restless sitting on the ground with nothing to do. I could not even ask a question of my mother as there was pindrop silence. One could hear the breeze and the rustling of the trees.

After half an hour of this silence, the old man stopped speaking and many amongst the crowd surged towards him. They were all trying to get closer, touch his feet, or just stand near him with folded hands. We too moved forward and slowly reached the old man.

After waiting a few minutes, our turn came and I found myself standing directly in front of this almost naked man, sitting cross legged on the wooden platform.

My mother, after a respectful obeisance and muttering a few words, thrust a small paper towards him, and the old man slowly wrote something on it. I saw him clearly for the first time now. He was bald, very lean, and bespectacled. Handing the paper back to my mother, he looked up towards me, ruffled my hair and said to me in Hindi:

*Jab tum bare hoge to acche admi banna aur apni maa ka dhyan rakhna. Tum swatantra bharat me rahoge. Apne desh ka bhi dhyan rakhna* (When you grow up, be a good man and take care of your mother. You will live in a free India. Look after your country also). He wanted to say something more but we were pushed away by those behind us.

My mother died in October 1990. While browsing through her cupboard, I came across her autograph book. On one of the pages, I saw a piece of paper pasted on which were scribbled the signatures of the old man. Below it, in the neat handwriting of my mother, were written the words: 'The signatures of Mahatma Gandhi after the Simla conference, on his way to Wardha. 17, July 1945.'

Anil Chandra's website is [www.indianshortstories.in](http://www.indianshortstories.in)

## Book Reviews

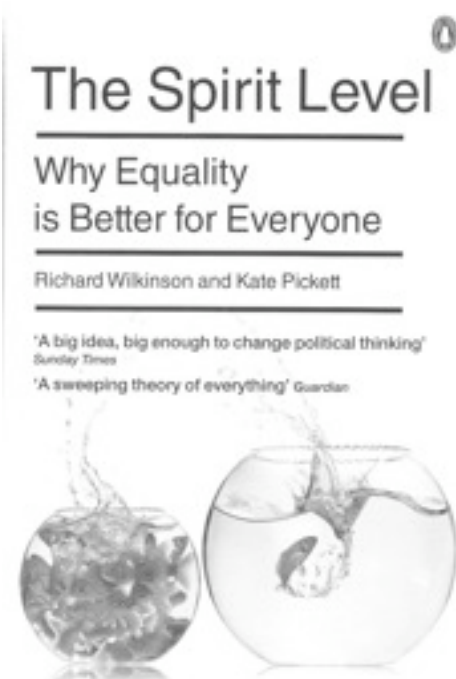
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**The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone** Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett Penguin 2010 pp347 ISBN 978 0 141 03236 8 £9.99

This is an exciting and important book. The authors draw on a wealth of social research to demonstrate that life would be better if we had much more equal incomes. Intuitively this reviewer has long believed that, but Wilkinson and Pickett are able to show that it is true by presenting the facts in graphical form. Moreover it is not just that lower income people would be better off but those on higher incomes would benefit too – in terms of quality of life.

The countries studied are mainly the most developed – 23 out of the 50 wealthiest in the world (the 27 which were not chosen were because they were either very small or did not have full comparable statistics). The other societies looked at are states of the USA where, because of the federal system, there are considerable variations from state to state. One of the striking things to emerge is that the patterns revealed are very similar across a range of issues – physical health, mental health, obesity, teenage births, educational performance, violence, imprisonment, social mobility. One also finds the same countries in approximately the same positions on most of the graphs (with occasional exceptions). The two extremes are occupied by the USA at one end (the bad one) and Japan (the good one). Close to Japan are the Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark. Britain usually comes in a little worse than average.

One of the striking facts to emerge is that



looking at rich and poor countries on the *world scale* life expectancy increases rapidly as incomes increase but only up to a certain level (where the middle income countries are now) and then it begins to level off. However there are still notable differences among the rich countries when *inequality* within the countries is used as the measure rather than average income. Using the measure of inequality the authors demonstrate how physical and mental health levels, teenage pregnancy, drug use, crime, educational attainment and social mobility are all strongly determined by the level of inequality in their societies.

The authors suggest that the cause of this pattern is due to individuals' social status within unequal societies and the arising anxiety and long-term stress arising.

Two countries which have shown dramatic increases in income inequality in recent decades are the USA and the UK. In the UK the second half of the Thatcher period saw a steep rise in inequality which peaked in the early 1990s but has fallen little since then. In the USA inequality began to rise in the Carter period and rose steadily until the Clinton period when it levelled off. In both countries the rise in income inequality was about 40%. Countries which did not show an increase in inequality in the 1980s and 90s include France, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, and Japan.

