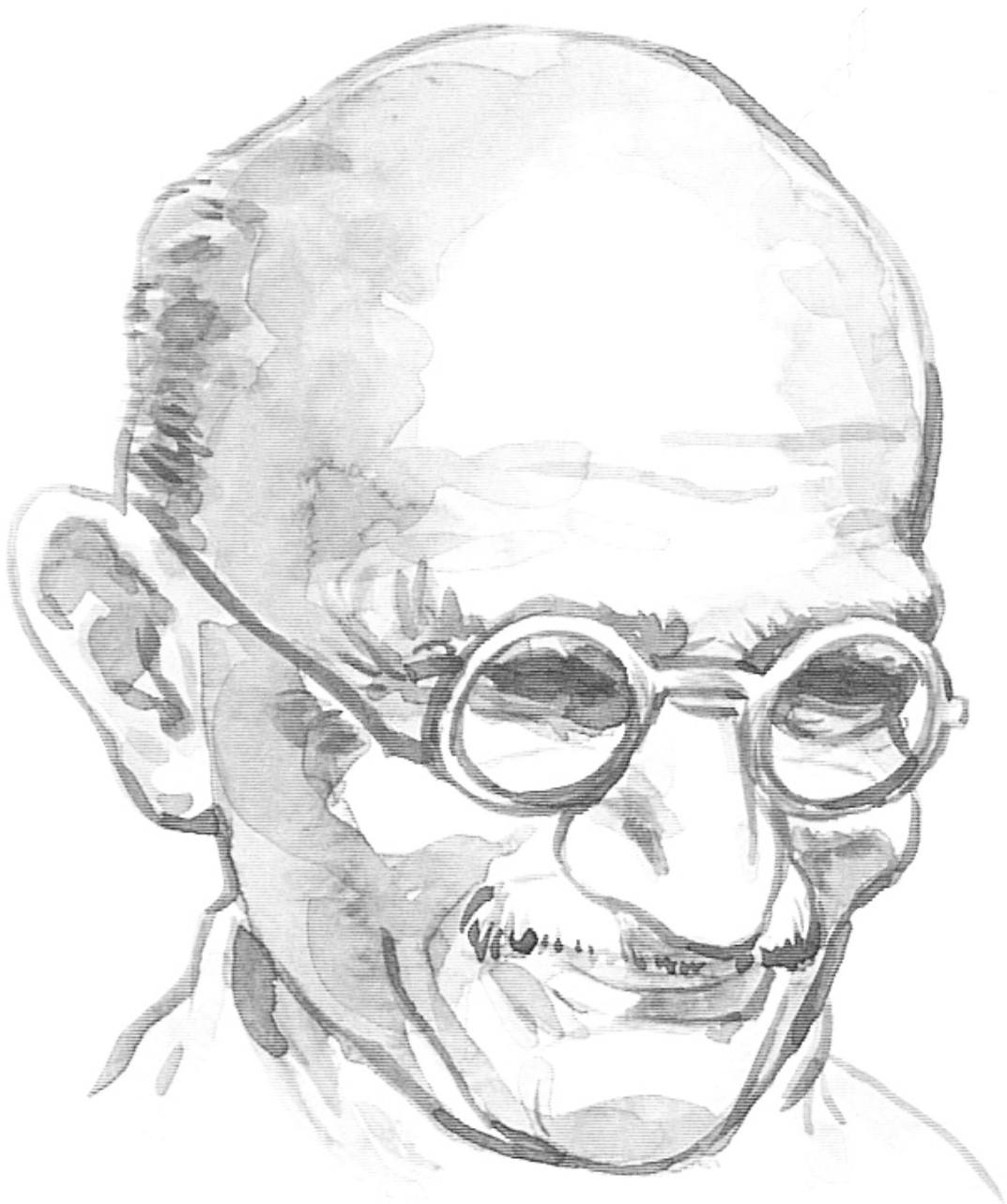


The Gandhi Way



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GF Events

We are not able to announce any further events for later in the year as the details are not sufficiently definite yet. They will be announced by email or post when available.



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Action Village India

GF International Peace Award 2022

On 27 October 2022, **Esther Trienekins**, Executive Director of Action Village India, accepted the Peace Award on behalf of AVI and delivered the following speech.

On behalf of Action Village India, I would like to sincerely thank the Gandhi Foundation for handing us this year's peace award. I stand here as Action Village India, but this award goes far beyond Action Village India.

This award really goes towards our partners in India:

Association for Sarva Seva Farms

Centre for Rural Studies and Development

Ekta Parishad

EquiDiversity Foundation

Lakshmi Ashram

Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra

Regional Centre for Development Cooperation

They all worked tirelessly during the Covid-19 pandemic to support the most vulnerable people in rural communities in India and continue to do so today.

