

Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2012

The St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital

has been chosen for this year's Award for the outstanding humanitarian work they are doing in very difficult circumstances and bringing people together for the betterment of all.

The presentation will probably be held in October but venue and date have still to be arranged. The GF website will carry the details and if you have supplied your email address you will receive a notice.

<http://www.stjohneyehospital.org>

The Annual Lecture 2012 is also expected to take place in the autumn and will be advertised on our website www.gandhifoundation.org

Contents

India in Chronic Famine, Funded from London John Rowley

Gloomy Thoughts on India Today Antony Copley

Voice of the Rohingya of Burma Nadia Hussain

Tribute to Hussain Sema of South Africa Tahir Sema

Book Review:

The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living (Fritjof Capra)

You will see the firm distinction between the two statements, viz that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to truth was through love... But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of god from their point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth, I should say Truth is God.

M K Gandhi *Young India* 11/10/28

The Gandhi International Peace Award 2011

The Gandhi International Peace Award was established by Lord Attenborough, Surur Hoda, Diana Schumacher and Martin Polden in 1998 “to honour unsung heroes and heroines for their advocacy and practise of Non-Violence”. The Gandhi Foundation's Vice President, Lord Bhikhu Parekh presented the much delayed 2011 Award jointly to Dr Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam 'for their humanitarian work' amongst the tribal peoples of India, the Adivasis, on 12th June 2012 in The House of Lords.

“CHRONIC FAMINE AND WIDESPREAD HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN INDIA FUNDED FROM LONDON”

Dr Binayak Sen argued that his Government's own statistics prove that India has been, and remains, in a state of chronic famine and that the hardest hit are the impoverished and the dispossessed. He said that Government should be held responsible as the famine is a direct result of its close collusion with the many multi-national corporations keen to exploit India's vast resources and the increasingly draconian panoply of laws it has enacted designed to eliminate dissent. The Courts, the Police and the Army support and facilitate the expropriation of land much of which legally belongs to the Adivasis – the Tribal Peoples. They now suffer not only the highest rate of famine but have also been subjected to widespread abuses of human rights. Bulu Imam said that only a ‘New Consciousness’ would allow humankind to survive. This demands greater understanding and insight into what is really happening, taking responsibility for it and learning from peoples like the Adivasis, who are most directly in touch with the elements of life and whose cultures require communal sharing. Dr Felix Padel pointed out that global mining strategy and most of the funding for its implementation is decided in the City of London and that, therefore, our Government must take responsibility for ensuring proper conduct and the same transparency in the mining and construction industries now expected from the banks and the financial sector.

DR BINAYAK SEN

Dr Binayak Sen graduated in Paediatrics and Child Health from Madras University and has worked ever since to extend health-care to poor children and their families in the rural-tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. While serving on the State Government's committee on health sector reform, he made strong criticisms about the State's the human rights violations during the anti-Naxalite operations and advocated instead nonviolent political engagement. In May 2007, he was detained for allegedly supporting the outlawed Naxalites, an armed group advocating a Maoist vision of the future for the poor, thereby violating the provisions of the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005. The evidence presented against him included alleged meetings with the jailed Naxalite leader, Narayan Sanyal. Dr Sen applied for bail before the Raipur Sessions Court and then the Chhattisgarh High Court

in July 2007 but was only granted bail, and released, by the Indian Supreme Court two years later on 25 May 2009.

Six months later, on 24 December 2010, the Raipur Sessions' Court once again found him guilty of helping the Naxalites and sentenced him again to life imprisonment for Sedition. This time the criticism went global and, on 15 April 2011, the Supreme Court of India once again granted him bail stating that no evidence of Sedition had been produced by Chhattisgarh to substantiate their charges. The Court was forced to return his Passport in order that he could receive The Gandhi International Peace Award but he will return to India to await the final verdict in the High Court of Chhattisgarh later this year. Dr Sen is national Vice-President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties. Amnesty International made him a Prisoner of Conscience in 2007.

“Hunger, Dispossession and the Legitimacy of Dissent”

Dr Sen produced figures from The National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau show that between 45% to 47% of children under 5 in India, 37% of the whole adult population and an astonishing 60% of Minorities and Scheduled Castes are malnourished by weight-for-age criteria, that is, they have a Body Mass Index below 18.5. The World Health Organisation declares a famine when more than 40% of a nation's peoples have a BMI less than 18.5.

The Adivasis, with whom he has worked for 30 years, have been able to survive the famine only because their traditions dictate that all members of a community have equal access to their common property – land, water, shelter and crops. Since Rajiv Gandhi opened India to foreign investment, the State has increasingly “acted as the Guarantor to the expropriation of common property resources, handing them over to corporate interests under the doctrine of Eminent Domain, through which the State is the ultimate owner of all the resources in the country”. And so, for decades, the vast resources of minerals, from bauxite to coal, under Adivasi land – never paid for at anything like the true 'capitalist market rate' – has been mined at an increasing rate, their valleys dammed for power, factories built and top flight transport systems built to serve them. The current Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is widely celebrated as the key figure in India's spectacular economic development but he and his Government brook no opposition. He called the Naxalite insurgency in the so-called Red Corridor [from Jharkand to Andra Pradesh] “the greatest threat to India's security” and in 2009 launched Operation Greenhunt deploying a huge array of the armed service to target the Naxalites – actually The Communist Party of India [Maoist]. As usual, this onslaught is having its most devastating impact on the people caught in between – the Adivasis.

