

ISSUE 37

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

"It is important to know that we are all human world citizens and belong to this fragile, limited space. If we go too far, we can't repair it."

Somali Environmentalist: Fatima Jibrell

Understanding Heritage

Immigration Stories - Chapter One

THE GIFT: from my grandfather Mahatma Gandhi

New Book

A Call to Care

Faith and Climate Change

WINNER:
SHAP AWARD 2011

Eternity

*I cannot comprehend the vastness of space
where the mind of God abounds
Nor the myriad fields of dimensions,
the black holes which confound and surround.
The timelessness of eternity,
which the stars cannot describe,
Nor the blackness of the void reveal.
Yet drawing down within,
to that tiny point
where the microcosm and macrocosm merge
in the smallest space
Love is found.
Reaching out into the vastness
encompassing all
on a particle or wave of light,
out to the furthest part
the essence of the universe pulsates.
And as we wonder at its starry gates
the endurance of love is there
to welcome all.*

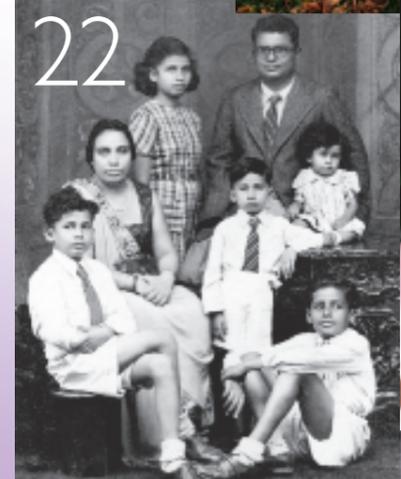
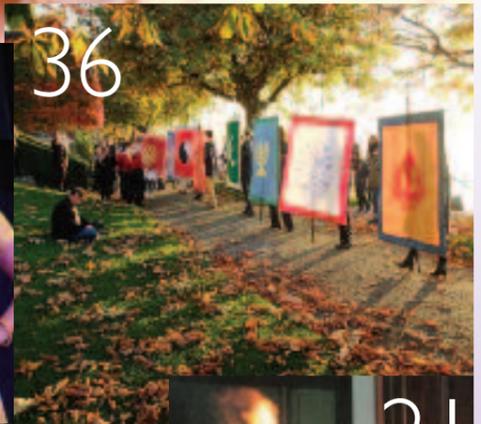
J.C.Rocher



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contents

- 04 EDITORIAL - Heather Wells
- 05 KEYNOTE
Dr Sanjukta Ghosh - *Understanding Refugee Experience as Heritage*
- 08 INSIGHT
Paul-Gordon Chandler - *Voice Within a Voice*
- 10 IMMIGRATION STORIES - CHAPTER ONE
- 10 Daljit Singh - *New Beginnings*
- 12 Rudi Leavor - *Welcoming Light*
- 15 Kuli Kohli - *Picking up the Pieces*
- 18 Bharti Tailor - *My Father Told Me...*
- 20 Brother Daniel Faivre - *Southall - The Town I Love*
- 22 Jehangir Sarosh - *A Morris Minor Can Change Your Life*
- 25 Khushnuma Anklesaria - *Lasting Impacts*
- 26 LANGUAGE OF ART
Samira Kitman - *Art: Impact and Empowerment*
- 29 POEM
From: Shi Jing (The Book of Poetry)
- 30 INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE
Rabbi Jonathan Romain - *Guardians & Pioneers*
- 32 OPINION
Shiban Akbar OBE - *Rohingya Muslims: The Right to Citizenship*
- 33 SUBSCRIPTION FORM
- 35 FAITH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
- 35 Martin Palmer - *Why Do I Care?*
- 38 Harfiyah Haleem - *Ever-Turning Back*



- 40 Gopal Patel - *In Service to Mother Earth*
- 41 Ravneet Singh - *EcoSikhs: Challenging Our Behaviour and Outlook*
- 43 NEW BOOK
Arun Gandhi - *The Gift*
- 48 REFLECTION
Priya Parrotta - *September 2017: Listening to Huracán María*
- 50 FAITH AND THE ARTIST
Pooja Vijayan - *Born to Dance*

editorial

At a time when the subject of migration is mostly narrated through political debates and media reports that give focus to statistics and quotas, it has been very enlightening for me to read the *immigration stories* of our contributors. Each one tells their own family narrative in which motivation to travel from their homeland is rooted either in a spirit of adventure - a challenge sparked by a fleeting encounter: a sense of foreboding as a cruel ideology places a whole community under threat - be it the Gestapo or the Taliban: or a sense of displacement as government and colonial forces create a mass movement of people through the drawing of a religious divide. Indeed, a number of our writers tell their story of Partition - when a line was literally drawn through India in 1947 splitting three provinces, Assam, Bengal and the Punjab based on Hindu and Muslim majorities, and involving the Sikh communities and others who found themselves on the 'wrong' side of the border. The division created turmoil, splitting not only a country but towns, villages and neighbourhoods where homes and communities had been nurtured over decades. Whilst there is obviously a collective memory of the stark reality of the experience, each story is deeply personal and conveys the affectionate bonds that unite the generations today. It is painful however, to read of the death and despair that confronted many caught up in the cross-border migration of Partition, and the psychological scars impact their memories today. It is with this in mind that our keynote writer Sanjukta Ghosh calls for an understanding of the refugee experience as *cultural heritage* to be honoured rather than demeaned as a source of humiliation or shame. All our contributors now are happy to call Britain their home, despite racial and religious prejudice that they may experience in their daily lives: and undoubtedly their contribution to British society has enriched it beyond measure. Sadly, a recent incident involving one of our contributors on *Faith and Climate Change*, Ravneet Singh, a visitor to this country, illustrates that as a society we have some way to go to wholly embrace diversity as a valued part of the richness of our culture. Ravneet was physically attacked outside the Houses of Parliament because he was wearing a turban, an intrinsic symbol of his Sikh faith. The continued work of interfaith dialogue and action is essential if we are ever to alleviate such irrational fear and/or hatred of religious and cultural difference.

As we become more alert to the needs of our fellow human beings we must also wake up to the needs of our magnificent planet. Martin Palmer calls for a greater humility in the way we perceive our role in the story of humanity. He believes that by placing ourselves at the centre of the meaning of life, which is what we have done, nature in all its forms is relegated as subservient to us and we feel entitled to plunder and exploit its resources. He is supported in this call by contributions from our faith communities - Sikh, Muslim and Hindu. Each are active within their worldwide communities and stress the need for a global narrative to restore a balanced relationship of responsibility and care for the world and all living beings.

Teach me, my God, to pray
And to recite blessings for the withered leaf
No less than for the splendour of the ripened fruit.....

(Leah Goldberg [Lithuania, Palestine/Israel], Sifriyyot Po'alim, 1959, trans. Rabbi John D. Rayner and included in Liberal Judaism prayer book Siddur Lev Chadash, 1995.)

Heather Wells

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faith
INITIATIVE

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Initiative Interfaith Trust

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Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas
and Charanjit Ajit Singh

Object:

The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative Magazine

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Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

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Aim: The aim of Faith Initiative Magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of faith, to foster understanding and help reduce religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, illustrations and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve. Editorial guidance can be obtained from

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- Immigration Stories - Chapter Two
- Women in Leadership

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Back cover: Poem: *Genealogy Test* by *Rebecca Bilkau*
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SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfillment
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,
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UNDERSTANDING

Refugee Experience

AS HERITAGE



Cries of freedom brought in its wake the largest mass migration in human history

On August 15, 1947, at the stroke of midnight, India and Pakistan achieved independence from British rule. New nation-states were born with a strong militarised border separating not only sovereignties but people from their land, homes and families. India was flanked by West Pakistan and East Pakistan, the latter known as Bangladesh in 1971 after another bout of border revolution.

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister echoed the sentiment of the political moment in 1947 with his speech:

The ambition of the greatest man of our generation (Mahatma Gandhi) has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but so long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

Nehru spoke of a temporal 'tryst with destiny' that lingered beyond the 70th year of the Partition's commemoration. India and Pakistan's freedom came with a large human and material cost, stories of which are remembered from the past, relived in the present, and preoccupy the future of South Asians.

Remembering the partition is not a blanket attempt to chart inhumane torture, suffering and deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, but also to reflect on futures and rebuilding of the approximate 14 million displaced. The personal stories of migrants and refugees bear the imprint of a fragmented idea of freedom, and with it a truncated sense of belonging in whichever side of the border they settled. Cries of freedom brought in its wake the largest mass migration in human history. There were both elite

and popular versions of what freedom meant, when power was formally transferred to the two nations after centuries of colonial rule. Talking about a recent exhibition on Partition in Cambridge, at the Centre of South Asian Studies, Professor Joya Chatterji brought out a mixture of emotions: '... euphoria mingled with the agony of refugees, and relief with horror at the brutality of partition.'

A mixed response to independence spread with anticipation and fear for the future. In East Pakistan, while many families were leaving Dacca for Calcutta, there were those who clung dearly to their gardens, farms and homes in the relatively calmer backyards of sectarian violence such as Sylhet, a district of Assam in India that became part of East Pakistan. In a personal interview with one of its affluent residents, who now lives in Cardiff, Subhendu Bikash Roy, age 79, recalled the moment of Partition with the sheer remorse of a helpless child.

Sitting on a ghat close to his home with his friends he eye witnessed, close at hand, a live announcement of freedom, rather than a distant booming radio relay. He painfully remembers how the Muslims came on to the boat waving a ragged cloth, shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad': they still did not have a ready national flag to fly. Subhendu instantly felt a chilling reality, shared too by his friends and family, and recalls: "We couldn't stay and feel rooted anymore. It was painful to even think of leaving the flowers, the trees, the coconuts in the garden of the Karimgunj subdivision".

...It was painful to even think of leaving the flowers, the trees, the coconuts in the garden...

A sense of insecurity prevailed in the intervening period for three years after the ghat incident, Subhendu recalls, with a deep pause even today. He then talked briefly about a gradual demoralising effect in the neighbourhood of Sylhet when news of riots and violence poured in through word of mouth, and their graphic details in the local news. One event that has left an indelible mark, despite the onset of fading memory at his age, is the gross killing of an 'affluent Hindu who lent money to a Muslim', on the route between the towns of Bhairab and Asuganj, on either side of the local river. The river flowed as usual, but, in his eyes, always with the blood of an innocent man stabbed and thrown into the waters from a moving train. News of the horror reached Sylhet where the Hindu gentleman was well known as a kind rich soul who was merely collecting the loan when the riot broke out on the train. For Subhendu, this loss seemed irreparable at that moment, and a demoralising downturn of communal events to follow stamped his memory of Partition until today, despite the comforts of his life in Cardiff.

It would be quite simplistic to pin down migration and displacement to the single historical event of Partition, that belonged to a tumultuous and traumatic decade of War, famine and evacuations. Neither would it be fair to restrict the ordeals to a political border divide. Many Indians posted in the neighbouring areas of British Burma, for example, felt the brunt of evacuation, occupation and discrimination, despite a sense of security in the imperial Services. Unearthing the family letters of an escaping Indian industrialist gives hindsight into the Partition decade, removed from the communal-torn nerve centres of divided Punjab/West Pakistan and Bengal/East Pakistan to British Burma. RK Majumdar (1926-2013), the past president of Bengal National Chamber of Commerce wrote in his unpublished memoir:

I was born in Toungoo, a district headquarter situated about 100 miles north of Rangoon, the capital of Burma. I was the youngest son of the family, and there was a younger sister to me

We were all brought up in Burma until our evacuation from that country in 1941-42, due to the Second World War and the Japanese occupation.

Until 1939, we were a happy family. Father was busy with his work at Toungoo. I was studying in a school in Toungoo. My eldest brother, my mother and my sister were all settled in Rangoon. Mejda (elder brother) was in Rangoon, studying in College. My Boromama (elder uncle, P C Bhattacharya, the future Governor of RBI) was posted in Rangoon in the A.G.'s office. The war started in Europe in September 1939 and Father was apprehensive of the Japanese invasion. While we got the news of the war from the daily newspapers, Choudhury babu had purchased a radio, which attracted us to his house every evening to hear the BBC. In 1941, just prior to the commencements of the Japanese war, my mother, my sister and I came over to India for good. Father left us with my maternal grandfather at Mymensingh (undivided Bengal) and went back to Toungoo.

The evacuation from Burma started in 1941 and we did not know where any of our relatives were since all communications had been cut off. At that age, it did not register on me the great crisis we were in, without any news of Father or Dada (brother) and without any knowledge of our financial status. Mother casually mentioned the situation to me and I then realised that we had become refugees in our own home. By the grace of God, our whole family from Burma led by my Father arrived on foot from Toungoo to Mymensingh - after trekking over the Arakan Hills for over three months. We heard their travails all our lives since then, and wondered what they must have gone through. Father had lost all his savings - his house properties, paddy fields etc. - and was virtually a pauper, excepting whatever cash he could bring along with him, which was not much. This was the case with all the other families who came over from Burma. Life had to be started all over again.

From West Pakistan to East and present-day Bangladesh, there are many more stories of such a displacement and migration that are being collected and documented. The tenor of these pieces of evidence has been changing too - from a complete reliance on 'paper tigers' in the preserves of colonial archives, to a recent shift in oral histories and testimonies which give a different meaning to Partition: meaning that is deeply personal, familial and communitarian, rather than singularly political and communal. Examples used in this piece show sufferings and disruptions from two liminal areas of tension - one in Sylhet with relative freedom from communalism, and another from Burma where wartime evacuation precludes the chaos of Partition's trauma.

The two largest provinces, Punjab and Bengal, had only a marginal population of Muslims over non-Muslims ie 53 - 47 percent, and yet the electoral register was used to allocate some districts to Pakistan and others to India. Initially planned over two years but effectively implemented in less than half a year, Partition created great personal trauma for all sides of the divide. So what was treasured and lost in the political haste? From testimonies we learn of the humanising of trees left behind, and fluid relationships between human and material artefacts. These relations reveal personal ties within an ecosystem of communitarian neighbourhoods, different to how religion and politics combined to differentiate space. Similarly, rituals moved; prejudices travelled; and so did losses and retrieval of materials. "There are utensils, textiles, photographs, and other treasured items that people carried with them while migrating, and have preserved even today" says Kishwar Desai, a patron of the Partition Museum in Amritsar.

Building a People's Museum that examines the pre- and post-Partition era is a step in the direction of understanding the impact of political haste leading to refugee experience as heritage, rather than a hidden past of fear and shame after 70 years of independence.

One final testimony demonstrates how Partition not only created new nation-states in a single stroke in 1947, but was re-enacted in different ways over several decades after. Prasenjit Bhattacharya based in the UK talked about this long-term dislocation within his family and their repeated search for survival:

The years after Partition saw communal riots spread in East Pakistan. Small Hindu landowners faced eviction and forced migration from Mymensingh region. Our family failed to protect and safeguard their lands at that point of time

and several houses in the village got attacked, burnt and pillaged. This created panic among family elders, who like others wanted to set up a base in West Bengal in 1949. Instead of taking the Dhaka-Kolkata train which used to get looted regularly at that time, they took the alternative route of coming via North Bengal that is the Bogra-Dinajpur-Katihar-Kolkata route. Upon arrival, they found the whole city had become slums of refugees. With the help of some relatives in Barrackpore, they got some rooms in Naihati, but it was really awful and not enough to hold so many family members. The daily misery again compelled my grandfather Samarendra Nath, who was a professor in Dhaka, and others, to find accommodation that was hard to get in and around Kolkata city at that time. With the help of some of his theatre-going friends, like Bijan Bhattacharya, he found some land full of jungles on the bank of the Ganges in Berhampore, Murshidabad under the Cossimbazar Raj. As a result, a number of our extended families, with skills such as land labour and barbers, also migrated to the new habitat that was rechristened as Manindra Nagar. On the second trip from Mymensingh to Berhampore in 1953, my grandfather and great-grandfather were completely looted, and all family riches were robbed. They somehow saved their lives. The partition horror became a reality for us.

Such evidence prompts one to question boundary-making as an act of political decision making, made over a hasty haggle in electoral politics. The two-way migration was accompanied by severe violence with a death toll approximating 1 million. The historical process of cross border migration continued in another wave during the war in East Pakistan, in 1971, which led to the formation of Bangladesh. Around 10 million refugees crossed the border into India. But such borders, as the Scotland based literary writer Bashabi Fraser says, remain porous till today - encouraging desperate refugees/migrants to move along or dare an illegal entry. In these cases, a sense of belonging, memory and a complex set of connections defy the logic of electoral politics underlying religion-based borders.

Today such historical moments provide a background lesson to manage international migration. India's partition exemplifies the need for a global political will, and commitment for hosting and supporting the world's refugees against xenophobia and intolerance. Similar to the current situation of global asylum seekers, memories of their homeland for many South Asians who survived Partition - the lingering smell of flowers, chasing butterflies, climbing trees, hedges and shrubs, rivers and ghats - all seem distant now, and divided with barbed wire.

...memories of their homeland...all seem distant now, and divided with barbed wire.

VOICE WITHIN A VOICE

The writings of Kahlil Gibran

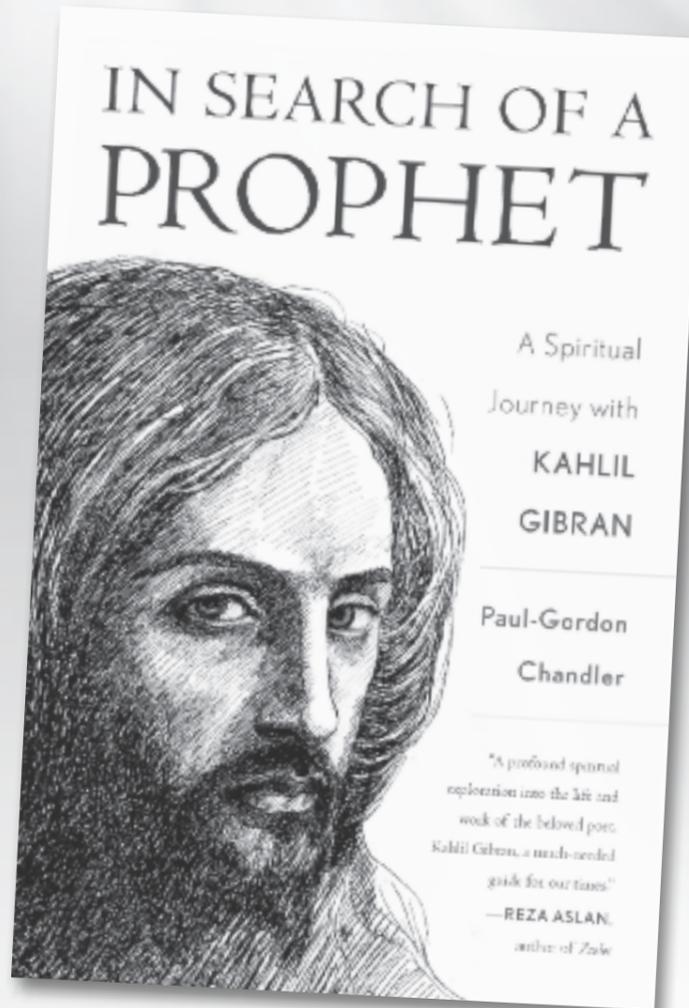
It is almost impossible to confront many of the world's challenges today without addressing religion or spirituality. More than ever before, voices are needed that call for unity and respect, and that inspire us to live deeply and generously in our thinking and actions toward the "other." I believe Kahlil Gibran is just that voice, offering much needed wisdom and guidance, an unparalleled spiritual guide for our times. His life and work touch on critical issues of today: bridging between creeds and cultures of the Middle East and West, care for the environment, gender equality, interest in spirituality rather than religion, and the importance of learning from the best in each faith tradition.

My own passion for Gibran came from living and working in the Middle East. I was intrigued by how enthusiastically he is admired both throughout the Middle East and in much of the West. I began to explore his journey of spiritual development and sought to discover what could cause a person, born into what was then an exclusive, sectarian and intolerant historic Christian community, to become someone who embraced all, and as a result became one embraced by all.

In 1883, Gibran was born high in the mountains of Lebanon, in the Qadisha Valley ("The Sacred Valley"), an area resounding with majestic natural beauty, and which served as the foundation of his spirituality and worldview for the rest of his life. His grandfather had been a Maronite priest, and thanks to his mother he was taught the great biblical stories, imagery that resonated with all the Abrahamic faiths and echoed throughout his future writing.

In contrast to these peaceful surroundings, Gibran was born into a period of political and interreligious strife during the latter part of a 400-year-long Ottoman occupation. Much of his early writing addresses sectarian strife, religious hypocrisy and corruption, leading to his determination to question ideologies and tear down walls of injustice.

Gibran was a natural mystic and his voice is timeless. He wrote: "Your neighbor is your other self dwelling behind a wall. In understanding, all walls shall fall down." As Gibran plumbed the depths of his inner life, he was forever exploring the deepest of life's questions. On the purpose of "being" he writes:



“HE WHO DOES NOT BEFRIEND HIS SOUL IS AN ENEMY OF HUMANITY”

“Spiritual awakening is the most essential thing in man's life, and it is the sole purpose of being.... He who does not befriend his soul is an enemy of humanity.... Life emerges from within....”

Gibran described himself as intentionally “going into the silence.” He wrote, “Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.” He named his New York studio “The Hermitage,” decorating it sparsely in a manner that created a contemplative atmosphere for him; with a simple wooden bed, several crucifixes made of wood and metal, a small brass chalice, an easel, and a tapestry of a Middle Eastern Jesus hung on the wall above an altar-like table with brass candlesticks.