Our partnerships are not created as a means to an end. They are at the heart of our work and many of our partnerships have spanned decades. Our partners, whether large or small organisations, all work directly at the grassroots level across rural India – from Bihar and Jharkhand in the North, in Odisha and down to Tamil Nadu. They are experts in their fields and design their development projects to best serve their local communities. The majority of our partners, like many of the founders and original supporters of Action Village India, have their motivations and practices rooted in Gandhian traditions and philosophy: truth, nonviolent resistance and self-sufficiency.

Association for Sarva Seva Farms – better known as ASSEFA for instance, started to enable formerly landless families who had received land through a voluntary Gandhian land reform (the Bhoodan Movement) but who had no tools or animals to start farming. One of the most famous disciples of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, had begun in 1951, with a view to offering a nonviolent solution to the problem of the inequality of land ownership that characterised rural India in those years. For 14 years, walking on foot through India, Vinoba asked landowners for the gift of a plot of land to be allocated to the poorest peasants. He collected over 4 million acres of land for redistribution. Special Bhoodan state committees were set up to register and distribute the donated land, but the beneficiaries could not work those dry and uncultivated lands

for years due to their extreme poverty, which meant they did not possess the necessary initial capital, nor tools. This is where the founders, Loganathan and Giovanni Ermiglia took initiative and the first ASSEFA village was born.

Also, Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra, or NBJK as we better know them have clear roots in Gandhian traditions. NBJK was founded in 1971 by four engineering graduates who were very moved to tackle the causes of inequality, exploitation and poverty in their state. Motivated by the vision and ideas of the Sarvodaya leader, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan, these graduates made the decision to abandon their careers and comfortable lifestyles in order to explore ways to establish a just society, in which no one remains hungry, unemployed, exploited, or discriminated against. Ivan Nutbrown, one of Action Village India's founders and coordinator from 2000 to 2018, met Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra's four founders in Bihar in 1969 before they started NBJK. Inspired by Gandhi, Ivan had made the journey overland to India and has been working and supporting different communities there every since.

Today is a joyous moment for us. A recognition of all the work that has been done. And I am so happy that we can all be here today in person and celebrate this together. It is not all that long ago that this wouldn't be an option, and although meeting in person seems all normal again, and our lives have moved on, the effects of the covid-19 pandemic will be felt for a long time – this is especially true for communities in rural India.

The impact of Covid in India

I recently travelled to India, to meet with our partners again after 2.5 years. Travelling through India, at first glance, you almost forget about Covid and that it had such an impact on the lives of many, if not all, of the people here. Sure, the masks you see here and there, are a reminder of it, but there are huge crowds at temples and bazaars, people are busily getting on with their lives and a cough or sneeze no longer turn heads.

Throughout my trip however, in conversation with our partners, passers-by whilst travelling and friends, I have been confronted by the devastation Covid has played on people's lives and how it still continues to do so.

I was surprised to hear from one of the staff at NBJK that many young people had died during the second Covid wave. He himself a young man in his 30s suffered terribly from the virus. Luckily after a few days of very low oxygen levels, he was able to pull through. For several of his friends unfortunately, this was not the case. Talking to other people, it became clear that in India many people aged 25-40, people my own age, lost their lives during the second Covid wave.

Where the effects of Covid also became very clear was in Tamil Nadu while visiting CRUSADE. Here we met Kethan, a man in his 40s, who his family told us was living a happy and successful life a year ago, before Covid. In tears Kethan's sister showed us a photo of him as a smartly dressed handsome young man before the 'black fungus'. His family had great hopes for him. She pointed out Kethan sitting at the back of the group his face and head now cloth covered.

Kethan caught Covid and was diagnosed with diabetes which it turns out is a terrible combination in the Indian context. Both these conditions severely affect the body's ability to fight the fungal infections. Kethan's world was changed completely by the rare fungal infection formally known as Mucormycosis but popularly and more dramatically known as the 'black fungus disease'. Fungal spores enter the body whilst breathing so the airways of the face are the centre of the infection. Many died but some, younger stronger people survive, though often with terrible disability and deformity. For Kethan the 'black fungus' spread dangerously and eroded away his nose, palate and part of his jaw. He has become blind due to spread of the disease into the eye sockets. He can only eat liquidised food.

Crusade and the self-help group are giving Kethan and his family much-needed psychological and financial support, but the road ahead for him will be difficult and uncertain. Though Mucormycosis is rare, given the number of Covid cases during the pandemic and the high prevalence of diabetes in India, there were a considerable number of cases. Kethan will need long-term and complex medical, surgical, rehabilitation and psychological support. Crusade will continue to support Kethan.

Besides the health implications of Covid, another big impact has been the closure of schools. During Covid, schools have been closed for almost two years, making it, after Uganda, the longest Covid-led school closures. With around 250 million students enrolled in 1.5 million schools, India has the world's second largest school-going population – which has meant a huge number of students have missed school or have had to follow online education. Access to online learning has been extremely limited among low-income groups, especially for girls, both due to lack of smartphones and patchy internet connectivity in its vast rural areas.

