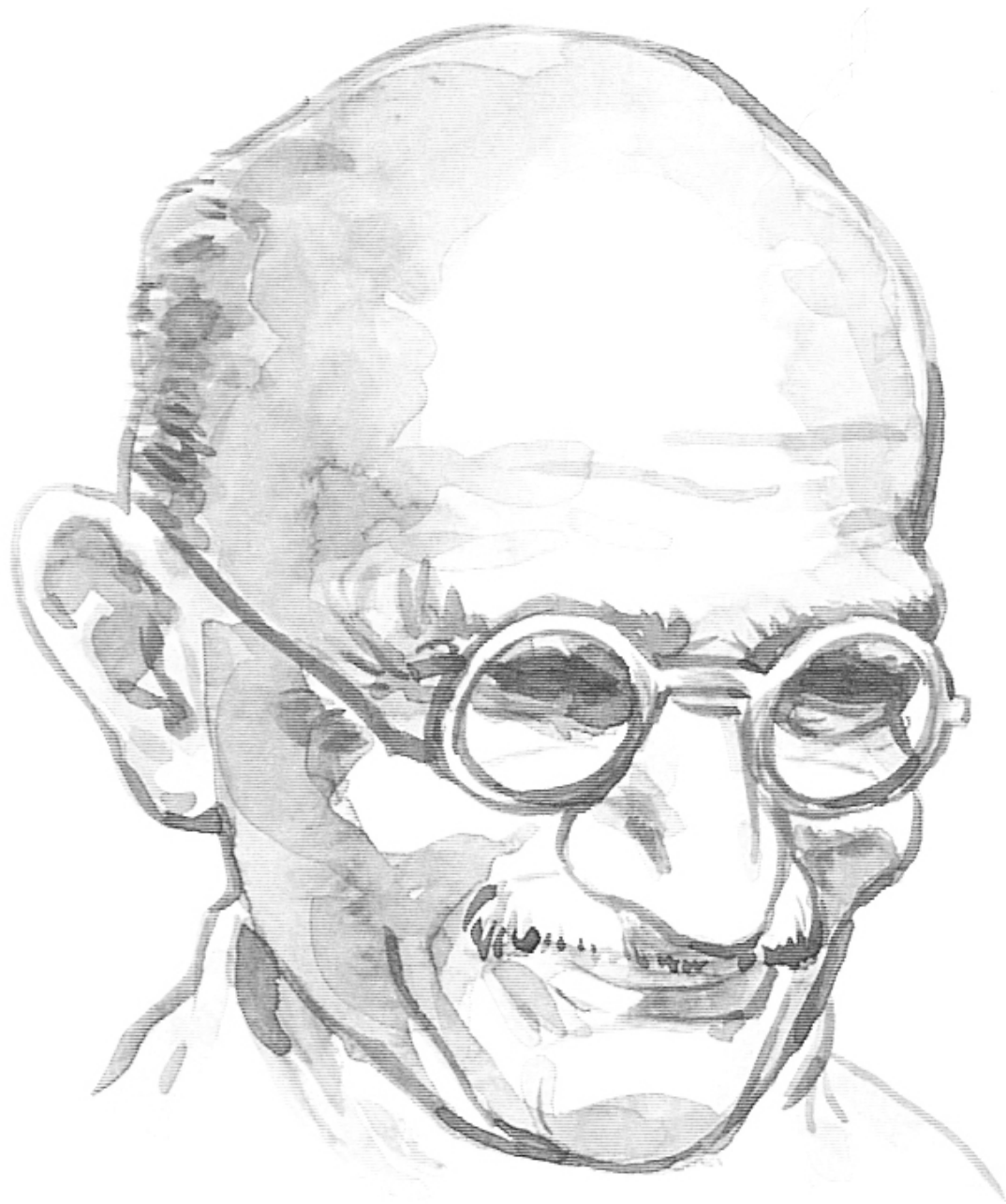


The Gandhi Way



Newsletter of the Gandhi Foundation
No.163 Spring 2025 ISSN 1462-9674

Gandhi Foundation Annual Lecture 2025

Professor Krishna Kumar

Gandhi – Fiction and Truth

Thursday 22 May at 2.30pm (time subject to confirmation)

Kingsley Hall,

Powis Road, Bromley-by-Bow, London E3 3HJ

More information on Professor Kumar is on page 23



Fergus O'Connor handing over donations raised at the MFC to British Red Cross staff

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Arms and the Man – Rethinking War and Self

Felix Padel

This is a condensed version of a Memorial Lecture for JPS Uberoi on 5th September 2024 for the Visvaneedham Trust. A longer version is published in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, of which Uberoi was a founder.

[J.P.S. Uberoi](#) was a sociologist/anthropologist whose work engaged with world history and examined the place of science in society. He was my teacher at the Delhi School of Economics, and died in January 2024, My theme here is the arms industry and trade, and war itself, as these were subjects Uberoi highlighted often, of the greatest relevance to examine today, through a historical lens he would have appreciated. I draw here on my first degree in ancient history, and question how politicians and media make use of this history.

‘The Backroom Boys’

Whatever ‘development’ human beings have achieved in recent decades, research in military technology appears to have been a key driving force. Where humanity appears to have learnt nothing, and developed not at all in 5000 years, is in the areas of avoiding war, creating peace on earth, and sharing its resources equitably.

In what follows, we examine the widespread belief in war as something natural or inevitable in the human condition. This belief is used to justify the arms trade: if wars are inevitable, then ‘might is right’, and the arms race makes sense – even though arms sales are an investment in war, and a major contributing factor in any war. Manufacture and trade in arms certainly appears to lie at the heart of the world economy, with very little analysis of this either by economists or environmentalists, considering armaments’ environmental impacts. Uberoi estimated that between a third and half the world’s scientists, technicians and engineers are engaged as ‘backroom boys’ in military R & D, even though ‘This simple truth is hidden from us everywhere’.