Gibran listened to his life. He paid attention and was ever striving toward a deeper dimension. “The soul is mightier than space,” he wrote, “stronger than time, deeper than the sea, and higher than the stars.”

Repeatedly, Gibran focused in his work on love for God rather than religion: When asked, “What is religion?” he responded; “What is it? I know only life. Life means the field, the vineyard and the loom. . . The Church is within you. You yourself are your priest.”

In our contemporary culture, where it becomes harder and harder to listen to our inner selves, our souls, or even what we may need spiritually, Gibran exemplifies someone who journeyed intentionally inward; creating room for silence to listen to the quiet nudging's of his soul, intent on allowing both the high and low moments of life to weave together into one voice. And it is that “voice within a voice” that Gibran wanted his readers to hear when reading his writings.

The depth of Gibran's spiritual journey led to an extraordinary breadth of spirit in which he experienced the oneness of humanity. The reservoirs he had cultivated in “the deep” gave him the capacity to go “wide”. Arising from his internalized bridging of the Eastern and Western influences of his life, a faith emerged over time that transcended all cultures and religions.

Addressing his fellow Arabs in the Middle East, Gibran wrote: “Humans are divided into different clans and tribes, and belong to countries and towns. But I find myself a stranger to all communities and belong to no settlement. The universe is my country and the human family is my tribe. . . Thou are my brother because you are human, and we both are sons of one Holy Spirit; we are equal and made of the same earth”.

Gibran recognized the necessity of boundaries and nations, yet he strove toward a borderless citizenship that transcended geography. I love the way he expressed his collective embrace of humanity with the visual imagery of a cloud. He wrote: “Should you sit upon a cloud you would not see the boundary line between one country and another, nor the boundary stone between a farm and a farm. It is a pity you cannot sit upon a cloud.”

Addressing one of the most sensitive topics of all in the Middle East, religion, Gibran does so by looking to the nature of God. “You are my brother [and sister] and I love you. I love you worshipping in your church, kneeling in your temple, and praying in your mosque. You and I are all children of one religion, for the varied paths of religion are but the fingers of the loving hand of the Supreme Being, extended to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, anxious to receive all.”

Finding a way to communicate a nonsectarian version of spirituality was something that weighed heavily on Gibran. And consequently, he felt that all the events of his life seemed to lead him toward the creation of his most well-known book, *The Prophet*. Of *The Prophet* he wrote: “It is the biggest challenge in my life. My entire being is in *The Prophet*. Everything I have ever done before . . . was only a prelude to this.” He felt a sense of sacred responsibility, writing it almost as if it was to be a holy book. The writing process became a type of spiritual rebirth for him and embodying the East and the West, it speaks to people of all faiths.

As Gibran journeyed spiritually he sought to sift through his own religious upbringing, through the baggage, trappings and traditions

that had accumulated over the millennia. And as he searched more deeply into his own tradition, he discovered its core essence by re-discovering the figure of Jesus. He came to see the person of Jesus as a figure far beyond Christianity, and instead as a Universal Sage for all humanity.

In Jesus, Gibran saw an all-embracing figure and was enraptured by his character. He wrote: “His life is the symbol of Humanity. He shall always be the supreme figure of all ages.” One of my favorite vignettes of Gibran's is about separating the Jesus of history from the Jesus of a religion (Christianity) that grew up around him. He writes: “Once every hundred years Jesus of Nazareth meets Jesus of the Christian in a garden among the hills of Lebanon. And they talk long; and each time Jesus of Nazareth goes away saying to Jesus of the Christian. ‘My friend, I fear we shall never, never agree.’”

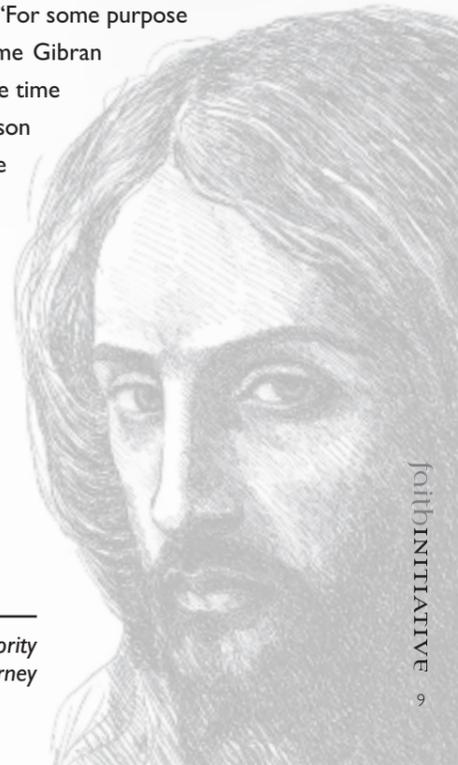
Although Gibran often spoke directly of God, his writings and art were infused with his deeper concern, that of living in harmony with one another and all of Creation. He wrote, “I bid you to speak not so freely of God, who is your All, but speak rather to and understand one another, neighbor unto neighbor.”

Just after Easter in 1931, after a battle with ill health, Gibran lay dying. At age 48, he slipped from this world into the realm he believed would be “an endless dawn, forever the first day”.

Gibran reminds us that it is time to reach across the divides that surround us and break down walls of inequality and injustice, to build bridges, and seek peaceful resolutions. It is time to defend the vulnerable and oppressed, to unite and see our own reflections in the faces of others. It is time to carve out room for quiet and respect for Creation, the environment. It is time to delve deeper in our own faith traditions, past outward imperfections, baggage and trappings, to the core of life.

I close with the words of Gibran's good friend and his first biographer Mikhail Naimy, “For some purpose unknown to you and to me Gibran was born in Lebanon at the time he was born. And for a reason hidden from you and me Arabic was his mother tongue. It would seem that the all-seeing eye perceived our spiritual drought and sent us this rain-bearing cloud to drizzle some relief to our parching souls.”

Paul-Gordon Chandler is an author, art curator, interfaith advocate, US Episcopal priest and an authority on Christian-Muslim relations. His new book is titled IN SEARCH OF A PROPHET: A Spiritual Journey with Kahlil Gibran (Rowman and Littlefield).



New Beginnings

Sikhs and others found the war an inescapable, uninvited presence in their lives.

This is the story of my mother, Swaran Kaur, who migrated to Britain from India in 1950. She was uprooted by the Indian civil war which resulted from the Partition of India in 1947. This was an unnecessary war in which thousands of lives were devastated, particularly those of Punjabi women.

For most Sikhs, including our family, stories in 1947 of the possibility of a divided Punjab, and a new Pakistan, were considered a myth. The very strong bonds of friendship between Sikh, Hindu and Muslim families were unbreakable: and a retention of respective religious beliefs and traditions, only added to the richness of a shared culture.

According to my older brother, Darshan Singh, there were reports at the time, in the newspapers and on the radio, frequently targeting commonplace Indians to look towards independence from the British Raj, whilst ignoring the prospect of a divided India. Those mostly in favour of Pakistan were male leaders from outside the Punjab.

Females in the villages of Punjab were discouraged from listening to the radio because of its supposed corrupting influence, and therefore mum and other females relied on male family members for party-political information. My mother and her peers, all girls, were therefore more inclined to socialise amongst themselves: their days consisted of meeting friends and family, community weddings, and daily gossip, often consumed at the community well.

Discussions about religious divisions and local issues took place only in the presence of male elders, in the Mosque, Gurdwara and Hindu Temples, or in the village where the seniors socialised – they would take refreshment and share gossip. Females were forbidden to attend such gatherings, wherever they took place: their prescribed role, was to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of their family. These years of innocence would affect my mother during the crisis that followed.

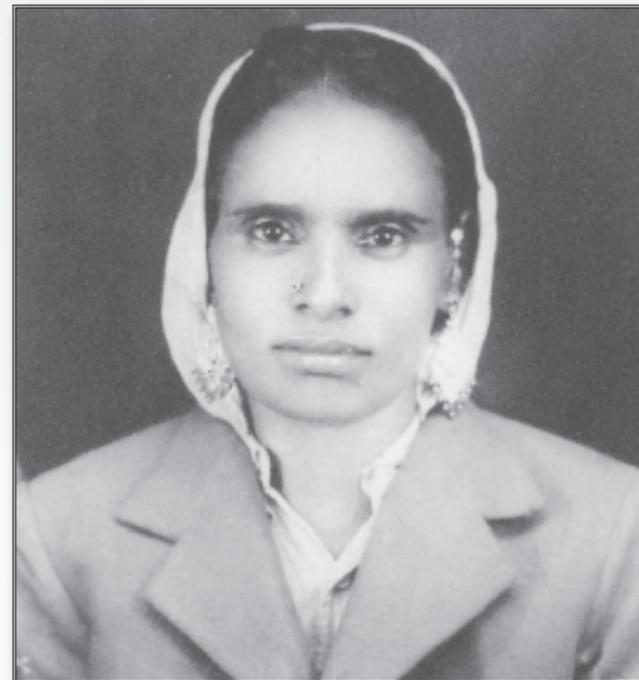
The first real indication of a new Pakistan, for our extended family, came a month before the partition. My first cousin returned from Malaysia with news that the formation of Pakistan was imminent. Once again, the politicians had overlooked to inform those that would be most affected by migration - Sikhs and Hindus that lived in the Punjab. This warning of mass exodus was ignored by my grandmother, Maha Jato, who claimed that the tale of two countries was a government trick, a ploy to take land from the villagers. A forceful character she often broke all the rules of a patriarchal culture, and was vociferous in stating her opinions.

Misguided and confused the villagers heard on the night of 14th August 1947 that Pakistan was a reality and the province of Punjab was to be divided: only Muslims would remain in our region, all others – Sikhs and Hindus – had to leave. The shock was unbearable for most people, especially females, including my

mother. That date was forever stamped on her memory, and that of my brother, for the horrendous events that took place - rape, looting and arson - mostly committed by Muslims coming into the village from other regions of India, joining forces with some locals that were caught up in the frenzy of events.

On departure day, my family, and other families, left with only the clothing on their backs and a few essentials, including some savings. They assured their Muslim neighbours that they would soon be back and resume life as before, but the years of happy, effective friendships between the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs was about to end. They were given protection by a few soldiers that had stayed loyal to the Punjabi province. Despite so called official support for vulnerable females, orders by the authority were given to leave behind Sikh and Hindu elderly, and disabled, that could not walk. Only the lucky few, including my blind grandmother, were given transport by caring and compassionate soldiers that ensured her safety and wellbeing.

Later it was reported that those left behind were mercilessly murdered by mindless gangs. This was my mother's recollection of the village where she was born, raised, got married and had two children. A place transformed into a dumping ground for corpses and a never-ending stench. This was once an avenue where citizens met regardless of religion, caste and social status to celebrate Eid, Vaisakhi and Diwali. (Muslim, Sikh and Hindu festivals).



Swaran Kaur (Mother) - Passport Photo



Myself with father Kartar Singh, mother Swaran Kaur and brother Darshan

The majority of the community of Sikhs and Hindus left on foot, and arrived as refugees at the temporary camps set up in the first city outside Pakistan, Amritsar. Having witnessed a gruesome reality of violence this holy city for Sikhs, where the golden Temple stands (a symbol of unity and equality), was to be the home for our family in the coming weeks and months.

It proved not to be the peace and tranquil place it was renowned to be. On the way, the families witnessed dead and maimed children, elderly women and bodies of victims lying in cornfields, and open ground. Later my mum and brother

witnessed train loads of Muslims travelling in the opposite direction, leaving their former homes where many of their family members had been slaughtered.

My mother saw the remains of mutilated bodies and bullet ridden corpses: faces and bodies blown to pieces by home-made petrol bombs. She carried memories of a hand – black and maimed – belonging to a desperate Muslim trying to get to safety, and begging for assistance: at this stage few were ready to compromise their safety for others. In some isolated cases those Muslims that had been left in their former homes were given refuge in the gurdwara, but if found by the vigilantes they were killed or maimed, and innocent females defiled.

Many Sikhs and Indians blamed the British officials and Indian politicians for the carnage which resulted in countless people from all religions losing their lives, and others their livelihoods.

Those Sikhs and Hindus that reached safety and sheltered in the make-shift camps in Amritsar, also suffered humiliating conditions. Once again, the officials given the task of catering for the homeless, and now impoverished, had failed the nation. Sikhs and others found the war an inescapable, uninvited presence in their lives. All civilians were touched by universal anxiety about the welfare of relatives and friends wounded and killed. Medical staff were in short supply and unable to deal with the growing numbers of refugees that were coming in fast and furious. The registration, welfare and wellbeing of the camp community was embedded in a bureaucracy, and incompetent officials. Food was in very short supply and this led to theft and trafficking of scarce resources. The lack of sanitary facilities caused outbreaks of dysentery and other diseases.

My mother recalled how she, alongside other Sikh families, was forced to marry my older sister to her fiancé to ensure her safety: and without the traditional dowry except a few handmade garments, some bedding and mother's personal jewellery. This make-shift arrangement affected my mother in later life when she arrived in the city of Glasgow - my beloved birth city - never to see her daughter again.

My father, Kartar Singh, his younger brother, cousins and other Sikhs from the same village, had found work in Glasgow, as traders providing much needed clothing. Glasgow was certainly far from an attractive place at this time, and on many winter nights, thick smog enveloped the city so tightly that pedestrians could often only see a few yards ahead. Mum recalled that in the late 1940's and 1950's, most streets in Glasgow were lined with tenements. Many stairs led up to cold damp rooms, with soaring ceilings and a coal fire, which failed to warm occupants. Conditions in the city were far from conducive to good health and it was this that led to my mother contacting asthma and bronchitis, contributing to her untimely death in 1958, in London.

The lack of female support and companionship were other significant obstacles my mother and other females had to overcome. Britain was still recovering from the second world war and unable to cater for this new and growing community. Rationing was in place and the constraints of patriarchal culture provided an isolated existence for Sikh and Asian women. There were very few households owned by Sikh landlords in a position to provide accommodation for their countryman. Most of the other rented accommodation was reserved for 'whites' and often with notices in the window saying, "No coloureds or dogs ----".

Although the situation was far from prefect. It was a far cry from the atrocities of a civil war. This was a new beginning. It provided homes, employment and much needed respite for mum and my brother and other refugees.

My grandmother, Mata Jato, lived for another eight years after the war, but unfortunately died after a fall at home, at the age of ninety nine.

Welcoming Light

We came out of metaphorical thick glutinous darkness into brilliant, warm and welcoming light

It was 1936 and we had lived for 12 years in Berlin, where my father had a prosperous dental practice. We were fully integrated into German society, my younger sister and I attended a non-denominational primary school and our friends were both Jewish and Christian. My father was a doctor in the First World War on the German side and won the Iron Cross for some act of bravery: he never talked about this experience and so it has always remained a mystery. One morning the doorbell rang at our flat. Erna the maid opened the door and two men said they were from the Gestapo and wanted to see my parents. Erna said they were still in their bedroom. They said: 'das stört uns nicht' – 'that does not matter to us', barged their way in and demanded to know which door led to their bedroom. As I and they met in the corridor, not knowing who they were and being well schooled in polite behavior, I said "good morning" and, as was the custom, offered my hand in greeting which they took in turn. They entered the bedroom, told my parents to get dressed and be ready to join them in their car. My father was President of his Lodge, a voluntary organization, and my Mother treasurer of the corresponding Ladies' Lodge. She was told to bring any monies that she held in trust with her. It amounted to about 30 Marks.

They were taken to the headquarters of the Lodge at Kleiststrasse 10, where other Lodge members were already assembled with more to arrive. They were told to stand in rows for several hours. If someone wanted to go to the bathroom they

had to hold up their hand and ask for permission. Sometimes this was granted, sometimes not. My Mother was told to hand over the money, for which she had the presence of mind, and the courage, to ask for a receipt which she received and put to good use several years later*.

They were eventually told that the Lodge was dissolved and that they should go home. The short arrest was truly a blessing in disguise for it was this experience that prompted my parents to leave the country. I realize now that if the Gestapo had not arrested my parents on this occasion, and so alerted them to the possibilities, we might not have escaped the tragic fate of millions of Jews under Nazi rule: most of our relatives and friends were deported to one or other concentration camp and died in the gas chambers.

Plans were made for our exodus and 18 months later, at the age of 11, I was on the train to Hamburg with my family, leaning out of the windows of the 2nd class compartments - a final treat! As the train slowly started to move, I have a vivid memory of a sea of white handkerchiefs from friends: this was the traditional way of waving good bye. We noticed that one family in the group was missing – but they stood at the very end of the platform so that they would be the last ones we would see on our departure. They were the family Radziejewski. This then was the beginning of a 48-hour roller-coaster of emotions: escaping tyranny but departing from relatives and friends whom we were not likely ever to see again.



Our wedding with my sister Winnie and brother-in-law Gerald Fleming

We stayed overnight in Hamburg and the next day took the boat train to Bremerhaven. Half way on this journey a customs officer came into the compartment and after checking our papers asked my father to accompany him to another compartment. Presently the train stopped at a station and when it began to move again and father was not back in our compartment, I asked my mother 'Wo ist Vati?' 'Where is father?' She was as anxious as I was but bravely put on an appearance of reassurance - our minds were in turmoil. The Germans would not have been above restraining him, in which case we would have come all this way to fall at the last hurdle. We would have been devastated. However, he came back saying the official had merely examined him more closely in case he had any hidden contraband on his person.

In Bremerhaven we boarded a German cruise liner bound for America, but calling at Southampton where we were to disembark. Technically we were still on German soil, and anything untoward could still happen to us though we had all the right papers and visas.

Wearily, carrying our luggage, we made our way to the cabin and, debilitated by the stressful journey, took a much needed rest before slowly making our way to the dining room. Our bodies were as exhausted as our minds. We were shaken to the core with conflicting emotions coursing through our veins and our fragile nerves shattered to shreds: we were beyond recognizing

anything as we stumbled along the gangway, which, although obviously lit to some degree, seemed dark and foreboding. We were full of fear, not knowing what unpleasant surprise might still be lurking around the next corner. With some trepidation, we approached the dining-room and as we entered the live band struck up: 'Dornröschens Brautfahrt'. Now I have to tell you that my father was an excellent amateur pianist and we often played the piano for four hands. Our favourite piece was called 'Dornröschens Brautfahrt', 'Cinderella's Bridal Procession', by Max Rhode. We played this endlessly at home and we knew it by heart. It became, in modern parlance, 'our tune'. To hear 'our tune' being played in this setting was a wonderfully uplifting experience, it was as if we had entered Paradise. We came out of metaphorical thick glutinous darkness into brilliant, warm and welcoming light. The depression flew out of the window like greased lightning, our nerves repaired and our emigration adventure had turned a welcome corner.

The next morning after breakfast my father invited us to the stern of the ship where he dramatically took out of his pocket a bunch of keys – these were the keys of the now vacant flat in Berlin. Carefully taking one key after another off the keyring, he threw them, one by one, into the sea, swearing that he would never set foot in Germany again. He never broke this self-imposed vow.

Having arrived in Southampton we overnighted in London, and continued to Bradford the next day expecting to move into accommodation arranged by my father. Possibly through a misunderstanding, the owners of the house, on which my father had paid a deposit, were still in the house instead of having vacated it as arranged. We were therefore forced to deplete our scant resources by staying in a hotel for a week. We then moved into a cold house where the heating was by open coal fires, and hot water by a back boiler in the kitchen. My father set about installing a dental surgery, having a white glass lamp placed on the garden wall with the words 'Dental Surgeon' inscribed on it. Soon the British Dental Association objected to the words saying it was 'advertising', and the lamp had to be replaced.

My parents thought I should get the best education and accordingly entered me to Bradford Grammar School although burdened with high fees. The rabbi's wife took my mother and me to see the Headmaster to whom I showed my leaving report. Fortunately, despite some variance between the English and German marking system, the Head took me in. I had learned English in Berlin for 18 months so soon found a good footing. I went on to follow in my father's footsteps, studying dentistry, at Leeds University, and eventually taking over a dental practice in Heckmondwike, whilst also working part time for my father. I went on to marry Marianne, who came from a Jewish family with a similar background to my own, and we had four children: we now have eight grandchildren and in 2017 our great-granddaughter was born.

The Radziejewski family, who had stood at the end of the platform as we left Berlin met a tragic end. Their son Hans, who was a good friend of mine, had found himself a job on the large Jewish cemetery called Weissensee – thinking that this would keep him out of harm's way - digging graves by day and sleeping rough in one of the many partially hollow graves by night. One day he received a message that Jews were being rounded up by the Gestapo, including his family – parents, two sisters and a brother. He went home and found his family, together with many others, on lorries ready to be driven off. The intention was clear: they were to be driven to a railway station to be transported east to concentrations camps. Exchanging a few words with them, but keeping his distance in case the Germans realized that he was one of them, he said before sorrowfully parting: 'Lasst mir die Rosemary hier. Ich kann auf sie aufpassen.' 'Leave Rosemary (one of his sisters) here, I can look after her.' But the father did not allow it. The lorry drove off and that was the last time he saw them. He himself was eventually also caught and spent some years in Auschwitz which he survived. He discovered later that his family were put on a train consisting of cattle trucks, driven without food, ventilation or sanitation to the outskirts of Riga near a forest called Rumbula, where those who were still alive disembarked

*A similar Lodge was founded in London after the war and this money was donated to that.
Rudi Leavor is Chairman of the Bradford Synagogue in Manningham.
Our family name was changed from Librowicz to Leavor in 1959.