During my visit to ASSEFA, Dr. Rani and I made a visit to the ASSEFA schools in Marakannam and Gingee. These schools provide holistic and quality education for a low fee, and one that the people in the surrounding rural areas can afford. The last time I visited 3 years ago, the schools were lively with lots of children running around. This time, it was quiet, and many classrooms were empty. The schools are currently running at a 25%-50%

capacity. Though ASSEFA expect the schools to get back to full capacity in due course, it is going to take some time for this to happen. Dr Rani explained to me that children were automatically passed at government schools over the last two years. Parents now see less value in sending their children to better quality but fee-paying schools and so many more children now go to government schools. Here they are also provided with a midday meal, which is beneficial to the students. The ASSEFA schools also saw a drop in girls attending school, and where previously the number of girls and boys was equal, there are now fewer girls than boys in the school.

The closing of face-to-face education during the pandemic meant that many children were following education as best as possible through their phones, or their parents' phones. This increase of access to mobile phones has also brought a number of other problems with it. We heard from Satish at NBJK, that there had been an increase of sexual harassment in his state which they felt related to boys watching more porn on mobiles. We heard similar stories from Bimla from the Ekta Resource Centre for women. She spoke about an increase of child marriage and violence against women and girls.

I also met with EKTA's railway children team who rescue children from railways. Over the Covid period the number of children running away had decreased greatly but over the past few months it had started to increase again. And what they saw as the main reason was phone addiction. They shared that some children ran away because their parents wouldn't allow them on the phone, and also children had been gambling on their phones and incurred deep debts.

As we all try to move on with our lives and Covid has become more 'normal', the varied effects will be felt for a long time – partners share that developments within their work have been delayed or even set back and effects for poor people are especially difficult.

These are just a few of the examples and people where the pandemic will have lasting effects and where our partners continue to support people. There were of course many more problems in the peak of the pandemic. There were two significant moments in time that I think we all remember.

You might all remember the images of people walking on foot hundreds of miles home after the sudden 21-day lockdown was declared in March 2020. This led to an unprecedented migration of workers and families from large urban centres to rural India.

Another crucial moment you might remember was the second and devastating wave which started in April 2021, where India was gasping for Oxygen. The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic affected almost two-thirds of the population directly or indirectly. This second wave came on the back of widespread food and financial insecurity amongst the poorest households in India.

The pandemic brought the predicament of migrant workers in India to the centre-stage of discussions and decisions. The variegated experience of an economic slowdown across people and places, coupled with the inadequacy of social protection policies for the most vulnerable populations revealed and enhanced existing inequalities in society.

It was during this time where a web of citizens' organisations and movements responded more than the government itself – and these include Action Village India partners.

The work of our partners has been incredible and the people reached, over 100,000 has been astounding.

The work has included food aid to vulnerable communities, including people living with a disability, elderly women and Self-Help Group members from vulnerable economic backgrounds, Sri Lankan refugees, nomadic families. Also food support was given to migrant workers on their journeys home and to those who had already reached home. Community kitchens were set up in different villages and extra nutrition was provided to women and children.

There were many awareness campaigns about the Covid spread, safety measures, common symptoms, isolation centres and vaccinations. Gloves, masks, sanitisers and medication was provided to frontline workers and vulnerable communities. Mental health support was provided to different communities.

Our partners worked together with local health centres and government hospitals to set up isolation units. NBJK converted its eye hospital and schools to quarantine centres for migrant workers. They worked with local hospitals with the vaccination roll out and they distributed oximeters and oxygen units to small scale health centres.

The work didn't just focus on immediate relief, but also on lasting change. Shramdaan camps were organised where communities built village ponds, livelihood activities were organised and home based nutrition gardens were set up.

Within all the work, Gandhi's philosophy carried on. The relief work, which has been full of compassion and commitment, not only focussed on the immediate crisis but also on self-reliance.

Rajagopalji, from Ekta Parishad shared the following about the relief work:

"Relief will be essential even in the most advanced societies but the attitude shouldn't be of pity, but of empathy. We have to ask ourselves, "How would I like to be treated if I am suffering?"

There should be an inbuilt idea of revolution in relief. Relief has become essential due to various policy failures and we want to correct it. Relief should lead to greater empowerment of individuals and communities, rather than disempowering them.

The system is moving into permanent relief mode, which leads people to think they can exploit all resources and keep people happy by giving them something. This behaviour needs to end. This is where Gandhi's idea of Swaraj comes in.

As long as every individual and community is in control of their own destiny, the dream of Swaraj can become reality. As long as the control is in the hands of the givers from the top, Swaraj remains a dream unfulfilled."

It is in this spirit that we supported our partners during the pandemic and continue to work and support our partners beyond the pandemic.