Uberoi’s 1989 essay ‘Technology of Obsolescence’ emphasised ‘built-in redundancy’ as central to modern industry, particularly apparent in military hardware, where technological innovation takes place increasingly fast, as ever-costlier new weapons systems become ever more swiftly obsolete. He quotes words of President Kennedy – ‘We’re in an arms race with ourselves – and we’re winning!’

‘This accelerated development of armaments is therefore the most potent single evil, peril and bad example that faces the world today.’
As part of this system, the world’s middle- and low-income countries have been exploited as suppliers of raw material and cheap skilled labour as well as ‘gullible customers of its products and designs, mostly those outdated or

discarded and obsolete.’

The more one examines the arms trade, the more one understands that built-in obsolescence is systemic. For example, during Britain’s Falklands war with Argentina (1982) and wars with Iraq (in 1990 and 2003), the RAF faced older generations of warplanes that Britain had sold to these countries, and therefore shot down in large numbers – often piloted by men trained in the UK. In 1989 I met an Iraqi man on a street in London, whose son was an Iraqi air force pilot being trained in UK. I often thought of them when the RAF were shooting down Iraqi planes in the ‘First Gulf War’ (August 1990-January 1991); which made me rethink the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, when UK and US politicians shamelessly promoted [arms sales to both sides](#), using this war to test weapons systems against each other – even weeks after the Halabja massacre in March 1988, when chemical weapons were dropped on a Kurdish town.

Corruption in arms deals is also systemic, at the centre of the world’s black economy, and arms sales boost the rising financial burden of unrepayable debt owed by ‘developing’ or ‘underdeveloped’ countries to the countries termed ‘developed’ or their financial institutions – part of the diabolical system of control imposed through debt over countries and populations everywhere. In fact, retaining an arms industry at its centre seems to be the key structural feature of those countries defined by the IMF/World Bank as ‘developed’.

Uberoi highlighted a *scientific culture* that produced a schism or compartmentalisation at the heart of our modern epistemology and value system, that has allowed ‘backroom boys’ to develop their weapons of mass destruction without any apparent problem for their consciences. The extreme dehumanisation that results he referred to as ‘the end of modernity’, symbolised in the twin violence of Auschwitz and the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. ‘Post-modernism’ Uberoi sees as born from these acts of extreme violence, in which the full destructiveness of science and technology was turned on fellow human beings, using a paradigm of experimentation. During his last months in the winter of 2023, Uberoi witnessed the genocide in Gaza as a new level of this dehumanisation; and I remember him speaking of Israel-Palestine as the key conflict that needs to be resolved if humanity is to survive.

***Pro patria mori* - Ancient roots, modern fruits**

George Bernard Shaw’s play [Arms and the Man](#) (1894) is unusual for its time as a British parody of patriotism and war-mongering, and made Shaw famous. Its setting is the little-remembered Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885-6; so the play was written between the two Boer wars (1880-81 and 1898-1902) and prefigures the first world war – wars which many people in Britain questioned, but against the trend, when questioning patriotism was severely frowned upon.

The ‘deep history’ of that patriotism – affirming or questioning it –

traces back to the Romans and beyond. Shaw's title is a translation of the opening words of Virgil's epic the Aeneid, one of the 'jewels' of Latin literature (composed 29-19BC), '*Arma virumque cano*' ('I sing of arms and the man'). These words describe the hero Aeneas, a Trojan warrior who escaped the sack of Troy by the Greeks. En route to Italy he spends a year with Dido, Queen of Carthage; and his abandonment of Dido, following a god's command, is depicted as sowing the seeds of Roman-Carthaginian enmity that would culminate after three drawn-out wars in Romans' annihilation of Carthage in 146BC. The Aeneid served as a founding myth for the Romans as they transitioned to a new, more autocratic form of power, which we call 'the Empire', as opposed to 'the Republic', which Augustus' rule terminated. The epic encompasses Rome's history right up to Augustus, Julius Caesar's adopted son and first emperor of Rome. According to Propertius, Augustus commissioned the epic, and it reads as a celebration of Rome's history of *imperium* and wars in a manner designed to create a founding myth inaugurating the new era of 'imperial Rome'. Previously known as Octavian, he established his new, emperor-centric power structure after defeating Marcus Antonius and others in bitter civil wars that followed Julius' assassination.

Alongside Virgil's Aeneid, the Odes of Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus) are another 'jewel' of Augustan literature, clearly crafted to appeal to Augustus and the Romans around him. '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*' are lines from a Horace ode (3.2) - 'Sweet and honourable it is to die for one's country'. Wilfred Owen, from the hell of trench warfare in the first world war, ended one of his most famous poems with these Latin words, calling them 'the old lie'.

The Aeneid, like the earlier Greek epics of Homer and the Mahabharata in Sanskrit, has often been read as a celebration of war. Gandhi believed the Mahabharata was created to demonstrate the futility of war and violence. A Gandhian scholar named B.P. Rath I got to know in Orissa, expounded his theory to me that the original text was much shorter and explicitly anti-war. [Rajmohan Gandhi](#) (Gandhi's grandson) agrees, but emphasizes that even the Bhagavad Gita served as a justification for war: Krishna's advice to Arjuna as they stand in the chariot ready to start the great war is not to doubt his *dharma* as a *kshatriya* (warrior caste): the drama of thousands killing each other and dying is *maya* (illusion). Did the Gita's key position in the Mahabharata serve as a justification for countless Hindu wars waged by royalty, as well as for caste? Many Hindu homes depict the Krishna-Arjuna chariot scene.

