

# WOMEN AND PEACE CONFERENCE

PREFACE by Jill Carr-Harris

*The set of sixteen short articles were written for an International Women's Meet on Nonviolence and Peace (IWMNVP 2016) that was held in October 2nd to 4th 2016 in Jalgaon, Maharashtra. These articles cover all aspects of women and nonviolence and how women handle violence in conflict zones: how they are facing global crises, examples of women engaged in bringing communal harmony, ways in which marginalised women and youth work together, and building women based peace armies. These are all strategies being taken up by women in dealing with conflict.*

*The meeting was also a starting point for building an international women's activist network towards the Jai Jagat campaign and some of the proposals for the future are also given in the final section, "Planning for the Future".*

## **1. Introducing Women and non-violent action & peace-building, by Jill Carr-Harris and Aasha Ramesh**

*« If nonviolence is the law of our being, then the future is with women... Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than women? »*

*(Gandhi in Young India, 10-4-1930, p. 121)*

Gandhian nonviolence continues to renew and offer alternative approaches to the politics of violence. Those with an expertise of nonviolence in India – and internationally need to come together, to resist and mobilise against this state of the world and create peace at all levels. Conflict can be in the form of direct violence like civil wars and natural disasters at the macro-level or in the form of indirect violence that emerges from oppression and poverty such as marginalisation of those that are already in vulnerable state at the local level. In saying what could be done to transform violence, Gandhi wrote: *« Nonviolence must express itself through the acts of selfless service of the masses (Gandhi, Vol. 8, pg.81) »*. This continues to provide succour to our common humanity.

One among the many segments of society that can play an enormously important role, but that have been largely invisible, are women. They have however been integral to several struggles alongside men, including the struggle for freedom, but have remained unrecognised and invisible. Many women that have experienced violence know how "to contain conflict" and have developed strategies and knowledge of handling violence without it haplessly going out of control. Some women have demonstrated leadership of not allowing conflicts to morph into destructive forces. Numerous women's movements

have found ways to turn violence towards constructive purposes and direct it towards positive political change. The challenge is that these forms of action that women take up to address the multitude of problems they face in everyday lives, is a forgotten narrative. It is this that needs to be unfolded and applauded.

The 16th UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs set in 2015) emphasises that « peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development provide access to justice for all and builds effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels ». The UN Women, the branch of the UN dealing with women's issues, makes a call for mobilising women as unique carriers of peace. Internationally, the UN has recognised the importance of women's contribution in bringing peace. Therefore, this has to be clearly underlined as a key point in national development processes.

Nonviolence and peace efforts seem to have become a historic necessity. We are in a period when the world has been overtaken by considerable amount of political and social violence and civil unrest. There is conflict and war in African countries like Congo and Sudan; Syria, Libya, and Chechnya are war weary. Countries in South Asia are facing religious and caste-related disturbances causing riots and bloodshed in many places. There is a spike in violence across the Middle East and the ten year long war on terror seems to be extending into the next decade. Not for many years have people seen such huge streams of refugees on their way to an uncertain future. To many, this appears to be a politics of violence spiralling out of control, with no exit strategy, ushering in an epoch where precipitous conflict affecting civilians in every part of the globe is a real possibility.

One of the silver linings is that women have played a critical role in times of conflict, as peace-builders, negotiators; they have been engaged at different levels using nonviolent action to make their point. There is Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, Ellen Johnson of Liberia, Shirin Ebadi from Iran, Tawakkol Salam from Yemen, Gro Harlem Brundtland from Norway to name a few well-known women leaders. But there are also countless and invisible women across the globe doing daily peace work. This is emblematic in the international campaign known as "Million Women Rise" (MWR). It is designed to mitigate violence against women.

On the other hand, we have the opening up of the global market to benefit the rich and powerful, and this is largely responsible for further increasing the divide between the rich and poor. Such inequality is another source of conflict, resulting in further impoverishment of the "bottom of the pyramid", which happens to be constituted by a large segment of the world's population, and poorest among these being women. In situations of extreme income inequality, it is women and children that suffer the most. This is particularly seen at the community or local levels where women are subjected to all forms of human rights violations, as they are easy targets, and powerful people use this tactic to oppress vulnerable and poor people. Women are not just targets for physical abuse and brutality, but they are subjected to economic deprivation too and hence the resultant increase in feminisation of poverty.

Ela Bhatt, founder of Self-Employed Women's Association and one of the great women leaders working in a Gandhian tradition in India remarked about the bargaining

power of poor landless women labourers : « Then I was thinking they do not have bargaining power. What strength do they have to demand ? Violence was out of question. They had not even thought of that. And that does not win your battle (Interview, May 31, 2016) ».

The destruction of our earth's resources is another area that needs to be countered with nonviolence on a massive scale. Controlling climate change is not possible without course correction on how people relate to the earth. Gandhi reminisced that « To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves ». Unbridled resource extraction, unlimited consumption, linear economic progress is violence at a planetary scale. Well-known ecologist and thinker, Vandana Shiva (2015) in her recent publication *Terra Viva* aptly reminds the reader of how conflicts over extracting resources is reduced to ethnic and religious conflict as a way to divert people from appreciating the real cause of ecological crisis. She says: « The conflicts emerging from non-sustainable and unjust resource use are not seen in their ecological context but reduced to ethnic and religious conflicts. For every problem and crisis created, ever greater applications of the extractive, linear, and blind logic are brought to bear ».

Social unrest, opening of global markets and planetary crises are all interlocking vectors that compel us to look for nonviolence in governance, economy, society, the environment and education. The complexity of the world order leaves people feeling that they are in a gridlock controlled by “top-down” global structures of *real* politic, corporatisation of the market, mass media and formal education. This is reminiscent of the British colonial period in India, when the *modus operandi* of the rulers was to control the minds of (wo)men. In the Indian Freedom Struggle, Gandhi countered this and made India's population indifferent to British control, giving people a sense of their own autonomy as a way to non-cooperate with unjust rulers.

Although India's government after Independence did not rebuild a new post-colonial society on Gandhian lines ; rather they used nonviolence only as a way to achieve political freedom. Yet Gandhi's vision of a nonviolent society did not die. In the last seven decades, millions of Sarvodaya workers, NGOs and freedom fighters have carried the message of nonviolence to remote corners of the country. There have been thousands of experiments at every level, and work in communities has imbued women and men towards organizing using nonviolent action and transforming the society. Building on these efforts, it is important to bring greater visibility to the women nonviolent actors that remain. One of those efforts emanating from a Gandhian tradition is Ekta Parishad's movement to address the issue of landlessness.

### *Different Kinds of Grassroots Inspired Nonviolent Action*

#### Ekta Parishad

Within one of the contemporary Gandhian social movements in India, Ekta Parishad has worked since 1990 using nonviolence in pressing for land redistribution and forest rights for the poorer landless rural communities. There have been different kinds of

nonviolent actions that have been taken up. These are all common in that they aim for “bottom-up” development. They include :

- \* *Nonviolent Conflict Resolution* : reconciling differences between warring communities particularly in cases involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and their access and use of resources.
- \* *Women’s Transformative Nonviolence* : this is where women change the life of the community through organising and a set of interventions, while learning to deal with the conflicts (resistance) created by gender hierarchies and elite groups.
- \* *Women’s Village-based Economic Empowerment as Nonviolence* : this gives women (community) more autonomy so that the women have greater space for decision-making, leading to greater dignity, and security with which to build local assets, have greater control over common resources, and better access to loans.
- \* *Grassroots Social Movement Building* : developing mass actions to press for dialogue with the state in the areas of social and economic policy or legal change.
- \* *Nonviolence as a Component in Youth Leadership Development* : to assist young people to discern what is violence and nonviolence both internally and in society and learning how to handle difficult conflicts especially regarding the discrimination and marginalisation of the poor.

There are many other examples in India and outside where nonviolent strategies and methods are being used on a regular basis. Some of these will be brought to the International Women’s Meet.

#### Mahila Shanti Sena : the Women’s Peace Force (Orissa)

Modelled from the Peace Brigades International and NV Peace Force, these are trained women teams that intervene in conflict situations especially gender-based conflicts.

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- \* *Sweat Lodges* : Purification and Healing Ceremonies: Mainly Found among North American Indigenous Communities and it is being revived by women leaders to change the family and community relations.
- \* *Mindfulness Training & Yoga* : Bringing mindfulness and meditation into educational spaces.
- \* *Inter-religious Dialogue* : Working across religions to bring common understanding.
- \* *Setting up Peace Zones* : to develop areas in conflict regions where people are able to live in relative peace.

- \* *Making the State Accountable* through Nonviolent Dialogue and Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Movements.
- \* *Social/Solidarity/Local/Nonviolent Economy Work* : Developing economies that are closer to the people and therefore equitable.
- \* *Cross-Cultural Exchanges and Oral Histories* : Widening understanding among different cultures, especially those that are in perpetual frozen conflicts.
- \* *Peace Education/Studies in Schools/Colleges* : Learning to bring negative and positive peace into research, training and life-long learning.
- \* *Nonviolent Communication* : This is compassionate communication.
- \* *Working with Inmates* of the Prison System and Perpetrators of Violence.
- \* *Male sensitisation* on Gender Equality.

In conclusion bringing all these different ways of promoting peace-building and nonviolent action together into addressing « Youth Leadership » is the critical agenda. Reflective action needs to be taken up in ensuring that the gains made by the current generation that is handing its baton to the next generation, is not lost. Peace is needed more than ever before. It is for this reason that an International Women's Meet on Nonviolence and Peace has been organised in India in October 2016. It is the first time in India that a women's initiative on peace is taking place on this scale. This will hopefully open up the doors for sharing of experiential learning of nonviolent action with international and Indian peace activists. This Meet brings together the local and international, the activist and the academic, the Gandhian and the feminist, All of whom, are using nonviolence, in its broader sense of, being action-oriented, holistic and context specific. The dream is peaceful coexistence and therefore using nonviolent action is a critical step towards transforming society for Justice Peace and Equality.

## **2. Overall Summary of Events**

IWMNVP, 2nd–13th October 2016

Held at Gandhi Research Foundation (GRF), Jalgaon in Maharashtra

Ekta Parishad, Madhya Pradesh

### Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was held under a large pandal on the GRF grounds with over 1 200 women and girls in attendance. The invitees included 150 women activists from 17 states in India, 41 women peace leaders from 24 countries and hundreds of school and college going young women students. This opening celebrated Gandhi Jayanti (Gandhi's Birthday) as well as the International Day of Nonviolence. Senior Gandhian Sarvodaya

leader Krishnammal Jaganathan lit the inaugural lamp of 'nonviolence and peace' at Jalgaon, and she blessed the participants and extolled them to keep working with commitment for the poor and marginalized people. Jill Carr-Harris of IGINP and the key organiser of the program gave the inaugural speech. There was an invocation song by P.V. Rajagopal Founder of Ekta Parishad, followed by greetings by Nisha Jain, Principal of the Anubuti School, and keynote addressed by Justice C.S. Dharmadhikari, Chairperson of Gandhi Research Foundation. Other dignitaries such as Ashok Jain, the son of the Founder of the GRF was in attendance.

In this opening program 50 grassroots women from across India, were honoured by the international dignitaries for their exceptional work as peace leaders in bringing social justice to marginalised communities. They each had a profile that illustrated how they used nonviolent action as a tool for negotiating change in getting entitlements for their community.

