

QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)

NEWSLETTER – July 2016

What is QSAIG?

We are a network, mainly of Quakers, with personal or professional links to people or projects in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and neighbouring states. We are also interested in working with and learning from people from these countries who now reside in the UK. We meet annually in London, Leeds or Birmingham and have a newsletter at least once a year. Our network is one of the Society of Friends' informally listed groups and has been active for over 16 years.

How to get in touch with QSAIG:

QSAIG has a website (<http://www.qsaig.co.uk/>), and if you would like to join the group or receive updates please contact our Convenor, Stuart Morton: stuartm46@gmail.com

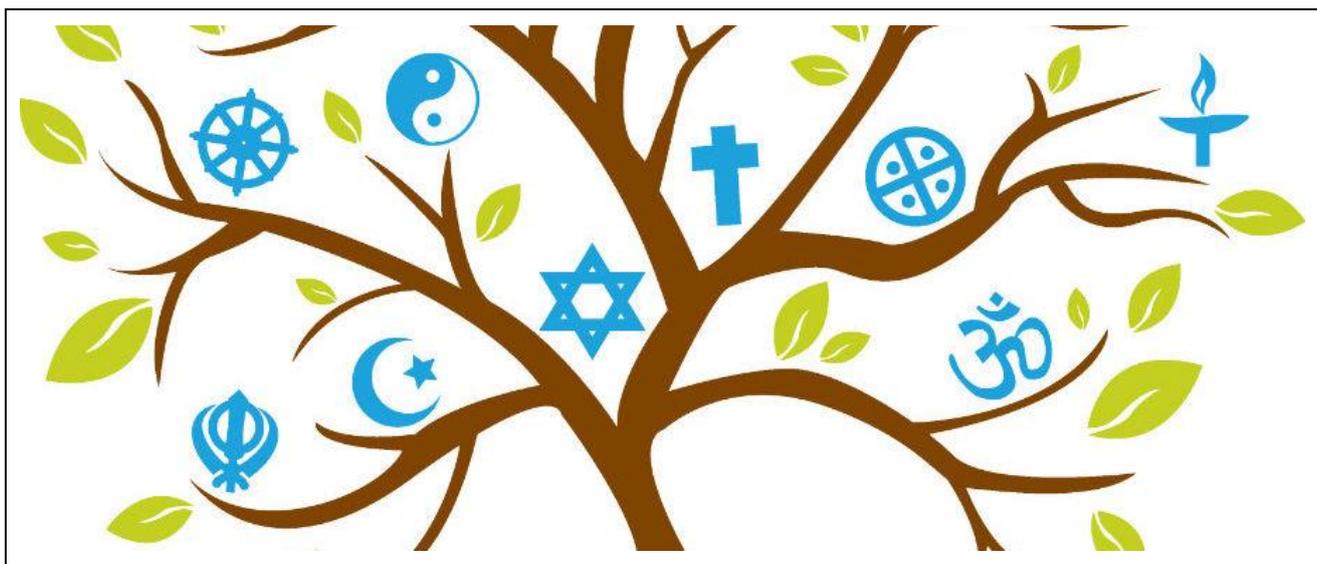


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Recent QSAIG Activities

April 2015	QSAIG Newsletter (see website)
May 2015	QSAIG at Britain Yearly Meeting: (i) stall; (ii) meeting on South Asia (Action Village India, Ekta Parishad, Nepal earthquake)
April-August 2015	Donations collected for Nepal earthquake relief, co-ordinated by Stuart Morton. Appeals on the BYM website and in 'The Friend'. £2866 collected from 13 individuals and 5 Quaker Meetings
Oct. 2015	Taped interview with Rajagopal, Ekta Parishad's President, by QPSW's Steve Whiting ('Turning the Tide' coordinator)
Oct. 2015	QSAIG AGM in Birmingham – 12 members attended. Guest speaker Rianne C. ten Veen on Islam and environmental issues in South Asia
May 2016	Networking at BYM (see below)
On-going	Peace and development initiatives assisted by Quakers in South Asia



Tree of faith – see article on pages 5-6

Forthcoming Events

15th Oct. 2016 QSAIG AGM, Leeds (see website, <http://www.qsaig.co.uk/>)

Contributions for the next QSAIG newsletter are requested. Please send them to the QSAIG editor: Rob Gallagher (Chippenham Meeting), e-mail address: gallagher.rob@hotmail.co.uk