As this so-called development accelerates, more and more – estimated at 20% – of the 70 million Adivasis and other Minorities have been purposively

starved, dispossessed, impoverished, physically violated with impunity, falsely imprisoned and barred from fair judicial process or suffered all six. Dr Sen pointed out that, quite obviously, resistance had to be organised if they were to survive. “But they and others right across India are now faced with a panoply of laws, old and new, that severely restrict free speech and any form of protest. However peaceful and nonviolent these protests are, they are branded as 'seditious', 'rebellious' or 'insurgents'. Protests are met with violence by police, army and corporate goondas. There are thousands of people in jail right now, just like me, who have been convicted under false charges. I am one of the very few lucky ones. I have been granted bail twice by The Supreme Court who explicitly stated ‘that no evidence had been produced by the Chhattisgarh Government against me’, but I am still waiting for the final judgement.”

BULU IMAM

Bulu Imam is a human rights and cultural activist who has worked for over 30 years to preserve Adivasi culture, traditions and their environmentally sustainable way of life. He has been the Convener of the Hazaribagh Chapter of the Indian National Trust For Art and Cultural Heritage since 1987. In 1991, he brought to light the first rock art shelter of Jharkhand at Isco and a further dozen painted rock shelters. He established the Sanskriti Museum of Tribal Culture in 1992, where he now lives, and the Tribal Woman Artists Cooperative (TWAC) in 1993. He has campaigned vigorously for many years to save the upper Damodar Valley (Karanpura) from the 30 open-cast coal mines scheduled to have been dug there by 2014. These will not only displace hundreds more Adivasi villages but will also destroy vital wildlife corridors, sacred archaeological sites and cause massive carbon emissions. The Cooperative has held over 50 international exhibitions to highlight the devastation these mines have brought and will continue to bring to all the people living in the region. Bulu has made several films on tribal culture and art and, in 2006, was short-listed for the prestigious Goldman Award in America. He is responsible for annual reports to UNESCO's Council on Monuments and Sites and has published many monographs on ethnic societies, including the definitive account of the Antiquarian Remains of North Jharkhand.

“A New Consciousness”

Bulu Imam said that: “We need Satyagrahas for the 21st Century. In modern terms, this means Citizens who take responsibility for understanding their society, act solely for the welfare of others and who are prepared to offer their lives in the pursuit of justice. Industrial civilization is an aberrant civilization. It has strayed from the path of Nature. It has made war, brutality and profit a path without compassion or hope and now brings planetary catastrophe by causing global warming. India with its older order of ancient spiritual values, nonviolence toward man and nature, tolerance and psychological fulfillment

still stands ready, even now, to show the way. The culture of the Adivasis, developed centuries before we arrived, offers us that very model. From them we can all learn, we can each learn how to become nonviolent within, towards each other and to the planet. All of us here must act now to stop all these self-centred forces destroying these fragile and exemplary communities and their priceless eco-systems. Once you perceive the links between your own life and theirs, you will understand that their struggle is our struggle and you will foresee that only profound mutual aid between all the planet's communities can save some of us from the apocalypse rushing towards us.”

DR FELIX PADEL

Felix Padel is an anthropologist educated at Oxford University, The Delhi School of Economics and Delhi University. His first book was based on his PhD into the effects of British rule on the Konds of Orissa: this created a new approach now called 'reverse anthropology'. He married in 1999 and set up his Indian home in West Orissa. His book with Samarendra Das entitled: *Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel* was widely read not only by activists and academics but also by politicians, including several senior members of the current Indian Government. It has radically changed many people's view of the Adivasis and of the role of international mining Corporations in India. His next book is entitled *Ecology and Economy*.



“How can Peace be Achieved?”

Felix suggested that India needs its own model of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission if the Civil War is to end. The escalating atrocities and human rights abuses can only be stopped through dialogue. The power elites are convinced that neo-liberal capitalism is the way forward but there is growing awareness and concern about its impact. But it is an uphill struggle as ignorance is widespread. For example, a survey of all the professionals directly involved in designing, building and managing an aluminium factory in Jharkhand were aware of only 2% of the effects it was having, and would have, on the local communities and ecosystems.

In the UK, however, there is even greater ignorance about the War. For example, only a few people know that “The City of London is the global centre

for coordinating corporate investment in mining and construction and that the City hosts the vast majority of the corporate headquarters involved, their banks and their financiers.” This means that the UK Government has not only an historic responsibility towards India but also a current duty of care. Three departments are directly involved: the Foreign Office, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for International Development. The effects of their policies and actions in the Civil War, even though distant and indirect, and the extent of their communication with the private and voluntary sectors with whom they work should be made more transparent. Dr Padel said: “It is imperative that we can all see the link between decisions made here and the actual impact they have on real people and living environments. We should campaign for an Independent Commission into the mining and construction industries, stronger even than the Vickers Commission on Banking, because equivalent scandals wait to be revealed there too”. One key aspect any such Commission should investigate is the interpersonal networks and career moves between the elites of these multi-national corporations, bankers, politicians, the big philanthropists and the media. Arundhati Roy has recently published her research into this in India in which she unpicked the friendships and pathways and exposed the cliques that work across all sectors. Felix asked that we should all campaign to expose the similar links at work here in the UK and that we should demand more responsible behaviour from all concerned. “If India ever does establish a truth and reconciliation commission, then the UK Government and the corporations we host would have to appear before it.”



