

Kusum Singh-Research Program. September 1993

LEARNING NONVIOLENT DEMOCRACY: The New Gandhian Activists

A cultural environment of violence--aided and often legitimated by the media--seems to permeate the post-cold war disorder. Yet throughout the world, one can find traditions of nonviolent conflict management that help create a culture of nonviolence.

Simple negotiation was probably the very first form of managing inevitable conflicts. Over the centuries negotiation was enveloped by a myriad of other nonviolent forms: elections, political parties, majority decision, minority rights, legislation, adjudication, and arbitration. Strangely, however, the term "nonviolence" is widely used to refer to passivity, pacifism or the militant actions of demonstrations and civil disobedience. Interpreted this way, the legacy of nonviolent leaders--Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrei Sakharov, Vaclav Havel, and others--has lost its legitimacy.

I interpret this legacy differently. Like Gandhi (properly understood), I accept the threat or use of armed forces, as a truly last resort and as a support for very serious efforts at negotiation. With the help of new-style Gandhians that I interviewed (close to 200 in number) in many parts of the world, I see negotiations as a careful, strenuous process seeking a kind of constructive compromise through which each party may gain something. Most of these interviews with policy-makers, journalists, lawyers, scholars and activists were done in India (some in Hindi) and the U. S. Some riveting interviews and discussions took place in Japan, Russia, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Brazil. Without calling themselves Gandhians, these women and men are adapting the Gandhi-King legacy to new and very difficult challenges. Theirs is a creative process of reinvention that, if more widely communicated, may help combat violence. My tentative conclusions are also based on historical analysis and a wide-ranging literature review that includes the work of Indian authors rarely read outside of their own country and women authors that seem neglected everywhere.

My effort is designed both to document past successes and to report on new experiments in participatory democracy. I analyze the perplexing relation between violence and nonviolence and discuss the major sources of violence against which nonviolent movements have had to contend with in the past and in the present. This involves a reevaluation of traditional approaches to violence and nonviolence and an examination of their connection with various modes of leadership and communication. My central hypothesis is that broader democracy evolves when leaders (1) endure failures on the long road to partial triumph, (2) hew to universal ethical standards, (3) work toward sexual equality, (4) disseminate the nonviolent messages through all channels of communication and (5) help people learn how to handle troublesome conflicts peacefully.

Many glorious triumphs have been achieved by nonviolent activists. In India, nonviolent activists achieved what had long been deemed impossible: liberation from the British empire. Other colonies followed suit. In the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Philippines, the "impossible" happened again. In Greece, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Chile and Brazil authoritarian regimes were

displaced peacefully. While widespread euphoria was created by these bloodless displacements, the euphoria itself was soon displaced by the bloodshed that followed. Communal violence in India, violence in American streets and schools, ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia and the assassinations of Gandhi and King are grim reminders of the many roots of violence in the human condition. Yet throughout the world unsung heroines and heroes have pioneered in nonviolent struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty and pollution. Progress on these fronts, while not large in comparison with rising aspirations, is nonetheless encouraging. "Triumph and Tragedy" (Chapter 1)

Nonviolent activism has usually been invented to attain one or another basic human right. In 1948 human rights advocates won approval, against tremendous obstacles, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly. The soaring words of this comprehensive resolution and its follow-up treaties have been historic forward steps--despite insufficient attention to duties--in setting forth both high ideals and specific kinds of action needed for strengthening nonviolent democracy. Yet these ideals are flagrantly violated. Much more commitment and monitoring are needed, together with new institutions for monitored force, as Gandhi himself visualized, in coping with violence. "Human Rights: Ideals and Deeds" (Chapter 2)

For centuries men have used violence or threats of violence in denying women equal rights. Although all human beings share some female and male characteristics and body structures, male dominance has for centuries weighed like a nightmare on the human spirit. Submissiveness of women has long forced divisions of labor that deny their potentialities and, as Gandhi often asserted, inhibit the flowering of men's nurturing capacities. New family structures and relationships among family members will help human beings escape cultures of male and heterosexual superiority. "Sexual Equality" (Chapter 3)

A cultural environment of justified violence often dominates the world's mass media. George Gerbner and his associates have documented how real-life violence is overdramatized and reinforced by TV drama, films and news reports. Nonviolence, on the other hand, is treated as less newsworthy and dramatic. Human rights are best transmitted through personal example and face to face communication. This requires less reliance on, and much reform in, the mass media. Top-top and middle level discussions seem to have been most successful when more "bottom-sideways" and "bottom-up" communication takes place. This is most likely with the kind of democratic charisma that (unlike Weber's definition of charisma) encourages initiative rather than dependency by followers. "Democratic Communication" (Chapter 4)