News from Britain Yearly Meeting, 2016

Stuart Morton, QSAIG Convenor

QSAIG's work was presented at the Groups' Fair at BYM on 29th May 2016. Gerald Conyngham, Pat Saunders and Stuart Morton connected with interested Friends and several people joined the Newsletter mailing list. The main interactions were:

1. BYM Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC) – Stuart Morton and Alick Munro of QWRC agreed to send the Newsletter to the Asia-West Pacific delegates of the **Friends' World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)** who attended the January 2016 world plenary session in Peru. Other ideas for co-operation are being developed, including the possibility of a database of Quakers interested in South Asia. Alick hopes to attend the QSAIG AGM in Leeds in October 2016.
2. Contact was made with Birgit Felleisen of German Yearly Meeting, a long-standing Quaker who works for a German NGO focussing on human rights and peace in Nepal (see below). She was put in touch with Subhash Khattel, the Coordinator of **Alternatives to Violence Programme (AVP)** and a key Nepalese link to War Resisters International (WRI) who has written for this Newsletter in the past.
3. At a Special Interest Meeting (SIM), the Conciliation Group of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) gave an account of their work related to violent conflict in South Asia. This work began in 2001.
4. Gerald Conyngham and Stuart Morton discussed ways of supporting Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum), the non-violent Indian people's movement for livelihood rights. Ekta Parishad is preparing for a 2020 march that will see people marching from New Delhi to Geneva with shorter parallel marches happening in some European countries.
5. Stuart learned from the BYM Recording Clerk's Office of impending changes in the arrangements for 'Informally Listed Groups' such as QSAIG. More news on this at the AGM.



Ekta Parishad's mass march of rural people from Gwalior to Delhi, October 2012, to peacefully raise awareness of rural issues and land rights

News of Groups and Contacts in South Asia

Sebastian Indian Social Projects (SISP), Kerala, India

www.sisp.in

Chas Lillystone, Chippenham Meeting, Cwillystone@aol.com

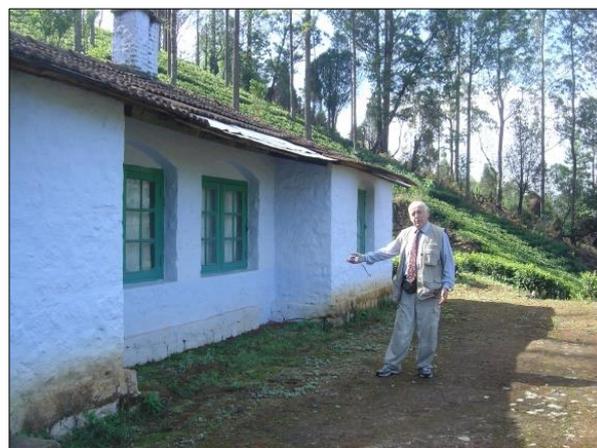
For over 10 years I have been in contact with **SISP**, a Kerala-based social charity which works with the disadvantaged in Kovalam, close to the capital Trivandrum. It offers educational, social, recreational and employment services to people of all ages, and also supports over 60 micro-credit unions. It is a compact and effective organisation and adaptive to change. Three years ago it developed an employment section for women manufacturing medical products under laboratory (albeit small) conditions using recycled materials. It was so successful that within two years it was challenged by a commercial firm. It bounced back by securing contracts for the manufacture of solar lighting products, again using recycled materials. Progress continues despite increasing demand for its services in a country beset by inequality. SISP India has a very interesting website and I would be very happy to provide more details.

TAMWED, associated with the ISLAND Trust, Nilgiri Hills, South India www.tamwed.org

Oz Osborne (brother-in-law of Pete Squire, Tavistock Meeting) writes:

I am associated with **TAMWED (Tamil Nadu, West Devon)**, a small charity set up by people in Devon and Cornwall with long-established links to communities in South India. Our current partnership is with the ISLAND Trust (<http://islandtrust.org.in/>) an NGO that works with tribal people on health, human rights and other issues in the Nilgiri Hills of South India. Visitors are very welcome – particularly those who can stay for a period and contribute to the work of the NGO.

The photo is of Pete visiting the former home of Marjorie Sykes who was a teacher who moved to India in the 1920s where she joined the Indian independence movement. She wrote many books and came to know many of the leading figures in Indian politics and culture, including Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. After an illness she moved to the Nilgiris where she set up a small Quaker meeting with her friend Alice Barnes and helped run an orphanage for tribal children. They became part of a group of formidable European women who are fondly remembered there today.



