

Notes from Quaker South Asia Interest Group

Held on 27th October 2007 at 12 Montagu Place, Leeds, West Yorkshire.

Present

Pat Saunders, Eliza Dear, Barbara Bowman, Liz & Martin Schweiger, Anne Smith Ashiq Rahman, Una Parker, Carol Wise, Stephen Petter and Joanna Cockshead.

Apologies

John Low, Deborah Padfield.

In the morning we were able to hear from Ashiq Rahman, son of Ataur Rahman the founder of Gonno Unnayan Prochesta. Ashiq is currently doing a business studies course at the University of Durham and kindly came down for the day to meet with us. He was able to talk about the real economic progress made by Bangladesh over the past decade. He also gave us some insights in the growing problems of drug misuse and radical Islamisation which is now taking place. Some young men are spending time out of the country and returning transformed in outlook and clothing with a new vision of turning Bangladesh from a Muslim but secular nation into their version of an Islamic State. Not all who go overseas return and it is possible that some of those who return are fearful that they will be attacked or killed if they now renounce their new path.

Convenors Report

Pat Saunders reminded us that over the last year we have considered whether we still have a useful role as a listed informal group. Two newsletters have gone out, the first being notes of our last meeting and the second mostly completed by Deborah Padfield. There is now a new QPSW Secretary and we should continue to support Stuart Morton and his work. We provided a stall at Summer Gathering at Stirling and have had a member (Pat Saunders) participating in the Woodbrooke Conference on Climate Change, which is actually a series of 3 conferences. Pat has been able to draw other participant's attention to the need to think globally in taking forward measures on climate change.

We have also been asked to make a contribution to the Long Term Framework.

We thanked Pat for all her work on the group's behalf. We also want to offer Deborah Padfield our thanks for all the work done to maintain the newsletter.

Treasurer's Report

The balance sheet was presented on a single page, showing that we have a current balance of £395 – 07p. We are encouraged to pay our subscriptions, but consider our finances to be adequate for what we are currently doing. If our next meeting is in

Friends House or another London venue there will be costs so we do need a small reserve.

Future of QSAIG

It is worthwhile continuing QSAIG if the group is of any service to the people of South Asia, to Stuart Morton or can raise awareness to people in the UK about key issues in South Asia. We note that it is also good once in a while to meet others with an interest in South Asia.

Can we support Pat or find others to do the work of convening and acting on behalf of the group. The group's origins lie within QPS Committee which had several committees for overseeing overseas work. These were laid down and the special interest groups were encouraged, but the funding for those came to an end. Slowly the listed informal groups are becoming more active within the Society of Friends.

If QSAIG is to survive and thrive it is essential that the newsletter gets more copy of all sorts particularly those that give insight into what is happening in South Asia.

Perspectives on life of Bangladeshis living in Leeds

Jolly and Momin join us to tell about the life of the Bangladeshi community in Leeds. Over the last 8 years they have seen how women's life has started to change, with more doing English classes so they can avoid interpreters. Academic achievement is still very low so they are involved in a scheme called Shantana which has a home work club and does other work to encourage learning in primary school age children. There is no similar scheme for High School Bangladeshi children.

Fathers do a lot of night work, particularly in food work (Curry Business). Children get good and bad influences with drug abuse growing in several areas, parents are not aware or assume that the drugs are actually medicinal compounds. If father is not there and mother has no knowledge it is difficult to control the growing problem. Parents still have the mindset of the mid 1960s when they came to work in the textile mills. There is a need to develop self esteem. Imams are employed directly by the congregation so they are unlikely to speak out or take action if it harms relations with mosque members.

The first generation - men do no work in the home, only about 20% of women work outside the home.

The second generation - About 20% of men do some work in the home.

The third generation- A more equal share of work in the home.

Some teenage girls are sent back to Bangladesh for marriage, most later returning to the UK with their husbands. Life is difficult if the husband cannot cope with a wife who is better educated than he is.

Long Term Framework

Time was not adequate for a proper consideration of the Framework document and questions which are available on the Britain Year Meeting website at:

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/surveys/framework.htm>

We would like all QSAIG members to take time to complete the Questionnaire and return it to Friends House, marking it that they are completing it as members of QSAIG. We felt that there should be a comment along the lines of:

“We recognise that an international dimension can be discerned in all items brought forward within the framework, but would like to promote the well being and social justice for people living in other parts of the world, specifically overseas.”

Next Meeting

We suggest a London venue on 18 October 2008.

These notes made by Martin Schweiger who accepts full responsibilities for errors and omissions.