I go back to the beginning of my talk – this award is not just for Action Village India – and not just for our partners. But it is also for our community of supporters. As it is thanks to this community, that we are able to continue the work we do. Especially during the pandemic, we were extremely proud and moved by all the support that was given.

True partnership and solidarity enabled us to achieve so much together.

We would once again like to thank the Gandhi Foundation for this incredible recognition.

Esther's first connection with India started about 12 years ago when she volunteered for a small charity in rural Tamil Nadu. After finishing her bachelor's degree in Social Anthropology and Non-western Sociology, she returned to India to work on documentaries in Mumbai. In 2013 she moved to the UK where she graduated in Visual Anthropology after which she worked for a youth organisation as a project manager. She started working with Action Village India in 2017.

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## Caring for the Planet – Caring for Humanity

This was the theme of this year's annual Gandhi Multifaith event, timed to coincide with the commemoration of Gandhi Ji's assassination. Once again it took place in the beautiful and peaceful surrounds of Golders Green Unitarian church where the new minister, Rev Michael Allured welcomed a much larger gathering than last year which was just post lock-down. The bright sunshine added to the atmosphere. The programme followed the pattern of previous years, with Reverend Nagase from the London Peace Pagoda and Marutasan from Milton Peace Pagoda beginning with their prayer, *Na mu myo ho ren ge kyo*. There followed a rich offering of reflections, interfaith prayers, readings and music, all on the theme of valuing and protecting our environment. An invitation to light a candle was accompanied by beautiful Indian music from Felix. The programme was recorded and was joined by a number of guests on Zoom, including from India. Apologies for the sound quality of some of the pieces. We plan to use You Tube next year which should help. There followed light refreshments and a chance to meet and catch up with people, some of whom had travelled very long distances to attend. Photos below are by Jane Sill.



Judith Morgan, Felix Padel, Mary, Michael Allured, Feargus O'Connor, William Rhind, Lyn Payne



Mark Hoda, Rev Nagase, Rev Feargus, Felix, Ciriaca, Rev Michael, Riky Choudhuri front



Saara Majid with her singing group: Jo, Ana, Jennie, Kate & Rachel





# Peacefully Preventing and Stopping War: Some Challenges to Conventional Wisdom

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos

Part 2 of The Gandhi Foundation's Annual Lecture 2022

## V. Structurings of international politics

One of the areas of 'overlap' between 'varieties of anarchism and pacifism ... is in their rejection of domination and critique of power' (Fiala 2018, 158). One of the areas where anarcho-pacifists go further than the liberal pacifists of the nineteenth century is in broadening their analysis of violence to structural violence and other forms of injustice ultimately sanctioned by the current political structures (Ostergaard 2016). For anarchist versions of pacifism, to insist on peace without justice is to risk defending a form of structural violence. If 'in one way or another you are the beneficiary of harms suffered by some others and the beneficiary of a culture that depicts those harms as necessary and just or that hides them from sight', then you might be enjoying peace but at the expense of violence and injustice upon others (Honeywell 2021, 25).

Anarchists have long articulated extensive reflections on varieties of political structures. One of their core claims is that the way we have a habit of structuring political organisations like states hurts us, and that there are other ways of organising for political ends. In the local to global political and economic structures of the modern international order, because of the way these organisations are structured, all those who reach positions of power come to behave roughly the same. Even well-intentioned individuals end up reproducing similar structural pathologies. Hence the anarchist claim that '[o]ur enemies are not human beings, but the institutions and routines that estrange us from each other and from ourselves' (CrimethInc. 2018). The problem is not with particular individuals but with structures – that is, with the way we have a habit of structuring our political and economic relations.

Of particular concern to anarchists is centralisation and lack of accountability: anarchists have been warning 'with foresight' (and 'have been killed ... for their troubles') about the dangers of centralisation, unification and the nation-state (Prichard 2010, 451). That is why anarchists call for 'subsidiarity' and 'multi-level governance' just as many liberals do, but they argue that the autonomy claimed by states in the international system ought to be '*a model for the autonomy of all social groups*' (Prichard 2010, 453, 8). That means that the kind of multi-level structuring of 'governance' preferred by anarchists is not a delegating down or up sanctioned magnanimously by the ultimately sovereign state, but a more radically bottom-up layering

constituted by autonomous and genuinely sovereign individuals. This is one of the reasons why anarchists find unacceptable the granting of ultimate sovereignty and the consequent monopoly over allegedly legitimate violence to the state.