In Japan, defeat in WWII followed by a benign occupation by the Americans resulted in a break with the past and a substantially new society which was much more egalitarian. Interestingly the smaller income range there is not produced by large government intervention but by pay rates that are less extreme than in most other countries. Sweden on the other hand uses government intervention to redistribute wealth but the result for both countries is good.

Although not the prime focus of the book, sustainability is also looked at – and how could it be avoided since it is now central to the future of the human race. Using data from the UN and the WWF the authors conclude that only Cuba has a reasonable quality of life without exceeding the biocapacity of the earth. However they also say that more could reach that state by using more environmentally friendly technology including renewable power generation. But a warning against depending on new technology alone is given as they point out that greener technology can be defeated by greater consumption, as has been observed already in some places. Nor would it be sufficient on its own. The aim of sustainability would be greatly aided if the consumerist philosophy of the last 50 years could lose its hold on people. The authors don't mention Gandhi but I am sure they would approve of all attempts to follow his simplification of lifestyle.

As Wilkinson and Pickett write: “ If, to cut carbon emissions, we need to limit economic growth severely in the rich countries, then it is important to know that this does not mean sacrificing improvements in the real quality of life – in the quality of life as measured by health, happiness, friendship and community life, which really matters.”



How far we have to go in the direction of egalitarianism in Britain at least is amply illustrated by the outrageous salaries and expenses and bonuses given to CEOs of many large companies and banks, in spite of a major economic crisis and prospect of a significant reduction in public services.

The authors, who are basically academics, are sufficiently convinced of the importance of their findings that they have set up a campaigning organisation – The Equality Trust – to promote the advantages of egalitarianism. As they say, unless there is a groundswell of public opinion the politicians will not take up the idea.

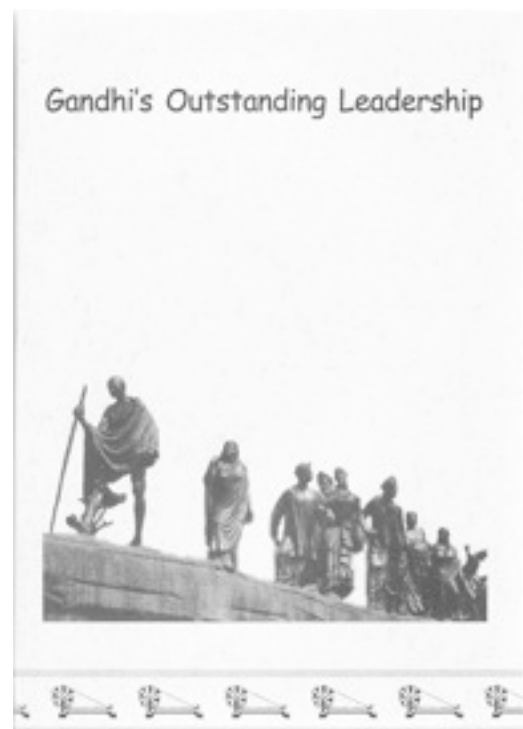
*George Paxton*

**Gandhi's Outstanding Leadership** Pascal Alan Nazareth Sarvodaya International Trust 2010 HB pp183 ISBN 81 89220 10 1

This is a revised and enlarged edition of a book originally published in 2006 and reviewed in *The Gandhi Way* at the time. The later part of the book, concerned with Gandhi's impact on individuals, movements and ideas world-wide, is substantially expanded. Although there is much about the historical Gandhi in the book it is this later section that is most valuable.

Gandhi and the arts is an unusual and welcome inclusion. There are succinct profiles of many individuals including some lesser known but admirable people who have been influenced by Gandhi. Big issues such as national defence, the Middle East, economic theory, ecology, science and technology are examined from a Gandhian angle.

The book is highly recommended to all those interested in Gandhian ideas applied to important current issues.



The book can be ordered through the Editor, George Paxton, whose details are on the back cover. Cost, in UK, is £15 with postage and packing included.

## Letters

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## **In support of the animals**

With as always (but particularly in our age of 24 hour news coverage) so many negative stories making the headlines is it any wonder that people increasingly feel powerless. Some decide not to get up in the morning whilst others turn to a hedonistic life. Well, friends as many Gandhi followers know we all have the power and talents to act for the common good of other people, our non-human animal cousins and our beautiful 'on loan' planet. To quote Mother Teresa "We can do no great things but we can do small things with great love".