Binayak Sen, Bulu Imam, John Rowley, Bhikhu Parekh

There were many passionate, thoughtful and radical contributions during the discussion that followed.

In attendance: Titus Alexander - Jasmine Alvis - Jay Ashra - R J Barraclough - Prashant Basanagoudar - Conrad Bailey - Gordon Bennett - Olivia Bennett - Colin Bex - Daniela Bezzi - Mischa Gorchov Brearley - Naomi Canton - John D Capper - Simon Chambers - Marion Conacher - Graham Davey - Mark Davies - Amrita Dasgupta - Gillian Deane - Sally Dean - Margaret Dickinson - Jane East - Erika and David Geary - Nitiben Gheewala - Ramesh Gopalakrishnan - Professor Janet Grant - Sophie Grig - Sunil Gupta - Omar Hayat - Annie Heslop - Mary Holmes - Martin Horwood MP - Elisabeth Imam - Binnie Innocenti - Bianca Jagger - Prof Narinder Kapur - Saleem Izdani Khan - Graham Lee - William & Ellen Lethorn - Trevor Lewis - Ramya Lindsay - Emma Mapp - Madhu Malhotra - Diana Mavrolean - Vijay Mehta - Easterine Mills-Clarke - Roger Moody - Agrotosh Mukherjee - Jonathan Parry - C B Patel - Manji Patel-Vekaria - Paul Piercy - Martin Polden - Peter Popham - Om Prakash - Matthew Puliyeel - Hemal Randerwala - Eric Randolph - Seetherama Rao - John and Poppy Rowley - Aruna Roy - Anthony Russell - Liz Rodgers - Diana Schumacher - Ilina Sen - Apaijita Sen - Pranhita Sen - Andrew Simms - Richard Solly - Arlene Spencer - Alexandra Smith - Jane Temperley - Alan Tritton - Madhava Turumella - Meena Varma - Satyapal Verma - Robert Wallis - Jennifer Wallace - Shaheen Westcombe - Jo Woodman

Photographs of the Award ceremony have been generously supplied by Tim Daroch
John Rowley, GF Trustee and GIPA 2011 Project Manager.

Gloomy Thoughts on India Today

Antony Copley

These reflections are prompted by attending the Award ceremony in the House of Lords of the Gandhi International Peace Award for 2011 to Binayak Sen and Bulu Iman and a seminar given by two very bright graduate students of the University of Kent on the writings and film making of Arundhati Roy. Biographical details on the two recipients have appeared already in *The Gandhi Way* and their two acceptance speeches will also be published, so this is no attempt to summarise what they had to say. But it filled me with a real sense of gloom about where India today is heading.

It was very moving to find oneself in the same room as Binayak Sen. It was something of a miracle that he was present at all to receive his prize, only by being let out of prison on bail and having his passport returned at a very late stage. Binayak Sen is a doctor and specialist paediatrician and he began by telling us that surveys on malnutrition, based on body mass indices, show that India is in fact in the grip of famine. Sen's struggle for civil rights is well known. He ended his talk by telling us the Indian government is currently drawing up legislation in which almost all forms of dissent will now be branded as sedition. Such was the charge brought against him for his own

active engagement in the struggle for adivasi rights and one that led to a sentence of life imprisonment.

Bulu Iman delivered a searing indictment against the current economic development of India with its rampant capitalism riding rough shod over the economic and cultural life of the tribal population. He opened up an apocalyptic vision of India's own economic self destruction. All this ties into the consequences of climate change. None has done more than Bulu Iman to memorialise the remarkable culture of the forest people. We were recently provided with a brilliant photographic record of this culture at an exhibition of photographs by Robert Wallis in the Brunei Gallery at SOAS, conveying a horrifying sense of the threat from the coal-mining and mining of other minerals to the very survival of this culture. Talking to Bulu Iman afterwards he left me with a disturbing sense that, in fact, the battle for survival has been lost. He sees the materials in his Sanskriti Museum, Hazaribagh as time capsules. How can any culture of this fragile kind survive the destruction of its village life, with huge roads ploughing through the forest destroying all in their way ? At least a third of the tribal population in the forest areas of eastern and central India have already been dispossessed and driven into urban slums.

Felix Padel, historian of the tribal struggle and vital intermediary between The Gandhi Foundation and the two recipients, endorsed their findings. If anything, he sees the situation as even more dire.

No-one has more vividly described this human catastrophe overwhelming the forest population than Arundhati Roy. I learnt that her imagery always refers back to the holocaust of the partition. Initially, I could see how this imagery would work for the disaster that has struck Kashmir and the horrors of communal violence in Gujerat in 2003 but I was less certain of its relevance to the tribal tragedy. But then it was explained to me that their forced dispossession precisely echoes those images of long lines of migrants on the move during the massive migrations of the partition years.