Education on nonviolence and human rights can help people handle domestic, ethnic and international conflicts peacefully. The Universal Declaration's preamble urges that "every individual and every organ of society. . . shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms." No nation and no national or local education system has really done

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such striving. More experiments--like Gandhi's "experiments with truth"--are needed in channeling frustration and rage into constructive channels or in preventing them pro-actively. Moral vision and example by family members and teachers are essential. Equally important are educational programs on nonviolence in defense of human rights for all people at work, rest and play. "Education for Handling Conflict Peacefully" (Chapter 5)

For each of these five chapters (as well as a general introduction) I already have detailed notes, outlines and preliminary drafts. These contain many quotations from my interviews and ideas stimulated by them as a result of a 1990 one semester sabbatical and a 1991 one-semester as a Fulbright scholar in India. With enough time free from teaching and advising, I intend to update my analysis by some reinterviewing and new interviewing--with special attention to new ideas about education for peaceful conflict resolution and human rights in school systems.

Throughout, I shall emphasize the many difficulties of competing with the cultural environment of violence. One of them is that those concerned with nonviolence and human rights are often reluctant to recognize the potentialities of either democratic capitalism or the trained police forces without which violence cannot be prevented or controlled.

I plan revisiting with the Albert Einstein Institution (Cambridge) and the Center for Creative Nonviolence and the Gandhi Memorial Center (Washington, DC.). Visiting for the first time with the Harvard Law School Program on Negotiation (Cambridge), the U. S. Peace Institute and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Washington, D. C.), the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Carter Center (Atlanta), and the Gandhi Center (Memphis) will also be instructive. I look forward to continuous discussions (mail, fax, telephone as well as personal visits) with colleagues elsewhere in many countries. Bertram Gross, a retired distinguished professor, will provide sustained assistance.

By completing a first draft in several months, and with a few additional months for revisions, I hope to have a final manuscript within a year. The book will respond to the new challenges created by terrorism, violent cults, crime in the schools, obsolete power structures and out-of-touch leadership. It will offer a non-utopian appraisal of how more people learn--or fail to learn--the arts of creative nonviolence in fortifying democracy in the public and private spheres of life. This transdisciplinary effort might help illuminate the opportunities and obstacles on the road from current barbarisms to more civilized societies in the first decades of the 21st century.

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SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA
MORAGA, CALIFORNIA 94575 (415) 376-4411 COMMUNICATIONS

Sept. 22, 1993

Dear George,

I hope you find the enclosed proposal to the Woodrow Wilson Center an improvement on the one I sent you earlier. I have had some time to incorporate your very helpful comments more fully, I think. You will note from the information sheet sent by the WW that the deadline date for the recommendation letters to reach them is Oct. 1st. This date also happens to be when

I expect to hear NEH decision but I am not holding my breath!

If I have the time and the energy, I might follow Max Kamelmann's advice and apply to the Institute of Peace as well. SMC, I am afraid, is not a place where you are given time to write books!

I know this is an imposition on your busy schedule. No matter how I try I will never be able to express fully my gratitude and appreciation for all you have done for me over these many years.

P.S. To play it safe, I am sending a copy to your office

As ever,
Kusum

JOHN SIMON GUGGENHEIM MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

90 Park Avenue · New York, N.Y. 10016

November 1993

Dear Mr. Gerber:

The attached papers concern a Fellowship applicant who has referred us to you. We shall be grateful for your candid and critical appraisal of the candidate. You may be sure that your comments (which we would appreciate receiving at your earliest convenience) will be held in the strictest confidence.

If you find it necessary to use your own stationery, please return our form as well.

With our best thanks for your help.

Cordially yours,



Peter Kardon
Director of Planning

NB: Please destroy the attached plans.

Mr. George Gerber
The Annenberg School of Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

I am very pleased to write in support of Dr. Kusum Singh. I was her dissertation adviser and have followed her academic career ever since. We have published some of her work in *World Communication; a Handbook*, and in the *Journal of Communication* (both of which I edited). I am, therefore, familiar with Dr. Singh's scholarly work and abilities.

Dr. Singh has developed a powerful and provocative theory on the subject of her proposal for a Fellowship project. It is a subject on which she is a leading expert. Extensive preparation and her own background make her uniquely qualified for this ground-breaking project.

Dr. Singh has qualities of a renaissance scholar. She is theoretically versatile and profound. Her research is thorough and her writing lucid. Her project is well-organized and ready to be completed. I recommend her highly.