Long before the Trojan or Mahabharat wars, 5000 years ago, the Sumerian city states 'normalised' war and slavery. The Trojan war is depicted in the Iliad as a kind of proxy human war between squabbling gods. It was a paradigm for warfare between Greek city states, not least during the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta (431-404BC). One of the best-known anti-war perspectives from ancient times is Euripides' play *The Trojan*

Women, first performed in 415BC, following Athenian soldiers' massacre of all male inhabitants of the 'neutral' island of Milos in 416, and enslavement of all its women and children.

The Trojan war is a mythical encapsulation of the Greek conquest and settlement of what is now coastal Turkey around 1200-800BC, displacing the Trojans among many peoples who were indigenous to what is now Turkey, who were driven inland by the Greeks, who subsequently lived in coastal Turkey until the 1920s, when Ataturk's army drove them out. 'The glory that was Greece' was marred by a long history of wars involving massacres and extermination, and the fate of the Trojan women, poignantly depicted by Euripides, was endured by countless thousands of women who became 'spoils of war' when their fathers, husbands and brothers were killed in wars of conquest.

Rome took the Greek pattern of war to another level, with a huge standing army and systematic conquests that established colonies throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. The patterns of extending colonial control laid down by the Romans involved extreme cruelty – triumphal victory parades culminating in public executions, gladiator combats that featured fighting to the death as a popular spectacle, and crucifixion as a slow death for anyone rebelling against Roman *imperium* – but also involved an elaborate technology of roads, aqueducts and siege engines. The Greek mathematician Archimedes was killed in 212BC by a Roman soldier when Syracuse was captured after a long siege, where Archimedes had been helping the Carthaginian defenders through applied mathematics in the science of siege defence. In 146BC, when the Romans annihilated Carthage at the end of the third Carthaginian War, they also annihilated Corinth, as an example to other Greek city states to submit to Roman *imperium*.

It is thus significant that Romans settled on a Trojan as mythical founder, and therefore an enemy of the Greeks. Romans suffered from a frequent inferiority complex towards Greek culture, with marked ambivalence towards 'hellenizing' influences, despite Roman emperors frequently employing Greek tutors to imbue their offspring with a veneer of culture.

Significant too that the entrance hall of East India House in London, from where India was governed from the 1720s until 1858, was adorned with statues of the two East India Company officials who established British rule in India, Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, dressed up as Roman generals – despite their much-publicised patterns of misrule and corruption, for which both faced impeachment. Roman conquests were glorified by Spanish conquistadors and British imperialists alike, and have been presented unproblematically in Hollywood versions of ancient Rome as a subliminal justification for US imperialism.

Justifications for war, conquest, massacre and colonisation in the Old Testament of the Bible give another precedent for modern wars. *Joshua* describes the conquest of 'the promised land' of Canaan with slaughter of the Amorites and Philistines. *Judges* chapters 2-3 describes the anger of the Lord

turning against Israelites after Joshua's death, for worshipping other gods, so that He allowed their enemies – Philistines, Canaanites, Amalekites, Phoenicians, Hittites, Assyrians – to beat them:

‘as a test for all the Israelites who had no experience of the invasion in Canaan – simply for giving lessons in warfare to these generations of Israelites who had no experience in fighting...’

This justification for war and occupation of Canaan/Palestine in the Old Testament lay dormant – a ticking time-bomb as it were - for almost 2000 years after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, when Jews began to be dispersed, until Zionists' settlement of Palestine turned militant in the 1920s. In the recent Israeli onslaught on Gaza and expansion of illegal settlement in the West Bank, the ancient slaughter of the Amalekites is frequently cited, laying claim to a land and ousting its population with extreme violence with reference to wars and conquest 3000 years ago.

Modern justifications for war often rely on particular interpretations of ancient history; but often also on the ‘Hobbesian’ idea of a state of war as ‘natural’ or inevitable. ‘*Bellum omnium contra omnes*’ (‘war of all against all’) is Hobbes’ phrase, who summed up ‘the life of man’ in the age before kingship, or among ‘savages’, as ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. Hobbes’ ‘Leviathan’ evoked kingship, and Hobbes was a royalist, who found refuge with other British royalists in Paris in 1640, when Parliamentarians gained ascendancy in England. But publication of *Leviathan* in 1651 revealed a secular or atheistic line of argument that turned other royalists against him, making him flee for his life back to Cromwell’s revolutionary England!

In other words, ancient Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Hindu justifications for war invoked divine judgement and religious texts; while Hobbes gave a ‘secular’ spin to the idea that war is part of the natural order of things, that can only be controlled through superior force in arms.

The pity war distilled – war as a racket

If wars and patriotism are often justified by citing ancient literature, Euripides, Bernard Shaw and Wilfred Owen represent a literary tradition that questions them. Owen’s poem [*Strange Meeting*](#) is a classic of this genre, prefiguring Owen’s own death in the trenches, highlighting ‘The pity of war, the pity war distilled’.

‘I am the enemy you killed my friend. I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed. I parried, but my hands were loath and cold...’

Those who questioned the first world war include Keir Hardie, founder of the Labour Party, and his close friend Sylvia Pankhurst, most radical of the suffragettes, whose opposition opened up a lifelong rift with her suffragette mother Emmeline and sister Christabel, who supported the war effort. Opposition to the war stirred up strong disapproval from many British citizens and a government in the process of dedicating itself to war, conscripting all able bodied men, sending at least a million (including many

Indians) to die. Sylvia was also ahead of her time in questioning British rule in India, forming friendly relations with key Indian nationalists.