Has the India of its founding fathers really come to this ? Was there some fatal flaw in Nehru's vision for change, a paternalist concern towards the vulnerable in Indian society that could turn dictatorial ? Did that visionary sense of rapid development with its power stations and dams in fact presage the rampant capitalism on view today ? It was Nehru himself who laid the foundation stone 5 April 1961 of the Sardar Sarovar, the scheme for some 3000 dams on the River Narmada. The forest people were drawn into a Nehruvian development project. Of course it is tempting to place the blame for the exploitation of the forests on the Raj and its Forest laws of 1878 and it is true that much of its timber was set aside for exploitation – think of the amount of wood needed for the Indian railways. But the colonial regime did set aside protected areas and sought to shore up the way of life of the forest people. It is also worth recalling that originally these were plains people but driven into the forest by aggressive agrarian castes. But independence seemed to release even great depredation of the tribal economies. In the eight

provinces of Bihar that were in 2000 to become the state of Jharkand, far more mineral wealth was being extracted and exported than development aid was being invested. Did it only need Narisimha Rao's Congress government's liberalisation of state controls over the economy in 1993 to release globalisation in all its exploitative greed? For decades India was the world's most exciting prospect of a developing economy and yet did we foresee Shining India as its outcome? Bulu Imam for one was sceptical if there be any life left in any earlier visionary outlook.

Martin Horwood MP

Bianca Jagger



Of course it is distastefully possible to be dismissive of the chances for survival in today's economic imperatives of such vulnerable communities as the forest peoples. If you adopt a historically determinist approach, then so called primitive or backward communities simply have to give way to 'progress'. At best, you offer the communities some share in the profits of the mining revolution. It was argued in that seminar on Arundhati Roy that the newly enriched Indian middle class have no sense that the forest people are worth protecting – they simply stand in the way of the making of wealth. It helps to understand such indifference if we realise the staggering profits that will be made from the mining of minerals in the forests. Maybe the forest people are themselves – or so it is sometimes argued – morally obliged to accept that they have no option but to share this wealth.

But of course there are very strong counter arguments. In the tribal way of life we are given an example of a sustainable economy, one that respects

nature, and is just the example of sustainability we need if we are to stave off the disastrous consequences of climate change. Bianca Jagger, inter alia Council of Europe Goodwill Ambassador and Trustee of the Amazon Charitable Trust, in her intervention at the Award ceremony pleaded for new paradigm on development. There has to be a development plan that accommodates the needs of such vulnerable societies. Not everyone knows that Parliament now has an All Party Parliamentary Group for Tribal Peoples. The LibDem MP, Martin Horwood, its founder and Chairman, attended the ceremony. He reminded us of the threat from the Maoists. And clearly there are alternatives models for development than industrial capitalism. More radically, we need to abandon the concept of growth for one of sustainability.

So is there any prospect of checking this invasion of the tribal lands in its track ? We have to live in hope. Iina Sen agreed with me as we said farewell in the corridors of the House of Lords. Without hope we are lost. I do not myself give up hope that the progressive ideals incarnated in the Indian Constitution, the democratic political vision of Nehru, the role of a free press in independent India, have wholly disappeared. At least one Minister of Forests tried to rein in the corporation, Vedanta and delay the mining of bauxite in Chhattisgarh. If the political class are too hand in glove with the capitalists then we have to fall back on dissent from India's intelligentsia. Aruna Roy, distinguished journalist of the Times of India, put faith in such dissent. Admittedly, if Binayak Sen's fears over changing the laws on sedition are accurate, then there is a momentous struggle to be waged. Will university students, amongst others, stand up for Civil Rights ?

Where does this leave the Gandhians ? In an earlier struggle, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement), under the inspired leadership of Medha Patkar, a Gandhian movement went some way to check the flooding of the river by the dams and the destruction of its riverside tribal culture. And it may well be asked, why did this cultural vandalism not cause as much shock as that of the vandalism of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992 ? In 1993 the World Bank withdrew funding, embarrassed by the wonderfully named Monsoon satyagrahas, with Gandhian activists ready to expose themselves to the rising waters, in the practice of jal samparan, sacrifice in water. The whole issue was referred to the Supreme Court. But it has to be acknowledged that in the end it came out on the side of the dam. In its judgement, "it became necessary to harvest the river for the larger good". There was to be rather more good fortune in a Gandhian protest against the Maheshwar Hydroelectric Scheme in Madhya Pradesh, a protest linked to the NAPM, the National Advancement of People's Movement, set up in 1996. Yet we were told at the award ceremony when the women of Tamil Nadu protested against a nuclear power station all 5000 were arrested. Has the iron entered the soul in current Indian policy making ?

So can a Gandhian protest influence the outcome in the current struggle in eastern and central India ? Few people are aware of the scale of the conflict today. Has the freedom of the press been stifled ? Are people just

indifferent ? To deal with the conflict both the police and increasingly the Indian army are heavily engaged. Quite who carries out reprisals against the tribal villages is unclear to me though I was told in the seminar that Hindu communal nationalists are heavily involved. They hold the tribal peoples, who of course lie outside the caste system, in contempt. Many tribals have joined the Maoist led revolt, driven out of their villages, outraged at the violation of their women. But what do the Maoists, or Naxalites as they are alternatively known, want ? Have they a vision which in the long run saves the economies of the forest peoples ? It does not fit with Marxist notions of economic development. Admittedly Marx, at the end of his life, came to see in such simple communities the very ideal of the communist society he was envisioning. Might today's Indian Maoists do the same ? It seems far more probable that the Maoists see themselves as engaged in a power struggle with the Indian state and have but opportunistically seized on this social unrest. The majority of the forest people find themselves in the crossfire of a civil war between the Indian army and the Maoists. Is there scope for nonviolent satyagraha ? So Bhikhu Parekh argued for at the end of the Award ceremony. Arundhati Roy feels that up against the violence of the State there is little prospect for a Gandhian solution and wonders if there is a nonviolent alternative to the violence of the Maoists. Bulu Iman, a committed Gandhian, is equally pessimistic. In his view a satyagraha can only impact if your opponent has a moral susceptibility to injustice and he feels that such receptivity, one that existed with the likes of a Christian Lord Irwin of the British Raj or a Smuts in South Africa, does not exist in today's India. It makes one fear that a committed Gandhian like Binayak Sen may yet be disappointed in his life's struggle. But again, one must not give up hope.