1960's: with my parents Hans and Luise Librowicz and my wife Marianne.

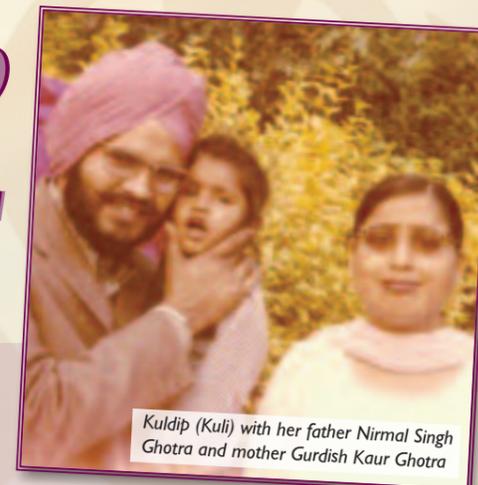
to the loud and unwelcoming shout of 'raus, raus' – 'out, out'; they had to stand at the edge of a wide trench in which there were already corpses of previously killed people. They themselves were machine-gunned and fell into those trenches, thus adding to the count of corpses. This event is one of millions collectively recounted today, and commemorated in the UK on Holocaust Memorial Day, 27th January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

My Mother had a sister who married the son of the late Chief Rabbi of Dresden Professor Dr. Jakob Winter. One of the first acts of the Germans in 1933 was to humiliate this revered Rabbi by making him scrub the pavement in front of his Synagogue. With a sense of foreboding, the family decided there and then to emigrate to Palestine vowing never to return. Their memories of Dresden created a family hatred of the city, and this rubbed off on me: rightly or wrongly the name of Dresden became synonymous with the Nazi regime. It was therefore, with trepidation, that I attended a concert last year in Leeds, given by the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra. It began with the prologue to Wagner's opera 'Die Meistersinger'. It starts, you may recall, with a loud chord.... and as I listened to this glorious music the curse of Dresden, after 85 years, was lifted and tears welled up in my eyes at the unexpected startling turn of events. Dresden, in my understanding was rehabilitated, and once again music had worked its power to heal.

...and once again music had worked its power to heal

Picking up the Pieces

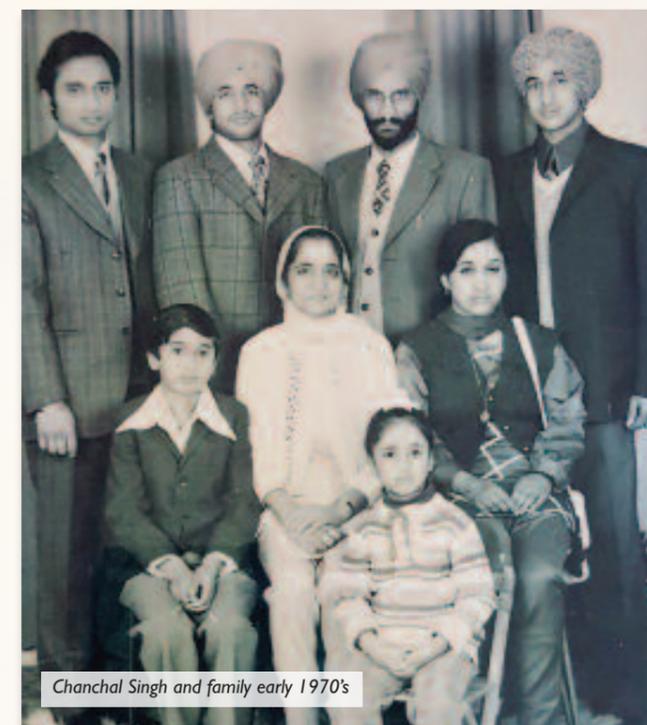
The lives of these people were shattered through no fault of their own...



Kuldip (Kuli) with her father Nirmal Singh Ghotra and mother Gurdish Kaur Ghotra

The displacement of people during the Partition of India in 1947, especially Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, brought about great personal devastation - the loss of many of their loved ones, and all of their material possessions. The lives of these people were shattered through no fault of their own, and although slowly they began to pick up some of the pieces to start all over again, the lifelong psychological health of many was affected by the trauma.

There was a lot of anger and resentment towards the Indian government, and especially the British Empire for its colonisation of India, and the subsequent exploitation of its people for political purposes. But in the 1950's, Britain recognised that if its economy was to grow, following the 2nd World War, an influx of immigrant labour would be required. It turned to countries of the British Empire, including India and the West Indies, and invited migrants to join the British workforce: hence Britain's labour shortages – largely due to thousands of young able-bodied men being killed in the war - moulded the post-war migration patterns from the Indian subcontinent.

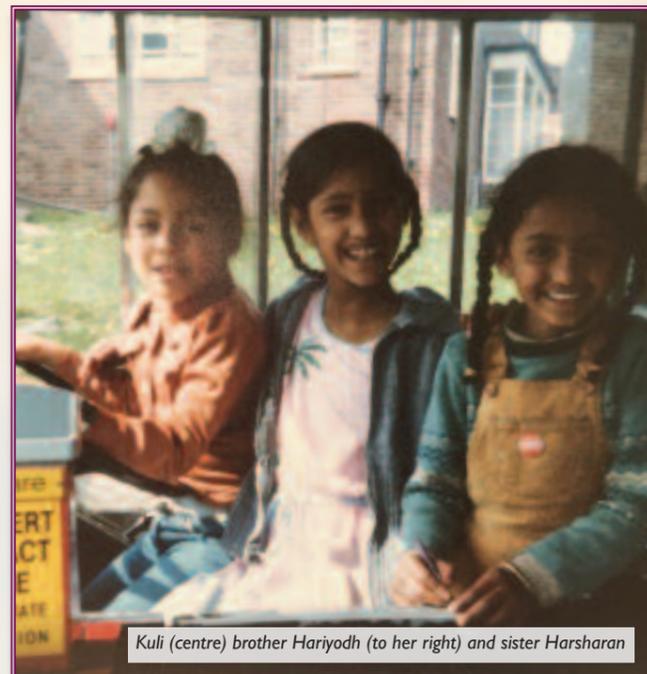


Chanchal Singh and family early 1970's

It was primarily men from middle-ranking rural families in Punjab, i.e. farmers with land, and predominantly those who had been previously employed in the colonial army or the police force, and their relatives, who took up this opportunity. They were given tokens to travel to the UK to work. These Punjabi migrants were very industrious and found jobs in the manufacturing, textile and the service sectors, including Heathrow Airport and local transport services like bus driving. Without this urgent request from the British government, my grandparents would never have migrated to the UK and I certainly would not be here: a story that will resonate with many other Indian, Pakistani and Jamaican migrants.

My grandfather, Puran Singh, was a typical example of migrants of the time. In India, he owned many acres of land and was a farmer of wheat and rice in Uttar Pradesh, where he and his family settled after the Partition of India and Pakistan. He had been previously employed in the Indian army, which was under British command. When his close friend, Chanchal Singh, who had also served in the Indian army, was offered the opportunity to go to Britain to work - it was these fit and healthy men who got asked first - he told Puran Singh and other close friends and relatives that they should take the opportunity too. My grandfather was very reluctant to leave his family and his many acres of land, however, his friend encouraged him to go with him. They ended up in the Black Country in the West Midlands and found jobs working in the foundry at 'The Wednesbury Tube Company' close to Wolverhampton. The work was extremely hard but it rewarded them with a regular income, which was more than they would get in India. Despite facing severe racial discrimination in Britain, these migrants settled in the UK, and through their struggles for workers' rights and civil rights many have contributed greatly to its economic, political and social life.

After the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was passed in 1962, which restricted the free movement of workers from the Commonwealth, most workers from South Asia decided to stay in the UK and were later joined by their families. Gradually my grandfather brought his family over, including my father, Nirmal Singh, who was then in his late teens. My father's first job was a bus driver in the West Midlands.



Kuli (centre) brother Hariyodh (to her right) and sister Harsharan

For me, as a daughter of a North Indian migrant, life was very challenging. I was under 2 years old when I arrived in Britain in the early 1970s. I came with my mother to live with my extended family in Wolverhampton. We lived in a rented semi-detached 3 bedroomed house with two other Asian families. There was no privacy as everyone in the house shared the kitchen, bathroom and outside toilet. All the men worked double shifts, and some worked triple shifts, while the women looked after the house and children. I remember not seeing my father for days. My parents struggled to adapt to the colder weather and a different way of life including language barriers, while my siblings and I, the second generation, had to straddle the Asian and British culture simultaneously.

As I had a physical disability I was sent to a Special School, which was Christian, and was taught the English way of life, but at home it was a completely different atmosphere: I was expected to eat, speak, watch and behave like an Indian, there was no other way. My elders feared that their children would become too British and lose their Indian cultural heritage.

Other parents, however, were very proud that their children could speak English, and encouraged their children to get a good education and go to university so they could afford a comfortable life. For example, my father's younger brothers, Gural and Gurthian, came to Britain when they were 6 and 7 years old: they did not know a word of English, but they were determined to get a good education at a comprehensive school. Now, both of them are in well paid professional jobs and are still securely attached to their cultural roots – an indication that the cultural insecurity of one family of migrants does not necessarily apply to all, and indeed can differ within an extended family.

Growing up aware of my cultural heritage, I wrote this reflective poem on the topic of Punjabi migrants, and especially the experience of my father who worked on the buses in the Black Country in the West Midlands.

On The Buses

Going on the bus with my little brother and sister on the streets of “Bhra-di-hal, Daal-lasan, Dada-jee, Bhens-buree, Meri-hal, Oh-buree, Sund-vella, Best Brahmin, Barah-gam, Bol-shawl, Bhen-de-fude!” I loved free family days out when Dad was a bus driver, proud of his red, white and black “DD52780” ID badge; uniformed - his own boss on a double-decker bus.

I saw his uneasiness when young skinheads boarded shouting, “Bludy stinkin Paki! Rag head! Tekkin ower jobs!” Sometimes Dad would carry on like he was deaf, other times responded bluntly, “Get off joo stu-ped bustad!” Disturbed he’d moan to his Punjabi colleagues - they’d all swear in Punjabi at ungrateful customers.

I saw the sparkle in his eyes as blonde and brunette women in tiny dresses and high heels giggled, “How am ya luv?” Replying in his Indian accent, “I am very fine, lav.” “Am ya gooin dawan the buzz station?” Chattering, “Got eny pennies, mi duck? I ey gor enof!” Winking, he would let them on free. I had never seen Dad behave so funny.

At break time, we’d play with rolls of grey tickets, we’d run up and down the empty double decker bus sticking navy “SORRY NO TICKETS” posters everywhere. In turn we’d sit in the driver’s seat, pretend to drive the great blue and cream monster, singing, “The wheels on the bus go round and round...”

Dad treated us kids with large fish and chips, while he ate chapatti with curry and drank spiced tea - Mum’s surprise - a packed lunch in a steel thermos. Back then I saw very few brown faces in a sea of white. Today, the Black Country lives up to its name. Sooty diamonds embedded in a respected cultural mix. Altogether on the buses.

Notes – Punjabi Black Country Dialect

Bhra-di-hal (Brother’s plough/tractor) – Brierley Hill
 Daal-lasan (Lentils garlic) – Darlaston
 Dada-jee (Grandad) – Dudley
 Bhens-buree (Sister’s-old woman) – Wednesbury
 Meri-hal (My plough/tractor) – Merry Hill
 Oh-buree (Hey old woman) – Oldbury
 Sund-vella (Dried root ginger time) – Sandwell
 Best Brahmin (Best priest) – West Bromwich
 Barah-gam (Extreme sadness) – Birmingham
 Bol-shawl (Talk shawl) – Walsall
 Bhen-de-fude (Punjabi swear word) – Pendeford

The next significant movement of Sikh Punjabis happened after 1984, when the Indian government attacked the Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple) in Amritsar. It is generally recognised now that Operation Blue Star was brutally carried out by the Indian Army troops with tanks, heavy artillery, helicopters, armoured vehicles and chemical weapons. The military operation, which happened between 1 June and 8 June 1984, was ordered by Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in order to establish control over the Harmandir Sahib. It was basically an operation to destroy separatist ideas.

Operation Blue Star set out to arrest the militant religious leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and his militant armed followers. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale occupied the Harmandir Sahib and made it his headquarters in April 1983 in a demand for a Sikh state, or separate country, called ‘Khalistan’, to re-awaken the Sikh faith. Bhindranwale was classified by the military as a terrorist but was recognised by many others as a guardian of his faith.

The attack on the Harmandir Sahib was devastating, disturbing and destructive in every way. No one was alerted to the attack; no warrants were issued. The Indian military came with tanks to destroy the Harmandir Sahib, killing many innocent people – Sikhs and Punjabis - who were there just visiting and praying. Many people believed it was the government’s way to create fear and discrimination against the Sikh community. The official statistics on casualties given by the military were: 83 deaths and 220 injuries in the Indian Army but according to official estimates by the Indian Government, the total number of civilians killed was 492. Many reports suggested however that casualties were over 5,000, and the attack is often compared to the ‘great massacre’ by the Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1762. In November 1983 “Time” magazine described Amritsar: “These days it more closely resembles a city of death”.

Operation Blue Star left a deep disturbance in the minds of Beant Singh and Satwant Singh, trained bodyguards and part of the Indian elite forces, and on 31 October 1984 they assassinated the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Following the assassination, anti-Sikh riots began almost immediately and continued in some areas for several days, killing more than 3,000 Sikhs in New Delhi, and an estimated 8,000 or more in 40 cities across India.

So, how is this significant to my story of migration? My cousin, who was a follower of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, had unexpectedly been classified as a terrorist, along with many other young men who believed that Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a defender of the Sikh faith. Many of the young men were killed by the Indian police force and my cousin went into hiding. His family feared for his life. Every other day the police would come with search warrants and take away family members to be interrogated and imprisoned. My cousin was found and then detained and moved from jail to jail for 4 years before being bailed out, which cost his parents tens of thousands of rupees. He was lucky because his parents owned vast amounts of land which they sold to pay for his bail.

Then he went to Europe to seek asylum. He now lives in Belgium and has a family.

Sikh families who had lost their loved ones had no one to turn to, and therefore they began selling their properties to pay agents to take their children out of the country. Many young Sikhs went to seek asylum as refugees in European countries. I know many friends and relatives who have migrated to Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Greece etc. I asked them about their experiences of moving to a European country from rural villages.

One close relative told me his story, “When I left India I was only 15 years old. Until then I had not been outside of the village. I was still a child and I didn’t even know how to make a cup of tea let alone fend for myself. I had seen so much pain and poverty while growing up in the rural village with my extended family. Differences among family members caused a lot of distress. Only one family in the village owned a TV, and the kids from the whole village used to watch it once in a while. I had to walk more than a mile in the heat to my government school, and looked after the farm animals and the crops in the evenings. In the rice season it was my job to make sure that the electric motor ran through the night to supply water to the crops. I was only 12 years old and I had to sleep all through the night alone in the middle of the field. That was my very basic and simple life.

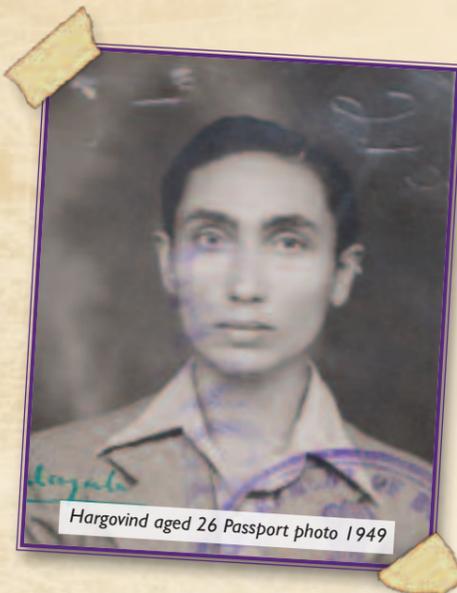
Then when Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi happened, we feared for our lives. Our family had been affected and our parents had to spend days in the prison cell just because we had connections with family members who had been classified as terrorists. The police were quite brutal, and beat anyone who would not obey their orders. I wore a turban and my hair was uncut. I suffered some abuse and wanted to get out of India, like my friends who had escaped. My parents had borrowed money from relatives to pay agents to take me out of India. Then an opportunity came for me to go to Germany. I had no idea where I was going and what to expect. All I knew was that life would be better than what I had lived previously. And it is.”



Grandfather Puran Singh and sons

Poem ‘On The Buses’ has recently been published in an anthology ‘The Poetry of the Black Country’ by Offa’s Press, 2017.

My Father Told Me...



Hargovind aged 26 Passport photo 1949

My father was born in British India in 1923, third child and second son of his parents. They named him Hargovind. His father Vithal was a tailor, who hand sewed clothes; not on a machine, they could not afford one. Mainly he made quilts by fluffing cotton and then hand stitching the quilts to create much needed bedcovers. The family eventually grew to one daughter and five sons, only four sons made it to adulthood, and they bought sewing machines, and never made quilts.

By the age of seven Hargovind knew about the fight for Independence, as there were people in his village, and surrounding villages, who used to lead demonstrations and had started wearing khadi (homespun cotton), and the Gandhi Cap. Vithal wore a black hat as did his cousin Lallu who lived next door. They were about the same age and as friends went about their work together. One day, sometime around 1930/1, they were returning from a visit to another village, on foot as usual, when members of the freedom movement stopped them just outside our village. They were not happy that the two men were wearing black hats made from 'foreign' fabric, and not Gandhi Caps. At the end of the altercation, their hats were taken off their heads and burned. The two men returned home without their hats, shaken and shocked at the aggression displayed which did not fit with Gandhiji's philosophy.

Our family home was in the village of Ashtgam, which was near the end of the route of the Dandi March or Kuch (the Salt March) undertaken by Gandhiji. South of the town of Navsari, Ashtgam is on the highway which goes from Mumbai to Delhi. Father talked to me, in 2009 when he was 86 years of age, about the Dandi Kuch, which took place in 1930. He was aged seven and the whole village and surrounding area was excited about going to see Gandhiji who was planning to make a speech in the evening. All the elders were going, including my father's older brother Vasanji, but as a child, father was told to stay home with his mother and do his homework. This was very important as he and his younger brother had applied for assisted places in a boarding school in Valsad and he had to maintain his grades to keep the place. So he did not see Gandhiji, but heard all about it from his older brother who spoke of a rousing speech

which led many of the locals to sign up for Satyagrah and the boycotting of foreign goods, which led in turn to the incident of hat burning I referred to earlier.

At Partition, father told me, all the Muslims in our village left, having made the decision to relocate to Pakistan: being so near the border this was easier for them. But many Muslims passed by on the main road, and sometimes it was clear to see they had been attacked. They often travelled at night and went by very quietly so as not to attract attention. "Where did they come from?" I asked him. He said from Gujarat, the East and the South. Some of them spoke languages he did not understand. This went on for weeks. The Muslim family that now lives in the village came during Partition and the mass migration that ensued. They had been on the road for weeks and were tired and exhausted. They had been robbed and had nothing left - no energy, no money, nothing to eat and no hope. They came off the main road, into the village and said "Kill us if you will, but we cannot go any further." From that day on they have lived in the village: they were given food, and built a little hovel opposite the house my father lived in, and they stayed.

My father was friends with the men from the Muslim family and my brothers grew up playing with the boys. They settled and thrived; now they have a Barbers shop in Navsari and are rebuilding their house yet again, this time with bricks and mortar and with many rooms. Whilst their house was torn down for the reconstruction, they stayed in my father's house which was empty as older family members had died and younger ones like me had moved away. They gave our house and village new life as many of the original families had moved out to the cities and abroad.

Because of the strategic position of Gujarat and the highway going past the village, its inhabitants were witnesses to the partition caravans going to and from Pakistan. Coming the other way across the partition line were Hindus and Sikhs, but none settled in our village. However, less than 10 Kilometres away is a settlement of Sikhs who came during the Partition and were settled in Gujarat by the government because the Punjab could not accommodate all the people that came over the border. The sign that they are there is the Gurdwara Singh Sabha at Bilimora and turbaned Sikhs who now speak fluent Gujarati.

...we got a letter from him, saying I am now in England...

With the upheaval of Partition, work was difficult to get for a tailor, people did not have money to have clothes sewn, so trade was slow, and father said sometimes they made things but did not get payment for their efforts. On occasions they worked as daily labourers in the fields to make ends meet. However, it was not possible to run his household on such income, so he was venturing further and further to find work. This issue was becoming even more crucial by 1949, when he was expecting to become a father again and began to question what sort of life he would give this new child. At that point in time he got an offer from a relative abroad to work in his business in the British Protectorate of East Africa (Kenya), under the voucher scheme. He and his younger brother Kalyanji took the opportunity and migrated to Nairobi. So he only lived in a free India for 18 months before moving to another of the British colonies.

In Kenya he witnessed the Struggle for independence (Uhuru). As Kenyans worked towards Uhuru, my father worked hard and progressed. He worked extra hours and bought himself out of his contract, and moved to work for a more benevolent boss, sending back money to India for his family.