Anarchists want power to be much more ‘diffused’, and in this sense embrace anarchy as ‘a *solution*’ rather than ‘the crux of the *problem*’ (Booth 1991, 541, 5). More specifically, they envision a complex federation of allegiances (Prichard 2011, 1659) to various overlapping ‘collectivities’ (Falk 1978, 71), in other words a ‘federated, bottom-up form of governance’ based on ‘the principle of subsidiarity’ (Prichard 2007, 642). Anarchism is therefore ‘not ... incompatible with the need for some form of global organization’, but central to it is ‘maximum participation in decision-making processes’ (Weiss 1975, 2, 4). The idea that somehow all groups, collectives and organisations must ultimately submit to the supreme authority of the state grants the administrators of that layer of governance too much arbitrary power. One of anarchism’s central disputes with mainstream political thought is after all ‘the Hobbesian assumption that hierarchy [and] chains of command ... are inevitable, natural and necessary’ (Honeywell 2021, 2). People can be trusted to organise from the bottom up – and if people cannot be trusted then there is no reason to foolishly entrust the most ambitious with the powerful levers of the modern state (Christoyannopoulos 2020).

The traditional structuring of the state also absolves too easily of any sense of moral responsibility the frontline agents of morally reprehensible state actions, because they tend to rationalise their actions by reminding themselves that the decision was not theirs but coming from above (Christoyannopoulos 2020, 74-7). Similarly, the consumers of products whose production involved violence, the producers of implements manufactured for such violence, the citizens invited to vote every few years to bless the system with their consent, all tend to shift away any lingering sense of moral responsibility to the professional politicians who operate the state. Reenvisioning politics from the bottom up instead, with sovereignty, responsibility, and accountability for federated layers of governance ultimately rooted in the people, means that every citizen, every political and economic actor bears their share of moral responsibility. The violence inflicted to others partly away from our sight but partly because of our own behaviour is no longer only someone else’s responsibility.

Also related to this is the deep anarchist suspicion of nationalism, which instils state projects with powerful emotions, but which anarchists consider deceitful and dangerous (Christoyannopoulos 2020; Gordon 2018; Kinna 2021; Levy 2019). Anarchists do sympathise with struggles for emancipation,

and they do see the people as sovereign, but framing this in nationalist terms oversimplifies the fluidity of ethno-cultural identities, masks socio-economic identities, essentialises differences between peoples, and offers demagogues much too tempting a spectre to conjure up and exploit in order to justify opportunistic power grabs. Nationalist hype can also all-too-easily facilitate the dehumanisation of others – an important ingredient in the rationalisation of violence against enemies in war. Nationalism bloats the importance of one particular layer of identity, helps legitimise one particular political structure, and instils a myopic devotion to a sense of community which could just as well be ‘imagined’ differently (Anderson 2006).

Moreover, it is interesting to observe how ‘a variety of contemporary phenomena’, including ‘international organizations;... national separatist movements; ... multinational corporations ... and international nongovernmental organizations’, are ‘straining the traditional state-centric system’ (Turner 1998, 28). Many of these movements bring attention ‘to problems that are not amenable to direct policy responses’ by states and ‘not oriented’ towards states (Turner 1998, 30). In a sense, this ‘global civil society’ resembles the networks, associations and federations envisioned by anarchists (Turner 1998) – except of course that for now it is subservient to the current order, which it ultimately respects and serves.

What this tends to suggest is that ‘anarchy’, or this kind of dynamic and organic bubbling up of various organisations with dedicated aims and functions not necessarily mapped onto states, might actually be the basis behind not just international politics, but all group formation and interaction in social and political life, and therefore that a focus on a ‘mythical, personified, [modern] state’ distorts our thinking about that (Prichard 2017, 373-4). From this perspective globalisation does not call for global governance in the liberal sense, but for a rethink ‘about the nature of global order and the virtues of anarchy therein’ (Cerny and Prichard 2017, 378). Because public perceptions are dominated by a conceptualisation of state control and an assumption that states must be the agents of political action, our imagination concerning how the international order operates and can operate is constrained. The challenge is to think of new ways to constitutionalise our relations politically in better harmony with the bottom-up and organic needs for coordinated political activity (Cerny and Prichard 2017). The current international order is poorly equipped to respond to this organic reality of human challenges. Imposing it as a straitjacket is enforcing an obsessive one-dimensional framing which is constrictive, and which only reinforces the hierarchies of domination and violence that drive so many of our common human challenges to begin with.

## Conclusion

In a sense, anarcho-pacifism radicalises and triangulates what is often described as a classic trade-off when comparing liberalism with socialism. Liberty and equality are often described as pulling in different directions, with liberalism prioritising the former and socialism the latter. One of the original contributions of anarchist thought and practice is that it tries to elevate both, and it insists on them being accessible to all, especially the hitherto disenfranchised. It is thus vehemently both antiauthoritarian and egalitarian. To this, pacifism adds a commitment to remain perceptive about violence and to keep working to avoid it. What this means overall is that anarcho-pacifists are ‘generally ... inclined toward world-order values: peace, economic equity, civil liberties, ecological defense’ (Falk 1978, 78). Anarcho-pacifism is therefore not as wild and counter-cultural as might first seem since it embodies values shared by many the world over. But it does commit to these values more insistently than many and follows them as far as they will go in critically analysing the international order. An anarcho-pacifist reading of international politics is therefore explicitly normative and emancipatory, and it seeks to ‘liberate the imagination’ from the encasings of modern states (Weiss 1975, 3).