Eastern and Central India is not the only locale for struggles by tribal people. It also rages in North East India, Kerala, and on every other continent. These are not saintly movements. Up against the threat from globalisation several have retreated into exclusivist and xenophobic autonomous movements. Their political future would be better served were they to seek out more pluralist solutions. Such tribal people are at risk world wide. In the Award ceremony much was made of the role of international capital, the City of London, host to most of the Corporations financing the mining of tribal areas, a particular villain. The threat to the forest economies is clearly a part of globalisation. The tribal people stand in its way. Their communitarian values and ideals of a sustainable economy may yet be the inspiration to save us all from the consequences of unchecked growth. Their struggle is one that concerns us all.

Books consulted, Alf Gunvald Nilsen *Dispossession and Resistance in India : The River and the Rage* Routledge 2010, Ed Daniel J Rycoft and Sangeeta Dasgupta *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* Routledge 2011, Arundhati Roy *Broken Republic* Hamish Hamilton 2011.

Antony Copley is Academic Adviser to the Gandhi Foundation.

“Which bed did Gandhi sleep in?”

But there can be no doubt that the myth-making tendency of the human mind has long affected the public image of Gandhi. Some western enthusiasts have uncritically glorified his memory, filtering out his human weaknesses; and the popular picture of him among devotees in India has attained mythic proportions, so that he is regarded by many as a divine avatar or incarnation. But to enable us to see through those clouds of adoration, there have until recently been some who knew Gandhi; and over thirty years ago, when I was in India for the first time, I was able to meet a number of people who had known Gandhi, had vivid memories of him, and in most cases had been deeply influenced by him. But apart from personal testimonies, Gandhi's is probably the most minutely documented life that has ever been lived. His own writings, including letters and notes, speeches, interviews, newspaper articles, pamphlets and books fill ninety-three volumes of 'The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi' published by the Government of India. Hundreds of people who knew him have published books and articles about him. And so the available historical materials do enable us to form a reasonably accurate and rounded picture of a life that was lived so recently and so publicly and that has been recorded so fully and from so many different angles.

Speaking of the clouds of adoration, there is a little anecdote about Gandhi in Birmingham whilst he was in Britain in 1931. He stayed, as you might expect, in Woodbrooke, the Quaker Study Centre in Selly Oak. Next week a lady who was an enthusiastic admirer of Gandhi stayed overnight at Woodbrooke and was told that she would be in the guest room in which Gandhi had slept the previous week. She was delighted at the prospect of being able to say that she had slept in a bed in which the Mahatma had slept. However when she went to her room she found that there were two beds. So, resourcefully, she set her alarm clock for the middle of the night, and when it went off she moved from one bed to the other. At breakfast next morning she asked as casually as she could, “By the way, which bed did Gandhi sleep in?”, and was told, “Oh Gandihji always slept on the floor”.

From John Hick's *The Significance of Mahatma Gandhi for Today*, The University of Birmingham Occasional Paper No.19 1999

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Voice of the Rohingya of Burma

Nadia Hussain

The Rohingya of Burma are described by the UN to be “the most persecuted community in the world”, yet most don't know who they are.

Living in a stateless limbo, the military junta of Burma in the 1960's formally enacted the 1982 Citizenship Act whereby the Rohingya were denied citizenship. They are restricted in their movement, education and employment, right to practice their religion and require permission to marry and procreate. “This is one way the government tortures us. They don't want the Rohingya population to increase. They say... ‘This is not your country. You don't have the right to reproduce here’ ”, explains a Rohingya. Living near the border with Bangladesh in a state called Arakan and though their heritage in the Burmese state dates back eight centuries, they are regarded as illegal immigrants in their own homeland. Due to their darker skin colour and practising a different faith to the majority Buddhist Burmese, they live a marginalised life on the fringes of Burmese society. “In Burma they're told they're illegals who should go back to Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, they're told they're Burmese who should go back home”, says Chris Lewa of The Arakan Project.

Early June 2012, the first of many inevitable incidents of violence broke out in Burma between the Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. Though initially the incidents involved civilians, the violence soon became state sponsored with a state of emergency being issued by the Burmese President Thein Sein. Nearly two months on, attacks and prevention of aid is now becoming more systematically targeted towards the Rohingya, with locals teaming up with state forces, the Nasaka, to abuse, rape and kill the already vulnerable Rohingya. Since June, over 100,000 Rohingya have been displaced from their homes, their villages being burnt down and forbidden from returning.

Due to the levels of violence and the state of emergency, UN and international NGO staff were pulled out of Burma and journalists have been unable to report on the incidents due to not having verified accounts. Therefore, the world's mainstream media, until a recent Amnesty and Human Rights Watch report, has been disgustingly quiet.

