

A revolution in education. Taking inspiration from Gandhi



Matthew Jones

Gambhir Watts, President of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Australia, inspired by Ela Gandhi (grand-daughter of Mahatma Gandhi) announced the International Centre of Non-violence in Australia on 2nd of October 2012 - on the birth anniversary of Gandhi, and the International Day of Non-violence as declared by the United Nations. This was its formal launch function, and in attendance was a high profile mix of politicians, academics, NGO's and the legend herself Ela Gandhi.

The beginning of the event was to signify a common theme running through it, that of diversity, peace and multiculturalism, as the Fort Street High Peace Band performed three National Anthems of Australia, India and South Africa in the theatre foyer of Parliament House; the whole crowd stood in silence as the moral significance of the evening ahead sunk in to the music. Ela Gandhi is a former Chancellor of the Durban University of Technology, member of South African parliament aligned with the ANC, as well as current Honourable International President of the World Conference on Religions for Peace, and Vice chairperson of the International Centre of Nonviolence, South Africa, which has been working for 43 years to educate young people as young as three years old in non-violence.

Present at the meeting, among others was Gambhir Watts, Founder and Chief Coordinator, Moksha Watts, convener, Victor Dominello, Minister for Citizenship and Communities, His Excellency Biren Nana, High Commissioner of India, Senator Lisa Singh of Tasmania, Dr Phil Lambert, Department of Education and Communities, Emeritus Prof Rees, and Ela Gandhi. Those unfamiliar with Ela Gandhi's work were in no doubt about the gravity and weight her presence signified upon hearing the various speeches and proceedings. All politicians displayed reverence and admiration, some acknowledging her as a point of reference for inspiration in their work. Dr

Lambert expressed admiration for her energy and passion, while Senator Singh noted it was a huge night in the history of her political career to be in the same room as Gandhi.

Icon works to make strategic interventions in education, through educators and curricula, teaching and writing that challenges structural violence, enabling learning untainted by violence and advance a culture of nonviolence. It works through reflective practice and focused research to develop and disseminate its understanding and to build networks of educators with a similar vision and commitment. It is inspired by the work of Mahatma Gandhi, who's philosophy and moral code has been taken and adapted through Ela Gandhi's work in South Africa, both in parliament and as someone who worked at a grassroots level as an advocate who's goal according to her was to "bring about awareness among people". It is a welcome movement, coming as it does in a climate of global economic recession, wars raging in the Middle East, and where egoism is said to dominate altruism (Rees).

The essence of nonviolence is that of linguistics and our current educational practices, which place priority on skills and employability over moral concerns. According to Rees, in a fascinating lecture "Practicing Non Violence", which referenced among others, Shelley, Thoreau, Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, Burmese leader Aung Sann Suu Kyi, "inventory of violence is worldwide. The language and practice of violence matches macho cultures, yet the alternative, the language and practice of non-violence, is much more health promoting and life enhancing.....Bhavan Australia, breathes those values and speak that language. Bhavan includes in its objectives, 'advances in education of the public in literature, music, dance, the arts and in languages and philosophies of the world'."

Indeed, the key theme running through all the proceedings was that of respect and admiration for different cultures, through the practice of non-violence. Rees cited Gandhi as evidence of this "the need of the moment is not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions".

To some, the evening also signified the growing tolerance in Australia for its growing multicultural community. In attendance was Mr. Vish Viswanathan, President, Federation of Aus. Indian Associations, who told me with pride "Project Icon is one more relevant contribution by the 400,000 strong Australian Indian Community to growing multiculturalism in Australia. By sowing the seeds of non-violence through educating Australian youth we continue to strengthen the fact that Australia is not a racist country." Here's to that, and a future where nonviolence is a reality.

"Non-Violence, the Gandhi – Word"

Bandy the singing professor, UNSW,
Sydney, Australia



Dr Sri Bandyopadhyay

Non-violence - the word of the day
Preached, persevered,
and promoted by
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
Going back one hundred years away.

An 'eye for an eye' and a
'tooth for a tooth'
Will drown the world into a 'helled down'
booth
Where there will be no humanity left
As did truly our Gandhiji in
his heart felt.

Gandhi's thoughts have
diffused over time
The Sabarmati river in India carries his
peace rhyme
No-doubt, east and west
'Non-violence' is the best.

Welcome Non-Violence Centre Founder
Madam Ela
At Sydney Australia, we give her 'UNSW
FASS Fellow'

Welcome Mr Biren Nanda,

Honourable HC India
Thanks Mr Gambhir Watts
Bhavan Australia.

Do we know Gandhiji started his life's
non-violence 'Swastika'
From no place other than the lovely
Republic of 'South Africa'.