One does not have to be committed to anarchism or pacifism to see the usefulness of reflecting with anarcho-pacifists on these ‘world-order values’, on how different governance structures affect them, on the problems with the international order, and on who currently benefits from it. My aim today was not to convey anarcho-pacifist *solutions* on how to prevent and stop wars as much as to begin to reflect on how some common assumptions about international politics might need to be reconsidered if we are to deal with this challenge at a more fundamental level. Even if one does not fully embrace the anarcho-pacifist critique, it seems ethically irresponsible (even if culpability-appealing) to turn away from reflecting on the violence, exploitation and domination that are often reproduced through the current setup of the international order.

From an anarcho-pacifist perspective, there are predictable reasons why the Just War Tradition and the way it is embedded in the current international order fails to more effectively prevent and stop wars. The fetishization of violence as a tool which is assumed to be effective is one problem. The way in which the drive to be prepared for the next war slides society towards increasingly embedded militarism is another. More fundamentally, the delegating of sovereignty to states in the international order is also something that anarcho-pacifists encourage us to reflect upon, because such centralisation of power is more likely to result in war-mongering than a more diffuse constellation of bottom-up political institutions which would



genuinely be based on the sovereignty of the people. The just war tradition is too late an add-on to a recipe that by then is already almost finished. Anarcho-pacifists encourage us to challenge conventional wisdom by reflecting on causes of war further upstream than traditional perspectives.

One particular characteristic of anarcho-pacifism which differentiates it from most other perspectives on international politics is that it ultimately addresses every citizen of the world directly, rather than states. If it makes 'policy' recommendations, it is primarily to individuals and communities – to resist non-violently structures of global oppression, to desist from participating in them, and to question organisational structures local to international. Unlike most established perspectives on international politics, it is not that interested in working through states. Instead, it affirms the sovereignty of the people and calls us all to do what we can to help build a better world from the ground up, or at least not to turn away from the violence and injustice from which, if we are honest, we know many of us benefit indirectly. An anarcho-pacifist reading of the international order, and its existing framework to ostensibly prevent and stop wars, is therefore one that is addressed not only to students and practitioners of international politics, but also to every member of the human community, including perhaps especially those in relatively comfortable positions in today's international order. If anarcho-pacifists are correct in their diagnosis of the international order, then it is for us all to do what we can, collectively and from the bottom up, to refashion our local to global political communities such that a less war-prone, less violent and less unjust order can be passed on to the next generation.

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The lecture was followed by a Q&A session initiated by **Lindsey German** of the Stop the War Coalition who had been invited to respond. Lindsey was one of the founders of Stop the War in 2001 after the 9/11 attack on New York which led to the 'war on terror' response. Stop the War has opposed other wars since then including the current war in Ukraine.

Regarding the Just War concept she questioned whether its limitations have been observed in the 20th century or at present. For example the deliberate targeting of civilians has been normal in many modern wars.

Pacifism is usually dismissed as Utopian or as actually helping the enemy. While not herself an absolute pacifist, actions to avoid war and the ending of it through negotiation as quickly as possible if it does occur is highly desirable. But in contrast, modern states are extremely militarised, thus supposedly giving security; but during a war winning outright is the aim with little restraint as to methods. Disarmament and building a more just world will lead to more genuine security.

This was followed by questions to the Lecturer from the audience and then the presentation of the Peace Award to Action Village India. The Lecture and the Peace Award speech can be viewed on the GF website [www.gandhifoundation.org](http://www.gandhifoundation.org)

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## **Commemoration of 75th Anniversary of Gandhi's Assassination**

Gandhi Foundation Executive Member, Jane Sill, and our supporter, Rev Feargus O'Connor, marked the anniversary of the assassination of Mohandas K Gandhi by an extremist 75 years ago by attending a ceremony at the statue of Gandhi in Parliament Square in London.

The Indian High Commissioner, Vikram Doraiswami, was joined by community leaders, Parliamentarians, and other representatives to pay floral tributes and reflect upon the legacy of the Mahatma. The event began with a minute's silence as a mark of respect, against the backdrop of the chimes from Big Ben.

"It's always a poignant moment to remember Mahatma Gandhi on the day of his martyrdom," said the High Commissioner in his address. "Mahatma Gandhi's message was his life and his life was his message. To be able to do what he did and to live it daily ought to be an inspiration to all of us."