Recently President Thein Sein had asked the UNHCR to take the Rohingya refugees or to settle them in other countries. “The resettlement programs organised by UNHCR are for refugees who are fleeing a country to another, in very specific circumstances. Obviously, it's not related to this situation,” said UNHCR chief Antonio Guterres. Thein Sein's statement and his idea of the Rohingya solution quite clearly indicates that he sees no future for the Rohingya in Burma.

Restless Beings, an international human rights organisation, through a network of sources in Burma has been able to attain footage from the ground,

showing groups of Rohingya being escorted out of their village by state forces and numerous horrific attacks on local Rohingya. The footage seeks to show as merely an insight, the strife and unknown abuse the Rohingya face, and to also show the international media that it is possible to obtain such news and report without bias.



Rohingya Refugees

The situation grows worse by the day, with both local Rakhines and Rohingya unable to get aid or medical supplies. However, our sources have told us that the Rohingya have been banned from buying or selling food and resources and any aid is being blocked before reaching them. On the 20th July our source in Maungdaw said that meetings were held in central monasteries where Buddhist monks and Rakhine civil society members attended to discuss how to cut off supplies. Some of the monks have been integral in prohibiting essential food items like rice, flour, cooking oil, beans and pulses that are used to prepare the main meals for Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. Monks were said to be on duty along the Maungdaw-Buthidaung motor road and Buthidaung jetty to check if rice bags were unloaded in Muslim controlled markets, such as the 4th mile market and Shikdarpara. On the 30th July, a ship carrying aid from mostly Muslim organisations in Burma arrived at a port in Arakan only for the goods worth an estimated \$500,000 to be looted before the vulnerable Rohingya had any access to it.

After lobbying the Bangladesh Government to open their borders to the Rohingya fleeing the violence and protesting outside the Bangladesh High Commission earlier in July, we then sought to lobby the British Government to not only raise awareness but to ask the Government as our representatives

to ensure that such violations were not acceptable. The response was phenomenal, with over 13,000 signatures from 134 countries worldwide and over 80,000 Restless Beings website hits. However, we still need to continue to champion the rights of the Rohingya and voice their struggle, till everyone is aware of the abuses against them.

It is at such times, that the international media and world leaders are required to pressure leaders enacting such grave human rights abuses. This issue is not about politics, race or religion, it is purely about simple human rights, rights that the Rohingya have been denied decades before this summer.

It is our duty as humans to make the atrocities known and to stand up for the oppressed.

In Gandhi's words: "We must be the change we wish to see."

To find out more about the Rohingya visit www.restlessbeings.org/projects/rohingya and if you're on twitter or facebook share news about the Rohingya community with your friends. and colleagues.

Tribute to Hussain Sema, his untimely death and his contribution to the liberation of South Africa

Tahir Sema

The year was 1926; my Grandfather's brother Hussain Mohammed Sema was born to Mohammed Sema and Fathima Sema in Newcastle. Newcastle is a small town in KwaZulu-Natal between Durban and Johannesburg. Little did he know that he would not live to see past the youthful age of 23 and that his actions would have colossal significance in the history of South Africa and undoubtedly the world. Hussain Sema was one of 11 children, born to a working class family. He was the younger brother of my grandfather Maulana Cassim Sema.

Hussain Mohammed Sema was energetic and strikingly handsome. In 1926 the political climate in South Africa was restrained. Apartheid was entrenching itself slowly but surely, it had the country and its people firmly in its grip.

Elsewhere in the world the year 1926 was the year when television was first publicly demonstrated in London. As the years had passed on, little had happened in South Africa – other than World War II – which South Africa took part in.

Many others at the time were filled with anxiety and anger about the current state of affairs in the country. It was also during this time that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was hard at work on his Satyagraha (insistence on truth)

and passive resistance campaign. The main purpose of Gandhi's campaigns was to oppose discrimination against Indians, non whites were subjected to unjust laws such as: those eight years or older had to carry passes for which they had to give their fingerprints; they would be segregated as to where they could live and work, new Asian immigration into the Transvaal would be disallowed, even for those who had left the town when the South African War broke out in 1899 and were returning. To oppose this inhumane treatment, Satyagraha was adopted which quickly spread to KwaZulu-Natal.

Hussain Sema joined the passive resistance campaign where he was welcomed and embraced. The year was now 1946 and the passive resistance campaign was well under way. Hussain and his comrades were undoubtedly hard at work meeting clandestinely, strategizing and planning in intimate detail, ways and means to break pass laws and oppose the apartheid regime in whatever symbolic way possible. To these politically astute activists it was universally agreed upon by the "non-whites" that the South African Government and its lackeys had lost all credibility in the eyes of the majority.

Between the years 1946 and 1948 many marches involving a few brave individuals took place, practicing passive resistance. Hussain was part of many of these campaigns. Newcastle had been significant for the Satyagraha campaign; Gandhi himself marched in 1913 from Newcastle (KwaZulu-Natal) to Volksrust (Transvaal) in defiance of the pass laws and discrimination but was summarily arrested and detained under unforgiving conditions.

Hussain Sema greatly admired Gandhi at the time, in the same way Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress and Martin Luther King did. He would not have met Gandhi, as Gandhi returned to India in 1915. Between the years 1946 and 1948 when a young and vibrant Hussain and his comrades were fighting fearlessly against discrimination and inhumane treatment utilising Satyagraha, Gandhi had been fighting for India's independence from the British utilising the same tactics. Sadly, Gandhi had died a year after India achieved its independence from the British, in 1948.