Also each of the grassroots women, Indian activists and international participants brought soil from their place as a symbol of they being part of one earth for one human community. This soil accepted by veteran Gandhian Krishnammal was later used to plant an « International Peace Tree for Global Solidarity » (peepal tree) planted on the grounds of the GRF.

### Conference Program

There were four panel discussions, one interactive discussion and one small group interaction.

In the first Panel « Dealing with Emerging Global Crisis and Solutions », the speakers expressed concern that currently the socio-economic situation is grave and we are passing through a global crisis. What we are looking for is global justice, economic reforms and equity. Nations need to acknowledge their interdependence and promote all of this in a nonviolent and peaceful manner.

In the second Panel « Women's Role in Transforming Society Using Nonviolence: Moving forward on Gender and Economic Equality », panelists found that culture and fundamentalist radical thinking is making people violent and much of this direct and structural violence is targeted at women ; leaving them feeling insecure. Gandhi recognised that he was a religious (ethical) person and he did not make religion his politics. Marginalised communities want education, social security, jobs and economic stability ; these are critical needs for mainstreaming people into law-abiding citizens. There ought to be a culture that internalises values of nonviolence and cooperation. In a nonviolent manner, voices experiencing oppression have definitely been amplified. Human rights violations need to be re-assessed as new forms of violence.

« Interactive Session: Experience sharing in Panels and Small Groups ». It is necessary to address issues of poverty and economic oppression among marginalised communities, and the growing divide between the rich and poor needs to be countered : there are wealthy territories such as in Kerala where money is on display in terms of lavish

living spaces. There is increase in violence against women (VAW) in many Indian states and due to poverty there is a high level of human trafficking of women and girls. The state is doing very little to curb human trade. Women do not have rights over property or land and they are vulnerable and poor. Local women's leadership is often resisted and leaders are often shamed and harassed. Cambodian activists narrated how during the Khmer Rouge period, school children were given guns to defend themselves but slowly after the war the gun culture went away, and children began to learn ahimsa and nonviolence as professed in Buddhism. Identifying root causes is important, said the Kenyan delegate, for women being landless does exist in Kenya but no man can sell land without the permission/consent of the woman. Women had to struggle hard to get this constitutional law in place. Wherever, marginalised communities are empowered and made aware of their leadership ; they are able to negotiate and get their basic entitlements, as can be seen in Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere, where hundreds of poor farmers could demand their land and forest rights. In Gujarat, the gender index of women in panchayats (local governance) is high and women members aspire to create a Salamatprashasan (a safe administrative constituency... especially for women.) They asked people and panchayats to identify places under their jurisdiction that are not safe for women and then began to make these into safe zones. In Trinidad and Tobago, they mobilise domestic workers and they demand basic wages and rights in negotiations with the government. Women in tribal belts had no property rights, but now in Jharkhand after the new laws are in place, thousands of people have got joint land/forest rights entitlements, in the names of both men and women. In Azerbaijan, 5 % of oil and natural gas is under the State ownership and the remaining 95 % belongs to large multinational companies. Hazards are plentiful, but digital technology and modes of SMS communication are being used to keep distant rural communities updated on different issues of governance and disaster management, and awareness among people is increasing.

« Youth session: Learning Peace from Youth ». Need to innovate appropriate technology such that it does not contribute to violence. Gandhian principles are relevant even today, as they speak of decentralisation of decision-making powers. In Georgia, young women are the worst affected by conflict, they bear the brunt, they often become targets of sexual violence, their family members may be killed, leaving them without support ; they are also the majority of casualties of war and 80 % were women from Aprasia and South Ossetia who had to flee their homes. Young people are at the heart of conflict, they have to deal with the lasting consequences of war. Allow the young to have a voice in decision-making ; they have intelligence and power to find their own solutions to conflict. The ancient African concept of 'Ubuntu Humanity' -meaning 'being humane to others' (I am, because you are)- shows faith in your humanity and faith in others humanity as well. Peace and justice are important for what is peace if there is no justice ? Capacity building is done for women's leadership, young people are encouraged and education is promoted in Nepal; women are trained to be entrepreneurs as well.

How to make Peace?

Women need to be present at peace negotiation tables, and not sit behind them ; they need to feel ‘equality in expertise’ on peace issues. Obstacles of conceptual understanding will crop up ; technical and political issues will also have to be addressed through trainings. Palestine has been at war for the past 25 years and discussions on political issues were forbidden. Talking to « the enemies » meant that you were legitimising the opposing voices in your midst. Women of both sides are trying against all odds to keep open the channels of dialogue. The political dispensation did not want to give women any role in political discussions, thereby telling that they did not want to give women any role in politics either. Young Columbian farm girls established the Humanitarian Zones (HZ, as these came to be called) and these were places internally displaced refugees could take shelter and feel safe. This became necessary as there were many victims of direct atrocities and conflict and displacement, and Columbia gave no guarantees that they could return to their lands any day soon. Youth are concerned about violation of human rights but are also concerned about the rights of the Environment and the Earth. Activists from countries outside, seek spiritual strength from India and its concept of nonviolence and ahimsa. In Bihar and other places have women’s *shanti senas* in several villages, we are under-estimating what women are a force. We need to capture learning and develop it as a forceful tool to be used in peace processes. Need to harmonise morality with legality and a ground level movement can do what law cannot do. ‘Peace’ personal or societal ? It needs close reflection.

### Voices for Evaluating the Meeting

“*Sab kosathlekaraagebadheinge*”...We will take everyone along with us, as we move forward towards peace. Since the Beijing Women’s Conference in 1995, this was perhaps the next big thing to happen. Women from so many diverse backgrounds came together on a common platform to share their concerns and experiences. Youth groups were fantastic, they had clarity on politics and they wanted freedom “azadi.” We thank organisers, for such a meaningful program, so much of sharing across borders, a program that gave energy because so many young people could articulate hope and a vision for world peace. Such events should get incorporated into one’s life for this is not an event, it is a life discourse. Basic tenets of Gandhi speak of equality on human terms and not in gender terms. Equality thus is in recognition of a human entity. The discourse on equality is an integrating process of humankind. A ‘*shabd*kosh’ or a meeting (issue-specific) jargon list should be prepared to facilitate translation and common understanding for all participants of vernacular languages.

IWMNVP, 5th-9th October 2016

Held at Various Sites in Madhya Pradesh - The Field Area of Ekta Parishad

### Site-Visits

The site visits for almost everyone I talked to, were the highlight of the program. Being with strong women in villages and getting hope in their struggle is always inspiring. It also reinforces that peace starts from below. Without indirect violence of poverty and exploitation, there is less possibility of structural violence.

There were four different site visits to four locations : *Group 1/ Chambal, Group 2/ Chilghat, Group 3/ Katni-Umaria and Group 4/ Bhopal*. They each covered different themes related to methods of conflict reconciliation, social movement building, women's capacity building, strengthening a nonviolent economy and youth mobilisation. Some of the comments of the trips were as follows:

From **Group 1**: "We were impressed with the capacity of people to change their situation."

From **Group 2**: "Beatrice, reflecting our own sense of wonder and delight, asks for all of us, 'Where [to the village women] did you get the power to struggle?' Many voices shout: 'EktaParishad!'"

From **Group 3**: "Villagers are speaking and listening from the heart".

From **Group 4**: "We were especially inspired by a youth group that publishes a newspaper. It inspired us because in the 21st century people are surrounded with negative information all the time. This group creates only positive news to encourage and motivate others".

IWMNVP 10th-13th October 2016

Held at India International Centre - New Delhi

### Peace Builders International Film Festival and other Events

Lighting of the inaugural lamp was done by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Founder Director, WISCOM (Women in Security, Conflict Management), and representative of the Tibetan government in Exile. A panel of International and Indian women activists spoke about their experiences of peacemaking at work. Ritu Dewan, President of Indian Association of Women's Studies also made an intervention.

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath gave the keynote address and said that Gandhi had recognised that women's role in nonviolent change was imperative for societies that have formal democracies in order for them to become substantive democracies. Referring to the international women on the panel from Georgia, Kenya, Trinidad, Colombia and Canada, she said they demonstrate the energies of women that can be released to counter the systemic violence that threatens to engulf humanity.

Women can initiate a new vocabulary using Gandhian practices and Buddhist insights to develop internal disarmament and mindfulness based on an understanding of the connectedness of all sentient beings. No individual can be truly free if anyone lives in

bondage. Cultivating empathy based on truly humanist values holds the key to dispelling ignorance, anger and hatred.

The festival screened documentaries from across the world including India, depicting stories of struggles on issues of democracy, peace, livelihoods, security, political genocide, war, disillusionment, hope and joy. These were amazing films of strong and committed women leaders who faced extraordinary challenges both socially and politically. The Festival had 23 documentaries from 15 countries : Afghanistan, South Korea, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Denmark, Nigeria, Paraguay, Sweden, Canada, USA, Iran, Argentina, Yemen and France. A sample of films were as follows:

- \* *Boxing Girls of Kabul (Afghanistan)* : Young girls take to boxing despite a hostile environment, and stereotypes are broken; family life goes on normal in spite of gun-touting young men walking side by side.
- \* *Empire of Shame (South Korea)* : Samsung, a well-known multinational company assembles its electronic devices in an apparently high-tech and sterile, clean environment, yet many young workers are contracting cancer, due to chemicals they handle. The management is unfazed and unconcerned, for this is routine for them. Women are at the forefront of taking this to the streets to win public opinion from consumers.
- \* *Invoking Justice (India)* : In a patriarchal milieu, a young Muslim woman takes on the agenda of involving women in the dispensing of justice to women of her community, nothing can stop this woman from showing that Islam is about social justice and woman must translate it into reality.
- \* *Dying Dreams (Indonesia)* : A young woman aspires that her son take on his father's mantle and be a fighter in the army, imagining this must have been the dream of her dying husband, however this was not the case.
- \* *Daughters of the Niger Delta (Nigeria)* : Immersed in deep poverty, patriarchal traditions and customs and difficult living conditions, Niger women work hard to sustain their families and seek out ways for survival.

#### Interaction with Youngsters from Marginalized Communities in Delhi

Interspersed with the film festival, this was one of the side events. Around 60 energetic and enthusiastic youngsters marched into the world of adults, full of confidence and purpose and interacted with some of the international delegates. Each youngster shared his/her 'exceptional' work experience with great conviction and joy and listened to the international delegates with curiosity and interest.

#### Mindfulness session with Buddhist Nuns

This session happened over the lunch hour. People were so busy doing many things, that the Buddhist nuns instructed how to find stillness in our activity, and do talking

meditation, walking meditation and so on. They encouraged the group to hold stillness like a baby and acknowledge its presence as it has a calming affect. The participants, silently and mindfully climbed down three floors with the nuns leading. The message was that: “There is no way to peace. Peace is the way”.

### Media as a Tool for Social Transformation

This interactive meeting and dinner thereafter was hosted by the National YMCA. Pam Philipose, (former journalist at Indian Express) was the facilitator. Media is always be a good tool for ‘social and transformative activism’ and it needs to be made use of in the right way. Market-driven policies are impacting media houses and the news production, and this needs to be countered with engagement with the media, bringing forward thoughtful and positive stories. This can be done through digital media.

### Gauging the Future: Jai Jagat (Uniting for Peace) 2020 campaign

The guiding thought of the campaign was « in a world torn by silence and violence, we need to come together to introduce active non-violence ». The international campaign of the Ekta Parishad sends out the message that « victory of the world is the victory of all humanity » as conveyed by Gandhi’s use of the term ‘*Sarvodaya*’ or the good of all and the development of all.