Lord Meghnad Desai, Founder of the Gandhi Statue Memorial Trust, the organisation behind the charity drive which resulted in the statue being unveiled in 2015, reflected on the symbolism of the sculpture facing Parliament. "London had a special meaning for the Mahatma and us. He had many English friends. It's a special meaning that he is here at Parliament Square staring at Parliament where he made a lot of trouble. It's a great place to honour and remember him." "Mahatma Gandhi wasn't just an Indian icon



but is a global icon as a symbol of freedom, unity, and equality in the world,” noted Lord Rami Ranger, founder of the British Sikh Association. The Bangladeshi High Commissioner to the UK, Saida Muna Tasneem, spoke of the Gandhian influence on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. “In Bangladesh, we believe in the Mahatma’s message of ahimsa or non-violence and satyagraha, which means passive and peaceful resistance. That is the ideology of our Founding Father, Bangabandhu who was a Gandhian at heart.”

Reverend Nagase from the London Peace Pagoda and Sister Marutasan, from Milton Keynes Peace Pagoda, then offered their prayer *Na mu myo ho ren ge kyo*, a chant which is still included in daily prayers at Wardha Ashram, following the stay there by the founder of Nipponzan Myohoji, The Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii, in the 1930s.

Following the addresses participants were invited to offer flower tributes in the form of rose petals which were distributed amongst those present.



Vikram Doraiswami, Indian High Commissioner, greeting guests





Jane Sill, Rev Feargus O'Connor, Bhikkhu Nagase, Sister Maratusan



## Gandhi Tolstoy Red Cross Appeal for Ukraine

Before the Parliament Square ceremony, Jane Sill and Feargus O'Connor had visited the offices of the British Red Cross to present the proceeds of our Gandhi Tolstoy Appeal for the tragic war in Ukraine. The appeal was led by Feargus O'Connor and raised £570. This included donations from the Gandhi Foundation's annual Multifaith Celebration which took place on 21 January this year. Rev O'Connor has written a declaration for the appeal regarding the war, which has been signed by numerous faith and interfaith figures.



British Red Cross official, Niall O'Regan, receives the donation for relief work in Ukraine

## Review

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**Nehru's India: A History in Seven Myths** Taylor Sherman, Princeton University Press. Hardback. 284 pages. £30.00. ISBN: 9780-691-22258-5.

The motivational principles, core achievements and perennial legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, founder and maker of modern post-colonial India, are customarily stated as: non-alignment internationally, secularism, socialism, democracy, the strong state, and progressive modernism. These key themes also highlight the nature of the man and illumine his hopes for his country. Taylor Sherman of London School of Economics, in a ground-breaking work,



examines how far these six ‘myths’ so closely associated with Nehru, actually cohere with his record in governing India and his relationship to its people.

Nehru led Congress to electoral victory from 1951-1962, yet his political ascendancy in this era was always in the context of the influence of the very special legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, assassinated in 1948. Seeing himself internally as patron, mediator, educator and symbol of the nation rather than its universal father-figure, internationally Nehru came to personify India and its values – an undogmatic spiritual figure seeking a ‘scientific approach’ to government. Proclaiming non-alignment as key to world peace amid the East-West Cold War, and rejecting the ‘bloc’ mentality, Nehru joined Nasser and Tito to found the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. However, in practice he remained close to UK and USA, notably in trade, and India’s links with the USSR were symbolic rather than substantial. The promotion of India’s values through leadership roles in the UN and other international institutions was another Nehru priority.

He upheld secularism as conducive to modernisation, but had to accommodate this to the reality of India as a majority Hindu multi-faith society, in which Muslims and Dalits suffered discrimination – against which he achieved little. For the economy, Nehru’s socialism accepted a ‘mixed’ model with but little public ownership: only road transport, the airline and insurance were state-owned. However, he brought in central planning, and in the mostly capitalist industrial sector, owners were pressured to look after their workers’ welfare. At the local level, community development and self-help projects were further significant features of Nehru’s Indian socialism.

General elections in India were always a triumph of dedicated administrators over huge obstacles of distance, mass illiteracy and population density, and so were rightly applauded, but continuing caste discrimination, corruption and rising political violence often clouded this positive picture. Dedicated to modernising India, Nehru once declared of a new dam: “These are the new temples of India where I worship.” The great dam projects of Nehru’s era, notably those of the Damodar Valley Corporation (modelled on USA’s iconic Tennessee Valley Authority), were both major practical expression and grandiose symbol of his passionate drive for future-oriented modernisation. They contrasted starkly with Gandhian spinning-wheel nostalgia. Yet DVC experienced many failures and rising environmental concerns set major question-marks over big-scale dam projects. Building Chandigarh, new capital of Punjab, proved a happier experience: Le Corbusier’s influence shared with British associates Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry led to successful blending of Indian tradition and Western technology. It finely expressed Nehru’s progressive modernism.

Sherman sheds new light on India’s founder-leader, and the success of his aims and hopes for its post-colonial future. This fresh-angle study, both most informative and very insightful, challenges erstwhile simplifications, presenting a convincing portrait of one of the greatest statesmen of the 20th century.