So with this in mind I would like to share with you three simple and inexpensive events that Eastbourne Quakers, vegetarians, military personnel, town councillors (including the mayor) and others, many of them complete strangers, have recently been successfully involved in.

i) During National Vegetarian Week last September local Quakers, vegetarians/vegans and friends ran two very successful simple outside vegetarian stalls. Organisations such as Viva!, Animal Aid, The Vegetarian Society, The Vegan Society, and Advocates for Animals, gave us lots of very interesting and colourful information and recipes plus posters and stall banners. Also friendly veggie companies were only too pleased to provide food samples as this is a very good form of marketing for them. We even persuaded a butcher delivering meat to local pubs to try several vegan dishes, he declared them all delicious and apologised for his day job!

Buoyed up by our success we decided to repeat this event at a big pre-Christmas Eastbourne Street Party in December. Our local health food shop Sunny Foods offered us the use of part of their premises. The stall was extremely popular gaining us lots of contacts and converts with widespread local press publicity.

ii) Last Spring/Summer we had noticed *foie gras* on sale at the French Market that visits Eastbourne and many other towns throughout the Spring to Autumn months. Foie gras is produced from the diseased liver of a duck or goose that has been forced fed, causing the liver of the bird to swell up to ten times its normal size. A pipe is inserted down the throat of the bird and pulped maize pumped into their stomachs, frequently resulting in severe injury or death. We therefore decided to try and get the product banned from all council land and premises. It is illegal to produce it in the UK and an increasing number of other countries. Due to the free trade EU regulations however it can be imported from mainland Europe.

We approached Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC) who advised us to write to them with several signatures. On reflection we decided to organise a petition. Within a few days friends, neighbours, sympathetic shop keepers etc had signed and we presented this in person to EBC. After months of discussion and meetings including providing them with excellent information from animal welfare charities they agreed to debate it at a full Cabinet meeting at the Town Hall on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. Prior to this they had watched a graphic DVD.

Quaker friends attended the Meeting and were amazed at the welcome we received and at the supportive speeches made by council officials and town councillors. Imagine our joy when the vote was taken resulting in a very unusual outcome. The LibDem and Conservative councillors joined forces and voted unanimously for an immediate ban. One councillor regretted that EBC had not already banned it and has now offered to approach trade organisations to influence their members to stop stocking the product at hotels, restaurants and other outlets. We have received a great deal of positive publicity both locally and nationally including a feature in *The Herald* (2nd and 9th April 2010) the main widely circulated local paper and *The Friend* the weekly Quaker publication.

iii) Lastly but by no means least a similar group of us in conjunction with the animal welfare charity *Animal Aid of Tonbridge* agreed to mount a local campaign to enable us to lay a purple poppy wreath in memory of all the millions of innocent non-human animals that have served and died in wars and armed conflicts. Some of us had already visited the beautiful Animals War Memorial in Park Lane central London. This is a powerful and moving tribute to all those brave animals which was unveiled six years ago on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of WW1.

Our format was broadly similar to our *foie gras* campaign. EBC agreed in principal to our request to take part in the formal Remembrance Sunday Parade and to lay a purple poppy wreath. However the final decision rested with the Eastbourne Combined Ex-Services Association Wreath Laying Committee. Much to our surprise we started gathering support from many ex-service men and women as well as individual residents and local organisations. These included the local branches of Quaker Concern for Animals; Vegetarian and Vegan Societies; Viva! and Animal Aid plus East Sussex Wildlife Animal Rescue.

Again imagine our delight when in October the Wreath Laying Committee met for the final time before Remembrance Sunday and unanimously voted in favour of us permanently taking part in the official memorial parade with the laying of our purple poppy wreath at its conclusion. Some purists may say that we should not get involved with a military parade but as Quakers say “co-operation is better than conflict”. Once again our campaign produced a lot of good publicity both locally and wider afield. The town centre Sainsbury’s has now granted us the week prior to Remembrance Sunday for selling purple poppies and giving out relevant information.

No doubt many Gandhi friends are involved in similar enterprises to the three examples above. However do please contact myself or the organisations direct (just Google them!) if you care to join any of these particular peaceful campaigns. Good news as well as bad can travel fast nowadays.

Bill Palethorpe @ Eastbourne [hobdell@fastmail.fm](mailto:hobdell@fastmail.fm) 01323 411 707

## **Dongria Konds' life and lifestyle threatened**

The Dongria Konds, a tribal community who live in the Raygada district of Orissa, and who worship their tribal deity closely connected with Niyamgiri Hills, are under grave threat by the industrial giant Vedanta which plans to mine bauxite found in the Hills. The thick forest area is full of flora and fauna which would be destroyed by the mining operations to obtain bauxite to be processed into aluminium.

The Dongria Konds have inhabited the area for centuries but the Government of Orissa and the Central Government, following a model of economic growth where mineral resources form a linchpin, have put the Konds on the losing side. However, many social activists and celebrities are fighting on behalf of the tribals and cases have been filed in the Supreme Court of India. More people have to raise their voices not only for the tribal people in this pocket of India but elsewhere in the land where mining activities have dispossessed them and uprooted them to fend for themselves.