By Uhuru, which came in Dec 1963, he had his own tailoring shop, and had moved his growing family from India to Eastleigh, and then to Nairobi proper. There was a move by the new Republic to oust the colonial past and establish a new order, but this cannot be achieved quickly and the general public was impatient for change. There were riots, and law and order was not always maintained. People took what they wanted and if the victim was not of African descent then justice could be hard to come by. Around 1963/64 my mother was robbed in the street, we children were with her, and whilst I don't remember it there must have been a struggle as one of the robbers grabbed a chain from my mother's neck. My parents became aware of what could have happened if one of the children had been hurt: mother was carrying the youngest child, and had the others in tow. This made my father re-think the situation and he sent Mum and younger children back to India, whilst he and the oldest son stayed on to look after the business. But the situation in Kenya did not improve for the Indians, who had been 'imported' there by colonials, and, in 1965, seeing an opportunity to improve circumstances for his teenage son, he sent him to the UK.

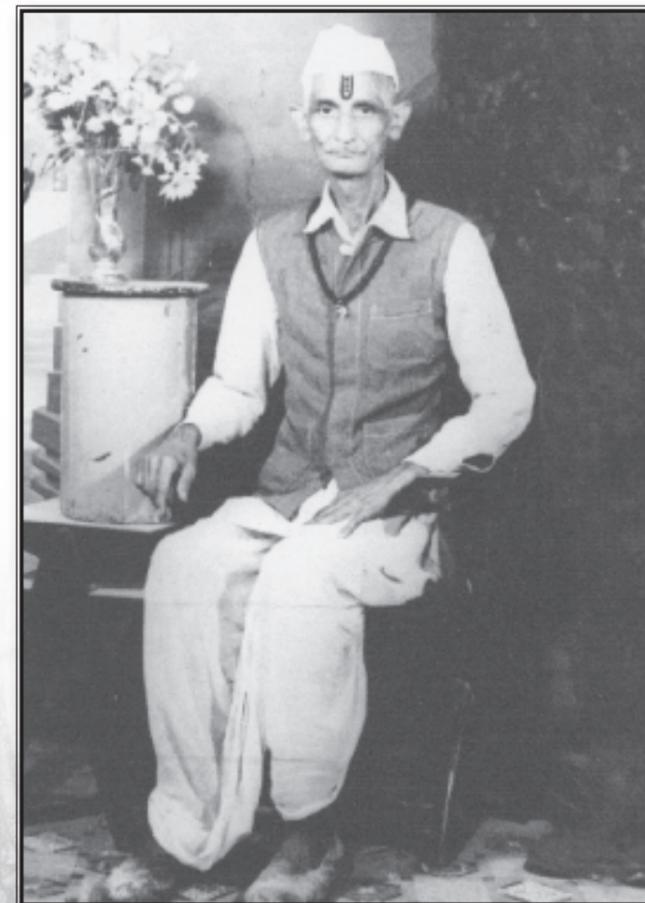
In 1967 a uniformed official walked into my father's tailoring shop and said "My nephew likes your shop. Either you give it to him or he takes it after you are dead." father said "Kill me, because I am not handing over that which I have built with blood and sweat."

When he told his friends about the incident, they told him you better give up the shop or you will be killed and then what will happen to your family? Father saw no future in returning to India where work was still scarce, but his son in the UK had work

and was doing well. So his friends bundled him on a flight to the UK with the tools of his trade - scissors, needles and thread, chalk, and tape measure wrapped in some cloth - and £8 in his pocket. From his shop, his friends made two bales of cloth and sent them to us in India.

The first we knew of my father's flight was when we got a letter from him, saying I am now in England... Mum and all of us, read it several times, trying to understand the situation. Then my brother got out an atlas from his school bag so that we could look up where England was. The bales of cloth took longer to arrive.

Though in later years he worked as a tailor in the theatre and so practised as a Master Tailor, in the early years in England father settled and found work in the rag trade: he used to work in the sweat shops behind Oxford Street, making dresses which were sold in Marks & Spencer, a few hundred metres away. He worked hard and saved everything he could to send back to us his family. He felt that life would be better in England for his children too and he saved up for the tickets to bring the family over: and so it was in June 1969 mother, and all five of us children, flew to England to join father.



Vasanji, in traditional Khadi with Gandhi cap circa 1967

Southall

- the town I love

DIARY NOTES OF DANIEL FAIVRE WRITTEN c1998

Salwar kameez and saris, turbans and chunnis of many hues, brought more colour to the streets...

EXTRACT

Historians and Sociologists will tell you better than I ever could how Southall grew from a railway junction in the middle of sprawling farm land into one of the most interesting and populous towns in West London. With time, it became part of the Borough of Ealing. Following the increasing demand for labour in the local light industry and, because of the proximity of the rapidly expanding Heathrow airport, the typical English suburb of the 1950s changed into an urban area with the largest concentration of Sikhs outside of Punjab.

In 1951, the majority of the 330 Commonwealth immigrants at the forefront of a first wave of immigrants were Sikhs. They were followed by family and friends from India and East Africa. Then came citizens of Pakistan and refugees from Uganda. The host population grew smaller. Green fields were replaced by housing estates, where English was not the spoken tongue and whose children were, for some years, bussed daily to schools outside the area. Cinemas changed their English programmes to Hindi tales of romance and dance: before being themselves replaced by video shops. Fruiterers' stalls, displaying exotic produce, started encroaching more and more onto the pavements. Mastheads to which Sikh and Hindu orange flags were attached - indicating a place of worship and refuge - appeared here and there within the precincts of disused dairies and churches no longer enjoying sizeable congregations. It became difficult to find a place where eggs and bacon could be had for breakfast, whereas restaurants mushroomed offering spicy curry. Salwar kameez and saris, turbans and chunnis of many hues, brought more colour to the streets, especially at week-ends.

Travelling along the Uxbridge Road from Ealing to Hillingdon on the 207 bus, one suddenly found oneself in a totally different country. The novelty, the exoticism, the sight of Asian schoolchildren waiting to cross bustling streets at traffic lights, riveted the gaze and caused either a worried frown on the brow, or a wry smile on the face. Conflicting thoughts, possibly the resolution either to come back one day or avoid the town in the future, raced through the mind. As for visitors from Bangalore or Amritsar, they felt very much at home. It is easy to understand why Southall was soon nicknamed "Littler India".

Of course, anybody who lives in Newham, Tower Hamlets, Brent, and indeed various other boroughs, could describe the changes in their environment in a very similar manner. In his book *The English*, (1998) Jeremy Paxman speaks of 'the many cities of any size (in England) that contain areas where white people have become a rarity. In those places, talking about immigrants as 'ethnic minorities' is beginning to sound decidedly perverse. It is white children who have become a minority at secondary schools in inner London, and even in the suburbs they make up only 60% of the secondary school population' But what gives Southall its uniqueness as an inner city is the fact that, within a one mile radius, it counts more than forty buildings where, at least once a week, congregations from most major world religions meet for worship.....

If the Eucharist is the sacrament of the broken body and blood of Christ, then Southall is eminently a 'eucharistic' community. There are rich people in Southall. Here, millionaires have made their fortunes in tinned food, Indian sweets, restaurants, real estate and telecommunications. There is brisk business seven days a week and, on Sundays and during festivals, most traders are especially busy, catering for customers who have come from far and wide, combining worship and shopping. It is interesting to note, however, that most rich people do not stay in the town during the night: they have homes in Cranford or Osterley; every bit of available accommodation over their offices and shops is let to migrants and asylum seekers.



Credit: Jan Janoszka

Looking at the town as a whole, however, Southall is very much in the situation of a deprived inner city area. There is the suffering of the unemployed, more numerous here than in the rest of the borough; of asylum seekers, especially young Muslims from Somalia, who are often well-educated but compelled to while away idle hours in the community clubs on the Green; of economic migrants from Eastern Europe and the poorer regions of the EC, who work hard for a pittance in local traders' shops; of a higher than average population of single parents, whose children are often mixed race - hence more easily subject to discrimination, and whose revenue is usually below the poverty line; of partners in mixed-faith marriages ostracized from the communities with which they used to worship; of young adults rejected by family because they have refused to enter into an arranged marriage.

There is the pain of older residents, who remember the time when litter did not obstruct alleyways and dirty pavements. There is the pain of clergy who see their congregations age and dwindle; who sense that people in authority do not always appreciate their pastoral difficulties. There is the anxiety of the Christian RE teachers who see the teaching of their faith neglected in state schools. There is the fear that gnaws at the very hearts and minds of many, from school and college to retirement age, because of the racism they find in institutions, including those that should protect them, and in individuals, even those they look up to.

What about the future then in such a community? Given the complexity of the ethnic mix, the shortage of financial resources from the local authority, the constant movement of population, it is hard to tell. As an example, to illustrate such shift in population, let me quote what the Southall Police Chief writes in the local Gazette this week: 'Recently the area has seen the arrival of Somalian refugees, whose numbers are estimated to be 8,000 to 10,000. This population is increased by a significant number of Somalis from other areas of

London to Southall to socialise.' There are difficulties between Muslim and Sikh young people during the marching season. One can already see growing tensions between young Somali men and young British Asian men. When the Stephen Lawrence inquiry came to Ealing, the Southall Police Chief said: "We are looking to involve the community much more in how we go about policing the borough. We have a willingness to learn and make changes if necessary.".....

BROTHER DANIEL FAIVRE SG:

8th April 1929 - 10th September 2007

Daniel Favre, or Brother Daniel as he was always known, was one of the most influential advocates of inter-faith understanding within the Roman Catholic Church. For the last thirty years of his life he lived in a small terraced house in the middle of Southall. A self-confessed 'bombastic Frenchman' he cut a wonderfully eccentric figure with his full grey beard and booming voice. But underneath the unconventional exterior lay a fierce intelligence and a gift for friendship which reached out beyond the boundaries of race and religion. He was a tireless worker for understanding between religious communities.

It is his contribution to the development of a practical approach to inter-faith relations for which he will be most remembered. He had a genius for spotting how a few words and a potent symbol - a flower, a light, a stone - could unite people, enabling them to bury their differences for a shared moment of precious silence. In this work he was inspired by the vision of a devout and fully orthodox Catholic Christian.

He was proud to be a British citizen and was an ardent cricket fan, yet to his dying day he remained French to his fingertips, never happier than when sipping a glass of good burgundy or preparing a simple well-herbed dish for his friends. Multi-faith Southall suited his particular brand of thoughtful eccentricity. He will be forever missed in the churches, gurdwaras, temples and mosques of the town which he loved.

MICHAEL BARNES SJ

He had a genius for spotting how a few words and a potent symbol - a flower, a light, a stone - could unite people...



Credit: Westminster Inter-Faith Archives.

A plaque is displayed at St Anselm's Catholic Church, Southall, in memory of Bro Daniel and the inscription states: "Brother Daniel Favre, S.G. (1929-2007) worked in Southall for 28 years dedicating his life to understanding and harmony between faith communities." It also includes Br Daniel's motto: "The lamps are many but the light is one."

A Morris Minor can *change your life*

...to those who shout and tell me to go home I say: *I am home.*

Each evening after work, my father had a ritual. He would ask the gardener to water the garden and the sitting area, partly to cool the place and partly to stop the dust blowing. He would sit on his chair and if it was the mosquito season, one of his children would rub citronella oil on his feet and lower legs to keep them at bay. We lived in a wing of the hotel that was his business. The hotel was on the main Bombay Agra trunk road, always referred to as the GT road (great trunk road), an ideal location for the passing traffic. We had moved to this site during the 2nd World War, I presume it was dad's foresight, for this brought soldiers to the hotel and bar. Especially the officers who were passing by in convoys on their way from the port of Bombay to the Burmese front.

The hotel was set in about five acres of land, with a long driveway from the road, which ran one whole side of the square plot. And it was here that dad sat for his evening drink. It was on one of these evenings when a green Morris Minor drove in through the gates. As the convertible top of the Morris was down, one immediately noticed the three unusual characters wearing what seemed like balaclavas.

The curiosity of all of us was too much to resist, firstly for seeing such an unusual car, and we are all mad about cars, and then these individuals in this unusual mode of dress. Therefore, we all, including dad, moved in unison to investigate. On approaching the car, we realised that it was even more bizarre; the three of them were all women... and Europeans. This was three years after India gained Independence in 1947, when most of the British had returned home, so it was more unusual to see Europeans.

Further enquiries and a near-interrogation revealed that they were in fact French, and had driven from Paris - and were now on their way to Colombo, Sri Lanka. I think it was in that moment that our father decided that he was going to drive to London: if three ladies could do it surely he could for he had toured India extensively and partaken in various car and motor cycle rallies. Added to this the hotel business was not doing so well now that the convoys were no more and the British had gone.

Next morning the Morris Minor and its occupants drove out and turned left towards Bombay: but the image of the tiny green car with its roof down, luggage stacked on the back, and the

three women, intent on their adventure, again covered in tight fitting balaclavas to protect them from the elements...left an indelible mark on us. What began simply as a passing remark from my father "let's drive to London" became an enterprise that was to change the lives of the family.

Dad's original job was as an electrician but he had to give that up when he lost his right arm in an accident. He was working on a contract for a meena-bazaar (a fun fair exhibition) while unloading a huge generator it broke loose and his arm was instantly amputated. While other people went into a panic he got in his car and drove himself to a hospital. Having lost his arm did not deter him from participating in motorcar or motorcycle rallies. It was this spirit that was to enable him to get to London.



Traditional Victorian/British family portrait in Indore our hometown circa 1943, before my youngest brother was born



Unloading from the ship - our future hopes dangling on 4 ropes

Now began the challenge, dad's adventurous spirit needed a reason to visit England. Many were found and thought of but they were excuses not reasons. Then one day it came to him, the boys, my two elder brothers needed to be properly educated in their chosen professions so he would drive to London, spend a few days finding the appropriate colleges for them and then return home. That was reason enough.

The conversation over the next few days and weeks revolved around the viability of the venture. This was not a case of driving out of our compound and asking some one "excuse me, which way to London?". Then there was the question of passports, visas, availability of petrol, and spares for the car, even which car to take.

We had two identical cars: Ford convertible 1938 models with V8 engines which meant that we could cannibalise them...we could make one good car from these two twelve-year-old models. A decision made! Day after day Roni (my brother) dad and I would remove parts from each of the vehicles, compare which was the better, clean it, put on new rubber seals and do what was necessary to try and bring each component, the fuel pump, the carburettor, dynamo, distributor, ignition cables to its pristine state. It was all a labour of love and hope.

While planning the route, there was continuous conflict, should we take the shortest route or the scenic route enabling us to see more countries and cities such as Kabul, Baghdad, and Damascus etc. The first priority however was to get to England economically. Every twenty miles was another gallon of petrol, every extra day increased the cost of accommodation. The choice was made for us by the circumstances, and the shortest route had to be found.

We discovered that Pakistan would not give us, as Indians, visas to travel through the country to Afghanistan and on to Iran, and so we decided to take the car to Iran by sea. We found



When we were tourist - at the Palace of Westminster 1952

that the British-India Steam Navigation Co. would transport the car from Bombay to Khorramshahr, a port some 80 miles south of the oil city of Awaz. Another decision made for us by circumstances. This meant we had to go south to Bombay some 375 miles, before we began our journey north and west.

After many family debates it was decided that mum would go too, and therefore my young brother Darius and I would join the expedition. My sisters were to stay in India and await our return. So now there were six who had to fit into the car with all their luggage, bedding and other necessities. How do we do this, for a roof rack was not possible, the car was a convertible with a soft canvas rooftop. Simple, make it a hard top, and thus a wooden panelled roof was constructed, and canvas and Perspex side windows were made to keep out the cold now that a mother and child were also travelling. By now the car, registration MBK 573 with 82,600 miles on the clock, was looking smart and the engine sounding good: it was 1952. Loaded with bags and baggage, spare jerry can of petrol, two spare wheels, and some other spare parts, such as fan belts, sparkplugs, distributors' caps we all climbed in - we were on our way to Bombay to take the boat to Khorramshahr, Iran.

The boat called MV Dara was grubby and heaving with human mass. We were travelling on the deck-class. We literally had to claim a space on the deck, fighting with other farers, each family with their bedding, pots and pans, cans of water and the most essential the Primus stove. The children and mother were told to spread the blankets and sit on them to ensure no one impinged on our territory. This was to be our home for the next ten days. As Dara sailed out on October 9th 1952 to the Arabian Sea, we waved to our relatives, not realising that we were bidding farewell to our India and would not return for years and then only as tourists.

...even as a child one knows and feels things and is aware of problems that parents are trying to protect the children from.

Three days later Dara anchored off shore in Karachi and someone on a boat pulled up shouting “Sarosh, Sarosh” and it was dad’s cousin come to greet us. It was a joyous reunion after many years of difficult political situations between India and Pakistan. They were not Indian or Pakistani, they were cousins hugging and laughing together for the few hours the boat had docked.

As Khoramshire approached the packing up began, each item had to be packed with due consideration to what was needed for the journey, the light clothes for the deserts of Iran, the warm clothes for the snows of the Alps and Mount Blanc. The quayside was heaving with people getting off the boat and my father went off to see about the car. Fortunately, it was one of the first things to come out of the hold. As it was being lifted up by the crane with just four ropes around the wheels, it swayed and seemed to slip to one side as it was lowered to the quayside. All was well however, and Dad thanked everyone concerned and sat behind the wheel, handing over the crank to one of the boys, refusing to use the “self-starter” in case the battery was low. The choke out, gears in neutral, thumbs up was given and crank, crank and the sweet sound of the ford V8 engine purring away as only a engine sounds.

Now begins the long drive to London, some 6,000 miles in a car that was overloaded with the six of us, baggage, rations and spares. As we headed out of Khoramshahr and into the desert we asked a truck driver the 80 mile route to Avaz: he explained that there were many tracks for in certain rain conditions the track becomes impassable. So, one just creates another track, they all lead to Awaz. But the rule is never to lose sight of the telegraph line, look out for the poles and you will get there. Awaz left a strong impression on us for this was the first appreciation that we were in Iran. A totally different country and culture to us. Where no one spoke Hindi, Gujrati or Urdu, and very few spoke English, the languages we were familiar with. All signs of what was to come but our next stop held a special significance to us Kerman and Yazd being two strongholds of Zoroastrianism. As Parsee (Zoroastrians of India) we felt at home with these small communities – descendants of people who had held onto their religion and culture for fourteen hundred years in spite of intense persecution by Islam and an Islamic political system: at the time of our visit the communities were enjoying a certain respite under the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty of the Reza Shah’s, which continued till the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, and the arrival of Ayatollah Khamenei.

Leaving this homely community was when the true adventure of the journey into the unknown began. The travel through the deserts of Iran, the mountains of Turkey, through the communist countries of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and entering into Europe, much of which was still recovering from the ravages of war: with cities like Trieste occupied and divided by four nations. Then through the snowy mountain passes of Italy and Switzerland reaching France where we crossed the channel to see the renowned White Cliffs of Dover. The adventure of 6000 miles

through these countries, with my father driving every inch, despite my two older brothers have driving licences, not knowing what lay ahead: simple things such as, would petrol be available in the next city or how to handle the accident we had in Yugoslavia – which is a story for another day.

It was however, a beautiful sunny winters morning on 2nd December 1952 as we drove into London, I cannot recall the journey through the suburbs but what is still vivid in my mind is the drive through Park Lane with Hyde Park on our left headed towards Marble Arch. All those black cars, and funny looking Austin and Morris taxis. It was just beautiful to be here, to recognise all those names we only knew from playing Monopoly.

It was so different from what we had imagined London to be. I am sure it was the glorious sunshine that welcomed us that made this everlasting impact on me. We made our way through Oxford Street and Regent street to the world-renowned Piccadilly, somehow that did not live up to our expectation, and even greater disappointment at seeing Buckingham Palace. Its sombre look just did not feel like a palace to this Indian who was used to the grand ornate palaces of the Indian Maharajahs.

The euphoria of being in London soon diminished however, as the small supply of rupees, which was worth nothing in sterling, ran out. The hopes of further education shattered, my two brothers and I were quickly put to work to pay for the daily necessities. It was then it dawned on us that we were no more just tourists and students but were now immigrants, for without money there was little prospect of returning back to India in the near future. The situation affected my parents most, for to them India was their home, where they had friends and relatives and thus an underlying desire to return.

Then came the break in 1955: Father managed to rent a whole house in Swiss Cottage, mainly through the generosity of a Mrs. Davidson, who not only rented the house to us at a very low rent but also allowed us to take in tenants. That changed things and made our finances a bit easier. Of course, I was not privy to all this, this was all for the grown-ups. However, even as a child one knows and feels things and is aware of problems that parents are trying to protect the children from. 14 Harley Road, Swiss Cottage NW3 was now slowly beginning to be our home. Mother had started taking in students for bed and breakfast, and sometimes dinner as well. This was more lucrative than just renting rooms, so financially we were getting on our feet. By now, our two sisters had joined us, they came by boat and the whole family was together again.

Some 20 years later we did return to India for holidays; it was no more the home that we had left and we realised that now Britain was our real home. Thus we live with divided loyalties, seeking an identity while we, after 65 years, still remain a foreigner in a land we think and feel is our home. Even with that caveat we are thankful to those who have, and do, welcome us, whereas to those who shout and tell me to go home I say: *I am home.*



Lasting IMPACTS

LIVING IN A DIVERSE COMMUNITY TAUGHT ME HOW ONE CAN SUSPEND THE DOGMATIC AND PEDANTIC CONFINES OF A NARROWLY DEFINED BELIEF SYSTEM: THAT PEACE BETWEEN PEOPLE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HOW THEY PRAY.

I was brought up as an only child in Mumbai, in a Zoroastrian family of academics. Both my parents were professors in Geology at the Mumbai University. I went to an all-girls school, and later for my undergraduate studies went to the same University as my parents: I didn’t really have a choice as to where I went, it was expected that I would follow in my parents’ footsteps. However, I did choose to break away from Science, and pursued a Bachelor’s degree in Arts instead. This was the beginning of making choices for myself.