From 2106 onwards, programs will begin from local to state level, then to national level. There after activists will travel taking the Jai Jagat message from Delhi to Geneva. In Geneva, Jai Jagat 2020 will culminate in an international 2 week action (September 19th, to October 2<sup>nd</sup>). At the same time, local action around the world is being planned : 1) Youth to be in focus : trainings on nonviolent concepts and practices to be promoted, to prepare the next generation for a peaceful coexistence with themselves, others and with the planet Earth / 2) Collaborative global activities planned with other countries using principles of nonviolence / 3) Women’s leadership : Women to be trained on nonviolence and peace, and then, for them to create core groups of local, national and international peace builders. There needs to be opportunities created for women to occupy key positions as peace negotiators and women need to build the capacity to carry this forward. They will be guided by the Jalgaon Declaration / 4) Aspirations for a Nonviolent Economy : an international conference to be held in India in march 2018 where economists and activists are set to deliberate and forge innovative change around the “nonviolent economy.”

### **3. Women’s Peace Initiatives in Conflict Zones**

These four articles are by women working on peace efforts in conflict zones, from the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and the Caucuses.

The first is Sumaya Farhat-Naser from Palestine. She speaks as a peace activist-academic who found that by bringing mothers and women together from Israel and Palestine, they were able to make some headway in the Peace Agreements. Although these agreements have fallen through, there is still the strong conviction, when people realise that the so-called “enemy” is just like you, that trust can be gradually built.

In the second article by Irene Santiago, who is working on the Minority Commission in Mindanao in Philippines to bring about a peace agreement between the Muslim Groups and the Philippine Government, and she shows that women can do negotiation at the most senior level. Women have to master negotiations conceptually, technically and politically if they are to be recognised interlocutors. Irene concluded that women are naturally peace builders.

In the third article by Yohanna from Colombia, she has had a long experience of Afro-Colombians being displaced off their lands because of the expansion of palm cultivation as a fuel, and other large cattle ranches. She tells the story of how to support the local people to come back to their lands and live on peace and biodiversity zones. Yohanna is very happy that the government of Colombia has now negotiated a major peace agreement with FARC, the main underground movement. This shows that the power of the movement that they set up assisted in bringing the government to the table.

The final article is from Azerbaijan in the Caucasus where there is regional disharmony in the region, especially between Armenia and Azerbaijan. One refers to this as ‘frozen conflict’. Zamira talks about the oil and gas corporations that can be made more accountable so that they do not add to the existing conflict.

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### Carrying out Peace, by Sumaya Farhat-Naser

***Sumaya Farhat-Naser*** is from Palestine. Since 1990, she has been active in peace education and nonviolence projects for women and youth. Sumaya Farhat-Naser teaches and does social mobilisation in Palestine and across the borders with mother’s group in Israel. She teaches nonviolent methods, and empowerment of women and youth. Between 1982-1997, she was Assistant Professor at Birzeit University (Palestine) Palestine, Director of Jerusalem Center for Women. She taught Peace Studies at the University of Augsburg Germany (2003-04). Since 2003 she has been teaching Nonviolence and Peace Education in schools and to women.



Palestine has been under war for past 25 years and discussions on political issues were forbidden. Talking to anyone in the opposition meant that you were legitimising the opponent in your midst. The political dispensation did not want to give women any role in political discussions, thereby telling them that they had no role in the politics or reconciliation. But the group and I felt that women can do what men can’t do. Men have not been bold enough to engage women from

Israel in their peace discussions. Discussions between the two governments were bitter and each thought they knew everything about the other.

When the Gulf war broke out in 1991, the government thought women should not go to war since their safety was important. Israeli government gave masks only to their citizens and we in Palestine opposed this. Peace talks broke down. We needed help and Jewish women from Belgium helped us. Twenty women from both sides went to Belgium and had talks; they were instructed not to talk to the press. Ten Palestinian women parliamentarians came under a secret agreement between Arafat and the Israeli President, and these ten women talked about how to end occupation. As a result this led to Israel withdrawing their controversial order.

Women found that they can find partners for peace on both sides. Women were the only representatives who could negotiate peace, for men only talked about war all the time. Even though the Peace process, that we started, collapsed twelve years back, women and peace groups have kept in touch with each other through the internet. It is good news that many peace groups are emerging from Israel. We have hope of peace some time between our countries.

## Geopolitics

The economic and military domination of the third world by the first world and the domination of the U.N. by the first world nations maintain the imbalance and injustice. This power situation has to be changed through genuine understanding and convincing arguments that otherwise the destruction will reach out to all nations and to our common earth.

Global justice and economic reform would be felt if the principle of sharing could be applied in directing a solution. Sharing financial resources and wealth more equitably can rapidly reduce poverty and inequality. And sharing rather than aggressively competing to control resources could de-escalate conflict and strengthen international peace and security. More democratic, inclusive and effective forms of global governance are imperative to make sharing resources possible. Placing the principle of sharing at the heart of future policy decisions would have far-reaching implications for the survival of humanity as it would ensure that the world's power and resources is distributed in an equitable and sustainable way.

Transforming international relations must put the needs of the world as a whole before the needs of any one nation. The problems are life threatening and more than acute. They are global in nature and extend beyond national borders. It is imperative that nations acknowledge their mutual interdependence and accept that all must share the same needs and rights. It is crucial to go back to nature, re-discover the wealth inherent in all religions and cultures, and honor the common values. These are the compass to guide to nature, humanity and honoring life.

One crucial approach is to decide on enforcing an education system free of nationalism, fanatic thinking and blind loyalism. Military occupation, discrimination and uprooting people from their land must end. Citizens must learn to act against feelings of powerless

bystanders who are kept out of important political decision-making processes. To enforce a positive change, we must learn how to intervene non-violently to counter increased resignation and the feeling of being excluded. One should never ever give up thinking solutions cannot be found.

The principle of willingness to change and everyone can and must get involved in the movement for change through learning and taking responsibility. Principles and skills of non-violent thinking, feeling, speaking and acting, enable us to define, analyse and understand our problems and empower ourselves to stay active, study, search and find solutions. This is true for our behaviour on the personal level in daily life, at our working place and in political and social life.

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Mastering negotiations, by Irene Santiago

***Irene Santiago***, Philippines, has personal experience in formal peace negotiation : she served from 2001-2004 on the Government of Philippines panel negotiating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ; more recently, she has taken the lead in the Mindanao Commission on Women, and is also the Convener of the National Mothers for Peace Movement. She is known as a strong advocate of gender equality to transform society.



Irene Santiago conveyed to the delegates of the International Women's Meet to go and sit next to the men on the negotiation table, not sit behind them. Meaning : we, women, need to feel the equality in our expertise on 'peace' and never be behind men. We need to be in the lead as well.

Since many in the audience were gender experts and activists of women's rights groups, Irene Santiago emphasised that it is not enough to be a gender experts. Gender is a soft option. She found that in male-dominated spaces like peace negotiations, women would be given space to address Ceasefire concerns. Why just this? Why not women on the Strategic planning desk? Go there! she says. Ceasefire ends an issue, but peace negotiations are ongoing ; women need to be there too, all along the process for 'resolution of conflict' until peace is settled.

« Women, she said, are equipped to do peace negotiations, so what prevents their equal participation ? » Three factors pose obstacles that are conceptual, technical and political. These are :

- \* Conceptually: Ceasefire is usually about ending war, but we change it to say that ceasefire is about « war and building peace » and we have an instrumental role to play at building peace.
- \* Technically: This is an easy obstacle and can be overcome through skill training. Women should gain a skill with regard to stopping war.

\* Politically: If you can't mobilise people... how can anyone take you seriously ? It is necessary to undertake political trainings, so that one understands political power dynamics.

We do not define power as dominating and controlling BUT as formative. Women should definitely come to peace processes, as we are political and we can see change, as being political and not technical.

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Peace zones, by Yohanna Almeida Lopez

***Yohana Almeida Lopez***, Columbia, gives assistance and support to victims of armed conflict communities for the past 11 years. She is a human rights advocate and works in counselling to build peace initiatives in Colombia linked to social and Christian movements inspired by the liberation theology of the Church of the Poor. Her main work is on the DEACHE education project, an initiative of distance training in human rights as a way to stop the spiral of violence in rural communities.



« Peace is not an event, but a process and we need to bring all parties to the conflict to the Peace Table.

Victims and Perpetrators have to transcend the story of heroes and villains to condemn the violence.

When Time shuts a door somewhere, spirit also opens a window : we need to recognise that in peace building. Building synergies is crucial so that when opportunity comes knocking the alternatives to an unjust situation are already in place. »

### The Peace zones

Yolanda began her work by engaging in the unusual experiment of young Columbian farm girls to set up peace zones so as to give shelter for the victims near the borders of Panama and Columbia. Young women established these Humanitarian Zones (HZ, as these came to be called), places where people could take shelter and feel safe. This became necessary as there were many victims of direct atrocities and conflict and displacement, and Columbia gave no guarantees that they could return to their lands.

When communities decided to return, they had no place to go : their land had been taken away by military combatants, as a method of displaying their armed strength. Furthermore, combatants wanted to enter HZ and recruit young men and women, but the women did not allow them to enter these protected areas, and they stood at the borders and made a declaration that these armed militants would not be given entry at any cost.

For the Columbian reconciliation process, there are witnesses national as well as international that are keen to establish memory houses for reconciliation so that reflection will continue on the experiences of victims that occurred during the conflict. Victims could

construct their own narratives around their suffering and pain they experienced, and this would help them to rebuild their lives, and take charge of their destiny.

Yohanna mentioned that they asked for the reconciliation and rehabilitation of the FARC Ex-combatants and their integration into Columbian society. The Colombian Government would need to take control of their educational needs, as an integral part of the peace process. This would lead to healing in Columbia, not just for those who have suffered the violations of human rights as *human* victims, and also for the rights of the environment and the earth need to be addressed. Today the network established at the national level, has been effective so far.

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International practice on human rights, by Zamira Abbasova

**Zamira Abbasova** is a specialist in post-war development and reconciliation. She is currently the Country Director of IMAGINE Center for Conflict Transformation (February, 2016-present.) She is a Member Services Officer of the American Chamber of Commerce in Azerbaijan (AMCHAM) (2015-2016) and handles Public Relations as well. Her research interest includes the culture of obedience and peace entrepreneurship in post-war countries. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philology and Foreign Languages (English) at the Azerbaijan Teachers Training University, Mingachevir, Azerbaijan (2007.) She has also been awarded the 'CONTACT' Peacebuilding Program across Cultures, SIT Graduate Institute, Vermont 2010.



In Azerbaijan there are not any indigenous people ; but social and environmental NGOs, media as well as communities are very active in terms of their rights around land acquisition. Foreign corporations especially the ones working in the oil and gas sectors are bound to act by various government regulations. These are : government guarantees ; certain provisions stipulated by the government ; compensation for loss and damage ; security issues, environment, health, safety and social impact assessments ; dispute resolution and applicable law, etc...

When project already starts implementing, the corporations keep engaging communities and keep them informed on existing procedures and location of construction sites through technologies, posters, community leaders, and etc. I want to highlight that these corporations are not doing all of these because they like it, but because they understand the power of people. They know that if there is no accountability or openness as such, people will protest and not let them work. Therefore, they mitigate with communities by using these methods.