*Rev Brian Cooper*

## A Peaceful Path to Real Reform

Jane Sill

“The presence of a wise population implies the search for felicity as well as for food ... No scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich by joyful human labour; smooth in field; fair in garden; full in orchard; trim, sweet, and frequent in homestead; ringing with voices of vivid existence. No air is sweet that is silent; it is only sweet when full of low currents of under sound-triplets of birds, and murmur and chirp of insects and deep-toned words of men and wayward trebles of children. As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary: the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures ...”

These words appeared in the work by John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, which Gandhi had plenty of time to read when he was evicted from a first class railway compartment in South Africa. The book would have a huge influence on the rest of his life.

The vital interlink between happy and healthy individuals and the natural environment was the theme for this year’s Multifaith Celebration in January. It was also the theme for a ground-breaking book by a contemporary of Ruskin and Gandhi, Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* first published in 1898. In it, he lays out in precise detail a blueprint for creating a healthy and sustainable community in surroundings which nurtured both humans and nature. This was to lead to the creation of the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden. The book not only lays out a ground plan for such cities offering people improved living conditions and dwellings, including plenty of recreational and growing spaces, local amenities, good transport links, agricultural land and workplaces close to home, it also offers a detailed finance plan of how such developments could be funded in an equitable and sustainable way. The book explains how natural resources can be utilised to supplement energy requirements, such as the use of wind and water power.

Howard also explores potential difficulties but, as he remarks: “the pathway of experiment towards a better state of society is strewn with failures. But so is the pathway of experiment to any result that is worth achieving”.

To end with a few words by Leo Tolstoy who also had a great influence on Gandhi and who is quoted by Howard, “Human beings, in their present condition, may be likened to bees ... All that is needed to change a solid mass of bees into a flying swarm is for one bee to spread its wings and fly away ... so all that is needed to break through the magic circle of social life, deliverance from which seems so hopeless, is that one man should ... begin to frame his own life, whereupon others will follow in his footsteps” (*The Kingdom of God is within you*).

‘To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform’ by Ebenezer Howard, [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org), reprinted 2010.



## **Blue Tit**

by Jane Thomas



## Ela Bhatt 1933-2022

Ela Bhatt was an outstanding Indian activist, internationally recognised for her championing of the rights of the poor, and particularly women who then had no status.

Born in Ahmedabad in 1933, for over fifty years Bhatt (fondly known as 'Elaben') campaigned to establish rights for the poor, especially women. She was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and also became a lawyer. In 1955 she joined the legal department of the Textile Labour Association. This had been formed in the wake of a textile workers' strike led by Gandhi himself.

Appalled by the exploitation of poor women home workers, textile and garment makers, and street vendors, in 1972 Bhatt helped to form the union of Self-Employed Women's Associations of India (SEWA). She then served as its Secretary General until 1996.

Bhatt also understood that these poor women workers had no access to a bank account or means of controlling their own money, and so in 1974 she helped in the formation of the SEWA Co-operation Bank. This bank provided micro loans to enable women to set up their own businesses, often instructing them in how to manage an account, and in some cases, even to read and write.



Ela Bhatt (centre) with vegetable vendors in Ahmedabad 2010

Initiating and supporting these micro loans proved a great success and very few women defaulted. The idea proved extremely popular and spread, until 1979 when Bhatt co-founded Women's World Banking, a global network of these micro-finance organisations. She served as chair of Women's World Banking from 1984 to 1988.

In 1986 the President of India appointed Bhatt to the upper house of India's parliament. From here she continued her mission and set up a National Commission on Self-Employed Women. The Commission investigated the condition of these poor women home workers who were so often exploited.

Bhatt also became adviser to many multilateral organisations on global microfinance and anti-poverty programmes, including the World Bank.

In the course of her eventful life, 'Elaben' received endless honorary degrees and awards in recognition of all her work in promoting human rights, poverty alleviation, and peace. These honours included the prestigious international Right Livelihood Award, and also the Indian Indira Gandhi prize.

In 2007 she was invited to join the exclusive group of World Elders, founded by Nelson Mandela, with Mary Robinson as its chair. The Elders included such world peace and human rights leaders as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mohammed Yunus, Kofi Annan and former US President Jimmy Carter.

The outstanding global achievement of this great and very modest Gandhian activist and peace worker may not be too well known in the UK. However, in India Ela Bhatt is a household name. She is revered with gratitude, especially amongst the millions of women who have benefited from their microcredit loans which have enabled them to set up their own businesses and escape from poverty.

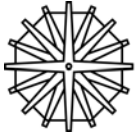
*Diana Schumacher*

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## **India Against Gandhi – A Legacy Rewritten**

The Financial Times newspaper recently carried an article on the state of India today viewed from a Gandhian point of view. It was written by Ramchandra Guha, one of India's foremost historians and cultural commentators. Although critical of the Congress Party he is extremely critical of the direction taken by more recent governments led by the BJP especially for spreading intolerance. You should be able to view the article using the link below.

<https://on.ft.com/3YjNMnF>



# The Gandhi Foundation

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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