I really wanted to complete my post-graduate studies in the UK but first, having lived a sheltered childhood, I had to build up the courage to convince myself that I would be able to cope abroad without my family, and then I had to convince my parents to let me go.

The family discussions began, and my plan did not go down very well with my father: he thought it was a bad idea for me to go on my own to a different country, but with my mother’s support I was able to persuade him that all would be well. And so, in 2003, at the age of 21, I found myself in the UK - a student pursuing a degree in Master of Business Administration.

Student accommodation for me was arranged in Wembley, London, in a neighbourhood with a majority of residents who were foreign born. This was a different side to the city than I had seen as a tourist, and I soon found myself making friends with people from different walks of life and parts of the world. I shared meals with a Muslim neighbourhood family, learned Spanish from my roommate, ate Caribbean and Polish food. There was a Mosque, a Church and a Gurudwara all within a mile of each other, and I imagined that the community as a whole lived in solidarity and peace.

Even on reflection after some years, I truly believe that there was a genuine and widespread belief of tolerance in my neighbourhood, and although I now realise sadly that this is not true of all parts of London, it has had a real impact on me. Living in a diverse community taught me how one can suspend the dogmatic and pedantic confines of a narrowly defined belief system: that peace between people is more important than how they pray.

The plan was to complete my degree and go back to Mumbai, however, while a student I met my now husband, who is also Zoroastrian. He had moved, at a very young age, with his family to London. I took the decision to stay on and pursue a career in London, get married and settle down here. All these years later I can’t imagine calling any other place home. Every time I go to Mumbai on holiday after a few days I miss my home, and can’t wait to get back to London.



My experience of living in the UK has taught me that, through the power of global communication, the world is truly becoming a village, and that we need to learn to embrace our differences in order to create a better world. This very reason has drawn me towards doing Inter-faith work and being a part of an international organisation called **Religions for Peace**.

As a member of Religions for Peace I am able to work on spreading awareness of the importance of dialogue by organising and attending diverse workshops and seminars here in London. I give presentations about my faith, and in return gain fascinating insights into other people’s religions, cultures and perspectives. I feel that my work is a vehicle through which I can spread awareness of the richness of diversity, especially with young people, through workshops and team building activities where people from all corners of society can come together.

Art: Impact AND Empowerment

WE, AS THE FLOWERS ON THIS EARTH, HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CREATE A POWER THAT IS TENDER YET STRONG, KIND AND PATIENT

I have seen the horrific results of power misused: a power that destroys, divides and creates hatred. I liken it to a rock crushing a delicate flower, wiping out its tender beauty and perfume.

But as a young Afghan woman who has experienced such a regime, I can tell you that it is possible to rise above such cruelty. I believe we, as the flowers on this earth, have the capacity to create a power that is tender yet strong, kind and patient: a power that generates hope, love and unity rather than fear and division. A power that enables other flowers to blossom, and colourful gardens to grow, creating a beautiful world of peace and love.

My first experience of life as a refugee was in 1998, when as a child I travelled from Afghanistan to Pakistan with my family: we were escaping the oppression of the Taliban regime that controlled a large swathe of the country including Kabul, the city of my birth. The regime strictly enforced an interpretation of Sharia law that oppressed the Afghan people, with a special emphasis on the control of women and girls: especially their freedom of movement and their education.



When the Taliban was overthrown in 2001, my family prepared to return to Afghanistan and it was with great joy that we arrived back in our homeland in 2002. My siblings and I continued our education in Kabul, and in 2007 I was fortunate to be able to pursue my growing passion for art and design by joining the Turquoise Mountain Institute where I focused my studies on the art of Calligraphy.

Following graduation, and supported financially by the Embassy of Afghanistan in the USA, in 2012 I established my own business 'Meftah-e-Humar' (The Key of Art), with a workshop in the Old City of Kabul employing and training young women to produce illuminated calligraphic artworks and traditional Islamic miniature paintings: it is especially pleasing to me that many young women benefitted from this training, and went on to become artists in their own right, creating a path to independence. Inspired by the work and ethos of Turquoise Mountain it is now my belief that there will be a greater awakening in Afghanistan to the value of professional artists, their skill and their creativity.

In 2014 I was awarded a commission by Turquoise Mountain to provide artwork for the 5* Anjum Hotel in Mecca, Saudi Arabia and to fulfil this contract I employed 30 women full time over a period of almost a year. We produced 600 original hand-painted calligraphy pieces and 8,000 prints.

In 2015 I was awarded "Best Woman Entrepreneur" during a celebration for International Women's Day at the Women's Centre of the American University of Afghanistan. I travelled widely to the USA, Dubai, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Europe.

Such high-profile activities brought me to the attention of the Taliban which had, once again, gained control of parts of my country and I subsequently realised that I should leave Afghanistan for my own safety. This decision was a very traumatic one as I would be leaving a lifestyle and culture that I loved, and of course my family who had always given me their support.

Inspired by the work and ethos of Turquoise Mountain it is now my belief that there will be a greater awakening in Afghanistan to the value of professional artists, their skill and their creativity.



*...art unites people and united people are strong:
together they have the power to change the world for good.*

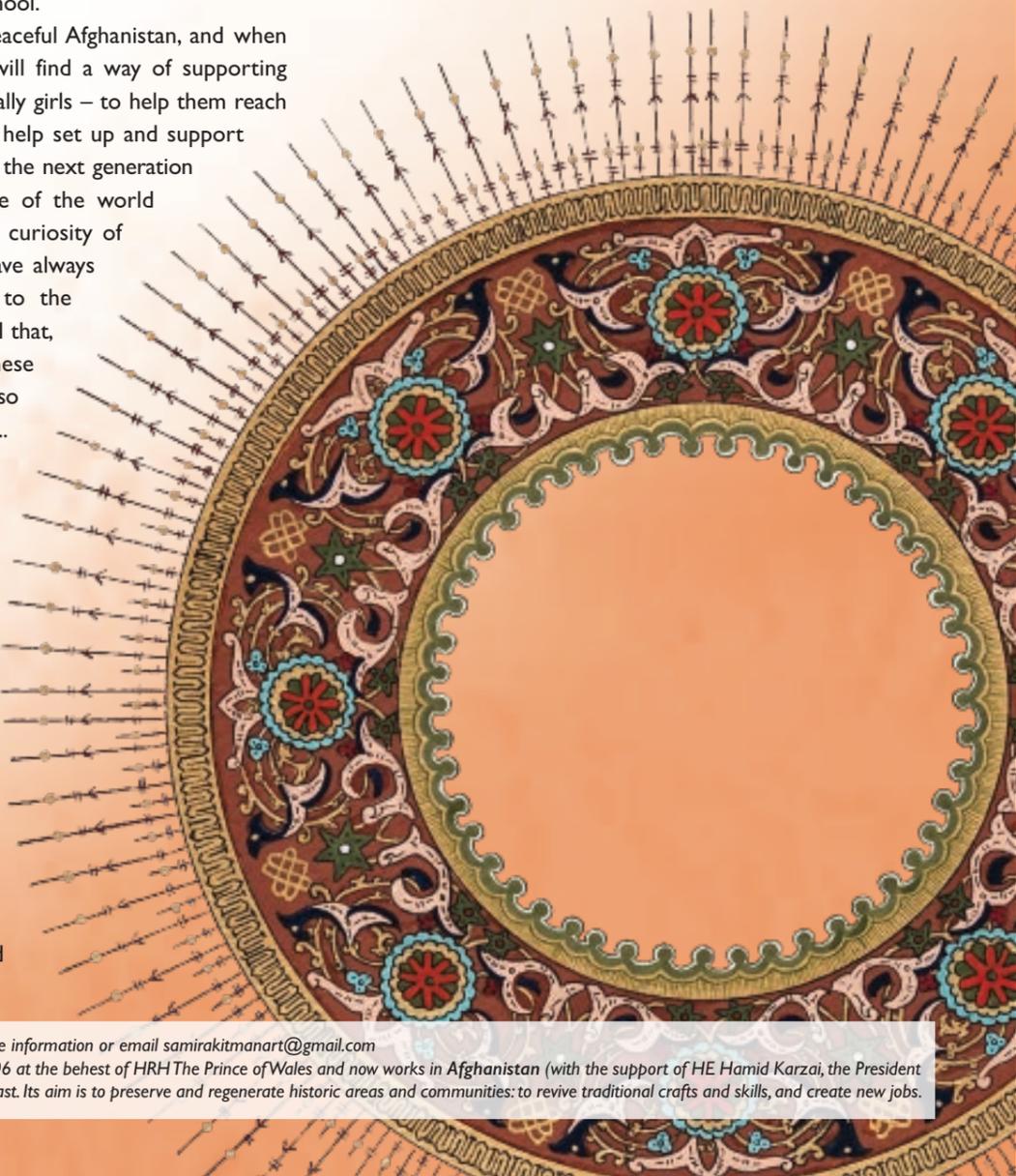
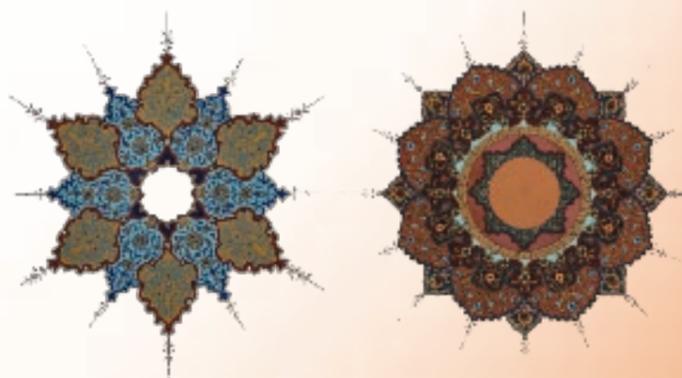
I was heading for a life unknown, with few material belongings and only my conviction that ultimately I was in a position to make an independent living, and also teach the artistic skills that I had learned at the Turquoise Mountain Institute.

I was granted refugee status by the Home Office and a five-year resident visa. I feel overwhelmed by the generosity of this country to grant me a safe and secure place in which to live. I will do everything in my power to pay back that generosity by contributing, through art - especially to the community in which I now live - Lancaster - where the kindness of people has made me feel very welcome. I am currently running workshops to pass on the technique of calligraphy, and my plan is to establish a series of workshops and maybe an art school.

I pray every day for a more peaceful Afghanistan, and when that time comes I know that I will find a way of supporting the education of children - especially girls - to help them reach their potential. I have a desire to help set up and support libraries so that the imagination of the next generation can flourish, and their knowledge of the world develop in a natural way as their curiosity of life grows. My long term plans have always included giving something back to the country of my birth, and now I feel that, with hard work, I can achieve these dreams. My only regret is that I am so far away from my beloved parents... maybe one day when I have achieved my dream of independence they will join me here.

Some people may question the power of an artist and I hope that by sharing my story I can convince them that art can make an impact. Art allows me to express myself, it empowers me to know who I am, and I want to empower others in the same way.

I strongly believe that art unites people and united people are strong: together they have the power to change the world for good.



Please see Facebook: Samira Kitman for more information or email samirakitmanart@gmail.com
Turquoise Mountain was established in 2006 at the behest of HRH The Prince of Wales and now works in Afghanistan (with the support of HE Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan), Myanmar and the Middle East. Its aim is to preserve and regenerate historic areas and communities: to revive traditional crafts and skills, and create new jobs.

*The prince travelled to the place of a hundred springs.
He viewed the wide plain,
He climbed the hill
And looked out over the land:
A land wide enough for many to live there.
Here there was room to settle,
Here they could build places for strangers to stay,
Here he made up his mind:
This was how it would be.*

Quoted in *Stories of the Stranger: Encounters with exiles and outsiders*. Collected by Martin Palmer and Katriana Hazell, Pub. Bene Factum Pub. Ltd 2014. From *The Book of Poetry, or Shi Jing*.

Guardians & Pioneers

Did you hear about the two rabbis who...

No, they did not go into a pub, nor did they become stuck in a lift. Instead they have just written a book together - but whereas that may not sound very noteworthy, what was special was that it was an Orthodox rabbi (Naftali Brawer) and a Reform one (myself), something that has never been done before in British Jewry.

In some ways, it is astonishing that it has taken so long to bridge the religious divide that exists within Judaism - and as Reform Judaism started in this country in 1840, that means it has taken almost two centuries to reach this point.

However, those from other faiths who also have their internal divisions will be only too aware that what may seem to the outside world to be relatively minor theological distinctions, can be the source of great friction, persecution or even wars, within that religion.

It is a well-known conundrum on a personal level too: fights within the family are always much fiercer than with those outside. Somehow we feel able to let go of standards of behaviour in private in a way that we would not do in public.

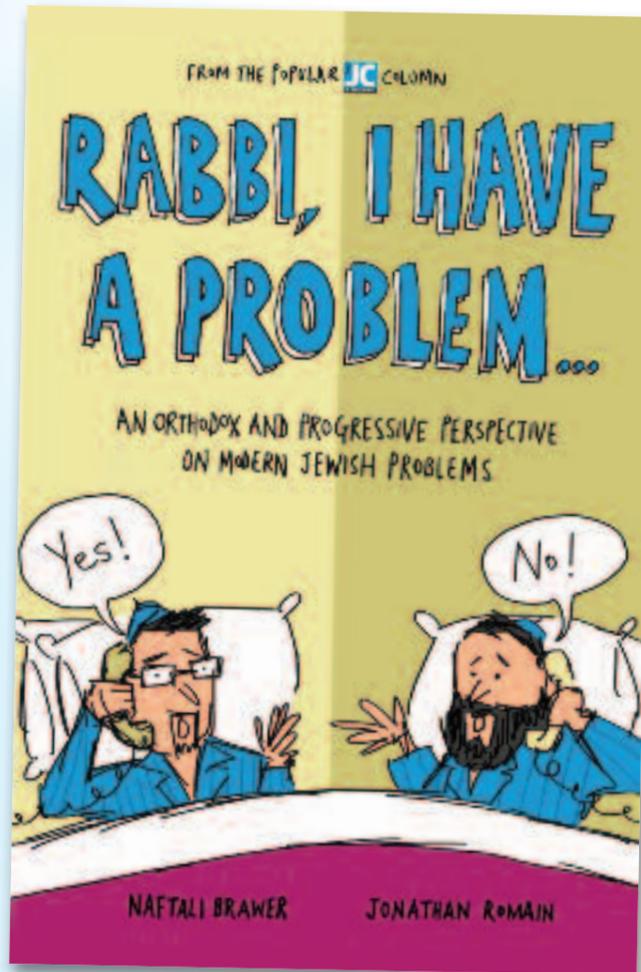
It applies to other institutions too, with splits within political parties (be it on the right or the left) always being much more vitriolic than the rivalry between the main parties. The caricature in *The Life of Brian* - the acute antagonism between the Judean People's Front and the People's Front of Judea - merely mimicked real life.

But whilst we accept polarisation in the wider world as perfectly normal, the internal religious chasms are less excusable, bearing in mind the numerous sermons we give about mutual respect and seeing God's handiwork in all human beings. Religious in-fighting does not sit well with our core values.

There is also a curious double-think: we tend to accept inter-faith dialogue but not intra-faith dialogue; we are happy to discuss relations between the different faiths, but much less open to those within our respective traditions.

In the Jewish world, there are many different streams (including Conservative, Hasidic and Reconstructionist) but the main divide is between Orthodox and Reform (also known as Progressive or Liberal).

As in other faiths, there are outer differences that make the most impression (such as men and women sitting separately in Orthodox synagogues, but together in Reform ones). However, the core difference is in their attitudes to Scripture and the right to change.



Orthodoxy sees itself as the guardian of tradition, based on God's immutable word, while Reform considers itself to be a modernising force, trying to marry the best of the past with the realities of today.

Sadly, these differences resulted in periods of either vitriolic antagonism or cold disdain between Orthodox and Reform rabbis. There was a refusal to engage with each other, even though both groups were promoting the same faith and sharing the same history and morals.

Thus there were many Orthodox rabbis who would shake hands with a vicar but not with a Reform rabbi. In similar vein, Protestants and Catholics no longer burn each other at the stake, but still question each other's religious authority. Sunnis and Shiites are engaged in bloody conflict abroad, and although relations are far better in the UK, both will object if meetings involve a third group, the Ahmadi Muslims.

It stems, of course, from the sincere belief that we alone are the true heirs of our faith and that we have a responsibility to maintain that precious heritage. It includes opposing any, to our mind, false variations of it.

There is nothing so guaranteed to infuriate our religious sensibilities than the claim of others to be the real us. Equally explosive is dealing with those who interpret our sacred texts in a variant way. Those with an entirely foreign set of scriptures can be politely dismissed as irrelevant, whereas those who quote the same verses, but derive a different conclusion, are far more threatening.

It is a far cry from the courtesy given to each other by the schools of Hillel and Shammai in the second century, who each claimed to be the true interpreters of Jewish law and argued incessantly with each other, but had the grace to recognise that both 'are the words of the Living God' (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 13b).

There have been occasional moments of religious harmony, such as in 1934 when the Orthodox Chief Rabbi, Joseph Hertz, was guest of honour at the opening of an extension at the West London (Reform) Synagogue. He did not hide where he stood, but was clear about his priorities:

"If I have decided to be with you this morning, it is because of my conviction that far more calamitous than religious difference in Jewry is religious indifference".

Unfortunately, his words were not echoed by subsequent generations. The gulf developed into an obsession that any form of contact might be seen as approving the other side.

When Pope John Paul II visited Manchester in 1982 and met with other faith leaders, the leading Orthodox rabbi, Dayan Ehrentreu, refused to attend. It was not that he objected to greeting the Pope, but he did not want to be in the same room as a Reform rabbi who was there.

An unexpected vehicle for improving Jewish-Jewish contact were local meetings of the Council of Christians and Jews. As all the rabbis in the area were invited, it acted as 'cover' for establishing relations with each other.

It may well be that a similar function is replicated at the wider inter-faith groups that now exist in many areas, and which allow clergy of denominations within the same faith to meet who might not have any other opportunity for doing so.

These fissures, and attempts to overcome them, indicate that any hope of mutual acceptance within faiths has to overcome three obstacles. One is the overwhelming power of tradition and the difficulty of letting go of past claims to be sole arbiters of the truth.

The second is that there is still a fear in some circles that by acknowledging the validity of other approaches, one is thereby lessening one's own integrity.

The third problem is that tolerance has not always been a religious value. It was the intolerance of paganism, sacred prostitutes and child sacrifices that was the hallmark of ethical monotheism.

Unfortunately, that intolerance became extended to groups that did not merit being opposed physically, abused verbally or simply ignored.

Our task today is to learn to love our same-faith-different-sect neighbour as much as anyone else. We need to embrace pluralism within faiths as much as between faiths. When we benignly say that all the major faiths lead to the same Creator, we have to extend that same religious passport to internal dissenters too.

Naftali and I writing a joint Orthodox-Reform book together is part of this new trend. We do not minimise our controversies, but nor do we inflate them to the point where we cannot communicate. We are writing side by side, with mutual respect, unafraid to differ where we think fit, and happy to agree when appropriate.

As for the book itself, *Rabbi, I Have a Problem*, it covers a wide range of issues that face modern Jews, ranging from religious doubts to sex-change, from business ethics to dementia. They are based on questions submitted by readers of *The Jewish Chronicle*.

What stands out is that the highest number of questions concern death and mourning. It indicates that this is the area where Jews, who may be lapsed in other parts of religious life, feel the most need to 'get it right'.

Having had the shock of a loss, there is a need to reclaim control by busying oneself with various rituals that help structure the void one is experiencing. In addition, there is a desire to honour the deceased by doing what it is thought they would have wanted.

In complete contrast is how few are the questions on Jewish belief. It reflects the fact that although Judaism is a faith, most Jews are concerned with what to do rather than with what to believe. As I say to many who struggle with theology, but are committed to Jewish values: "To be a good Jew, you don't have to believe in God, just do what God says".

The book reveals that there is no issue in general life that does not affect Jews too. Thus other questions range from problems in the bedroom, to talking to one's children about drugs, to the death of a beloved pet. They encompass financial misconduct, noisy neighbours and impossible in-laws.

Above all, the book indicates that we are not harmed by co-operating, and would be diminished by refusing to do so. We hope this can act as a model for more rabbis, as well as clergy of other faiths.

"We need to embrace pluralism within faiths as much as between faiths"

Rohingya Muslims: *THE RIGHT TO CITIZENSHIP*

Their childhood is a catalogue of obstructive, and emotionally and spiritually destructive, experiences...

March 14th is commemorated as #My Freedom Day, a yearly global awareness day to fight the crime against modern-day slavery through human trafficking. I wonder what freedom would mean to the minority ethnic Muslims of Rohingya who are in the grip of a humanitarian crisis, at the core of which lies xenophobic supremacy. What would it mean for those who suffer a multifaceted servitude? Freedom for them, I feel, would mean anything and everything a dispossessed and terrorised community would wish to escape from.

The Rohingya Muslim issue needs to be revisited again and again until they inhabit geographical, social, economic and political spaces worthy of entitled citizens. Their plight should be embedded in our consciousness as the incidents of ethnic cleansing, with evidence of genocide, are repeatedly making disturbing headlines. Organisations such as Doctors without Borders, Red Cross, Amnesty International, the United Nations, Muslim International Charities, Reuters, together with different world media outlets, have all reported or documented the cold-blooded subjugation of the entire Rohingya community by their Buddhist majority counterparts. The repression has many forms, such as mass execution, burning children alive, torturing the elderly, torching of corpses and homes, destruction of entire villages - numbering approximately 350 - and gang-rape of women and children. Accounts of ethnic cleansing are accompanied by hedonistic horrors enacted by the perpetrators. Once famed for their humility and peace-loving way of life, members of the Buddhist community are now transformed into a militia community that terrorizes their Muslim minority neighbours with the aid of Buddhist police.