While you are already doing an amazing job in terms of advocating for your rights, I would also kindly suggest (if I may) to review the international practice on this. The best way to make our governments, as well as corporations, accountable to what they promise is us. Therefore, I would encourage each land advocate and lobbyist to :

- \* Educate yourself on the existing legislation and acts signed by government ;
- \* Be aware on what grounds these corporations function on your lands, what documents they have ;
- \* If not, hold your governments responsible for setting these protocols with corporations ;
- \* Continuously ask for corporate reporting, and urge them to accept your points ;
- \* Set up a public coalition group for monitoring over these corporations to make sure they abide ;
- \* Publicise your findings and call for public and international action.

It is never late to make these calls and believe me with time, these corporations ruling on our lands will understand your power. It is just the matter of time.

#### **4. Women and Communal Harmony**

Communalism is a divisive issue in the women's movement in India. It is a complex problem that is not adequately covered in this section. Here we bring two spokespersons from the Muslim religion, to speak on how they are helping women to adopt Gandhian values and humanistic approaches in the interest of achieving peace.

First the article of Razia Patel, a long-time spokesperson on Muslim women and education that is trying to bring an enlightened vision, drawn from Gandhi's principles. The second is Nafisa Barot, who is one of the leaders of the civil society in Gujarat, who worked tirelessly to bring Muslim and Hindu communities together so that they could build long term peaceful coexistence.

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Economic gender justice issues of minorities, by Dr. Razia Patel

***Dr. Razia Patel**, is an Associate Professor at the Indian Institute for Education in Pune, as well as the leader of the Rachana Vikas Trust, an NGO assisting minority women. She has been working for the last 20 years on various academic research projects on issues covering various aspects of education of minorities, ie. identification of root causes of illiteracy, factors affecting their developments and remedial actions...*

Indian women are also spread along these lines and are closely governed by customs, traditions and laws of these diverse religions and cultures even as they seek equal opportunities for development. As per the 2011 Census of India, within the percentage of

minorities in the total population of India, Muslims constituted 14.23 %.

The Constitution of India has provided its citizens with the right to equality and social justice. However, it is seen that Muslims in India are having huge development deficit over other communities, with lack of development due to deficit in education, employment etc. Further the complexity is due to the fact that the Indian Muslim community is overall marginalised ; hence Muslim women are minority within the minority and marginalised within the marginalised. Issues of Muslim women in India are thus complex related with their survival in identity politics specially and protection. In her own words, as stated in one of my nationwide surveys, their issues are related with "*Shiksha, Suraksha, Rozgar aur Kanoon*" (Education, Security, Employment and Law)

Another issue that acts as a form of disempowerment for Muslim women is the present form of Muslim Personal Law as practiced in India. It has some provisions such as the exercise of 'oral' divorce, and polygamy and which are adopted by Muslim men, resulting in violation of human rights of Muslim women. These issues are also used by minority and majority fundamentalists for identity and communal politics, impacting the Muslim community as a whole in adverse ways.

After the demolition of Babri Masjid, in 1992 and the series of countrywide riots that followed in India, a tendency of ghettoisation of Muslims took place. It further affected Muslim women in particular, (changing her way of life). The riots communalised relations between Muslims and other communities, thus pushing back the agenda of 'reforms in those laws' that impact Muslim women negatively.

While making a nationwide survey for Times project by the Author, many Muslim women asked "Jab samaj hi nahi bacha to kanoon ko lekar kya karenge?" (While there is no existence of the community, what is relevance of law reforms?)

The way ahead is already indicated by Muslim women themselves. Some of the courageous women like Shah Bano in 1986, to the recent challenges of personal laws by Shayra Bano are examples of individual women who have shown faith in the Indian Constitution and have fought for justice through nonviolent and democratic means.

The most path breaking example of Muslim women's fight against fundamentalist oppression (in a nonviolent way) was the Gandhian Satyagraha on Women's day on 8th of March 1982, here in the city of Jalgaon itself. There was a ban imposed by the so called religious leaders against viewing cinemas for Muslim women. The local punch committees punished some people for defying the ban by physical attacks on them. We along with other colleagues under the organisation called *Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahin* and hundreds of Muslim women defied the ban publicly by organising a public viewing of the said movie. This peaceful protest was a big jolt to the people who wanted to impose this ban throughout the country and the unwarranted ban collapsed because Muslim women made bold to exercise their democratic rights as Indian citizens.

This was a victory in a true Gandhian mould that we experienced in 1982, and till date remains an inspiration for further struggles of Muslim women to ensure themselves, a life of 'dignity and justice.'

*Nafisa is the Founding Director of Utthan, a committed, independent, non-governmental agency working to demonstrate sustainable, gender-sensitive processes for development. In spite of being a cancer survivor, Nafisa has played a leading role in the development of women community. She is recognised by the Government of India for the many roles she has played in the work of CAPART, NABARD, DWACRA as well as with civil society as a national leader. She has also been a model for the Bohra Muslim community for her dedicated service for all marginalised peoples.*

Nafisa Barot expressed the exceptional role of women who brought about peace and healing during and after the 2002 communal riots of Gujarat. They took lead in identifying common issues such as water, sanitation, place for washing, and inter-dependent livelihoods to create opportunities and build platforms for women affected by violence and others to dialogue, understand each other and thereby also create an enabling environment for accessing justice and addressing the root causes of communal violence. There is a lot of religion-based polarisation going on in the country and polarisation can be combated through peace building among all communities.

Nafisa remembered how her mother, Nasim Bano was her first teacher of peace, and because she had a flair for leadership, she would celebrate every festival, get the community together and mix with families from all religions. Whether her intention was to bring peace was not clear, but her ethics and lifestyle and her relations with people across religion worked through tough times. She would wear her traditional burkha but mix with others and maintain a cosmopolitan outlook. At times she would be irritated when people would say you don't look like a Muslim, you are so good ! Her father was forced to take early retirement because of religion-based internal politics in place where he worked and she grew up in anger to what happened to him but her mother would say "you can't take revenge by being violent". She could hardly understand these sentiments then : « A lot of what Gandhi said, was similar to what women like my mother practiced and taught their children in homes, that is, 'don't be violent be cooperative, be respectful of others take everyone along, reach out to people's hearts and minds'. What we need today is a culture that internalises these values ».

In 2002 when she and her group went into battered villages due to the carnage, there were broken and burnt down homes, broken people and pregnant women who had been refused treatment what does one say to these people...? They were scared and have mistrust in the Muslim community. At such a time some women came out and said we must do something to get the communal harmony back. In this post-conflict time among communities we found that we needed preventive measures in normal times to maintain sustained peace at all times. What was the root cause of what had happened? People came from all corners and said to the minority community, we could rebuild our lives and all is

not over there is some humanity left in all of us. Muslim women too reached out with equal sentiment.

The situation even today is not conducive to peaceful living, for there are cases of love jihad violence, and beef eating is raked up which hurts communal sentiments. There are talks that Muslims are getting converted to Hinduism and politicians are talking about '*ghar vaapsi*' ('*come home*') as a way of getting Muslims back to their original Hindu roots. Women and youth have been able to prevent conflict through reason and dialogue, and efforts continue, to keep peace among different communities. Women haven't kept these learning to themselves but are transferring them to the youth, who have taken to Gandhian ideals and are working for peace building with no vested interests attached to this work. These small drops will enable us to break the walls of hatred.

#### **4. Marginalised Voices**

This was an opportunity for 8 women from the grassroots to talk about their experiences as women struggling against poverty and exploitation. Also there was a youth forum of six women who also spoke about how they saw peace in the future.

In the remarks from grassroots women, they were social workers spanning six states in India and two countries outside India, namely Kenya and Trinidad. Each woman came from different contexts, some urban, and some rural. What was interesting was that they were all talking about how to handle violence in spite of the pervasiveness of conflict.

In the Youth Forum, there were perspectives from Gabriela of mobilising Afro-Brazilian women to bring change to the state on gender relations. Gabriella Caldarero is a practicing Italian Gandhian working on theorising what an alternative and local economy would look like. There was Roya, a Baha'i who is working on inter-religious dialogue in the violent areas of Durban in South Africa. Diana and Mariam who are trying to see how to act out peace in a region marked by frozen conflict. Leigh-Anne is working on peace education among girls and young women as they define their future trajectories. All of these left the impression of very hopeful stories from multiple narratives.

#### **5. Women and the justice system**

There are two articles in this section : one written by a senior Police Officer in India about the way justice and policing is carried out ; and the second by a feminist poet writer about how to replace punitive with restorative justice. These is an important interaction from two very different viewpoints.

**Anuradha Shankar** is the Assistant Director General of Police in the State of Madhya Pradesh. She is known as an exceptional police officer who has brought ethics and nonviolent tactics into the job. She is articulate and dedicated to the cause of justice.

If the caption “Nonviolence in Law Enforcement” looks like an oxymoron, the fault is at the very root of our view of governance. Had ‘Law Enforcement’ been replaced with ‘Police’ it wouldn’t prevent the contradiction. To ‘police’ is to enforce or at least guide under watch. Violence is ingrained in any system, which seeks to guard or protect as it must infringe on some rights to ensure the rights of others.

India’s struggle for freedom was unique for it was largely non-violent under the insistent guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. Free India however, chose its tools of governance from her Colonial inheritance. Why we did so is a subject of a full seminar if not a doctoral dissertation. All in all, the regime came to accept a status quo-ist executive and chose to police Independent India through a Police Act promulgated in 1861 and a Penal Code fixed in 1860. Even if their obvious relationship to the quelling of the First National Struggle for Independence may be forgotten for a while, the known world had walked a long way from mid-nineteenth century in 1947. The laws accepted in continuity by our brilliant law-makers were to say the least, anachronistic.

Over the last seven decades there have been hard-fought efforts to reframe laws to suit a changing society but have met with befuddling resistance. An obvious reason seems the administrative convenience of a ‘force’ in State control.

Violence is the preserve of the State in legal terms. This rests with the police within the borders of India. Barring self-defence the citizen has no right to violence. Even the State may resort to violence under extreme duress. This idealistic premise is known more in violation. When an organisation is a ‘Force’ tasked with maintaining the status quo, it has little inspiration to think of solutions other than the immediate. Fire-fighting and ‘maintaining Law and Order’ under any circumstance, with any tool at hand is a result of this cry for immediacy. Any expectation of non-violence in this scenario of rushing through solutions for defusing the crisis at hand would be unrealistic.

I don’t claim a high pedestal for myself when I recount my quarter century in the Police service. Taking the lead is easy for anyone in my exalted position as a supervisor of a force which still hobbles in its time-worn hierarchical edifice crafted as a feudal tool by the Raj. I am far removed from the grime of patrols, the labyrinth of investigation, the unbearable pressure of traffic in a country where rules cannot regulate an essentially anti-establishment population. Yet I have tried to do unto others as I wish they do unto me.

The place to begin with is my own department. It’s a finely tapering pyramid with a huge base. Strangely the top has more mass than the base. A senior is the dispenser of all things good and bad to the subordinate. I have tried to treat my police personnel as colleagues rather than juniors. My hope is that they will accord the same dignity to the people who seek their intervention in their woes.

As a supervisory officer I have tried to look at people's issues as one of them. All servants of the people are enjoined by our Constitution to be fair and just. It's a tough call in a society pulled asunder by shrill identities constantly crying for rights but unwilling to take any responsibility. Patience and empathy have been the most helpful tools in this attempt to assuage the hurt of the people.