Amid widespread realisation that the build up in armaments had been a major cause of the first world war, the League of Nations was set up to try and stop any similar conflict. In 1927 a motion was brought at its conference on disarmament at Geneva 'that the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objection'. A US arms lobbyist was paid \$27,000 to help defeat this motion, and an article in *The Times* pointed out that this defeat showed how 'war is not only terrible but is a terribly profitable thing'. Already, arms were at the heart of the world economy.

The early 1920s also saw the first use of aerial bombardment by the RAF, during British involvement against communists in Russia, against Kurdish and Iraqi 'rebels' in northern Iraq, Pashtun 'rebels' on the 'North West Frontier', and in Somalia – a grim centenary we are living through now! This was carried to another level during the Spanish civil war, when Italian and German planes aided Franco by bombing cities such as Guernica, a horror famously depicted by Picasso's painting in 1937.

Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy brought belief in war to a new level, echoing Horace's words, especially in the writings of the fascist propagandist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, author of a *Futurist* as well as a *Fascist Manifesto* (1909 & 1919), who published an article in 1915, '[War, the World's Only Hygiene](#)', boasting about the pleasure of fighting pacifists in the streets. Later, Sylvia Pankhurst strongly denounced Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, when many in the British establishment remained silent.

America's first expansionist wars, between 1898 and 1934, were denounced by an American General who had taken part in them: after retirement, General Smedley D. Butler gave speeches around America that he published as a booklet, [War is a Racket](#), in 1935. He had taken part in US takeovers of the Philippines (in a war that killed up to a million Filipinos, 1898-1902), Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guam and Puerto Rico; participating in the suppression of the 'Boxer Rebellion' in China (1900), in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and the 'Banana Wars', supporting vicious dictators in aid of United Fruit Company and other US business interests in Central America, especially Panama, Honduras and Nicaragua; and after repudiating '[the business plot](#)' in November 1934. This was an alleged Nazi conspiracy to overthrow President Roosevelt and his socialist 'New Deal', whose plotters – including Du Pont arms manufacturers, oil and banking interests, and the new 'Liberty League' - had hoped Butler would lead an armed forces march on Washington similar to Mussolini's March on Rome.

Matt Kennard's updated [Racket](#) (2024) follows Butler's lead in exposing the US empire today, with its estimated 750 bases in over 100 countries. The UN, set up to ensure that the bloodshed and genocide of the second world war would never happen again, failed even faster than the League of Nations had.

As the war ended, bloodshed continued into the horrendous Greek civil war (1946-1949), where Britain played a leading role defeating Greek communists (abandoned by Stalin); into Indonesia's war of Independence against Dutch rule (1945-1949); and into six months' forgotten [British occupation of Vietnam](#) (September 1945-March 1946), commanding surrendered Japanese as well as 26,000 British troops to prevent communists coming to power, setting the pattern for the French and then US wars in Vietnam. The British ended their mandate in Palestine by ceding the area to nominal UN control, facilitating the '[ethnic cleansing of Palestine](#)' or *Naqba* in 1948, with the killing or expulsion of at least 750,000 Palestinians by the Haganah and other Jewish militias that became the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), who had been armed to a large extent through mafia and intelligence operatives in the USA.

Britain bears responsibility for setting up concentration camps of extreme cruelty, during the second Boer war, as well as during the 1950s in both the 'Malayan Emergency' against communists (1948-1960) and the 'Mau Mau Uprising' in Kenya (1952-1960) – episodes that should surely be taught in British schools!

The proliferation of US armaments I first studied in depth through the [aluminium industry](#), which an expert called Dewey Anderson pinpointed as a key factor in winning the 2nd world war, revealing that

'no war can be carried to a successful conclusion today, without using and destroying vast quantities of aluminum.' (in his 1951 booklet *Aluminum for Defense and Prosperity*)

Post-2nd-world-war disarmament was reversed as soon as cold war proxy wars and regime changes started exploding around the globe, including the Korean (1950-54) and Vietnam (1955-1975) wars. The latter laid down some appalling US patterns – of 'black operations' (meaning operations not approved by Congress and therefore self-financing, particularly through drugs) such as the Phoenix Program, which officially 'neutralised' over 80,000 North Vietnamese communists and civilians during 1967-1972. [CIA involvement in drugs](#) and proliferation of [prostitution and trafficking](#) were significant offshoots of this war.

Far from improving, such abuse has only worsened. The regularity and impunity of supposedly illegal assassinations in other countries, most flagrantly by the [USA](#) and [Israel](#), increased as the main 'enemy' switched from Soviets to Islamic terrorism, with 'secret renditions' giving way to Obama's weekly 'kill list', authorising [assassinations by JSOC](#) (Joint Special Operations Command) teams or drones, in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere.

Uberoi highlighted a significant shift towards more civilian casualties in 20th century wars: out of approximately 10 million people killed in the first world war about 95 per cent were combatants and 5 per cent civilians; in the second, of an estimated 50 million killed, 52 per cent were combatants, 48 per cent civilians, including tens of thousands in the fire-bombing of German and Japanese cities; in the Korean war, of 9 million people killed, only 16 per cent

were combatants: 84 per cent were civilians – a trend that has continued in numerous wars since, from Vietnam to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Gaza and Lebanon.

The situation since 2022 is worse than ever, in Ukraine and Israel-Palestine-Lebanon-Syria alone. Boris Johnson played a key role in [preventing any peace deal](#) between NATO countries and Russia; and the Ukraine and Gaza wars both appear to many observers as proxy wars, expanding the hegemony of a ‘US empire’, while hugely [boosting arms sales](#).

The shadow world

It is widely recognised, though little emphasized in media, that war and arms sales offer the biggest profits of any business worldwide – shown in detail in Antony Sampson’s *Arms Bazaar* (1977) and Andrew Feinstein’s *Shadow World* (2011), which emphasizes how Tony Blair put pressure on UK’s Serious Fraud Office in December 2006 to [drop its investigation](#) into corruption in British Aerospace deals on the grounds that this would harm the national interest.