In exile, the suffering of the Rohingyas has been witnessed a number of times, in either makeshift refugee camps, flimsy huts, forests or elsewhere, with poor or no sanitation, under harsh weather conditions - unrelenting monsoon rain and annual cyclone. All of this against a backdrop of bleak uncertainty and distressing exploitation of children, women and young men, where the exploitation is either sexual or in the nature of radicalization.

A substantial population of the fleeing refugees are children, with babies being born in the camps every day. In such a scenario, the children do not enjoy being in a state of protected innocence, which is the birth right of every child regardless of where they are born. Their childhood is a catalogue of obstructive, and emotionally and spiritually destructive, experiences, ranging from absolute deprivation, rootlessness, fear, moral and social corruption to despair, and potential radicalization by insurgent groups. Children born under freedom know the worth of freedom for themselves and for others. Those born under tyranny, control and compliance however, may not see the harm in it for others when ultimately,

they are able to break free to change the course of direction for themselves.

Overburdened with the unprecedented exodus of refugees, the remarkable hospitality of Bangladesh is at breaking point. The talk of repatriation has gained momentum with the signing of a repatriation treaty in November 2017, between Bangladesh, the sheltering nation and Myanmar, the terrorising homeland, to return gradually all the refugees, totalling around a million. But amidst fears, misgivings, uncertainty and criticism, the repatriation process - which was to commence January 2018 - has been postponed indefinitely. Bangladesh however, agrees that it has to be a voluntary rather than a forcible repatriation. Rohingya leaders demand justice. They would like to see the military and their accomplices held accountable for the killing, torture, looting, raping, and arson attacks on them before they decide to return to Rakhine - or what is left of their villages. They would like to see the innocent Rohingyas who are detained in counter-insurgency operations released from custody. Although a displaced diaspora in Bangladeshi camps, the Rohingya refugees would rather live there than return to their homeland for fear of further oppression by Buddhist gangs, the army and police. In any case, before they return, they must (a) receive a guarantee of justice from the Burmese authority for the crimes committed against them and (b) a process has to be put in place to reconstruct their lives, including those who have been orphaned - grant them citizenship rights; return their land; ensure immediate livelihood; build permanent homes; ensure safety and security - first and foremost. If Myanmar accepts refugees simply to divert the attention of the world for the rule of tyranny they unleashed on these people, then that would be immoral and an infringement of the human rights of those who suffer.

In 2010 on her 65th birthday Aung San Suu Kyi famously said: *"please use your liberty to promote ours"* - a message released exclusively to a British newspaper by a friend and political ally, UWin Tin, with a view to garnering support for her freedom and justice movement, and for the Burmese people who were under the rule of the oppressive military regime. Now, enjoying freedom from political confinement and an established member of the government of her country Suu Kyi is transformed completely, to the point of being complicit in the persecution of the Rohingya Muslims, an ethnic minority in her own country. She is no longer the political 'elder' the world used to look up to. Under her watch now even Reuters journalists have been detained for investigating a massacre in Rakhine!

With no positive future to look forward to, what lies ahead for the Rohingya Muslims? This is a question those in charge of their immediate destiny, should meticulously consider with compassion.

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faith INITIATIVE

Why do I Care?

“The major issue is human greed, stupidity, violence and arrogance.”



I first started working on what we now call climate change issues in the early 1990's after the World Council of Churches (WCC) highlighted the disappearing lands of Pacific Islanders. These Christian islanders had come to the once every seven years General Assembly of the WCC to tell other Christians of the way the sea level was rising and washing away the ancestral burial grounds of the people. I found their personal stories deeply moving and began working with groups such as the now called Interfaith Power and Light movement in the USA, seeking to address these issues through, amongst other things, supporting the use of alternative energy in faith buildings.

I attended my first COP (Conference of the Parties) meeting in Amsterdam in 2000 as an official member of the Mongolian delegation because we were working with the Mongolian Buddhists on eco-building of temples, and on their programmes supporting a more ecological outlook in Mongolia specifically, and throughout North Asian Buddhism generally. For example, this focused on recovering and restoring traditional ways of building not just temples, but also houses, in Mongolia which were supremely energy efficient.

I have turned down invitations to every COP meeting since because, frankly, they are not fit for purpose – or certainly were not until the Paris COP which began to change the overall approach. More on that later.

Sadly, over these last almost thirty years I have watched as 'climate change' has distorted the environmental movement almost beyond recognition. I say distorted because it has come to

so dominate the environmental discourse that all other issues – marine life, forests, agriculture, species etc – have been relegated by it, and can often now only be justified for action if a climate change element can be proved.

The dramatic, if not at times hysterical, outpourings of politicians, environmentalists and, occasionally, religious leaders, have only added to the confusion.

Climate change is not the major issue because climate change is the consequence of something far deeper, far more profound and far more difficult. And that is that we have put humanity at the centre of the meaning of life, and have made all else – everything else in Creation - subservient to us. The major issue, therefore, is human greed, stupidity, violence and arrogance.

Climate change is a manifestation of these deeper issues and unless and until we actually start to address these by establishing the right relationship with God – however we might understand that word – with our neighbour, with ourselves and with the whole of Creation, we will make no real long term difference to climate change, nor to protecting or living in balance with the rest of Creation.

Don't get me wrong. Climate change is a profoundly serious threat and challenge. But if we only seek to address it in isolation to the much more challenging examination of what we think we are - what rights we have, and what role we can play - we will fail to address its cause and only attend to its effects. We will have only dealt with the wounds not with what is causing the wounds.

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...many of the faiths questioned the very assumption that life could go on but just required a little tweaking...

Let me give you an example. ARC (Alliance of Religion and Conservation) is the official partner with the UN (United Nations) in developing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These have been created as much in response to climate change as to any other key issue such as poverty, education, health etc. When we brought together the major faiths to debate and discuss with the UN the SDGs at the Bristol meeting in 2015, the UN was somewhat taken aback. I think they had expected the faiths to simply say “Well Done”, agree to support them, and generally give them a pat on the back.

Some did, but some did not. From Islam, from Daoism, from Hinduism and from the Shinto came a series of challenges. Why, they asked, was the only economic model assumed by the SDGs that of consumerist capitalism? And why was the SDGs basically attempting to make the impact of this consumerist capitalism *a bit less destructive* – for example in the field of climate change solutions? The uncritical assumption that there is only one viable economic model shocked the faiths, as it is primarily this economic model which is driving us down the road of loss of bio-diversity, and the destruction of forests. It is this concept of ‘sustainable development’ which ignores the cost to the environment and the pursuit of happiness, which means we feel we can take what we want from nature – so how can it also save us? The faiths offered a range of alternative economic models which divorced the greed and self-centredness of consumerism from the need for serious development of education, health, the tackling poverty, the resolving of conflict and so forth.

In other words, many of the faiths questioned the very assumption that life could go on but just required a little tweaking. They saw climate change and all the other issues as being the

manifestations of wrong relationships, wrong economic models and indeed in many cases wrong understanding of the place and role of humanity within the great Story of Life itself.

The word ‘story’ is also important. We are a story-telling species. Our great faiths have continued from generation to generation over hundreds, indeed thousands of years by telling stories. These stories range from our sacred texts to the lives of saints, gurus and teachers as well as contemporary stories which highlight faith truths about who we are. Yet it has only been in the last couple of years that the climate change movement has begun to discover this for themselves. We have been bombarded with data for over twenty years and frankly it has had very little impact on the vast majority of people. Entire academic empires have been built upon the quest for data about this critical issue and this has been like a small pebble falling into a lake.

Back in 1986 HRH The Duke of Edinburgh caused controversy in the environmental world. He was the International President of the World Wild Life Fund (WWF) at that time and at a planning meeting to celebrate WWF’s 25th anniversary he said “If the environmental crisis was a crisis of data, of information, it would be over now. The fact is that data does not change hearts and minds. Only two things have done that throughout history – the Arts and faith”. So saying, he suggested that WWF should meet with the major faiths to explore how the insights, wisdom and authority could be partners with the major conservation/environmental organisations. This resulted in the first ever such meeting between major faiths and the main environmental organisations at Assisi, Italy. It achieved the largest press coverage of any WWF event before or since. The movement needed our stories and our wisdom.

Data is only as important as the context within which it is used. To quote Mark Twain, there are “lies, damned lies and statistics”. Data is used within specific contexts which colour what the numbers mean. It is therefore ridiculous to talk of data as neutral because it never is. However, because we have created a culture which likes to pretend that data is neutral, we have pushed narrative into the far background or denied its validity at all. Yet all information is narrated so it is vital to understand the narratives themselves to really appreciate what is going on.

The faiths know this and have the ability to narrate the true nature of our crises, which facts and figures can enhance but not reveal.

For example, Daoism. When the UN held its first formal meeting with the Daoists of China in 2008, it was a year before the disastrous Copenhagen COP which many already knew was not going to work for all sorts of reasons. At the Daoism meeting the UN tried to explain with graphs, data, predictions etc what climate change meant. The blank looks on many faces told us all that this was not working until one of the most senior Daoists rose and said: *“It is our belief that the universe is composed of two opposite, often in conflict, occasionally in harmony natural forces. Yin and yang. Yin is the earthy, cold, wet, feminine element while yang is the heavens and stars, male, hot and dry. These two have to be balanced and our role as human beings is to help keep that balance. It is the basis of all Daoist ritual and teachings. So let us put this as we would in Daoism. Carbon fuels are yin – earthy. When we burn them they become gases, yang, and ascend to the sky. This means the fundamental balance of yin and yang is thrown out of kilter, and we as humanity have failed to fulfil our role as those who maintain the balance. This means that burning fossil fuels is against the Dao.”*

That one speech did more in a few minutes to explain within a Greater Daoist Story, a meaningful narrative, the issues that lie behind climate change as a manifestation of a wrong relationship with nature, than any UN document. And it has been quoted hundreds of times by the UN itself.

In 2015 ARC was asked by the then President of France, Francois Hollande, if we would convene a gathering of religious leaders prior to the Paris COP and as the President said “Get them all to issue a challenge to the political leaders”. We said no we wouldn’t because at every COP for the last fifteen years or more, religious leaders have ‘spoken out’, have ‘written demanding action’ etc. And no-one has paid the slightest bit of attention. Most COPs generate over 10,000 petitions to political leaders so you can imagine how many actually get read. Instead we suggested that we, with the President, invite key religious leaders who had actually done things, significant things within their own faiths, to address environmental issues including climate change. No point in having people who say one thing but have failed to do anything themselves about it. We also invited artists, philosophers, humanists, craftspeople to join us and we asked each one to come answering one question. Not how do we make other people do what we want, but to answer honestly “Why do I care?”. The event – the Summit of Conscience – was a huge success and from this President Hollande asked us to craft

a letter which he sent a few weeks prior to the Paris COP. The letter said:

By their nature, COPs offer an opportunity to meet and talk at the highest level. They also offer an opportunity to undertake decisive steps to tackle climate change; but as we all know that opportunity is beset by challenges.

2015 is a dramatic year for making key choices for Humanity: we need to reinvent how we tackle the major challenges that face us and our planet. This calls for new ways of living and acting.

This calls for real honesty at every level, and it is vital that it starts here, among those deeply involved at the level of leaders of national delegations, NGOs, the scientific community, civil society...

So as you prepare to come to Paris we would like to ask you to think about your personal role, and answer a simple, but profound, question: “Why do I care?” Your response might be very personal – the influence of a parent, child or grandparent; the influence of culture or personal beliefs; the influence of a transformative experience of the wonder and beauty of nature; a crisis in your life which brought you back to core values.

In our contemporary world it is very rare that we are asked to talk about what lies at the heart of our actions. Instead we hide behind statistics, data, policy statements etc, few of which actually touch other people’s hearts and minds.

In telling the story of “Why do I care”, you will be joining millions around the world, including the example set recently by His Holiness The Pope, in making climate change and the protection of our beautiful planet a personal issue of our own beliefs and values.

Why are we asking you to do this? Because we hope that in answering this question, you will come to the COP primarily as a conscious human being not just a representative of a Government or agency.

In the end the most important element of this is that we hear from you as a person, a member of the human family who has for a time a uniquely significant role to play in protecting the world.

The result of this totally different, story based, personal beliefs and values centred appeal was that over a quarter of those coming replied. Their answers are of course confidential, but it was this group who were prepared to go the extra mile and to broker and compromise, cut and deal in order that a Paris Agreement could be achieved. In other words it was only when this became personal and about what motivates each person that the data had a context within which to work.

As faiths we have sometimes given up our own wealth of understanding, our own stories in order to seem relevant to the secular world. This is usually a mistake because only through stories can we change hearts and minds. Only by being true to our own traditions at their best can we be of real help to our world. And only by remembering that climate change is a manifestation of what some faiths call sin, others karma, and yet others going against the Dao, can we really speak - not the data and science - but to the souls of those who in the end need to change and change dramatically.



Ever-Turning Back

The challenge is to change our own behaviour, trapped as we are in a system that may seem impossible to change.

Some people do not believe it, but the Earth's climate is changing – we have lived on it only a few decades ourselves and records from before, even during those decades show how much things, such as sea and ocean levels, are changing.

Scientists have predicted what will happen if the climate goes on changing in the way it is at the moment: their best guess is that - the climate will become even more unpredictable, with bigger storms, droughts, floods, forest fires, heatwaves and even seismic activities sparked off by changes in water and ice levels: landslides, earthquakes, eruptions and so on. The snows are melting in some places, stranding polar bears, and snow is being deposited in others unused to it, such as the southern states of the USA, the Middle East, Japan and Korea, which we think of as being in the warmer parts of the earth, nearer to the Equator.

What used to be storms in the Philippines, North India and the Caribbean are becoming regular typhoons, cyclones and hurricanes, bringing floods and destruction in their wake. Small forest fires are becoming immense: like the fires in California this year, which were as big as major cities like Paris and New York, burning for weeks, so that even the homes of the rich and powerful were not safe. Remember too the forest fires in Indonesia (Bali and Sumatra) which killed inhabitants of the forest, especially vulnerable wildlife, and polluted the air with smoke haze for hundreds of miles around, drastically reducing the forest's capacity to absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

Droughts and floods bring crop failures and famines in their wake – and, needless to say, hungry people desperate for help. The Pentagon long ago predicted unrest and conflict as a result of climate change, as well as an influx of migrants. There is indeed,

no shortage of conflict, and people who exploit conflict for their own agendas, leading to displaced populations on the move, too often to unwelcoming, suspicious and hostile parts of the world. The need for harmony is becoming critically urgent as the whole world slowly and painfully becomes conscious of the huge and growing crisis it is facing.

A small but growing number of people are joining up the dots, seeing the moral crisis in the climate crisis, looking to their wisdom-teachings and scriptures for guidance. The Muslim Ulama of Indonesia, for example, have recently issued a video on YouTube calling for mosques to take a lead in educating people, collecting rainwater to use in ablutions, and generating their own electricity by renewable means. They want 1,000 eco-mosques by 2020.

The Qur'an says: *'God created death and life to test you and reveal which of you does best – He is the Mighty, the Forgiving'* (Q. 67:2). And God also commands Prophet Muhammad to say [to his people] (Q. 2:148): *'Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything.'*

In the face of Climate Change, though harmony will be difficult; coming together to find solutions will be vital. Sharing what we have with others will be difficult, but essential to keep people from anger, despair, fighting, crime, and the sort of mass destruction and death we are seeing in the Middle East, and have seen elsewhere far too many times before throughout history.

The Qur'an frequently tells Muslims to repel evil with that which is better (Q. 13:22, 23:96): *'[Muslims are] those who repel evil with good, give to others out of what We have provided for them'* (Q. 28:54)

I recently watched the old film of *'The Diary of Anne Frank'* on TV, empathizing with the Jewish families, as they tried to carry on their lives in the confinement of their friends' concealed attic, their human flaws heightened by fear of capture and death at the hands of the Nazis. Anne's final statement of faith, before being taken away to the death camps, was extremely moving, ... *there is good in all people, although the bad side may take over sometimes... and that... nature is beautiful and good.*

'Heartbreaking' was the term used by David Attenborough, commenting on the death of albatross chicks as a result of the plastic waste painstakingly collected by their faithfully monogamous parents from hundreds of miles of sea around Antarctica, and fed lovingly to their only offspring of that year. Attenborough's concern has sparked off and given impetus to many initiatives to ban plastic bottles, bags, straws, cups, and so on and to clean up major rivers that spew plastic into the oceans.

'Causing corruption on land and sea' is the term used by the Qur'an (30:41) to describe the actions of ignorant and careless people like ourselves:

Corruption has appeared on land and sea as a result of people's actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back.

It is this capacity to 'turn back', to God, to see what we are doing wrong, and to put it right, that could be the saving grace of human beings. The Qur'an (Q. 38) describes the sincere servants of God as 'ever-turning back (awwāb)', giving the examples of David and Solomon, Job, and Jonah, all of whom committed sins, but realized and repented to God afterwards, achieving forgiveness, closeness to Him and a happy ending. Maybe they didn't save the world, but they reaffirmed their relationship with God and got their own rewards with Him for doing so, and honourable mention among people in this world forever after.

The challenge is to change our own behaviour, trapped as we are in a system that may seem impossible to change. In our sincere efforts to do this, we can perhaps set an example to those around us and beyond and show them how to do better themselves.

If not, we are just preaching, like Mullah Nasrudin in this Sufi tale: Nasrudin was scheduled to give a religious speech one day to an all-male audience, but had no particular topic in mind. He thought of one, and began preaching:

"Gentleman," he said. "We must stop allowing our wives to wear make-up. It is inappropriate, indecent, impure, wicked, and by all means sinful. Any man who lets his wife wear make-up should be ashamed of himself!"

"But Mullah," said one of the men, "your wife always wears make-up!"

"Yes, that's true," Nasrudin remarked. "And it looks great on her, doesn't it?" (www.rodneyohebsion.com/mulla-nasrudin.htm)

An easier option is to share other people's good examples, and there are plenty around if you look hard enough. I share some of the ones I find via Facebook.

Here are some recent 'good example' headlines:

- **Chile creates five national parks over 10m acres in historic act of conservation.**
- **Tanzania Eco-Mosque**
- **Renewable energy now makes up a third of all energy generated in the UK.**

We can all switch to renewable energy if we search for it. The Green Mosques energy switch, launched in 2016, followed the example of the Big Church energy switch and plumped for www.bulb.co.uk and, having road-tested it in our household for over a year, it certainly has saved us money and improved customer relations. There are other ways of switching to cheaper tariffs, but I prefer to keep my switching under my own control and avoid being switched to a cheaper but less green company.

The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change urges all people to "Commit themselves to 100% renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible," so switching our suppliers is the easiest way to do this. Keep an eye out for 100% green gas...

God created death and life to test you and reveal which of you does best - He is the Mighty, the Forgiving

Harfiyah is a trustee of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES). She is also the editor of a collection of essays on Islam and the Environment and co-editor of the Muslim Green Guide to Reducing Climate Change.

Qur'an translation used in this article is by M.A.S. Haleem, Oxford University Press.

www.ifees.org.uk/ where you can read:

- *The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*
- *The Green Muslim Guide to Reducing Climate Change*
- *The Green Mosques pages*

www.interfaithdeclaration.org/ www.greenfaith.org/ <http://EarthCharter.org>

Action sites: 14/2/2018: *The Climate Coalition (UK)* had their Show the Love week www.showthelove.org.uk and will be organising a Week of Action <https://weekofaction.org.uk/> later this year to lobby UK MPs.

In Service to Mother Earth

Through our work we have been able to inspire and mobilise countless Hindus worldwide to increase their love and care for Mother Earth.

In the 70 years since Indian independence, Hindu populations have grown significantly beyond the borders of India. We now find sizeable Hindu communities all over the world, most notably in North America, Europe, South East Asia, Africa, and Australasia. This spread of Hindu cultures means that Hindus are now more involved in global issues, and share more responsibility to work together towards solutions. This requires new thinking about the role and application of Hindu principles in a global context – about offering dharmic proposals to global discourse and action.

A major step towards a more globally engaged Hinduism was the launch of the Bhumi Project at the Windsor Celebration of the Faith Commitments for a Living Planet in November 2009, organised by Alliance of Religions and Conservation. The Project was conceived to educate, inspire, inform and connect Hindus interested in service to Mother Earth. The project is aptly named after Bhumi Devi, a Sanskrit name for the personality of Mother Earth, famed in Indian literature.

The Project is a joint initiative between the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (OCHS) and GreenFaith - a multi-faith environmental organisation based in United States. This partnership allows the Project to draw upon world-class Hindu scholarship from the OCHS which then informs cutting-edge environmental leadership training and campaigns with GreenFaith.

Since the launch of the Project in 2009 we have engaged with Hindu leaders, temples, and communities across the world to address a range of environmental concerns, such as climate change, pollution, and wildlife conservation.