While I cannot claim to have been mostly non-violent in my service, I've tried to break predetermined modes of violence in policing. An example that my teammates like to quote, is the raid on a weapons' factory run by Maoist extremists in Bhopal, an operation led by me. With a reward of over two million rupees on their heads, the five operatives that we arrested were sitting ducks for what Indians call an 'encounter'. The factory yielded lethal weapons and dies in thousands, enough to destroy a few well-populated cities in India. The public opinion veers towards the police in such scenarios. I wouldn't deny that there were enough hints from the Establishment to 'neutralise' the anti-nationals with promises of gallantry medals for me. Even the Maoists told us later during interrogations that they expected to be shot dead. They lived to be meted out with life-term sentences through a fair trial while I did get a bravery medal without shedding blood.

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Re-imagining Justice, by Dr. Corinne Kumar

**Corinne Kumar** was the founder of Vimochana, a Collective in Bangalore dedicated to women facing violence in the home, workplace and society. Born out of the Center for Informal Education and Development Studies (CIEDS) in 1979, Vimochana has also focused on larger issues of women and militarisation, especially from a gender and Global South perspective. « *Asking, We Walk: The South as A New Political Imaginary* » is a large tome of writings focused on these issues. Corinne has also been the Coordinator for the World Courts of Women and EI Taller International.

The frames that have defined by the institutions and instruments of justice have been drawn blinded to and mindless of gender; and have been based on the legitimated discrimination and degradation of women. Women have been denied, dispossessed, devalued. Women have been made invisible, excluded, erased. It is to this invisibility, to this disappearing that we speak, of female infanticide, dowry killings in India, rape all over the world, female genital mutilation in Africa, honour crimes in the Arab world, trafficking and sexual violence in Asia, inviting the women to tell their stories.

We must begin to speak truth to power, speaking to those who use, misuse, abuse power, yet also, speaking truth to those who are powerless- the indigenous, the tribals, dalits, the women, marginalised and oppressed people with no power the nameless, the faceless, the right-less. Ours is a journey of the peripheries of power, where power itself is being re-woven from the fabric of powerlessness.

We must speak too of *another notion of justice*; of jurisprudence, which bringing individual and collective justice and reparation will also be transformatory for all. A jurisprudence that is able to *contextualise* and *historicise* the crimes, moving away from a justice with punishment, a justice of revenge, a *retributive justice*, to a justice seeking redress, even reparation ; a justice with truth and reconciliation, a *restorative justice*, a *justice with healing*, healing individuals and communities. Can the tears and narratives of the women, these *sites of pain*, and these sites of devastation and destitution lead us to re-thinking and *re-imagining another way to justice* ? What ideas and sensibilities do we need to explore and to expand the imagination of justice? Refusing to separate the affective from the rational (juridical) creates a space in which emotive demands are allowed to be voiced and collective trauma is understood. This can be a step towards re-imagining this jurisprudence from within civil society in which we are able to creatively connect and deepen our collective insights and understanding of the *context* in which the *text* of our everyday realities is being written.

*We need to imagine justice, differently.*

There is an urgent need to challenge the centralising logic of the master narrative implicit in the dominant discourse of justice. This dominant logic is a logic of violence and exclusion, a logic of superior and inferior, a logic of civilised and uncivilised.

This centralizing logic must be decentered must be interrupted, even disrupted.

The *Courts of Women* interrupt; they speak to this disruption; to this trespass. The *Courts of Women* are finding new paradigms of knowledge and new paradigms of politics; a politics with an ethic of care, concern, community, and connectedness: a *politics with ethics*; a political vision that can bring change for all.

The Courts of Women return through testimony, the voices of the dispossessed to political discourse. In its search towards a new political imaginary, the Courts of Women work towards a politics with an *ethic of care*; for any theory of poverty (poverty lines, the World Bank one-dollar-a day, millennium development goals, poverty reduction strategies etc) that is disconnected from a theory of care will not listen to the voice of the other and simply leave the poor out: the new political imaginary speaks to an ethic of care, affirming one's responsibility to the other, an ethic that will include compassion, connectedness, community, *conviviality* (that wonderful phrase of Ivan Illich). The discourse and praxis of rights cannot mean only economic and political emancipation, but must challenge the current paradigms of thought and politics.

## **6. Voices of the Marginalised : Women Countering Exploitation and Poverty**

*By Kasturi Patel, (Madhya Pradesh) Manju Dung Dung (Bihar), Sandhya (Orissa), Laxmi (Jarkhand), Jaya (Karnataka), Pamela (Kenya), Ida Le Blanc (Trinidad), Meena (Gujarat)*

It is necessary to address issues of poverty and economic oppression among marginalised communities, and the growing divide between the rich and poor needs to be countered for there are wealthy states in India such as in Kerala where, money is on display in terms of lavish living spaces and then there are states like Bihar with 70 % poverty.

Because of poverty there has been an increase in violence against women (VAW) in many Indian states, and due to poverty there is a high level of human trafficking of women and girls. The state is doing very little to curb human trade. Women do not have rights over property or land and they are vulnerable and poor. Local women's leadership is often resisted and leaders are often shamed and harassed.

Identifying root causes is important said the Kenyan delegate, for women being landless does exist in Kenya, but no man can sell land without the permission/consent of the woman. Women had to struggle hard to get this constitutional law in place.

Wherever, marginalised communities are empowered and made aware of their leadership, they are able to negotiate and get their basic entitlements, as can be seen in Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere, where hundreds of poor farmers could demand their land and forest rights.

In Gujarat, the gender index of women in panchayats (local governance) is high and women members aspire to create a Salamat prashasan (a safe administrative constituency especially for women). They asked people and panchayats to identify places under their jurisdiction that are not safe for women and then began to make these into safe zones.

In Trinidad and Tobago, they mobilise domestic workers and they demand basic wages and rights in negotiations with the government.

Women in tribal belts had no property rights, but now in Jharkhand after the new laws are in place, thousands of people have got joint land/forest rights entitlements, in the names of both men and women.

## **7. Introduction to Global Peace**

The two articles that are in this section cover some of the primary issues of women at a global issues: firstly, the trafficking of women as a form of sexism and discrimination, and secondly, the refugee problem in Europe that is leading to a marginalisation of feminine voices that are calling for peace and social harmony.

The authors do not only refer to the problems but are quick to point out that there are nonviolent actors that are taking on these issues. "In every country where there are victims of trafficking, there are also associated people raising awareness, denouncing injustice, assisting victims, getting organized to exert pressure to pass and change laws to put an end to modern slavery and exploitation" says Corina Fuks from the SAIN party in Spain. In response to refugees, Margrit Hugentobler says: "People of all ages and background rush to provide material help and psychological support. Thousands of often

young volunteers spontaneously created support networks and new grassroots organisations”.

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A presentation on Breaking Chains against human trafficking, by Corina Fuks

*Corina Fuks is based in Spain and is an active member of SAIN (Spanish acronym for Internationalist Self-management and Solidarity) Political Party and a co-founder member of Liberata, a Spanish association that fights against human trafficking. She works as a translator and an interpreter, but her main job has been teaching English at different schools and universities in Argentina and in Spain for more than 20 years.*



In the next ten minutes at least another 20 children will have been sold and bought in the world, some of them, mostly girls, will be used for commercial sexual exploitation or forced into marriage, some other children for domestic servitude, some for bonded labour, or for all of these evils together, or even to have their organs removed. This is called Human Trafficking and conservative figures estimate that 46 million people (2016 Global Slavery Index) are victims of modern-slavery across the world. 800,000 million people are trafficked across international borders every year; most of them experiencing physical violence and abuse. The profits generated by this horrendous business make trafficking in persons the second most lucrative crime in the world. It is estimated that more than 70 % of these trafficked people are women and girls, and about 50 % children.

Yet, these are just numbers, but behind these appalling figures, there are names, mothers, fathers, daughters, sisters, brothers, shattered lives and dreams...

*We are talking about Paula, who was sold into prostitution when she was 15 years old; now she is 18 and still lives in a brothel in Argentina.*

*Camila, who is 11 and was sold for the first time into prostitution a couple of months ago to satisfy the demand during the last Olympic Games in Brazil.*

*The trafficking of Nigerian women from Libya to Italy by boat is reaching “crisis” levels, with traffickers using migrant reception centres as holding pens for women, who are then collected and forced into prostitution across Europe. About 3,600 Nigerian women arrived by boat into Italy in the first six months of this year.*

*In western Nepal, as many as 25,000 young girls are sold into indentured servitude for as little as 30 U\$A. Known as Kamlaris, these girls are sold like cattle. They are physically, sexually, and emotionally abused.*

*In the hilly forests of Jharkand, India, children as young as 10 are hammering flakes of rock off the mountainside. Others carry baskets of rocks to the top of the*

*mine to sort through their contents to separate glittering fragments from the rock debris. These fragments are mica, the mineral that adds a shimmer to our make-up.*

*Six-year-old Gharibgol was forced to marry a 55-year-old man in exchange for a goat, rice, tea, oil and sugar, in Afghanistan.*

*In Spain two children, both about 3 years old, were locked up in a house. They suffered from malnutrition and were given sedatives by their captors, who kept them captive to force their Nigerian mothers into prostitution in France.*

*To help support her family, 26-year-old Jocelyn left her home town in the north of the Philippines to work as a domestic worker in Singapore. A week later, she landed in the hands of an abusive couple who frequently beat her. The three-month ordeal was made worse when she did not receive the promised monthly salary and was wrongfully accused of stealing. After being forced to sign a confession letter, she was detained at the Changi Prison for women.*

In 2015, Bangladesh export industry set a new export record, benefiting companies such as H&M, Mango, Primark, Gap, Walmart, but the human cost behind the bargains, and not always just bargain shopping, is slavery. Workers are exploited and forced to work endless hours for a meagre salary in an environment of harassment, violence and abuse, where not even the most basic guarantees of safety exist. We have Rana Plaza collapsed building that killed 1,246 people reminding us all up to which extent this is true.

I would like to mention that I am laying the emphasis of this talk mainly on women and girls, however, this does not mean that slavery is limited to females. The greed for power and money also affects women's fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, partners, male friends... They are also enslaved in the fish industry, in the textile one, in mines, in agriculture and construction, in brick kilns, namely in mainly every single primary and secondary sectors... and hideously, the number of boys forced into prostitution is also dramatically growing.

To date, the social, mental and physical consequences of human trafficking for victims have received woefully limited attention, particularly when compared with law-enforcement and immigration responses to trafficking. For people who are trafficked, health damage is often cumulative, making it necessary to take account of each stage of the trafficking process. At each stage, children, women, and men may encounter psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse; forced or coerced use of drugs or alcohol; social restrictions and emotional manipulation; economic exploitation, inescapable debts; and legal insecurities. Risks often persist even after a person is released from the trafficking situation, and only a small proportion of people reach post-trafficking services or receive any financial or other compensation.

Human trafficking, however, does not occur in isolation. It is part of an exploitative system, where capital rules over labour. Any person asked would agree that human trafficking is an outrageous crime. In almost every country, at least in theory, it is illegal,

condemned and punished. Yet, it is essential to see that it is at the bottom of an oppressive system and that without legal speculation, unfair and dehumanizing migration policies and border controls that put these people in the hands of smugglers and traffickers, without unemployment, legal exploitation and the lack of workers' rights, human trafficking would hardly exist.

Exploitation and slavery exist because people's work and their dignity are being crushed by an unfair system. Work produced by human beings and people themselves are considered mere commodities that can be bought and sold in the search of maximum profits. Human trafficking is caused and fed by financial mechanisms and the primacy of economics over politics, wars, border walls, restrictive migration policies, lack of fair laws, a mafia-run institutionalised system, and of course multinationals' demand for cheap workforce along with our own demand for bargains or prostitution. Sadly enough, undoubtedly, also due to our indifference and inaction.