If steel was the key metal for first world war armaments, aluminium was the crucial metal that won the second, and it has remained fundamental to bomb technology as well as ‘defence’ ever since; so escalating arms sales are predicated on more mining of bauxite, among other minerals. Abdul Kalam was essentially a weapons/aerospace scientist before he was appointed President of India (2002-7). As ‘India’s missile man’ (in Uberoi’s words), he promoted aluminium as well as weapons manufacture. As pressures to [mine more bauxite](#) continue to build, so does India’s arms industry, with Adani, for example, manufacturing missile-firing drones near Hyderabad for export to Israel, in [joint venture with Elbit](#) Systems; whose factory at Bristol in UK has come under attack by pro-Palestinian activists, as Israel’s foremost weapons manufacturer, implicated in the Gaza genocide.

Antony Loewenstein, as a conscientious Australian Jew, has documented the central place of [arms manufacture in the Israeli economy](#); along with Israeli counter-terrorism training exported to many of the world’s most repressive governments. Israeli experience in military occupation and counter-terrorism against Palestinians, has served as a ‘laboratory’ (as Uberoi would have emphasized), for this increasingly ruthless [training of security forces](#) – including for India, where [human rights abuses with impunity](#) by security forces, as in so many other countries, follow the example set by the US and Israel, in discarding the Geneva and other international conventions intended to mitigate military conflict.

Arms sales and increased militarization are not only a major cause for wars, and predicated on unrepayable debt, they involve the most [extensive yet least talked-about assault](#) on the earth’s ecosystems and weather patterns. This includes pollution from excessive use of munitions in places such as Gaza, Ukraine, Iraq and Libya, pollution from arms factories, and impacts from mining and metal factories, among other factors, which official bodies as

well as environmental NGOs tend to downplay to an extraordinary extent.

Self in a Society that Believes in War

Belief in war puts pressure on individual citizens to identify with and support a country's wars; particularly so in countries that have conscription. Israel is the most obvious example right now, where most conscientious objectors face jail, and even ultra-orthodox Haredi Jews, exempt until recently, have been [mandated to enlist](#) since mid-2024. In the UK, conscientious objectors were penalised and met widespread popular condemnation during the first world war. Conscription was in force during 1916-1920 and again during 1939-1960. In the USA and Australia, [the draft brought in during the Vietnam war](#) was so unpopular that it fueled the movement that stopped the war.

Yet belief in war, and identification with wars, is often hard to resist due to the proliferation of war movies and computer war games – which have strong links with [drone warfare](#), where ending human life is reduced to pressing a computer key. To many, war seems a lot more exciting than peace. Artificial intelligence surrounds us, and often makes it hard to use our own discrimination to tell what is true or real. Belief in war is also repeatedly promoted in corporate media, manufacturing consent for wars.

A major aspect here is that most people don't realise that one of the key roles played by intelligence agencies is to put out propaganda in the guise of measured opinion through extensive control of corporate media. [Disinformation disseminated by British intelligence](#) was a key factor in winning the second world war. Postwar, this expertise in spreading disinformation was turned against the USSR, and then other 'enemy countries', including Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, to legitimise bombing, invasion or programmes of destabilisation. Use of the term 'conspiracy theory' to debunk critique of the 'American empire' forgets that conspiracies are precisely what intelligence agencies such as the CIA have used repeatedly, to orchestrate or support coups in at least 70 countries since the 2nd world war.

Arguably, wars of liberation are another matter. Should groups such as [the PKK](#) and (formerly) [Nelson Mandela's ANC](#) be listed as 'terrorist' organisations, when state terror, exercised by the Turkish state against Kurds or the South African state against the ANC, is far more extreme (and hi-tech) than any terror these resistance groups have created?

As immigration becomes an increasingly fraught political issue, with strident racism against refugees or asylum seekers, it is rarely highlighted by politicians or media that foreign policy belligerence by the UK and other governments has been a key factor in pushing people to leave their homes – especially in countries targeted in recent wars, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, [Libya](#) and other African countries.

A crisis in 'scientific knowledge' is extreme in many branches of science. For example, does climate science support 'carbon net zero' policies? Is there scientific evidence that '[clean development mechanism](#)' (CDM) carbon offsets

will mitigate global warming? Or are CDMs basically an elaborate accounting trick? The green credentials of internationally government-promoted technologies such as that for electric vehicles appear highly questionable given their use of cobalt, lithium and [‘rare earths’](#), mined under some of the worst conditions anywhere, while extensive use of aluminium in the new vehicle bodies depends on new bauxite mines and aluminium smelting. Aren’t carbon emissions a subsidiary cause of climate change compared with a more fundamental problem of exponentially expanding extraction of minerals, fossil fuels and water? Transition away from burning fossil fuels threatens a [‘green extractivism’](#) that compounds entrenched existing problems.

This begs many questions about ‘belief in science’. The present age forces every self to question the nature of knowledge: What does one know? How does one know this knowledge is valid? [‘Cognitive warfare’](#) is a technique of intelligence agencies to control the media, which bombards the self with often contradictory propaganda. *Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide and Brainwashing* (1956) is a book by Dutch psychiatrist Joost Meerloo, who was tortured by Nazi experts, and worked with hundreds of others who had suffered such torture. Meerloo shows that freedom of thought is vulnerable to many forms of coercion: ‘Democratic freedom has to battle against both the individual’s inner will to power and his urge to submit to other people... so often backed up by armies’.

Increasing use of AI puts unprecedented pressures on 21st century selves, in terms of what to believe and value.

