Proposal by Kusum Singh
April 11, 1993

NEW ARTS of GANDHIAN DEMOCRACY:
Creative Nonviolent Activism

This project's aim is to explore the process of reinventing nonviolence as one path toward strengthening democracy in a world of escalating violence. This process has been going on for a long time--but it is a story that has thus far remained untold.

Nonviolent movements have often sparked historic democratic advances. In India, nonviolent activists achieved what had long been deemed impossible: liberation from the British empire. In Africa and Asia, other colonies followed suit. In the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe (with the exception of Romania) and the Philippines, the "impossible" happened again. In Greece, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Nicaragua, authoritarian regimes were displaced peacefully.

But under the new conditions of post-cold war disorder, democracy is now threatened by violence: civil wars, ethnic "cleansing" and terrorism. In all parts of the world--even those rich in wealth and technology--people suffer from violent crime, domestic violence, murder or terrorism. A cultural environment of justified violence often dominates not only in relations among cultures and nations but also in many homes, neighborhoods, schools and work places. The legacies of such non-violent leaders as Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrei Sakharov and Vaclav Havel are now rarely remembered, understood or regarded as relevant. This is one of the many reasons why nonviolence as part of the arts of democracy needs reinvention.

I began by studying the story of Mohandas Gandhi. As a moral and political leader, Gandhi's actions and writings spanned half a century and influenced people throughout the world. He saw the possibility that people of different religions, races and cultures would work non-violently together as partners in the world community. Many of these values had been earlier voiced in the ancient texts of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism--and also in Buddhism, Taoism and Shintoism. Gandhi's constant "experiments with truth" achieved results far beyond the perceived realm of possibility. For Gandhi, politics was not merely the "art of the possible." He forged non-violent activism into the improbable arts of democracy.

I then went on to study Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrei Sakharov and Vaclav Havel. But my major work--more attuned to the last years of the 20th century--has been obtaining personal testimonies (through almost 200 interviews) of lesser known or unknown women and men in many parts of the world. They have been telling me the stories of their struggles on behalf of basic human rights--often for economic and social as well as civil and political rights. With some exceptions, they have avoided the temptation of becoming charismatic leaders in the Weberian sense.

Proposal by Kusum Singh-2

Most of them have found ways of communicating their messages without undue reliance on the mass media. Many of them have been making progress in escaping cultures of male superiority and allowing women to emerge as full (or almost full) partners. Some have used new confrontational methods that respond to unique situations and pave the way toward resolving conflicts without bloodshed. With the help of these in depth interviews and some participant observation, I hope to develop demonstration models based on the work of human rights activists, lawyers, politicians, business people, media workers and religious leaders.

My research also indicates that many leaders today confront serious obstacles--particularly well articulated arguments that violence is needed as a so-called "last" resort. Violent emotions and actions have deep instinctual and cultural roots. Some of these are patriarchal in nature. There is also the obstacle of a semantic tangle. Gene Sharp, for example, has brilliantly combed historic records to provide important examples of militant activism, demonstrations, withdrawal of support (including civil disobedience), and strong nonviolent sanctions. These are seen as techniques to be used where ordinary democratic procedures are not available. In a larger sense, however, the processes of constitutional democracy (elections, political parties, adjudication, legislating, majority decision and minority rights) go far in resolving conflicts without violence--although they rarely carry the "nonviolent" label. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its follow-up covenants also strengthen commitments to nonviolence. Recent U.N. actions around the world demonstrate that armed force under strict control may sometimes be necessary (as Gandhi himself realized) to prevent or stop bloodshed.

With this broader approach it becomes clear that nonviolent values have been accepted in principle throughout the world. In fact, they are inherent in the ethical principles of major religions. Although these principles have been widely violated, it is nonetheless clear that nonviolence in one form or another has always been a major part of human life. Historically, women, since they had no choice, became the pioneers in the invention of nonviolence even before the wheel was invented. Sara M. Evans has documented how women in the USA have gone beyond the home by creating and sustaining "a vast elaboration of voluntary activities and organizations . . . [to] refashion domestic, ethnic and religious traditions and values into tools of change and democratic action." I also make special use of the work of Indian authors rarely read outside of their own country and women authors that are neglected everywhere.

My subjects, whom I call "Neo-Gandhians," demonstrate enormous variety of non-violent actions, despite deep skepticism that they confront daily. In fact, when one has seen one set of Gandhians, one has not seen them all. For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr.,

although influenced by Gandhi, developed a form of non-violence that related to unique conditions of the American South at a particular time in history. In the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, two nations that no longer exist, Sakharov and Havel reinvented non-violence in response to Communist oppression. Although they knew about Gandhi's work, they concentrated on the future rather than celebrating a predecessor. Similarly, three of the Gandhian symbols of liberation--the a boycott of British textiles, the spinning wheel in the home and the conspicuous wearing of homespun cloth--were adaptations to Indian conditions of methods used over a century earlier by North Americans opposing the British empire.