In every country where there are victims of trafficking, there are also associated people raising awareness, denouncing injustice, assisting victims, getting organised to exert pressure to pass and change laws to put an end to modern slavery and exploitation. I can mention: La Alameda association in Argentina; Shakti Samuha, a group of former Nepali sex slaves freeing women and girls from trafficking in India and China; in Spain, the Christian Cultural Movement has been denouncing child slavery for decades, as well as an Inter-ecclesiastical Group and a Network of associations that are working against human trafficking and assisting victims; in Mexico, the Human and Labour Rights Commission of Tehuacán; the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, in Pakistan; The Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Nigeria; Attawasol, an association of working women, in Morocco; only to mention a few. Being in India, I cannot fail to mention Apne Aap Women Worldwide, founded by Ruchira Gupta with twenty-two women from Mumbai's red light district. These women have passed away from hunger, suicide, and AIDS-related complications, but their work and vision of a world without slavery still continues today, reaching over 21,000 women and girls.

Our revolution is for peace, for freedom, for a sustainable world where there will be no hunger, no slavery and no exploitation; and even though we know we will not meet these goals, we are initiating processes that can engage others to do actions together, to march together and, by walking, to get closer and closer to the goals and, by walking, to pave the path to reach them some day for our future generations.

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A presentation on Emerging Global Crisis and solution, by. Margrit Hugentobler

*Margrit Hugentobler is a sociologist/political scientist and previous director of the ETH Centre for Research on Architecture, Society & the Built Environment (ETH CASE) in the department of architecture (ETH Zurich, Switzerland). Her research areas encompass housing quality, access to housing of different population groups and sustainable urban development. She has also been president of the CESCO Support Association in Zurich*



*since 1996, a 350 member volunteer civil society organisation.*

*The Association supports socio-cultural programme activities and village development projects of the Centre for Socio-Cultural Interaction in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India which was co-founded by Maya Koene, a Swiss activist and Rajagopal PV, the founder of Ekta Parishad. CESCOI Association also has supported the mobilising work of the social land rights movement that Ekta Parishad has been working on for many years. Margrit Hugentobler coordinates Ekta Europe, a network of small NGOs in the U.K. France, Germany, Belgium and Spain which are partners of Ekta Parishad. She is also member of the board of Bio-Re Foundation, supporting schools and livelihood development projects in farming communities in Madhya Pradesh and in Tanzania which produce organic cotton for the European market.*

According to a recent UN report, almost 60 million people are currently migrating. 19.5 million are refugees, who had to leave their home country ; 38.2 million have been displaced within their own countries ; 1.8. million are official asylum seekers. Not since World War II have there been migration streams of this magnitude, affecting, for example, countries such as the Lebanon or Jordan, which are neighbouring war-torn countries. Millions of families now live there in refugee camps with an uncertain future, in some cases for several years.

Other refugees, also including many families with children left Syria and Afghanistan in the direction of Europe. In addition, very young men and women arriving in Western Europe left their homes by themselves as children. Some have been "on the road" for several years, arriving in the countries where they seek asylum still underage. A large number of political as well as economic refugees – very often younger men – come from Africa and Mid-Eastern countries trying to reach Europe as the final target, and within the European continent in particular western countries with stable democratic systems and some measure of economic prosperity.

In 2014, almost 218.000 persons from African and the Middle East tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat. Around 3 500 persons drowned in the process, among them women and children. During the first half of 2016 alone, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported almost 3 700 people as dead or missing, an increase of almost 20 per cent compared to the first half year of 2015. The extent of worldwide displacement is unprecedented, says UN Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Gutierrez.

Migration from Africa is also a result of large population increases. While the population was 220 millions in 1959, it grew to 1.2 billion today. Because Africa is young, and Europe is "old" –70 million additional persons are needed just to keep the population stable (low birth rates) by the year 2050. However, in contrast to earlier waves of migration, when young farmer explored and sought land in uncharted territories, many of the current young male refugees are unqualified, but end up in cities who need mostly

highly qualified people. Two kinds of reactions are observed in target countries. Some typical earlier immigration countries like Australia, New Zealand – and lately also Great Britain have become so called competence fortresses. They secure their borders militarily and admit only the well-qualified. They don't want to lose their economically privileged positions (Heinson 2016). Other countries being part of the Schengen area with different immigration laws and regulation such as Germany, Italy, Austria, Scandinavian countries and Switzerland have more open borders for refugees, regardless of their qualifications. Yet, as the wave of refugees in the last 2-3 years has reached seemingly uncontrollable proportions, these doors seem to start closing, too.

At the very same time where an open door policy on the part of immigration countries would be the necessary, nationalist rightist movements are on the rise in many of those countries. Hungary, Polen and others in Eastern Europe – entry points from many refugees have closed their borders and simply refuse to follow an EU plan for the distribution of refugees. Even in Germany and Austria which had admitted close to a million refugees last year, political pressures from the right are forcing the governments to develop stricter policies. The unimaginable rise of Donald Trump as a serious contender for the U.S. presidency despite his blatant nationalist and racist comments is scarily indicative of some recent developments.

Solutions for problems with various causes and manifold consequences will have to be as creative and diverse as their causes are. An end to the wars in Syria, Afghanistan and other countries would take pressures off and reduce suffering, yet larger scale imbalances in population growth and economic development will remain long-term challenges. in the population, as witnessed in Russia and many other countries. Thus interventions have to focus at the policy level and at a broader international cooperation, which, however, is difficult at a time when local leaders strengthen their power by appealing to nationalist sentiments

Encouraging however, was the outpour of solidarity, support and active engagement of thousands of European citizens vis-à-vis the enormous number of refugees arriving at the European border last year. People of all ages and background rushed to provide material help and psychological support. Thousands of often young volunteers spontaneously created support networks and new grassroots organisations. Many of them are still functioning, often more effectively than large aid organisations. It is the individual non-violent engagement for human dignity and empathy with "the other" that will make a difference, at the same time strengthening the democratic liberal political forces in our own countries.

## **8. Women's Peace Army**

What is interesting about these two articles, is that it is a discussion between a woman from Canada, Anne Pearson, and a Gandhian leader and High Court Judge, C. Dharmadhikari from India. They both determine the importance of women in India in

building peace. They both show that women have a capacity to struggle nonviolently against injustice. The peace army was promulgated by Mahatma Gandhi, and later by Vinoba Bhave, and this was picked up more recently by Ramamurthy in 2002 in response to the Gujarat riots. Dharmadhikari shows how important a women's peace army is to transform behaviour and for purposes of ushering in a more peaceful society, and this leaves the reader that there are real solutions for addressing problems of conflict in the society.

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Women and women peace brigades, by Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari (Chairman  
Gandhi Research Foundation)

From time immemorial Indian woman were either exalted as Goddesses or shunned as demons. As a human being, or as an individual, she never enjoyed rights at par with men in social life. It was as though after the husband's death, a woman ceased to be a human being. In a sense, women constituted a second class humanity.

It is no wonder then that parallel to the freedom struggle, social reformers launched movements for women's liberation to emancipate and mainstream them into national life. Justice Ranade, Agarkar, Mahatma Phule, Mahatma Gandhi and Shri Karve will be remembered for their valuable contribution to this end. Mahatma Phule was the first social reformer to initiate the struggle for women's emancipation and equality; his efforts enabled women to enter political and social activities.

On January 26, 1931, The Congress party paid tribute Indian women at the commemoration of the first anniversary of the Independence Pledge... *'We record our homage and deep admiration for the womanhood of India who forsook the shelter of their homes and with unfailing courage and endurance, stood shoulder to shoulder with their men folk in the front line of India's national army, to share with them the sacrifice and triumphs of the struggle.'*

Pandit Nehru gave opportunities to women to advance in public life by placing them in important positions in the United Nations, foreign embassies, the Parliament and the State. However, women continue to be second class citizens notwithstanding the status of equality guaranteed under our Constitution, as if the life of a woman is a just a candidature for marriage or apprenticeship of motherhood. Women are the silent victims of most of the conflicts and are real targets of violence. We generally talk about empowering women, but do we really mean it or want it? All over the world, atrocities on women are increasing, domestic violence is rampant.

On 12 May 2000, on Mother's Day in New York, several thousand mothers resolved and demanded a ban on the manufacture of arms and their use. The race for arms is, in fact, just an expensive way of spreading and heightening fear. The balance of power theorists argue that by spreading fear, equalising it, so to speak, danger is reduced : « Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will, its seat is in the heart and it must be an inseparable part of our very being ». At one level, non-violence is a transcendental ideal,

at another level non-violence is a process, a way of life, an alternative to dealing with conflict. According to Gandhi's concept, non-violence was not a negative concept, but it was a positive approach to life.

Contrary to a misconception held by some people that it means civil defence, Gandhi called it a constructive programme, that is, the transformation of our social and economic institutions so that they are not a source of violence to certain segments of society and so they do not create conditions to which violence is the expectable response. Nonviolence lies in the degree to which humane values are embodied in its social institutions. These social institutions involve not only the relations of human beings to our natural environment but to other forms of life.

Worthwhile here, to note the observations of the great philosopher Krishnamurthy :  
*« People do not see the great challenge to the human consciousness of the computer and genetic engineering and new technologies. The threat is that human brain could deteriorate, perhaps even atrophy, if the muscles of the mind were not exercised ».* Ancient wisdom teaches us 'Vibhuti Yoga'- the worship of all, and the relationship with everybody that makes life rich. We believe in Advaita that is, oneness, harmony, co-ordination and mutual co-operation.

#### *Women Peace Brigade*

In India, the so called religious and spiritual country, foeticides and infanticides are being carried out on a large scale. Women will have a sense of security only when they are under self-protection. Admittedly, shanti sena, particularly mahila shanti sena, is the need of the hour.

To that end, we have to change the entire conception and the way of thinking about our culture. We have to build up a new culture of peace and harmony both inside and outside our homes. Unless that is done, there would be no end to the acts of violence against women and children in our society. It was with such a perspective that Gandhiji had stated that constructive programme would provide a real foundation for Swaraj, he had also made a proposal for shanti sena as far back as 1938, he wrote in Harijan: 'I have placed a proposal for Peace Brigade/Shanti Sena. The shanti sainiks would work for peace and harmony putting even their lives at stake ; they will play a very crucial and useful role particularly at the time of communal riots. Their pristine reputation would be their earning. *There is a need for such sainiks who would replace regular police/army by making their use as redundant*'

Not only that, they have to rise above the feelings of caste, creed, region and religion. Their role has become all the more important as the conflict-situation in our society are always on the increase. In fact, a similar situation is also prevailing at the universal level. Hence, they have to play a constructive role at the universal level. The real challenge before shanti sainiks, whether at local or international level is to create an environment of peace and brotherhood.

In the present atmosphere of globalisation and marketing system, man himself has become a marketable commodity. The present marketing system has commodified women,

in beauty contests a beautiful woman is selected by those who want the lion's share of the market for their commodities.

Emerson was right when he said that the position of women in any civilisation could provide a singular yardstick to judge its quality.

Gandhiji himself put forward the idea of *shantisena* particularly *mahilashantisena*. It is a matter which deserves serious consideration. Talking about the programme of *shantisena* he said: « A shantisainik's life was to be built up on the basic principle of freedom from fear, partiality and enmity ». Gandhiji wanted women to work as mahilashanti sainiks, because it was here that the possibility of developing soul power and women power was possible.

Thus the idea of a Mahila Shanti Sena, is one of the major contributions of Gandhiji in recognising women as peace builders.