Conclusions

Uberoi often spoke about the importance of self-knowledge, in a society where schools and universities give very little guidance on what this means or how to go about acquiring it. If it is correct that, collectively, human beings have learnt very little in 5000 years about how to avoid war, create peace on earth, and share earth’s resources fairly, could this be because our education hasn’t cultivated self-knowledge?

We live in an age when vast bodies of knowledge are available, but we haven’t been able to put it into practice to create peace, for example, largely because we haven’t solved the problem of power: How to stop power corrupting? Ancient history has been studied and used more as a status symbol or to justify belligerence than to avoid past mistakes. This is why ‘history repeats itself’. History does *not* have to repeat itself; but if students of ancient history who attain power seek to [emulate past heroes such as Augustus](#), the violent paradigm of Roman conquest will continue to repeat itself to the point of collective suicide, since weapons of mass destruction are a reality now.

One area we can look to for regeneration is to [learn from Indigenous Peoples](#) before it’s too late. Most developed without committing genocide or ecocide; which is why they have increasingly taken a stand not just for their own survival, but also for Rights of Nature, generally showing far more

restraint in what is taken from nature, especially through the principle that Maori call *tapu* (origin of the English word ‘taboo’).

Many Indigenous Peoples are under threat. For example, in response to Chinese naval expansion, India is developing huge naval bases on the Nicobar and Andaman islands, with harsh impacts for indigenous groups such as the [Shompen on Great Nicobar](#), who have safeguarded a unique island environment.

Another example is [CONAIE](#), Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, that has united a large section of this country’s population to oppose neoliberal and extractive policies imposed under IMF and corporate influence.

The Kurds are among the oldest indigenous peoples of the Middle East, and ‘Democratic Confederalism’ sums up a new model of democracy they have developed under the influence of [Abdullah Öcalan](#), whose core question is: Can humanity yet progress to a stage that can be called democratic civilisation?

Our prehistoric ancestors in Britain present another example. Stonehenge incorporates the ‘blue stones’ from the Preseli hills in southwest Wales over 200 kms away, as well as a huge ‘[altar stone](#)’ from northeast Scotland, 700 kms distant. The question that haunts archeologists (and others) is not just *how* these enormous stones were moved, but *why*? To an anthropologist, the facts seem to indicate a considerable state of peace, or at least some kind of confederation of tribes, existing at this remote period, approximately 5000 years ago. Maybe war isn’t as inevitable between peoples as we have been led to believe?

Uberoi asks ‘whether armaments really do constitute wealth at all’? This points us towards questioning the fundamental values of our world system. What kind of democracy do we live in where the ultimate financial value derives from selling armaments, whose purpose is intrinsically destructive? Maybe there’s nothing more important, for students of sociology, economics, politics, international relations, and branches of science, than to discover how to dismantle and transfigure our arcane power structure? How to set up political checks and balances that prevent power from corrupting? And economic systems not based on debt or unsustainable extraction of resources? How to cultivate non-violent techniques of diplomacy aimed at sharing the earth’s resources rather than squandering these resources in fighting over them? Uberoi’s legacy pushes us to question the history of the social systems we live in, and to grapple with these and similar questions, in the hope of overcoming an entrenched dualism through mediation that upholds the self, the world, and the other.

Note: Profound thanks to Ananta Kumar Giri who invited me to give the lecture; to several old friends, including fellow pupils of Uberoi, who gave excellent comments after my lecture, which I have incorporated; to the Gandhi Foundation for publishing this; and especially to Malvika Gupta for inputs on many ideas.

43 Weblinks (by section):

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Felix Padel has recently joined the Executive Committee of The Gandhi Foundation.

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## Protecting the Flame of Peace

*Jane Sill*

The 2025 Gandhi Foundation Multifaith gathering was once again made very welcome at Golders Green Unitarian Church which has generously offered hospitality for the past few years. The Church built in the aftermath of the destruction of WW1 and constructed to hold the beautiful and evocative tapestry depicting a land without war as the focal backdrop, offered the perfect setting for an afternoon of reflection, music, readings and connections. This year, the theme was 'Protecting the Flame of Peace'. Amidst a world beset by so much violence and conflict, particularly inflicted upon vulnerable civilian populations, such a protection is never more needed.

Omar hosted the event and after welcoming everyone who had braved a cold, damp February day, the gathering began with the chanting of Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo by Reverend Nagase from the London Peace Pagoda. Reverend Feargus then offered a few words highlighting the fact that 2025 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Dr Albert Schweitzer whose foundational ethic of 'Reverence for Life' led him to reject anthropocentric ethics. For Schweitzer as for Gandhi, all living beings have inherent moral worth and "this should awaken us to a sense of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings: a religious sense embodied in the Seventh Principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Schweitzer believed that to the truly ethical person all life is sacred and that we must 'seize every occasion to feel the happiness of helping living [beings] and shielding them from suffering and annihilation'. This included banning experimentation on animals and vivisection, and he looked forward to that time when 'thoughtless injury to life' would clearly be seen as incompatible with true ethics". Rev Feargus then invited a voluntary collection to be given to the British Red Cross Gaza emergency appeal in memory of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Albert Schweitzer. The collection amounted to the very generous amount of £1,000 from participants present and also additional anonymous donations sent in afterwards. This was handed over to the British Red Cross at their head office in London and was very gratefully received.