John Alexander

Red Building (Ground Floor), Tailors Lane, Chawni, Nagpur: 440013 (M.S.)

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## **John Linton 1910-2010**

For my friend, John Linton, who has died (4 March 2010) aged 99, India – and especially Mahatma Gandhi – was a major influence. In 1978, convinced that no one religion has a monopoly of truth, he founded the Quaker Universalist Group ([www.qug.org.uk](http://www.qug.org.uk)), a context for those of any religion or none to worship together.

John was born in 1910 into a solidly Anglican line of squires, parsons, professors and army officers. Oxford played a key part in his life – happy school holidays during and after World War 1, student days at University College, and decades of retirement in Jericho.

It was in Trinidad, in 1934, working as an oil refinery operator, that he met people of Indian descent and found himself identifying with the disadvantaged. Subsequently, during theological training in Birmingham, he abandoned plans to be a clergyman and instead became a prep school master. In 1939 he joined the Lincolnshire Regiment and soon volunteered for the Indian Army – another turning point.

In 1941 he sailed to Bombay, later becoming major on the general Staff of the Army HQ in New Delhi, where he reported on India's political and economic situation for the Army. Returning to England in 1946, he worked for the old India Office and then as Indian programme organiser in the BBC World service. He was asked to stand as a Labour candidate for Wimbledon but could not do so as a BBC employee.



John lost his first wife, Zoya, to cancer, and their son, Julian (born in Simla on the day the bomb fell on Hiroshima) died of cancer in 1966 as an undergraduate at Oxford.

John and Erica, his second wife, became Quakers and were appointed Quaker International Affairs Representatives for South Asia, based in New Delhi. A later stint as Quaker International Affairs representatives followed service as an Oxfam volunteer in Bihar and then research at the Gandhian Institute of Studies in Benares into Indo-Pakistan relations.

Back in Britain again, John established the Quaker Universalist Group, inspired by his experience in India of meetings in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians worshipped together in Quaker silence. For some UK Quakers the movement affirmed their own convictions, while others were concerned at what they saw as a departure from Quakerism's Christian roots. During the 1980s both Universalist and 'Christocentric' Friends articulated their divergent understandings in the pages of the Quaker weekly, *The Friend*.

Widowed again in 1981, John was active in retirement, speaking in America and the UK on Universalism, and – as an honorary life member - supporting the United Nations Association, and (until recent years) the Labour Party and the Ex-service CND. He delighted in seeing his many friends and visiting India. His 'dear Ruth' (Ruth Barker) and his two nephews, Peter Linton and Martin Linton MP, survive him.

*Eleanor Nesbitt*

John was a prolific communicator and wrote encouraging and kind letters over many years. Through them I learned much of how he had lived his life and what his values were. I have a warm memory of John – and was so glad to have visited him a few months before he died at his home in Oxford. Although frail and a bit disorientated, he gave me a beer and insisted we take the picnic I had brought up on the roof. In brilliant sunshine and warmth we surveyed Oxford from his roof amidst munching and reminiscing. I was so impressed that a man in his late 90s would choose to do this, brushing aside the physical difficulties, and focussing on Gandhi and India and other topics of interest to us both. Go well, John! We remember you with affection and admiration.

*Denise Moll*

A memorial service after the manner of Quakers will be held on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June at 10.30 am at Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles', Oxford OX1 3LW. Enquiries to Marieke Clarke [mariekefclarke@pop3.poptel.org.uk](mailto:mariekefclarke@pop3.poptel.org.uk) 44(0)1865 557807

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## The Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2010

**The Parents Circle-Families Forum** has been chosen for this year's Peace Award which will be presented later in the year probably in October (details in the next issue). The remarkable Forum is a community of Israelis and Palestinians who have lost close family members during this long-running conflict and who promote a reconciliation process through dialogue and mutual understanding. The members do this in schools as well as at adult meetings.

Further information can be found from

Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum, 31 Coleridge Walk, London NW11 6AT. [www.familiesforum.co.uk](http://www.familiesforum.co.uk) and also [www.theparentscircle.org](http://www.theparentscircle.org)

### **Jeevika Annual Lecture**

Tuesday 8 June 2010 at 7pm

Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR

#### ***The Last Civilisation ? The Living Past in South India***

Illustrated lecture by Michael Wood (TV historian)

There is also a bazaar 6pm-9.30pm

Tickets £20

Further details from

[www.jeevika.org.uk/MichaelWoodLecture2010.htm](http://www.jeevika.org.uk/MichaelWoodLecture2010.htm)