Those who were part of the Satyagraha and Passive Resistance campaigns in South Africa took a principled stand and dedicated themselves to ensuring their families, friends and fellow South Africans were treated with dignity and respect.

It is believed that in 1947 Hussain Sema had been arrested in a defiance march against pass laws and unfair discrimination which saw a group of activists march from Newcastle to Volksrust (Transvaal). This march had been led by the famous Dr G M (Monty) Naicker and Dr Yusuf Dadoo. More than 16 activists were arrested in this action and thrown into a Volksrust jail. The conditions of the jails which many activists were to endure was unbearable, they were tortured and had to withstand icy weather conditions.

Hussain had spent a number of months in jail, together with his comrades. He had fallen ill after six months and was released into the care of his family. Sadly, he contracted pleurisy, which is an inflammation of the lining of the lungs and chest that leads to sharp chest pains when you take a breath or cough. He contracted pleurisy due to falling ill with pneumonia or tuberculosis that set in while he was in prison.

His dreams of liberation, a society free of discrimination and ill-treatment were dashed when he passed away in 1949, as a direct result of ill health due to imprisonment and torture.

In a speech at a mass welcome meeting held in Durban on the release of Hussain Sema's comrades Monty Naicker and others, Naicker overwhelmed with emotion said, "Our struggle has lit fire in the hearts of other oppressed peoples and unshackled their bonds to unite with all oppressed people of South Africa. We have reached a stage when we can no longer think in terms of the Indian people alone. We must form a United Democratic Front and challenge any force that will lead the land of our birth to the fate of fascist Germany or Japan."

On June 13, 1996, President Nelson Mandela inaugurated a year-long observance of the 1946 Indian passive resistance in South Africa. Speaking at the University of Natal in Durban, he described the campaign as "an epic of our struggle for liberation" and paid tribute to Dr G M Naicker, Dr Yusuf Dadoo and other leaders of resistance. In an introduction prepared by Mr Reddy for a *souvenir book* released by President Mandela on that occasion, the following had been said, "The Indian passive resistance of 1946-48 was a landmark in the history of the South African liberation struggle. It was the first episode in a continuous and determined mass movement for liberation from racist tyranny and the training ground for many Indians who went on to make great contributions to the national liberation movement. It initiated the mobilisation of world public opinion in support of freedom in South Africa. The Indian movement set an example to all the black people of South Africa, and gave them confidence that the monster of racism could be defeated. It helped prepare the way for an entirely new stage in the struggle against racism – away from mere petitions and compromises with racism, and towards confrontation with the system of white domination to eradicate racism and secure full equality for all the people in a democratic society."

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Book Reviews

The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living Fritjof Capra Flamingo 2010 pp272 £8.99 ISBN 978 0 00 655158 4

Fritjof Capra is a well known author through his famous book *The Tao of Physics* which discusses the philosophical implications of the dramatic changes of concepts and ideas that occurred in Physics. His second book *The Turning Point* explored the paradigm shifts in biology, medicine, psychology and economics. In the book under review the author has presented a conceptual framework that integrates life's biological, cognitive and social dimensions. His aim is not only to offer a unified view of life, mind and society, but also to develop a coherent, systemic approach to some of the critical issues of our time.

Our academic disciplines have been organized in such a way that the natural sciences deal with material structures while the social sciences deal with social structures, which are understood to be, essentially, rules of behaviour. In the future, this strict division will no longer be possible, because the key challenge of this new century – for social scientists, natural scientists and everyone else – will be to build ecologically sustainable communities, designed in such a way that their technologies and social institutions – their material and social structures – do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life. The design principles of our future social institutions must be consistent with the principles of organization that nature has evolved to sustain the web of life. A unified conceptual framework for the understanding of material and social structures will be essential for this task. The purpose of this book is to provide a first sketch of such a framework.

Part One is titled Life, Mind and Society. There are three chapters titled (1) The Nature of Life, (2) Mind and Consciousness (3) Social Reality. The author dwells on definitions like what is life ? – its elements etc. Then he discusses the problems involved in the definition of mind. Part Two of the book is titled The Challenges of Twenty-first Century. There are four chapters titled (1) Life and Leadership in Organization (2) Network of Globalization (3) Biotechnology at a Turning Point (4) Changing a Gene.

In every chapter there is a brilliant analysis of the topic which brings out the author's scholarship. The book is full of important and interesting pieces of information.

I would like to share a few pieces with the readers.

“You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased it: ‘You're nothing but a pack of neurons’.”

A quote from Galbraith on the origin of power:

“The exercise of power, the submission of some to the will of others, is inevitable in modern society, nothing whatever is accomplished without it: Power can be socially malign, it is also socially essential. The essential role of power in social organization is linked to inevitable conflicts of interest. Galbraith distinguishes three kinds of power, depending on the means that are employed. Coercive power wins submission by inflecting or threatening sanctions, compensatory power by offering incentives or rewards, and conditioned power by changing beliefs through persuasion or education.

A community would be able to act much more effectively if somebody had the authority to make or facilitate decisions when there were conflicts of interest. Such social arrangements would have given the community a significant evolutionary advantage”.