From 2010 - 2014 we worked extensively with a number of major Hindu temples, places of worship and pilgrimage in India. This work consisted of engaging religious leaders, community activists, local NGOs and governments. Sites where we worked included Rishikesh, Varanasi, Vrindavana, Puri, and Dwarka. During this time we also initiated tiger and lion conservation projects in India, looking to minimise the effects of religious pilgrimage in wildlife sensitive zones. A major outcome of this work was a publication entitled the 'Green Temples Guide'. This handbook detailed how Hindu religious institutions could be more environmentally friendly over seven thematic areas.

In 2015 our work took on a more international tone in the lead up to the Paris climate negotiations, COP21. The Bhumi Project was invited to work with other leading faith-based environmental organisations to advocate for a strong climate treaty. In July of 2015 we helped convene an international climate change leadership training in Rome, Italy. This gathering brought together 100 young religious leaders from across the world for an opportunity to develop the skills needed to become change-makers in their local communities. Of the 100 attendees,

15 were from Hindu backgrounds; they had come from India, the US, UK and Fiji. This was the first time that so many Hindu climate activists had come together for a faith-based climate event. Later in 2015 we issued the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change. Written by an international team, the Declaration was endorsed by over 70 major Hindu institutions and leaders from across the world - the highest ever for a Hindu climate statement.

In addition to our environmental work, we have engaged considerably with the United Nations. Prior to the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) we were invited to offer a formal response by the UN on how the international Hindu community could help implement the Goals: these formed part of the Bristol Faith Commitments. In late 2017 we participated in the launch of the Zug Faith Guidelines, where we contributed guidelines for how Hindus could invest for sustainable development through impact investing.

During 2018 and 2019 we will be participating in a major international campaign on renewable energy solutions for India and Africa. We will also be a founding partner for GreenFaith India – the first multi-faith climate change initiative in the country. We will continue to build upon the considerable partnerships we have developed in the US by offering climate change leadership workshops for Hindu students at a number of major universities, including Georgetown, Princeton and Yale.

Through our work we have been able to inspire and mobilise countless Hindus worldwide to increase their love and care for Mother Earth. As the climate crises intensifies over the coming years and decades, Hindu leaders and communities will have an increasingly important role to play in caring for the natural world. The Bhumi Project is honoured and humbled to play a role in that work.



Gopal Patel, Director of the Bhumi Project, speaking to Hindu leaders at a gathering on Capitol Hill, Washington DC.

EcoSikhs: Challenging our behaviour and outlook

“WE NEED TO PROTECT NATURE, FOR OUR OWN EXISTENCE.”

Scattered in almost 20 nations, the 30 million Sikh population believe in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and the rich traditions of Sikh history which describes the Sikhs as pioneers in environmental work, the hard workers and the ones who thrive for the wellbeing of all, we say *sarbat da bhalla*. Punjab is the homeland of Sikhs where EcoSikh invests the majority of its energy and focus towards its ecological revival through behaviour change in the community worldwide.

Launched at Windsor Castle in 2009, EcoSikh is the Sikh community's contribution to the UN and Alliance of Religions and Conservation (UNARC) Seven Year Plan for a generational change project. It has been helping the global community of Sikhs to connect all that it has been doing since then, whilst enabling new paths to be forged towards creating sustainable traditions and lifestyles.

EcoSikh has been able to connect thousands of Sikh families through its most revered project the World Sikh Environment Day which has been celebrated since 2011 during the week of March 14th. The date, 14th March, is significant as it is the enthronement

day of Seventh Guru, Sri Har Rai, who has been remembered in Sikh history for his deep sensitivity towards nature. There are so many important stories of the Guru that are being used to inspire eco-action – one of these stories is that he inadvertently damaged a rose bush when he was child, and from then on he dedicated his entire life in conservation projects; he created 52 gardens, opened a wild-life reserve and a herbal medicine centre at Kiratpur Sahib. EcoSikh has designed its unique educational programme to share this important piece of history to the people of faith.

World Sikh Environment Day is now celebrated in 16 countries via thousands of Gurdwaras, educational institutions, social groups and organizations who have been taking action through religious discourses, seminars, bicycle rallies, trash clean-up and plantation drives, organic langar, flower shows, children activities, environmental exhibitions, workshops and much more. The revival of the historical Naulakha garden of Kiratpur Sahib, and Guru Ka Bagh at Nabha Sahib, are two important pointers as to how this event is shaping mindsets.

Air is the Guru,
water the father
and earth the
great mother
of all



THE WORD “ORGANIC” THEN BECAME POPULARIZED, AND INITIATED DEBATE AGAINST PESTICIDE LADEN FOOD BEING SERVED AT OTHER GURDWARAS



Additionally, along with our partner organization Vigaas Foundation, we have produced a short (36-minute) environmental movie, ‘A Little Gardener’. This movie has been screened in over 100 gurdwaras and schools and inspired thousands of people to partake in environmental action plan introduced by EcoSikh.

In March 2015, a major news item broke that Sri Harmandar Sahib, (the Golden Temple) had started serving organic langar (free food served at Gurdwaras). This magnificent outcome of EcoSikh’s “Organic Langar” campaign was well received by the holiest shrine, and then by the community worldwide. The word “organic” then became popularized, and initiated debate against pesticide laden food being served at other Gurdwaras: this was primarily instigated to promote pesticide free food and support organic farmers. Now many Gurdwaras serve organic food on special events like Baisakhi and Sikh Environment Day though the apex Sikh organization SGPC: the organisation that manages the major historical Gurdwaras and started organic farming on 12 acres of its land in Amritsar, using the produce at Harmandar Sahib’s free kitchen.

It is a fact that the cultures and religious traditions are being affected by 21st century life-styles and rising consumerism.

The traditional langar system is witnessing extensive use of Styrofoam plates and plastic cutlery in serving food in the Gurdwaras, and in the religious processions called Nagar Kirtans. This is harming the health of the planet and human health as well, and affecting the Sikh carbon footprint on earth. Our campaigns notably addressed the issue where Gurdwaras in Maryland, New Jersey, Ludhiana and many others switched back to steel plates to serve food.

Many of the Sikh Gurus have been known to have meditated under trees, and there are so many Gurdwaras named after a tree. The seventh Guru especially has stories of training his followers to become high skilled gardeners, and creating Kiratpur Sahib as city of gardens. Today, parts of the world are facing threats from global warming and rising temperatures and our campaigns are resulting in stunning action by the community; “eco” Sikhs are seen planting trees in the many villages and cities of Punjab and other parts of India, in the forests of Maryland, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Derby and many other parts of the world. They are switching to energy efficient LED lights, kitchen gardening, and organizing special environmental workshops at the Gurdwaras to train the young children as eco-warriors, and creating special ways to present a planet-friendly lifestyle as a Sikh lifestyle. And all this is being done as a part of their spiritual duty, and to pay tribute to the seventh Guru, Sri Guru Har Rai.

As a faith inspired environmental non-profit organization, EcoSikh has been promoting Sustainable Developmental Goals of the UN, and enhancing the traditions of sewa, langar, our festivals, faith practices, education from a sustainability point of view.

Well! This is the role that a faith needs to play in shaping behaviour to combat climate change.

EcoSikh connects Sikh values, beliefs, and institutions to the most important environmental issues facing our world. We draw on the rich tradition of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh history to shape the behaviour and outlook of Sikhs and the world, ensuring that our deep reverence for all creation remains a central part of the Sikh way of life.

Also see:

- Trailer A Little Gardener: <https://youtu.be/qG4obmNxx5Y>
- Sikh statement on climate change: <http://www.ecosikh.org/first-sikh-statement-on-climate-change-presented-by-ecosikh/>
- Gurbani on nature: <http://www.ecosikh.org/inspiration/gurbani/>

From the press:

- Sikh Environment Day reached 2 million people in 15 countries and 21 states this year
- World’s Largest Community Kitchen at Golden Temple Will Now Serve Organic Langar

The Gift

ARUN GANDHI pub. Penguin 2018



Ten spiritual lessons for the modern world from my grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi

LESSON TEN:

You Will Be Tested

The two years I spent with Bapuji on the Sevagram ashram were a crucial time in both his life and world history. All the political forces in India were coming to a boil. The country was getting closer to achieving independence from Britain, but Bapuji’s hope for a united country where people of all religions and castes could live together harmoniously was being dashed at every turn. An idea had been forged a decade earlier of creating a separate Muslim state out of some of India’s northern provinces. The country would be called Pakistan, which means “Land of the Pure.” Bapuji was ardently opposed to the partition.

One of the leaders of the partition movement was a Muslim named Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Like Bapuji, he had started his career as a lawyer in London, but he had never given up his proper (some would say “arrogant”) bearing. He fought hard against Bapuji, so many people were shocked when, as independence drew closer, Bapuji proposed to Britain’s Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India, that Jinnah should become independent India’s first prime minister. Bapuji thought this was the only way to win the trust of the Muslim minority and preserve a united country.

His suggestion was pretty spectacular when you think about it. American politicians care so much about staying in power that

they are willing to stop legislation, stonewall Supreme Court appointments, and even shut down the government to feed their own egos and war chests. Bapuji was willing to say that the good of the country should be above all personal feelings and desires.

Lord Mountbatten later said he was “staggered” by the proposal, but that it wasn’t the time for idealistic action. He needed to move forward with a steady plan. Nehru would become prime minister, and Jinnah the leader of Pakistan. Bapuji felt cut out of the complicated negotiations and headed to another part of the country to try to stop some of the bloody fighting between Hindus and Muslims that was leaving corpses scattered in the streets.

On June 3, 1947, negotiations came to an end and the agreement was signed: India was free of British rule, but it was now divided into two countries. The approaching partition sparked increasingly violent clashes between Hindu and Muslim radicals. Instead of joyously anticipating India’s August 15 Independence Day, my grandfather was heartbroken. The mass disruption of the country was already starting. Ultimately the partition would lead to the largest migration in world history, with some 15 million people trying to escape the sectarian violence.

I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of love. But are not all great and good things difficult to do? Love of the hater is the most difficult of all. But even this most difficult thing becomes easy to accomplish if we want to do it.

In early August, Bapuji made plans to head to other parts of the country to try to end some of the violence and bloodshed. People from Calcutta to Delhi feared that the religious massacres would intensify even further. I wanted to go with him on the trip, but for once Bapuji didn't agree. "It is not the place for young people," he told me.

So I stayed behind while Bapuji went to cities being torn apart by riots, whose residents were fearful of what would happen to them and their families after partition. He was stunned by the explosions of anger. When his train stopped in Calcutta, the local officials, afraid that the violence would get even worse, begged him to stay until Independence Day. He agreed, on the condition that he and the Muslim League's chief minister, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, sleep under the same roof. "Adversity makes for strange bedfellows," he said. But instead of a joke, it was a masterful strategy. If the most famous Hindu in the world and the most prominent Muslim in the region could offer this show of unity, wouldn't the masses in the street respond by giving up some of their violence and bloodshed? They went together to a home that had been looted and stood empty in a neighborhood destroyed by ethnic fighting. At first my grandfather was surrounded by angry mobs, and he thought the furious people would kill him. But his calm words with Suhrawardy at his side had an astonishing effect.

On August 15, instead of more horrific killing in Calcutta, people marched through the streets chanting "Hindus and Muslims are brothers!" People in the crowds threw rose petals at my grandfather. Lord Mountbatten congratulated Bapuji on "the miracle of Calcutta" and admitted that he had established an oasis of peace where the military had failed. Amid all the turmoil and bloodshed, it was a great statement on the power of nonviolence. Meanwhile, across the country in Delhi, the new prime minister raised the flag of a free India for the first time. "If credit is due to any man today it is to Gandhiji," he told the huge cheering crowd.

I was with my family that day in Bombay. Millions of people came out to march in parades and dance in the streets, but out of respect for my grandfather, none of our extended family participated. "I don't see any reason to rejoice", Bapuji had said.

Some of us children and teenagers went out to see the lights and hear the noise. I remember being torn by the excitement all around me and the sadness I had seen in Bapuji's eyes when he realized that his plea against partition would not be heeded.

His colleagues had abandoned him in their rush to get into power. He saw partition as the negation of all he stood for; it would encourage more divisiveness between people and — as was quickly becoming obvious — would lead to an unprecedented massacre of innocent people on both sides. In the following days Bapuji continued to visit one village after another, pleading for sanity and peace. But even he couldn't hold back the roaming gangs who began killing again. Panicked refugees fled in all directions. There were reports from one town that the line of people trying to escape on foot stretched over fifty miles. Bapuji made his way to Delhi and maintained his calm demeanor even as the violence moved closer and people in Lord Mountbatten's own house were murdered. The mayhem and upheaval in the country were tragic proof to my grandfather of what happens when nonviolence and *satyagraha* are forgotten.

With so much uncertainty in the country, my parents thought it was time for us all to return to South Africa. In those days the sea voyage from India to South Africa took twenty-one days, sometimes longer. The first passage we could get was in early November, nearly three months away.

Father wrote Bapuji of the plan, and he sent his blessings to all of us. Then he sent some special words to me. "Do not forget what I have taught you, Arun," my grandfather wrote. "I hope you will continue working for peace when you grow up."

I hope you will continue working for peace when you grow up.

I had learned so much in our two years together, and I stood a little taller at his words of encouragement. I didn't realize they were the last he would ever give me.

In the two years that I had been with Bapuji, he had been a positive and transforming force in India — and he had inspired similarly dramatic changes in me. I no longer felt angry all the time, and when I was angry, I knew how to redirect it to do good. I could be the positive spark of electricity in the world. I had learned the nuances of nonviolence, and just as Bapuji hoped, I wanted to dedicate myself to fighting bigotry and discrimination and all the inequalities that lead to violence in the world.

The journey home was long, but it wasn't as harrowing as our arrival. I smiled when I remembered my exhausting walk that first day from the Wardha train station to Sevagram. Now as I was leaving, I was still a teenager with much to prove to myself and others, but I would never again let my ego rule my common sense. I had learned about humility and that you prove yourself by your heart and your actions.

Back in South Africa at last, my parents told me that a school had opened for the Indian community just a few miles from where we lived on the Phoenix ashram. I never had to go to the terrible convent school again or deal with the punitive nuns. My sister Ela and I began to attend together rather than traveling the seventeen miles into the city each day. All that was good, but it still felt strange to be back in South Africa. I had become an entirely new person in two years. My parents' home on the Phoenix ashram offered more comforts than I'd had at Sevagram—and better food. But my heart was still in India with my grandfather, and I thought often about going back.

But a reunion would never occur. On January 30, two months after I left him, the unthinkable happened.

Ela and I were walking home from school, making our way along the muddy track created by the trucks and tractors of the farmers working the land. It was a hot day and tall sugarcane surrounded us. We hadn't gotten very far when Ela protested that she couldn't go any farther. With a sigh, she sat down on the ground. "I'm not walking anymore. You'll have to carry me," she demanded.

Before my education from Bapuji, I would have tugged her along or gotten angry at her childishness. (She was six years younger than I.) But now I knew to handle the situation with respect and understanding. "I am not carrying you, so I will just have to leave you here," I said calmly.

I wasn't really going to leave her, so I simply stood. That's when I noticed an older man who lived in our Phoenix ashram walking rapidly toward us. He almost never left the ashram grounds, so I was very surprised to see him. I wondered where he was headed. It took me a moment to realize that he was coming in search of us. When he got close he called out to me with panting urgency: "Arun, run home immediately. Your mother needs you. I will bring your sister." "I am already heading home. What's the rush?" I asked. "Just go. Run. Don't argue. Your mother needs you."

I realized something very serious had happened. I ran home and found my mother on the phone, heaving with sobs. She hung up when I came in, but the phone rang; she answered it but could barely speak. In between the tears and phone calls, she managed to sputter out the horrible truth she had just learned. My beloved grandfather had been murdered. "We will never see him again," my mother cried. I was stunned. I asked where my father was. "He went to town this morning for a meeting, and I don't know how to get in touch with him."

She kept trying to talk to me, but the phone kept ringing and ringing as more people heard the news and called to share their horror and dismay. I stood in the midst of the cacophony and began to weep. All the moments of the two years I lived with him flashed in my mind. Racing at the spinning wheel, swinging him

from my shoulder, the caress of his hand on my cheek when I tried to make him laugh. It was not possible that he was gone. "How could anyone kill Bapuji?" I asked my mother.

I knew that there had been many assassination attempts on him in the past, often by right-wing Hindus who thought he had betrayed them. But he had survived them all. I thought he was indestructible.

My father soon arrived home, ashen and holding back his tears. He had finished his meeting and been in the market buying fruit when he heard the awful news. Some of the vendors had offered to drive him home, but my father had managed to keep his composure and get back to us. He hugged my mother and held us close.

The house became more and more chaotic as close friends learned of the assassination and came over. "Is it really true?" each would ask.

My father tried to reach his brother in India to get more details, but it took a while to get through. Telecommunications were primitive where we lived, and the call had to be placed through a series of operators. When we did get connected, the line was shaky, but my father managed to convey that we wanted to come for the funeral. My uncle said there was no time. Bapuji was assassinated at 5:16 in the evening, and within a few hours nearly a million people had descended on Delhi. Officials feared that if they delayed the funeral, half of India would turn up and there would be riots. My uncle had agreed to arrange the funeral for the following afternoon. We would have to say good-bye from five thousand miles away.

The next day, along with my parents, I listened to the funeral proceedings over a crackling radio. I learned that my grandfather had been staying at Birla House in Delhi, the same place I had once stayed with him. He had strolled into the garden to lead a prayer meeting with his grandnieces at his side as his "walking sticks." As the crowd parted for him, a man rushed forward and pushed aside the woman next to my grandfather — the place where for the last two years I could most often be found. He shot Bapuji three times.

Many world leaders wanted to attend the funeral, but like us, they weren't able to arrive in time. The pope sent a tribute, as did President Harry Truman and King George VI. More than a million and a half Indians of every religion, caste, and color joined the funeral procession; likely the same number watched from vantage points around the city. Perhaps the most stunning tribute was when the violence in India came to an abrupt halt. Someone described it as being like the throwing of a switch. At the news of his death, the rampant killing ended — and suddenly Bapuji's dream of peace and unity seemed possible after all.

But for me, listening to the radio commentary from thousands of miles away didn't bring any peace at all. I tried to envision what was happening, and my initial shock and sadness turned to anger. As we clustered around the radio, I finally exploded.

"If I had been at Birla House, I would have throttled the person who shot Bapuji! I would have killed him!" I said furiously.

“Did he not say we must use anger intelligently? What would be the best use of the anger you feel now?”

I thought for a moment and took a deep breath.

“To work like he did to stop violence in the world.”

My father wiped tears from his eyes and looked at me with great seriousness. “Have you already forgotten the lessons your grandfather taught you?” he asked quietly. He was sad, but I heard the great compassion in his voice. Then, as Bapuji would do, my father pulled me to him. “Did he not say we must use anger intelligently? What would be the best use of the anger you feel now?” I thought for a moment and took a deep breath. “To work like he did to stop violence in the world.”

My father nodded. “That’s right. Never forget his lessons. The best thing we can all do for Bapuji is to continue his mission and dedicate our lives to seeing that tragedies like this don’t happen again.”

My father knew that I needed an outlet for my anger, and positive action can often push away negative thoughts. We decided to plan our own memorial service to help ourselves as well as the legions of mourners in South Africa. My father suggested we put together a special memorial issue of the Indian Opinion, started by Bapuji and continued as a weekly by my father. We got people to share memories and photographs with us, and we researched my grandfather’s life. Within a month we had a special hundred-page commemorative issue, printed on a primitive hand-operated press. The project redirected our minds from grief and anger, demanding instead our love and warm attention.

I looked with pride at the issue we created and turned the pages over and over, thinking about my grandfather. But I couldn’t stop myself from replaying the shooting in my mind and imagining myself at Bapuji’s side. Could I have stopped the gunman?

“I wish I could kill that murderer right now,” I told my parents one day.

My mother sighed. She knew how I felt, but she also knew that my grandfather would not appreciate the sentiment. “Your grandfather would want you to forgive the person who did this,” she said quietly.

Her words caught me up short. Of course that was what Bapuji would have wanted. Instead of offering forgiveness to the killer, I wanted revenge. But I knew Bapuji would say that revenge is never the right solution. A desire for revenge eats away at you, destroying your peace of mind and leaving you constantly on edge. Instead of hurting you once, the evildoer takes over your life and destroys you again and again. I couldn’t let that happen — or I would be letting Bapuji down.

Bapuji had taught me that nonviolence was not the same as passivity or cowardice. It’s acceptable to use limited force to disarm aggressors and protect the ones you love. If I had been one of his “walking sticks” that day, Bapuji would have wanted me to tackle his would be killer and not just run away. But I hadn’t been there. And now the question was how to respond to what had already occurred.

“Forgiveness is more manly than punishment,” Bapuji had said.

Forgiveness is more manly than punishment

When we are tested, we don’t prove our strength with violence or anger but by directing our actions for good. India had given Bapuji the great gift of a brief peace after his death. I had to give him the similar gift of forgiveness in the face of great evil. Bapuji had once explained that it is easy to love those who love you, but the real power of nonviolence comes when you can love those who hate you.

“I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of love,” he had said. “But are not all great and good things difficult to do? Love of the hater is the most difficult of all. But even this most difficult thing becomes easy to accomplish if we want to do it.”

He was right that it was difficult to find forgiveness, but I knew I had to do it — both for myself and for him. It would be my tribute to our two years together. I remembered again how my grandfather liked to say that an eye for an eye just makes the whole world blind. We need to redefine what we mean by justice. Our goal after a tragedy should be to see how we can make the world better, not to prove that we can descend into more violence and revenge.

And so in the years since my grandfather died, I have dedicated myself to spreading his messages of forgiveness and hope and nonviolence.