In making my analysis, I extract from the old-time Hindi terminologies used by Gandhian leaders in different cultures. Unlike most writers on Gandhian action, I do not use the specific terminology developed by Gandhi: satyagraha, ahimsa, swaraj, or swadeshi. These words are usually translated into English as truth force, nonviolence, self rule and self-reliance. As one who grew up learning Hindi as my first language, I know that these terms have deep connotations that cannot be fully expressed in a translation. I also strip off many Gandhi's distinctively personal aspects like his unique emphasis on personal celibacy, vegetarianism and extreme austerity.

This research began during a 1990 sabbatical that took me to India, Moscow and Washington D.C in an effort to explore the extent to which Gandhian ideas might be still alive. Did some people still mistakenly believe that Gandhi's nonviolence meant passivity rather than activism? Did the many leaders and activists believe that the mass media are the only way to reach the so-called "masses"? How has India, the largest democracy in the world, avoided a coup d'etat or a major civil war since independence despite increasing violence? In some of my articles cited in the attached bibliography, I attempted to throw some light on these issues. Pursuing this matter further as a Fulbright scholar in India (and Prague) September through December 1991, I found that some advocates of nonviolence were focusing less on mass action (which may directly or indirectly induce violence) and more on such other nonviolent forms of action as education, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication, elections and legislation. I developed this theme in my article, "Mass Communicators for Peace: Another Way." Other trips to Russia, Japan, Brazil, Spain and the Netherlands broadened my focus to include <u>all</u> forms of non-violence that are uniquely relevant to the post-cold war era. It has also led me to go beyond present thinking on nonviolent struggles by attempting to develop a feminist model based on the concept of gender partnership

With a year of full-time commitment to bringing my manuscript to completion, I shall formulate questions on how from childhood onward human beings can best learn the Gandhian arts of democracy.

April 10, 1993 Bibliography with Singh Proposal

Usha Bala, Indian Women Freedom Fighters: 1857-1947. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1986

S.C. Biswas, ed., Gandhi:Theory and Practice, Social Impact and Contemporary Relevance. Delh: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1990

Joan Bondurant, Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969

Judith Brown, Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, What is Civilization? Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989

Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel, Indian Women: Change & Challenge. Bombay: Popular Prakashan Private Limited, 1990

Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade. Harper and Row, 1988

EriK Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence. New York: Norton & Company,1969

Diana Eck et al. eds., Speaking of Faith: Cross-cutlural Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change. Delhi: Kali for Women Publisher, 1986

Sara M. Evans, Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America. Free Press, 1989

Mary Parker Follet, "Constructive Conflict," Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett. Fox & Urwick, eds. Pitman Publishing, 1973 (second edition)

Experiments with Truth: Gandhi's Autobiography. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1960

Richard Gregg, The Power of Nonviolence. N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1971 (Fourth edition)

George Gerbner, ? (Invisible Crises or Cultural Environment Movement? proper citation?) Annenberg School of Communication, January 1990

Vaclav Havel,"The Power of the Powerless," in Jan Vladislav, ed. Vaclav Havel or Living in Truth. Boston: Faber and Faber,1987

Martin Luther King Jr., ?

Madhu Kishwar, Gandhi and Women. Delhi: Manushi Prakashan, 1986

K.P. Misra et al. ed., Gandhi and the Contemporary World: Studies in Peace and War. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981

Ramashray Roy, ed., Contemporary Crisis and Gandhi. Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1986

J. D. Sethi, Gandhian Critique of Western Peace Movements. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989

Gene Sharp, The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action, Boston: Porter Sargent, 1974 (Volume 111)

Niroj Sinha, Women & Violence.New Delhi:Vikas Publishing House, 1989

Ann Ruth Willner, The Spellbinders: Charismatic Leadership. Yale University Press, 1984

Andrei Sacharov, ?

Mark Shepard, Gandhi Today: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi's Successors. Seven Locks Press, 1987

April 11, 1993
Proposal by Kusum Singh

NEW ARTS OF GANDHIAN DEMOCRACY:
Creative Nonviolent Activism

This project will explore how Gandhian nonviolent action could strengthen democracy in response to increasing societal and national violence. In-depth interviews present a concept of democracy that relates not only to the nation-state and civil society but also to the family and world community. Such integration and harmony requires nonviolent activism on behalf of human rights through democratic leadership and "bottom-sideways" communication that makes constructive use of conflict and female-male partnerships. This theoretical framework could have important implications for new forms of social education and participatory democracy.