Under the heading Emergence and Design he says:

“For example, we would say that a flower has a certain colour to attract honey bees, or that a squirrel hides its nuts in order to have a storage of food in winter, but these are anthropomorphic projections that ascribe the human characteristic of purposeful action to non-human phenomena. The colours of flowers and the behavior of animals have been shaped through long processes of evolution and natural selection, often in convolution with other species. From the scientific point of view, there is neither purpose nor design in nature.”

The Rise of Global Capitalism

“The new information and communication technologies, which made it possible to transfer funds between various segments of the economy and various countries almost instantly and to manage the enormous complexity brought about by rapid deregulation and new financial ingenuity. In the end, the information technology revolution helped to give birth to a greatly expanded capitalism.”

“Profit margins are generally much higher in the financial markets than in most direct investments, hence, all flows of money ultimately converge in the global financial networks in search of higher gains.

These global gamblers are not obscure speculators, but major investment banks, pension funds, multi-national corporations – and mutual funds organized precisely for the sake of financial manipulation.”

“The new capitalism that is one of the driving forces of globalization to some extent is a mystery. We don’t fully know as yet, just how it works.”

About Biotechnology in Agriculture and Genetically Modified (GM) crops of Monsanto, Capra says:

“During the past three decades increases in global food production have outstripped population growth by 16 percent. Mountains of surplus grains

have pushed down food prices. This clearly shows the argument that biotechnology is needed to feed the world is disingenuous – world hunger is not a technical but a political problem.”

The Ecological Alternative:

“Organic farming is sustainable because it embodies ecological principles that have been tested by evolution for billions of years.”

Criminal Economy:

“It is becoming increasingly apparent. The new global capitalism has also created a global criminal economy that profoundly affects national and international economics and politics. It has threatened and destroyed local communities around the world, and with the pursuit of an ill conceived biotechnology, it has invaded the sanctity of life by attempting to turn diversity into monoculture, ecology into engineering and life itself into a commodity.”

The world wide decimation of coral reefs is one of the clearest and most troubling indications that our planet is warming.

Globalization has no future unless it is designed to be inclusive, ecologically sustainable and respectful of human rights and values.

We are all members of humanity, and we all belong to the global biosphere – we are members of Oikos, the ‘Earth household’ which is the Greek root of the word ecology and as such we should behave as the other members of the household behave – plants, animals and micro-organisms that form the vast network of relationships that we call the web of life.

Three issues are the focal points:

One is the challenge of reshaping the governing rules and institutions of globalization; second is the opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods and the promotion of sustainable agriculture; and the third is eco-design, a concerted effort to redesign our physical structures, cities, technologies and industries so as to make them ecologically sustainable.

Solar Energy – its advantages discussed. About nuclear power – the conclusion that must be reached is that from an economic stand point alone to rely upon nuclear fission as the primary source of our stationary energy supplies will constitute economic lunacy on a scale unparalleled in recorded history.

The author also discusses the growth of Wind Energy and Hydrogen as a Fuel.

There is Hope:

“The kind of hope that I often think about I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul, and it is not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. (Hope) is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.” *M R Rajagopalan*

This is a new Journal dedicated to the philosophy of Gandhi. It starts by linking the fairly recent activities in India of Anna Hazare concerning corruption in political life and declares the necessity of value transformation at grass roots level.

This is followed by the full version of Gandhi's 1910 English translation of *Hind Swaraj*, with an introduction by Prof. Anthony Parel [who was this year's GF Annual Lecturer]. Often considered essential to an understanding of Gandhi's philosophy it deals with three great ideas of swaraj (freedom), civilisation and satyagraha.

In addition to six articles and four book reviews there is a lengthy book discussion of K Ramakrishna Rao's book *Gandhi and Applied Spirituality*. Five authors take three chapters each and discuss them in detail.

This all makes for a very lengthy and stimulating journal of 264 pages. It is intended to produce it twice per year. It is well produced and is a welcome addition to Gandhian scholarship.

Available from Gitam Institute for Gandhian Studies, Gitam University, Rushikonda, Visakhapatnam - 530045, Andhra Pradesh, India. \$25 per year, plus \$10 for airmail.

Piet Dijkstra

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## **Asia Armed (and the world)**

The latest figures on military expenditure revealed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) include the remarkable fact that Asian countries have become the largest importers of arms. This includes South Korea, Singapore, China and Pakistan but by far the largest is India which last year bought \$3.6 billion of arms, mainly from Russia, and is at present the top importer in the world.

The USA and Russia are by far the largest exporters of arms but Germany, France and the UK are also significant.

World military expenditure which has been increasing since 1998 reached \$1.74 trillion of which the USA spent \$711 billion which represents 4.8% of its Gross Domestic Product. The UK spent £39.6 billion (\$58 billion or 2.6%GDP) and India \$44 billion (2.7%GDP). However India's expenditure does not include nuclear weapons! Pakistan's expenditure appears much lower but does not include paramilitary forces! Japan's expenditure is one of the lowest at 1% GDP but one of the highest must be Israel with 6.5% of the GDP going to the military.

Costa Rica stands out for its zero expenditure as it has no army. It does have frontier and paramilitary forces but expenditure amounts to only 0.05% of GDP. The country is recognised for its sustainability and has been placed top of the New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index.

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Charity number 292629

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

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## The Gandhi Way

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

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