There followed a rich tapestry of music and readings from various traditions, starting with the evocative and deeply inspirational songs by Sacred Sounds, led by Saara whose idea it had been with Mark to incorporate more music into the annual Multifaith Commemoration, a suggestion which has blossomed over the years. Prayers for peace were offered by Asha from the Jain tradition and Christian prayers by Reverend Michael. There followed a beautiful Bach violin recital by Felix who had braved the storms to join from West Wales and who went on to offer a meditative Indian raga whilst participants were invited in turn to offer to light a candle for peace and in memory of those who had passed during the year. The reflective tone continued with La Tenebra, a Taize song, followed by the haunting sound of the Bansoori Indian flute by Riky, accompanied by Felix. New to the event



were a group, Bal de Bourdon, who brought traditional Celtic music from Brittany, Cornwall and the Channel Isles. Ana Ngala, now aged 10, shared her new song, 'Together we shall rise' which was warmly received. Finally, Saara invited everyone to join in with Sacred Sounds for the Nightingale Song, based on a poem, 'Defiance' by Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish.

Finally, there was time to meet and reconnect with others over light refreshments with the request from the Church that more such events would be welcome there.

- A recording of the event will be made available and uploaded on to the Gandhi Foundation website after editing.

- If you would like to make a donation to the British Red Cross, you can do so by visiting: [www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)





Saara Majid with Bal de Bourdon group, Martina, Jeremy, Evra



Andrew Coles, Omar Hayat, Asha Buch, Shuja Hoda



Nagase Shonin and Ana Ngala



Malvika Gupta, Felix Padel, Martina of Bal de Bourdon

## Origins of the GF Peace Award and Statuette

Surur Hoda approached Lord Richard Attenborough in 1983 and suggested the formation of a UK Gandhian charity. Lord Attenborough agreed to become its first President and in 1984 The Gandhi Foundation was formed.

Diana Schumacher was then asked by Surur to become a Trustee of the Foundation. Diana suggested that the Foundation should give an annual award to unsung heroes/heroines who were taking a significant grassroots initiative, or who were making some other contribution along Gandhian lines, to better the lot of society or of their environment. It didn't matter whether they actually knew about Gandhi or not. This idea was adopted and Surur contacted Philippe Tallis, via Andrew Coles, to submit suggestions and drawings for a sculpture. Lord Attenborough chose the final design and Diana paid £3,000 for its production.

The award has now been given annually for over 20 years (see below) and the award ceremony has become one of the core activities of the Foundation. Diana Schumacher is still involved with The Gandhi Foundation and is a valued patron.

## Recipients of the GF Peace Award 1998-2024

1998 General **Michael Harbottle** posthumously received the first Peace Award at the 50th Anniversary event of Gandhi's death in St Martin in the Fields. Harbottle commanded the UN peacekeeping forces in Cyprus; also founded Generals for Peace during the Cold War. His wife Eirwen, who personally received the Award, was also a peace activist.

1999 **Nicholas Gillett**, life-long promotor of peace through education including teacher training, writing and employment by UNESCO and Quaker bodies.

2000 **Adam Curle** was the first Professor of Peace Studies at University of Bradford; he was also a mediator in many conflict areas around the world.

2001 **Jubilee 2000** which aimed to achieve cancelation of unpayable debt in many poor countries; the Award was given to the founders, Martin Dent and Bill Peters. The organisation is now called Debt Justice.

2002 **Denis Halliday** who resigned his high UN position because of the damaging effect of UN sanctions in Iraq.

2004 **Helen Steven & Ellen Moxley** for their direct action against nuclear-weapon establishments; also for education for peace and founders of Peace House in Scotland.

2005 **Clive Stafford-Smith**, human rights lawyer and founder of Reprieve which campaigns against the death penalty and other abuses.

2006 **Shabana Azmi**, film actor for her social activism in India.

2007 **Media Lens**, founded by David Edwards and David Cromwell to challenge bias in British media.

2008 **Rev Harold Good & Fr Alex Reid**, witnesses to disarmament of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland.

2009 **Childrens' Legal Centre**, promotes children's rights in UK and abroad.

2010 **Parents Circle – Family Forum**; a community of Palestinians and Israelis who have lost family members during the conflict and who promote reconciliation.

2011 **Binayek Sen & Bulu Imam** for medical aid and defence of human rights among the tribal people or Adivasis of India.

2012 **St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital**, eye care in Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank.

2013 **Jeremy Corbyn**, socialist politician and peace campaigner.

2014 **Godric Bader & Scott Bader Commonwealth**, for life-long commitment to promotion of Trusteeship in industry.

2015 **Tore Naerland (Bike for Peace)**, Norwegian campaigner for a nuclear-free world.

2016 **Peter Tatchell**, ardent supporter of human rights, in particular LGBT.

2017 **Al Kamandjati (The Violinist)** bringing music to the children of refugee camps and villages of Palestine.

2019 **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**, UN Special Rapporteur for the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

[The gap in Awards given was mainly due to the Covid Pandemic.]

2022 **Action Village India** is a UK based development organisation which operates with several partner organisations in India which are Gandhian in outlook.

2024 **Ben Parkinson (Chrysalis Uganda)** This project gives education and diverse training to young Ugandans from poor families. The programme encourages a strong ethical approach to work and life.

**The Peace Award is a means to acknowledge works of individuals or organisations that have actively and consistently adhered to the guiding principles of Gandhi and have had a substantial impact on the political or social challenges of our times concerning nonviolence, social justice and environmental protection.**

There is no cash prize with the Award but the chosen person, or representative if an organisation, will be given a statuette of Gandhi to keep for 7 months from the date of the award, if within the UK, and then returned to the GF in time for the next Award.

Candidates should preferably be UK or Ireland resident but not essential if they are willing to travel to the UK, at their expense, for the presentation of the Award.

**You can nominate a person or organisation by contacting Omar Hayat, a Trustee of the GF who will provide the procedure to be followed.**  
**ohayat@ceamd.co.uk**

## **New member of the GF Executive Committee – Asha Buch**

Having worked as a social worker for five and a half years in Gujarat, India, I moved to the UK in 1979.