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The Gandhian-inspired Mahila Shanti Sena Movement in India (& its Partnership with Canadians), by Dr. Anne Pearson

*Anne M Pearson has a PhD in Religious Studies, specialising in ritual, gender and Hinduism from McMaster University Ontario and has published and taught courses in the fields of South Asian religions, gender, and peace studies at McMaster, and at the Universities of Toronto and Waterloo in Canada. She has been active in many community organisations including as chair of the Annual Hamilton Gandhi Peace Festival, and chair of the Hamilton Interfaith Peace council. In India she has been associated with the Gandhian-inspired Mahila Shanti Sena movement since its inception at Vaishali, Bihar in 2002. This brief paper discusses the creation and development of the Gandhian-inspired Mahila Shanti Sena, or women's peace brigade that was inaugurated by Acharya Ramamurti in Vaishali Bihar in 2002, and its Canadian connection.*

The Mahila Shanti Sena is a loosely organised movement aimed at fostering women's leadership in the creation of a culture of peace and prosperity at village levels. The overall goal was to prepare women to be agents of change in community building and in conflict resolution. Women would help other women to find solutions to problems they face, including domestic and other forms of violence, alcohol abuse, and lack of access to education and employment. The MSS has provided training in collective action leadership and women's legal rights, while promoting the Gandhian tradition of engaging in constructive village service. The MSS is not identified with any particular religion, political party or social group. It does evoke and utilise principles that Gandhi identified as crucial to India's development, including nonviolence, equality of women and men, education as a pre-requisite for self-determination, self-reliance, consultative decision-making, service and the spirit of sacrifice for the common good.

*The Formation of Ramamurti's Mahila Shanti Sena*

In encouraging women to become actively engaged in the nationalist movement, Gandhi described women as having special capacities for self-sacrifice and for leadership in peace building. He said that the world had been too long dominated by ‘masculine’ aggressive qualities and that it was time that the ‘feminine’ qualities to come to the fore; Gandhi also suggested that men need to generate womanly qualities in them to become nonviolent, as he himself had done. Since women, he thought, are accustomed to making sacrifices for the family, they can now extend such a spirit of sacrifice for the country. He invited all women to get enlisted in his non-violent army. Thousands of Indian women from all walks of life did respond to his call to become actively involved in India’s struggle for independence. Yet, after independence, the momentum behind the encouragement of women’s leadership dwindled, and the linkage between women’s advancement, a country’s development and the achievement of a culture of peace was obscured.

Further, Gandhi’s prescription for bottom-up, locally-directed and inclusive social, political and economic development was largely ignored by India’s political leadership. While Article 40 of India’s Constitution provided that « the state shall take steps to organise village *panchayats* (councils) and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government », it had not been meaningfully implemented. The lack of implementation led to a growing demand for a stronger constitutional mandate for local governance. This demand was met by the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India in December 1992, which required the reservation of one third of the total number of panchayat seats for women. With the enactment of these Amendments, a new hope for women’s influence in local governance was raised. In Bihar, a state with one of India’s highest illiteracy rates and population densities, the April 2001 elections resulted in 45,000 women being elected to panchayats. Most of these women found themselves elected to public office for the first time, and many of them found themselves ill-equipped for the challenge due to illiteracy, inexperience in the process of village councils and public decision-making.

Renowned Gandhian Acharya Ramamurti, director of the Bihar-based organisation Shrambharati Khadigram, was among those who realised that after these elections the large numbers of women now sitting on these councils was an extraordinary opportunity for women to regain the lost momentum of the years leading to India’s independence. As panchayat members women could begin to influence policy priorities at the local level in a way that truly met the needs of women, children, families and communities. Ramamurti began to work on a plan to invite some of the elected women to a week-long training camp to assist them to become better equipped for their new roles, and to facilitate change in their communities. Referring to Gandhi’s idea of establishing a *shanti sena* (“peace force”) he decided to call the trained women the *mahila shanti sena* or “women’s peace corps”. As Ramamurti said, « The village community needs an army of peace-workers, who will not fight among themselves but are willing to solve problems and resolve conflicts and disputes peacefully. In this task of neighbourhood-building, women are likely to be better than men. [...] Can we not use her [woman’s] creative talents to make society more humane and enlightened? » What Ramamurti had in mind also was Gandhi’s statement

that « If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women (Young India, 10:4:1930) ».

The first MSS training took place in 2002, followed by a meeting of Gandhian activists and academics who gathered in the village of Vaishali, Bihar to consider the implications of *panchayatiraj*, the need to promote participatory democracy and women's role in peace-building. Vaishali was chosen due to its historical association with the Buddha and Mahavira, and because it is near the area where Gandhi launched his *satyagraha* against the British control over indigo farming. It was during this campaign that Gandhi also first introduced women-led education initiatives.

A friend of Acharya Ramamurti, professor Rama Singh of Canada, organised a delegation from the McMaster Centre for Peace Studies, and I had the privilege of attending the initial founding of the MSS in February 2002, just as a fresh outbreak of Hindu-Muslim communal violence erupted across the country in Gujarat. At this gathering, the first group of a hundred or so *shanti sainiks* ("peace workers"), rural and largely low-caste women who came from nearby districts shared with us some personal stories. We heard statements such as : « I was just nine when I got married—I did not even know the meaning of marriage—no daughters should be forced to be married so young. My daughter will be married according to *her* wishes. Education is crucial ». Another said: « If women become the leaders, there will be a change in women's conditions [such as] an increase in education. Many women die in childbirth – there would be a reduction in such crimes ». One woman noted that for women to become leaders they need to start at home with themselves, and « We have to peacefully oppose men and others in our homes who try to suppress us. We need the support of other women. We have to work together to be successful. To get the society that we want will take many painful steps. Even members of your own families will oppose you. But we need to persevere. Can we all accept the challenge of this suffering to bring about change ? » Another women concluded that « In this gathering, with this orange scarf [worn by all the Shanti Sena women], I feel very proud. After learning about peace here, I want to go to every village [and tell what happened]. I should follow my duty and light the whole nation. I beg all of you that I can see a better future for women ».

With such words communicated in a powerful manner by women who had direct experience of the effects of poverty, systemic and social violence, lack education and often lack of encouragement, it was clear that they knew what the priorities should be. It was a matter of working together to find solutions -not from the government, not from some outside agencies, but from among themselves. That is what the MSS is all about.

### *Development of the MSS*

Since 2002 hundreds of women in seven states (Bihar, UP, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Odisha) have taken the vow to be Mahila Shanti Sainiks following training. Tens of thousands have participated in peace marches, assemblies, and one-day workshops. In addition, partnerships were formed between local MSS groups and NGOs, from UNICEF in Bihar, to the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh in Guwahati, Assam, to Unnayun in Odisha, among others. Relationships with Indian universities (e.g.,

Women's College at the University of Jammu) and with Gandhian organisations were established. Despite minimal funds (and the deaths of Acharya Ramamurti and his right-hand man in the North-East, Gandhian elder Ravindra Upadhyaya in 2010), numerous stories of success have been reported. The Mahila Shanti Sena has focused on peace-building and problem-solving skills to an unusual degree among comparable grass-roots development organisations. Violence and its threat remain a constant hindrance to the security and sustainable development of many local communities in India. Women are often targeted by violence. Being given some simple tools to prevent and reduce conflict, and address direct violence, as well as being supported by the strength of numbers, is a vital feature of the Mahila Shanti Sena, bearing witness to its name. Inspired by the vision of the MSS and emboldened to take action, women shanti-sainiks have worked collectively in villages to close toddy shops where availability of alcohol was allowing the squandering of scarce resources by male family members; cases of rape and domestic abuse situations—often ignored by local police—have been addressed, as have been disputes between neighbours. In Assam, insurgents were turned away at the door in extraordinary acts of courage. Here is one example from 2012 of Shanti Sainik actions described in a meeting in Bhubaneswar, Odisha: A peaceful protest by 150 MSS women in front of the Block Development Office resulted in allocation of much needed funds for a road in the village, reminding everyone of the power of unity and purpose. In another case, Damayanti from Sambalpur spoke about her group's initial struggles to be heard and the opposition women faced from men of the village and police. Then an opportunity came to solve a big problem affecting the whole village. Her village had a fish farm where they had worked very hard, but just before harvest time, some people from a neighbouring village started claiming the fish farm and the fish as theirs. The men of the two villages started fighting but the men from the other village had more power and filed court cases against them. At this point, the women resolved to do something about the injustice. They came in great numbers riding tractors, bicycles, and on foot seeking justice in the case and offering their testimony about the truth of the matter. They won not only the fish for the village but also the respect of others in their ability to speak out and their determination. There has been some literacy training and the establishment of self-help groups—each success creating a momentum for change and instilling greater confidence and respect among the women protagonists.

At such gatherings of women shanti sainiks such as the one at Bhubaneswar, stories of challenges and successes serve to encourage women to continue to struggle for social change and justice.

Let me turn now to say more about the Canadian connection to the MSS. The Canadian connection to the MSS was McMaster's Centre for Peace Studies was able to get funding from a Canadian government agency (CIDA) over several years to send one or two undergraduate students to India for up to three months to learn about the MSS. Some 16 students have participated, and each has returned to Canada greatly affected by their experiences. I supervised many of the students who used the Mahila Shanti Sena as a case study to investigate the role of civil society in strengthening democracy, building effective forms of local governance, the promotion of education for girls, and gender and health

issues. Students conducted interviews with dozens of women involved with the MSS, and their research was then sent back to India in the hope that their analyses would be helpful to the MSS. One young woman reflected on her experience in the following words: “Acharayaji and Ravindrabhai planted the MSS seed. Since then, the women have truly rolled with it. I remember walking somewhere with Ravindrabhai [and he said to me], « you know, the very act of us walking here -in conversation, a man and a woman- is changing things. It’s changing minds; and that’s enough ». She further commented: « A revolution—I learned from the MSS—was built with slow, intentional and community-based efforts, and was as much about the mind as it was about the community... » Another student related to me that, « The personal interviews that we conducted [...] was truly a life changing experience, on a very simple level... It demonstrated to me how much you can learn about people simply by asking. The women that were a part of this movement were looking for changes and the way they understood change was very much about sharing their experiences (with one another, but also with us). [...] When one of the only tools you have is your story, words become much more powerful ». Another said: « My biggest lesson from India has been in the importance of community; the understanding that no individual or family can achieve success, unless the community as a whole is thriving together ». Meanwhile, to help raise awareness of the MSS, enable fundraising, and share learning from India that may be applicable in the Canadian context, the MSS International was established as a Canadian incorporated NGO in 2008. Rama Singh, its founder, and another professor from Canada, continue to travel to India regularly and have helped organize various conferences related to MSS where members of the MSS, Gandhian scholars, university faculty, and other groups who have partnered with the MSS may meet and share information about the goals, strategies and successes of the Mahila Shanti Sena. An e-newsletter was established that keeps readers informed of the progress of MSS.