Unfortunately tragedies continue. With every senseless murder in America, my adopted country, friends and family members are left with the same torment and pain that I experienced that day by the radio.

I spent many years grappling with the question of how we should respond to unthinkable acts. In 1999 more than a dozen students were killed at Columbine High School in Colorado, in what was then the deadliest school shooting in American history. A friend of mine in the area asked that I speak to the survivors. Everyone was angry and wanted vengeance. Shortly before the meeting, my friend asked me what I intended to say.

“I will talk about forgiveness and moving on with their lives,” I replied.

“If you do that, they’ll throw you out of the room,” he warned me. “They are too angry to hear that.”

But I stood up before the group and spoke about nonviolence and shared the lessons of forgiveness I had learned from my parents and grandparents. I told them I understood their pain and anguish because I had experienced it. I urged them to move ahead and try to fill their hearts with love instead of hate because it was the only way to a better society. Instead of being thrown out of the auditorium, I got a standing ovation.

More recently, in 2014, I found myself once again addressing a crowd of mourners. This time it was in Ferguson, Missouri, after the killing of an eighteen-year-old black man by a white police officer led to charges of racial discrimination. A huge group had gathered to show their solidarity, and they read aloud the names of the 110 people murdered in Ferguson that year. There was anger in the crowd, and the speakers emphasized the need for whites to acknowledge the prejudices they wittingly or unwittingly harbored against blacks.

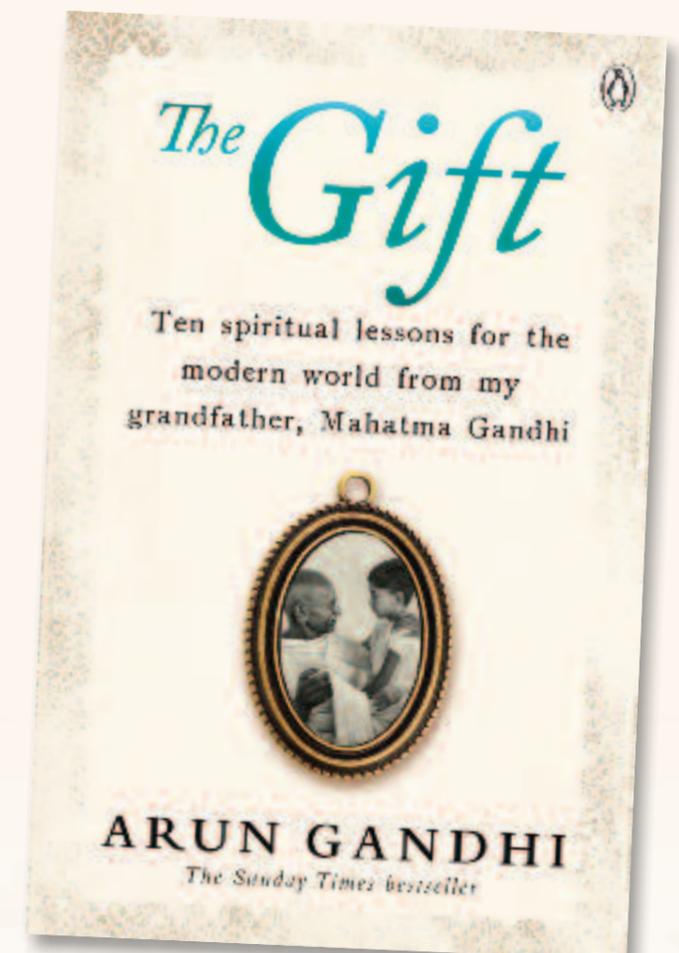
With all the finger-pointing about who was in the wrong, I suddenly felt as though I were back at my mother’s side,

hearing her tell us children, “When you point a finger at someone, you have three fingers pointing back at you.” Instead of looking for what others have done wrong, we need to look at ourselves.

When it was my turn to speak, I tried to channel Bapuji and find a positive outlet for the crowd’s anger. I wanted to help them heal, but I also challenged them to move beyond vengeance. “Prejudice exists in every one of us, whatever our color or race,” I said. “Unless we are willing to recognize this weakness in our character, we will never change. We transform the world only when we face challenges with love and kindness rather than hatred and meanness.”

I shared with them Bapuji’s most important words: **We must be the change we seek.** I saw nods in the crowd and murmurs of understanding. I was moved that these grieving people could still be touched by Bapuji’s powerful message and understand his call to look beyond labels and find the good in everyone.

The power of my grandfather’s lessons can inspire all of us in good times and bad, and his light of hope will continue to shine. If we want this world to change, we have to change ourselves.



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September 2017: Listening to Huracán María

Monday/lunes

The days before a hurricane are spent in uneasy silence. A moment of impossible waiting which feels both long and compacted — the hurricane feels too far away and too close. I am far more nervous than I thought I would be. I listen to the sound of the pen scratching against this page.

Nature, it seems so abundantly obvious now, is more powerful than we are ever told. I am afraid of what I have not yet heard. And I know for a fact that if I am afraid now, then the terror of countless people (not to mention plants and animals) who are more vulnerable than I... well, then the terror they feel must take you beyond the line which separates life from death.

Tuesday/martes

A calm before the storm. Viejo San Juan was empty this evening, but for a few people who seemed brave to me. Nothing has begun, but for the soundscape that we ourselves allow for in that time of anticipation.... Nature will have her way tonight. We have hushed our voices, and silenced our opinions.

I wish we could always live this way — in observance. Why do we only do so when we fear we might die? Why do we only look at the skies with awe and respect and humility in the moments when their might is so obviously beyond us? Why don't we listen? This afternoon's soundscape was precious, serene, and it resonated with what life is — to me, at least.

My mother (whom I call by the Tamil name, Amma) and her friend Richa listen to *Hanuman Chalisa*, a hymn for the wind god, beside me. There is a joy in their song — the anxiety disappears, replaced by a bindasidad, brought on by the knowledge that this bhajan has triumphed over fire.

Who are we praying to? "The wind god to the wind god," Amma and Richa happen to be answering this question as I write this.

Wednesday/miércoles

María has begun.

morning

The hurricane has her sounds. So far I've heard her "whistle" so forcefully that she could break our entire existences with it. I've heard her sound like a void — a confirmation that absence and presence might be the same after all. I look out the windows and see nothing — only a smoky and pale blue where there used to be a clear horizon between sea and sky.

The sky is getting lighter, and I am reminded that even during a hurricane, the sun also rises.

afternoon

We listen, even if we do not want to. We cannot go out... I do not want to be blown away... But I have an intrepid curiosity — what does this storm that I hear, sound like in the wild? What does it feel like? As I contemplate this I also understand — do not mess with Nature.

evening

These times show you a side of life that we would never elect to see ourselves. In most senses, I have seen nothing. I have been safe and dry and able to read and write all day today. I do not know what this hurricane means tangibly, not yet, and I recognize that this is a rare privilege... But something happens in my soul, you know.

I do not know what to make of
this peaceful sunset.
I cannot believe that this is
the same sky,
the same ocean,
that produced what we just experienced.

My hands are trembling, and it is difficult for me to write with a pen. Because right now, I and many of my loved ones — not to mention the island which has always been my home — reside in a universe beyond comprehension.

Predictions and reports of hurricanes are conveyed to us through triple-digit numbers and color-coded graphics. But nothing — I mean, nothing — is as impressive as the hurricane itself. And by "impressive," I do not mean pretty or inspiring. I mean "impressive" in the most literal sense of the word — it impresses upon us experiences and insights that, in our daily lives, we always, always forget.

The hurricane takes you into the void, into a space between, beyond, (no, neither of these words truly fit), silence and noise, between life and death. It impresses upon us that we are, quite literally, next to nothing — and that in the society we live in, we live hubristically by default, asserting that we are far more powerful than we actually are.

"Life is about understanding that in this infinite creation, we are but an infinitesimal part... but we are a part." My grandfather used to tell me this during our visits to India, as a supplement to the yogic texts that he introduced me to. In the hurricane, you understand this. You are at once in awe of infinity, and also aware of the preciousness of the infinitesimal-ness of our own lives.

In listening, the self disappears, and all that remains is this. The art of listening is deeper and more potent than I ever would have expected. You disappear, and you are found. Of course, I refer only to listening to the hurricane in safety. The impressions of people who have been more deeply affected matter infinitely more than mine, but nevertheless, in the last few days, I have learned something about the wonder of listening. And what will happen if we did so, even after the hurricane has taken its void elsewhere?

Thursday/jueves

no entry

& Friday/viernes

I sit on the patio and watch a placid, easy, golden sunset. My neighborhood is destroyed. I have never seen so many uprooted trees, twisted metal, and shattered glass on these streets. Enormous objects that I've never seen before flew in the storm, and landed nowhere near where they belong. Roofs are partially gone or swept away entirely. Everyone is without power, water will soon be cut off, and a curfew is being enforced. At night, the island is pitch dark, reminding us of what night used to be before streetlights. It is possible we will not have food. It is possible we will not have water. Amma and I may leave next week, and I don't think I have yet ascribed an emotion to that possibility. I don't think I have ascribed an emotion to any of it. I am in shock.

I do not know what to make of this peaceful sunset. I cannot believe that this is the same sky, the same ocean, that produced what we just experienced. The air now is fresh, and a gentle breeze passes by. The temperature is perfect...? Above, a slate grey meets a white gold. You would think that the sky is the former and the clouds are the latter, but mostly it's the other way around.

Priya Parrotta is a writer, editor, singer and director of Music & the Earth International. She was educated at Brown University and subsequently attended Oxford's School of Geography and the Environment. Author of *The Politics of Coexistence in the Atlantic World*, she can be reached via her website — priyaparrotta.com. Photographs: with thanks to John Parrotta

Not entirely, though — the colors dance across the sky, forming a vista that is beyond the capacity of most human beings to design.

I am in shock when I consider what the sky was like 48 hours ago. It boggles the mind so much that I am not even trying. Except I must, and I do. I do not see right from left.

This a tragedy. It feels like there is no other way to see it.

I listen for the music I have not yet heard.

Pa'lante.



Postscript

Shortly after Hurricane María passed through Puerto Rico, a second storm hit the island. This storm was not a meteorological phenomenon. It did not inspire awe, humility, and primeval fear. Instead, it demonstrated with shocking clarity that natural disasters are not only environmental — they are also political.

In the days after the storm, I began to nurture hopes that the damages brought on by María would compel politicians in Puerto Rico and the United States to respond wisely. I hoped that they would finally start to prioritize sustainable building — by embracing renewable energy, for instance. I also hoped that they would reverse the austerity measures that have threatened the island's public sector for years. But much of what has taken place, in a political and economic sense, has ended up confirming the opposite.

Under political regimes that can be terrifyingly efficient when they wish to be, the rebuild of Puerto Rico's infrastructure has taken place at an absurdly slow pace. Among activists, a fear has settled in that this slowness is a deliberate act, intended to pave the way for privatization of the island's basic services. Of course, we have also witnessed humanity at its best: people helping their neighbors, taking control of the rebuilding process themselves, and doing so with patience and humor and love.

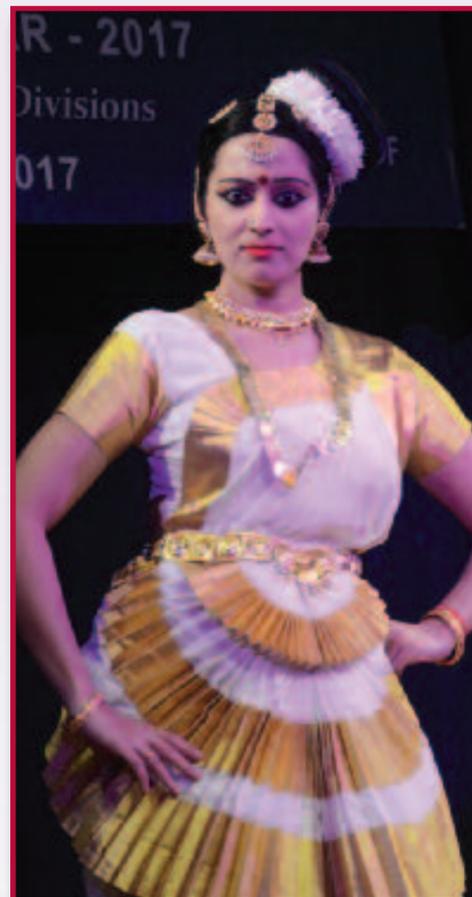
Nevertheless, the fact remains that María has also been a bracing wake-up call to two forms of power which are essential to understanding climate change, and which cannot be ignored. The first, of course, is the power of nature. And the second is the power of corrupt politicians to use even the most humanizing forms of devastation to their own advantage. Listening to these forms of power is perhaps necessary, if climate change is to be comprehensively understood. And it is up to us to do so.



Born to Dance

...from an early age...I would imitate the professional dancers; imagining myself a great performer....

A great fan of television from an early age, I was particularly drawn to a series of programmes called "NUPUR" which were crafted and acted by yester year Bollywood actress-dancer Hemamalini. The stories were based on classical Indian dance and they ignited my passion for this particular style of dancing. My fascination was further enhanced by the marvellous screen and stage performances of contemporary Bollywood actress Madhuri Dixit. In the loneliness of my house, I would imitate the professional dancers; imagining myself a great performer - sometimes in front of the mirror!



I asked my parents if they would find me a teacher. They agreed, and their search for a guru ended with Ms Anandi, a disciple of Mrinalini Sarabhai, who had an institution for classical dance in Ahmedabad. Anandi was an exponent of *Bharathanatyam*, and a true believer of giving everything to her students. I was fortunate to study under her from the early age of 7 years. Sadly, the practicalities of life interfered in this fruitful relationship and for economic reasons Ms Anandi had to discontinue the classes, and I was filled with dismay. Again a search for a guru was undertaken and culminated with the engagement of Mukesh Joshi, a disciple of Kumudini Lakhia, a renowned exponent of *Kathak* dance. *Kathak* is a classical form of dance mainly practised in the northern part of India. I was fortunate to learn the basics of Kathak from Mukesh Joshi, and our Guru-Shishya relation went on for more than five years.

I then took the decision to pursue classical Indian dance as my professional career, and persuaded my parents to move back to Kerala, where I was born. I joined Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit for BA Dance (*Mohiniyattam*), an inter-disciplinary subject linked to Theatre. Here my interactions with many well-known dancers and theatre personalities helped further my interest and love for the subject, and Mr Ramesh Varma (HOD, Theatre) especially, harnessed my personality to the expertise within Theatre.

My ardent desire to improve led me to postgraduate studies at Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed University, Cheruthuruthy, Thrissur; an institution devoted to furtherance of Classical Dances of Kerala, and Prof Kalamandalam Leelamma, my Guru, who trained me further in *Mohiniyattam*. A strict teacher, a devoted dancer, she took me under her wing and gave me time and space to learn and practise the techniques of *Mohiniyattam*. Her strict discipline to conform to the techniques, and the theatre training of Ramesh Varma helped me to fulfil my dream of becoming a classical dancer of the highest standard. It is with gratitude that I received the acclaim of being a 'Dancer with Spark' from Shijith Krishna (a renowned Classical Dancer).

My pursuit of excellence then took me to Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts, Trichy, Tamil Nadu (east-southern state of India) to study *Bharathanatyam* as part of a Performing Arts programme. The highly disciplined training and devoted teachers taught me advanced techniques and so by 2013 I had obtained two professional post graduate degrees in the classical dances of *Mohiniyattam* and *Bharathanatyam*.



MOHINIYATTAM

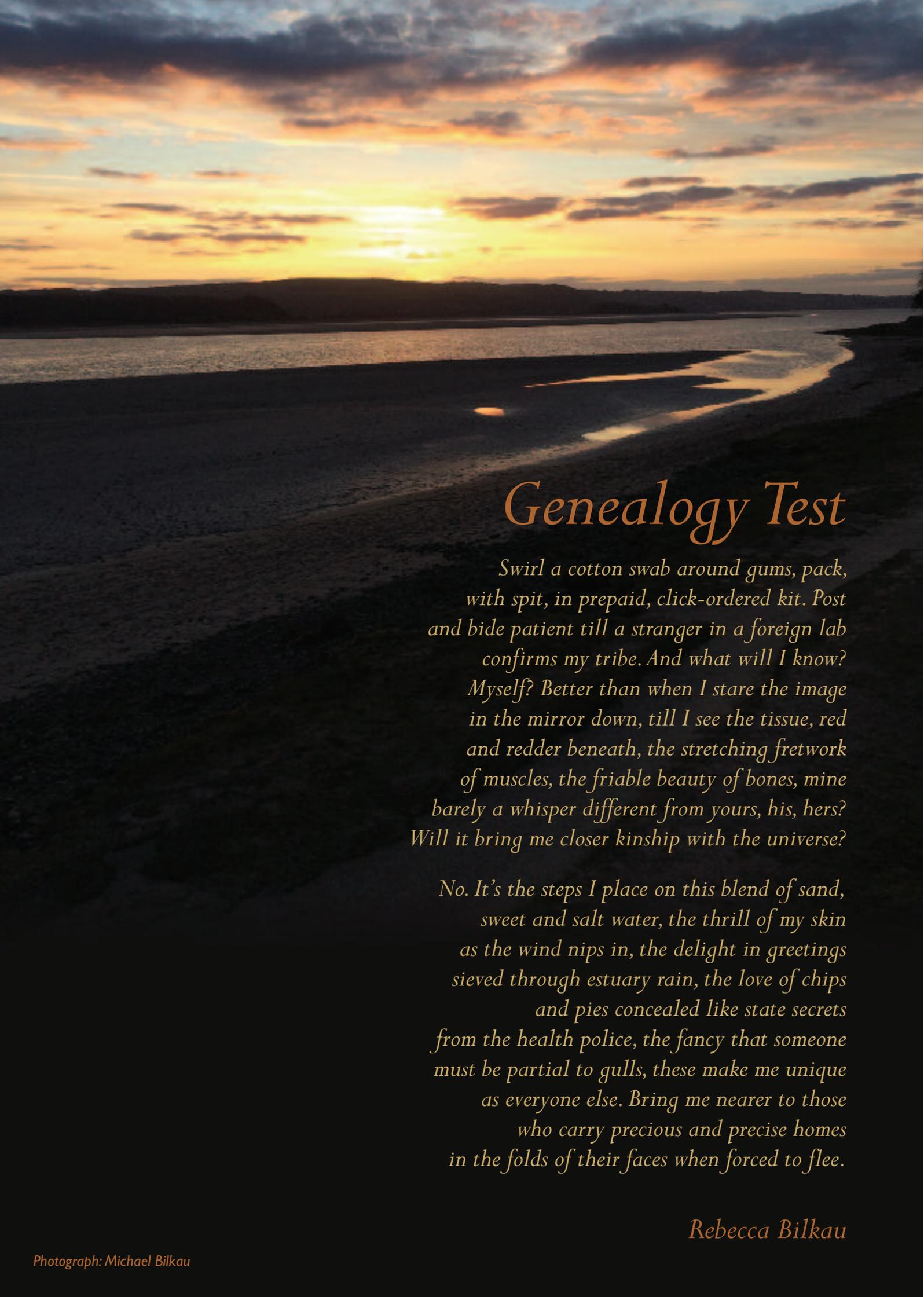
The theoretical foundation of *Mohiniyattam*, like other major classical dance forms of India has its roots in Sage Bharatha Muni's text called "Natyasastra", Sanskrit Hindu text that deals with performing arts. Compared to most other dance forms, *mohiniyattam* gives more importance to gestural and facial acting. The mudras (hand gestures) are almost always the same as those employed in *Kathakali*. The artists try to enact the lyrics almost in its entirety, as they do in *Kathakali*. The body of the dancers swing around just like the green paddy leaves swing with the wind in the vast paddy fields of Kerala.

Mohiniyattam developed further as a performing art during the 18th and 19th centuries, thanks to the patronage of several princely states. The initiation and patronage of the Maharaja of the Kingdom of Travancore, Swathi Thirunal Ramavarma, a poet and brilliant music composer himself, in the early 19th century, saw development of joint teams of artists of two genres namely *Bharathanatyam* and *Mohiniyattam*. His contributions in the art form saw the eventual development and systematization of present day *Mohiniyattam*.

I have been fortunate to perform on many stages in India and abroad (Australia and Singapore) for the last 15 years, noted among them is Thanchavoor Amma Veedu, the palace of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and Koothambalam of Kerala Kalamandalam.

Mohiniyattam being a temple art form, I have also performed at many famous temples of Kerala, worthy of special mention are Guruvayur Melpathur Auditorium and SreeVadukkumnathan Temple.

It is with gratitude that I received the acclaim of being a 'Dancer with Spark' from Shijith Krishna...



Genealogy Test

*Swirl a cotton swab around gums, pack,
with spit, in prepaid, click-ordered kit. Post
and bide patient till a stranger in a foreign lab
confirms my tribe. And what will I know?
Myself? Better than when I stare the image
in the mirror down, till I see the tissue, red
and redder beneath, the stretching fretwork
of muscles, the friable beauty of bones, mine
barely a whisper different from yours, his, hers?
Will it bring me closer kinship with the universe?*

*No. It's the steps I place on this blend of sand,
sweet and salt water, the thrill of my skin
as the wind nips in, the delight in greetings
sieved through estuary rain, the love of chips
and pies concealed like state secrets
from the health police, the fancy that someone
must be partial to gulls, these make me unique
as everyone else. Bring me nearer to those
who carry precious and precise homes
in the folds of their faces when forced to flee.*

Rebecca Bilkau