I taught ethnic minority pupils including refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Manchester for more than two decades. I have been fortunate to work as a volunteer in various sectors.

A counsellor at an ICU at Hope Hospital, Salford, Executive member of Indian Association Manchester and Faith Network for Manchester as well as Sacred Sounds of Women's Choir are some of them. Running the Indian Classical Music Society was challenging, but immensely satisfying. I worked as a telephone friend for the Silver Line and now for the Age UK providing befriending service to the housebound and isolated people.

After moving to Essex, I have been an active member of Khadi London, Metta Centre for Nonviolence, USA and The Gandhi Foundation.



## **Rev Feargus O'Connor**

A long time Friend of the GF, Feargus O'Connor, has now joined its Executive Committee along with Felix Padel and Asha Buch. Feargus was previously Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths and Chair of the Animal Interfaith Alliance. He is a former minister of Golders Green Unitarians.

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A Memory

The story starts years ago in 1931. Gandhi stayed in Bow and one morning at 8am he came to the school, Coopers Company School, where my father was a teacher. Gandhi spoke to the staff and pupils. Probably it was the same way he spoke to the British cabinet! He spoke about his people, about India and its drive for independence, and explained a course of action that was truthful and peaceful. My father told my family this story when we were growing up and impressed on us the extraordinary effect Gandhi's visit had on the staff and the pupils. In my father's last years I recorded his memories of those years leading up to the Second World War, and his depiction of Gandhi's visit is immensely poignant and moving, and a rare shaft of light during that darkening decade.

Andrew Cole

The hardback children's book ***Courage***, mentioned in previous issues, can now be obtained in the UK via this link:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Courage-Ela-Gandhi/dp/0997867698>

The GF Annual Lecturer 2025

Krishna Kumar did his Ph.D. in Educational Theory at the University of Toronto and taught during most of his career at Delhi University. He was Director of the National Council of Education and Research and Training, (NCERT), New Delhi, from 2004 to 2010. At present, he is Honorary Professor at Panjab University, Chandigarh. He was awarded an Honorary D.Litt. by the Institute of Education, University of London in 2011. The same year, he was awarded Padma Shri by the President of India.

Professor Kumar has been a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow, a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Oriental Studies, Berlin and at the Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania.

He is the author of a number of books, including fiction and he also writes for children. His latest book is *Thank You, Gandhi* (Penguin Random House).

GF greetings cards featuring nature photos by Jane Thomas on the front and the Peace Award statuette and a quotation by Gandhi on the back can be ordered from George Paxton by email (gpaxton@phonecoop.coop) or post (2/1, 87 Barrington Drive, Glasgow G4 9ES).

A 4 card pack is £5, and an 8 card pack is £10 (postage included). Payment can be made by cheque (*The Gandhi Foundation*) or by bank transfer (Co-op Bank sort code 08-92-99, account no. 65234714).



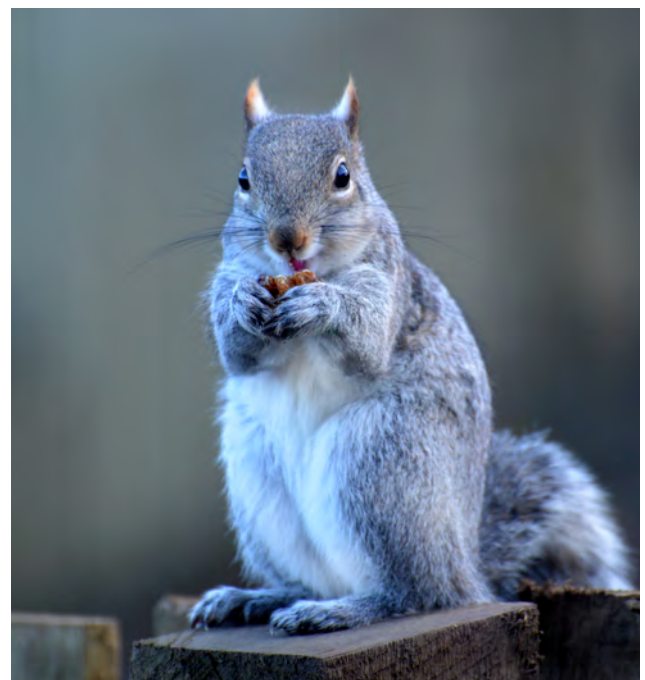
Statuette for the Gandhi Foundation
International Peace Award
(Sculptor: Philippe Tallis)

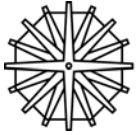
Squirrel –
Photo by Jane Thomas ©
Website: janeincolour.com

**I am not a visionary.
I claim to be a practical
idealist.**

M K Gandhi *Young India* 11/8/20

gandhifoundation.org





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.

Founder President: Richard Attenborough

President: Bhikhu Parekh

Patrons: Navnit Dholakia, Denis Halliday,
Diana Schumacher, Mark Tully, Sandip Verma

Members of Executive Committee:

Asha Buch, Shaheen Choudhury-Westcombe, Omar Hayat, Mark Hoda (Chair),
Trevor Lewis, Feargus O'Connor, Felix Padel, George Paxton,
William Rhind, Jane Sill

You can become a Friend of the Gandhi Foundation for a minimum subscription of £20, or a concession rate of £10, or be a Life Friend for a donation of £200. As a Friend you will receive the quarterly newsletter The Gandhi Way and notices of events organised by the Foundation.

Subscriptions to the Editor (address at bottom).

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www.gandhifoundation.org

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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.

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The deadline for the next issue is the end of April 2025

Printed on recycled paper using vegetable based inks and 100% renewable energy
by www.hillingdongreenprint.co.uk

Tel: 020 8868 7852