## **9. Voices of youth**

Gabriella Calderao works as a volunteer with the Gandhi Centre at Pisa, Italy. She has recently received her Masters Degree in Economics and has published a book on Gandhian Economy. She got interested in Gandhian Economics as it is an economy for life, that it supports all life forms and nature’s existence. She believes that social transformation can take place peacefully with Gandhian principles of Satyagraha and as we can see it happening in South Africa during Gandhi’s struggles with racism in that country. We can practice *shramdan* (voluntary labour), as enunciated by Gandhi, which leads to the dignity of labour and this conveys that all work is equally important, whether it is manual or intellectual, nonviolent economy means that we also need to dedicate one hour to communal activity daily. Nonviolent economy means generating appropriate technology, such that it does not create violence but it is nonviolent by nature and it is not harmful to anyone. Gandhian principles are relevant even today as they speak of decentralisation of decision-making powers. Mass-industrialisation has led to degradation of the environment and created mass poverty too. This is evident with the depletion of the ozone layers in the

atmosphere. This means we need to control our production processes. Practices should not destroy land but sustain it; freedom of trade should be seen as of mutual benefit and cooperation, not a way of the few dominating the many.

Gabriela Monteiro is a black feminist from the Northeast of Brazil. She has worked for seven years as a political adviser for the Movimento da Mulher Trabalhadora Rural do Nordeste (MMTR-NE), a grassroots movement led by rural women. She graduated in journalism with a specialisation in gender, development and public policies and she is currently pursuing a master's degree in women's studies, gender and feminism. Gabriela spoke about her work as a black activist in Brazil organising women to fight against militarism, sexism and racism. The actual march she showed in photographs was an intentional nonviolent act with women coming together to offer support and solidarity. They were happy and created a spirit that was uplifting and positive, recognising women as a social power in the society.

Diana Giglemieni and Mariam Gellashivilli from Caucasian University Georgia. Diana and Mariam have just completed their Masters Degrees in International Relations from Caucasian University in Tblisi. They are both involved in the Gandhi Foundation in Georgia, which helps to raise issues of peace and acting nonviolently. « Gandhi is not just father of the nation, he is father of nonviolence to the world, and reading about him tells us how to live ». These young girls gave the audience a surprise by narrating a beautiful story about Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.

*Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had a quarrel. One word led to another, and suddenly Prince Albert angrily stormed out of the bedroom, went to his study, slammed the door and locked it. Queen Victoria ran after him, knocked on the door and demanded, "Open!" There was no answer. She pounded the door with her fist and shouted, "Open at once!!" No answer. She shouted at the top of her voice, "I am the Queen of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the Empress of India and of the entire British Commonwealth, I am the Commander in Chief of all the British armed forces, and I order you hereby to open this door!!!" Still no answer, finally she said in a soft voice, "Albert, I am sorry, I love you and miss you." Now the door opened. This shows that nonviolence is more powerful than violence.*

If we want to reach real peace in this world we should start educating children first. The young Georgians then went on to quote Gandhi: « If you want to see change, be the change you want » ». They then quoted what John W. McDonald, the founder of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy when he said: « There are three types of people: 1) Those who talk of problems, 2) Those who write about problems, and 3) those who do something for prevention and change of problems ». Young people in their circle, they felt should be enrolled in peace activities in order to find out what is their role during conflicts. They explained the situation their country, South Caucasus that is located in a region full of

conflict. In Georgia, young women are the worst affected by these conflicts. They bear the brunt because when war comes, they often become targets of sexual violence, their husbands and children may be killed – leaving them without support, and they are themselves the majority of casualties of war. Women make up 80 % of those who have to flee their homes. Young people are at the heart of conflict. They are the ones who are left to deal with the lasting consequences of war. We believe that young people have the power to find their own solutions to conflict – and to build their own better futures because they learn about the wider world, and make links with peers in different cultures.

Roya Vajravandi: Interreligious Dialogue, South Africa. Roya Vajravandi has lived in South Africa for the past decade and has made it her home. She has just completed her Masters Degree in Peace Studies at the Durban Institute of Technology in South Africa. As a peace educator and from the Baha'i Faith, she has written her thesis on educating young people and children in peace. Roya is an active member of an ecumenical interreligious dialogue group. Roya asked a pertinent question: What were you taught when you were growing up about people from other communities ? Talk about a positive and memorable interaction you have had with someone from a community outside your own. Her maternal parents are from Glasgow, Scotland, her paternal grand parents from Iran, Zoroastrians, she married an African from Mozambique. So much mixing has gone on in her family. So they have inter-religious forums and groups in South Africa and they get together to discuss all matters pertaining to peace and harmony in homes and society. Roya spoke about Ubuntu. Ubuntu is an ancient African word meaning « humanity to others » (« I am, because you are ») and it is a perfect name for faith in your humanity and faith in others humanity as well.

Leigh Ann Ingram is a teacher, researcher, activist, and teaches at the Faculty of Education Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. Her research explores issues of global girlhood and youth, gender equality, social justice, citizen participation, and international development. With over 15 years of professional experience in education and development, she has worked with a variety of civil society organisations in Canada, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Leigh Ann too comes from diverse family background and she went to educate herself even though her grandparents really struggled in their life in Toronto as working class people. Peace and justice are important and what is peace if there is no justice? She is the initiator of 'Project Citizen-girl', in Toronto, Canada, which uses participatory methodologies using photography and film in her research with young women to explore issues of gender equity, citizenship and schooling. She was also a co-creator of the Real Change Girls' Film-making Project where she supported young women to produce short films exploring issues facing girls and women in Canada today. This helps young women re-imagine gender. They do it using a media which they can control, through photo-voice which gives them a basis from which to handle and reflect on resistance and gender inequalities. The learning from this was used to fuse to better relations between

women and peace groups between Canada and India through an exchange program, known as PEHRLE.

Saraswati, Land Rights Movement of Nepal. Saraswati is a land rights activist in Nepal that is supported by the Community Self-Reliance Centre. As a young and strong woman, she travels to villages educating and organising village people that are deprived of their basic rights to land. Through various programs Saraswati empowers them to lead free, secure and dignified lives. Saraswati spoke about the young people of her country. She is land rights activist and said in villages in Nepal, the society is agrarian and women are fighting for their rights to have land property, and reservation in politics. There is much happening in Nepal, and the government is trying to make reforms in many areas of public life. There is a new Constitution, and a new women's commission, which is redefining the property rights of women and the spaces available for women's leadership. Side-by-side efforts to do capacity building of women, there needs to be women leaders. Young women are being encouraged and education is being promoted everywhere. Women are also being trained to be entrepreneurs and do independent business and trade. They need to also come into the social field in order to link urban and rural women.

## **5. Planning peace**

After hearing all these discussions in the gathering it was decided to connect the women and peace efforts with the Jai Jagat campaign in the form of a Jai Jagat Manifesto. This can be found in this section.

### *Plan for Jai Jagat International Campaign: 2016-2020*

There was sharing of the « vision » of the “Jai Jagat (Peace for the World) Campaign 2020”, planned by the Ekta Parishad Trust. This campaign starts from 2016 and culminates in Geneva on 10th December 2020 (Human Rights Day). In Jalgaon, a power point presentation of Jai Jagat campaign was made by P.V. Rajagopal, at New Delhi, Margrit Hugentobler gave an introduction to the campaign and Santhosh Singh of Ekta Parishad could speak about the campaign's to a small group of media friends at Delhi.

The Ekta Parishad International Campaign aims at spreading the message of Jai Jagat visualised as one big family (*kutumba*) and Jai Jagat also implies the victory of the world, the victory of all. The campaign as planned will begin by first taking the message to grassroots level, after that come up with programs for sharing of vision at the state level, gradually bringing the programs and message to the national level in New Delhi. Finally the group of around 250 activists will begin their march from New Delhi to Geneva

covering a journey of 8700 km across 14 states and international borders, to reach Geneva on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and to stay there until October 2nd, 2020. Here the friends in solidarity with the campaign, will connect with During the course of International Women's Meet on Nonviolence and Peace 2016, from Jalgaon to New Delhi the international community and engage with others to spread the message across the world.

Upon arrival at Geneva, there will be a shared meal around Lake Geneva with the host of friends and supporters of Ekta Parishad and those in solidarity with the Jai Jagat movement.

The guiding thought of the campaign is « In a world torn by silence and violence, we need to come together to introduce active nonviolence ». The international campaign of the Ekta Parishad sends out the message that « victory of the world is the victory of all humanity » as conveyed by Gandhi's use of the term 'Sarvodaya' or the good of all and the development of all.

From 2106 onwards, programs will begin from local to state level, then to national level. Thereafter activists will travel taking the Jai Jagat message from Delhi to Geneva. In Geneva, Jai Jagat 2020 will culminate in an international 2 week action (September 19th, to October 2nd). At the same time, local action around the world is being planned.

- \* **Youth to be in focus: trainings on nonviolent concepts and practices to be promoted, to prepare the next generation for a peaceful coexistence with themselves, others and with the planet Earth.**
- \* **Collaborative global activities planned with other countries using principles of nonviolence.**
- \* **Women's leadership : Women to be trained on nonviolence and peace, and then, for them to create core groups of local, national and international peace-builders. There needs to be opportunities created for women occupy key positions as peace negotiators and women need to build the capacity to carry this forward. They will be guided by the Jalgaon Declaration.**
- \* **Aspirations for a Nonviolent Economy : An international conference to be held in India in march 2018 where economists/activists are set to deliberate and forge innovative change around the "nonviolent economy."**

### *The Jalgaon Declaration*

The three-day program, concluded with the delegates unanimously endorsing the Jalgaon Declaration. The International Women's Meet on Nonviolence and Peace held in the Gandhi Research Foundation, Jain Hills, Jalgaon, Maharashtra was a grand event. Over 150 grassroots peace activists and leaders from over 15 states of the country and peace promoters from 25 countries across the globe congregated to discuss and share experiences of nonviolence action-marking this as a historic conference at a time when conflict worldwide is on the ascendancy. The Women's Meet ushered in a new wave of

grassroots women activists involved in nonviolent action for social change, thereby enhancing existing movements in India and many internationally. Women's leadership is believed to be on the threshold to move to the next level of capacity building, this time, for peace building and strengthening collaboration to reduce conflict. To take forward this movement, a Jalgaon Declaration has been endorsed. It reads :

**We, the participants of International Women's Meet on Nonviolence and Peace – 2016 (IWMNP – October 02 - 04, 2016), unanimously call upon all, to express the urgent need for full implementation of socio-economic and political rights for all peoples. We envisage a consolidation of national and international solidarity initiatives to ensure women, children and men, a secure and peaceful world.**

**To achieve this goal of peaceful coexistence, the IWMNP-2016 commits itself to nonviolent means to promote social, economic and ecological justice. We reiterate the necessity of a lasting and substantive peace which needs to be, and is deeply linked to social justice and inclusion of all people.**

**We the participants of the International Meeting on Women's Non-Violent Action, affirm that**

- \* The fundamental dignity of each individual should be upheld.**
- \* The human right to live in peace is basic to all other rights.**
- \* Women have a crucial role in peace building through nonviolent action.**
- \* Peace is not possible without women's full participation in all areas of human life,**
- \* Men are equal partners in this endeavour, and need to work along with women in the advancement of Peace.**

**We also declare the need to take further action to:**

- \* Protect and honour the rights of our Mother Earth.**
- \* Reflect on relationships; lead a life without fear and conflict, freedom to make choices and to continue to oppose the different forms of injustice inflicted on women.**
- \* Work to make transparent and to oppose the structural violence of the current economic systems.**
- \* Urgent need to review and make transparent, the inadequacy of the current "development" model that often neglects marginalized people's interest.**
- \* Continue to build an international network of women's nonviolent peace activists.**

**\* Mobilize women and promote partnership for specific unified actions nationally and globally.**

**FINALLY, We Women implore and urge country governments to listen to women's voices, their wisdom and experiences. Include women in all peace and conflict resolutions/negotiations and recognize their peace building initiatives, which impact the lives of millions of people at all levels across the Globe.**