After an illness, aged 85, she moved from India to Swarthmore where she remained until her death in 1995. My wife Jane and Pete's wife Maggie spent much of their childhood in India where their parents managed a Quaker project in Madhya Pradesh where they met Marjorie and Alice. Jane and Maggie went to boarding school in the Nilgiris not far from Marjorie's cottage and near to where Tamwed's partner organisation is based.

TAMWED's latest newsletter is available at www.tamwed.org, and a biography of Majorie Sykes by Martha Dart is available at: www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/marjorie.pdf

Indra Congress and the Study Hall Foundation (SHEF), Lucknow, India

News from Pete Squire, Tavistock Meeting: petersquire0@gmail.com

The Quakers in Tavistock are active supporters of the **Indra Congress** (International Development of Reconciliation through the Arts, www.theindracongress.com), which is a global network of young people, artists, educators and others committed to using the arts for the purposes of reconciliation and conflict transformation in our communities. There are Indra groups in the UK (Bolton, Burnley, Plymouth, Durham and Derry), South Africa, Palestine, Sierra Leone, India, Kosovo, Brazil, Malaysia, Portugal and China, each undertaking creative projects that address issues such as bullying, racism, inter-communal tension or inter-generational lack of understanding. The 2016 Indra Conference is taking place in Bethlehem (17th July). UK contact person: Maggi Squire, e-mail: maggisquire@gmail.com

The **Study Hall Educational Foundation (SHEF)** is the Indian partner in the Indra Congress and a formidable contributor to social justice in India. Based in Lucknow, it was established in March 1994 with the objective of imparting quality education to children. By day Study Hall is a fee paying school for around 1,500 middle class children. Later in the day the same building becomes the base for Prerna School, which provides a high quality, virtually free education for disadvantaged girls who are vulnerable to poverty and abuse and suffer prejudices from gender to caste. The girls come from the neighbouring slums and most work as domestic helpers. Other Study Hall programmes include:

- Digital Study Hall, to improve education for poor children in slums and rural schools throughout India;
- A rurally linked co-educational school in Malihabad, 32 kilometres from Lucknow;
- The Prep School of Study Hall;
- Dosti, an integrated education programme for over 70 children with special needs.

SHEF's founder and Executive Director is Dr. Urvashi Sahni (e-mail: urvashi.sahni@gmail.com), and their website is: <http://www.studyhallfoundation.org/index.php>

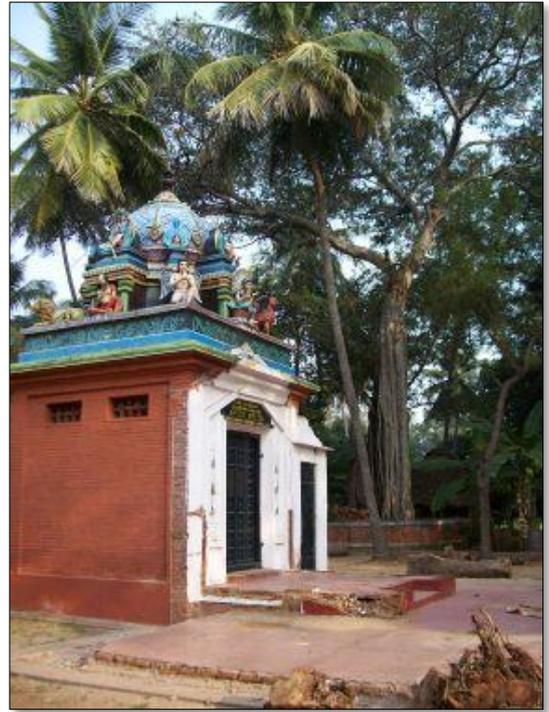
Shantivanam Ashram, Tamil Nadu

Extracts of a recent article by John Gibb, Bournemouth Meeting. The full article is available at: http://www.quakerbournemouth.org/Files/files/NEWSandViews_Y16.03.pdf

John Gibb recently visited Shantivanam Ashram in India, which practises a blend of Hindu and Christian teaching. Started by two French Jesuits in 1950 to overcome cultural obstacles by adopting various forms of Hinduism, today it is run by Benedictine monks headed by Brother Martin, an internationally famed speaker and author. Bro. Martin's mother was Hindu and his father a Christian. He robustly continues the tradition that blends Christianity with Hindu mysticism.

John wrote: "The ashram is a place to seek God within a contemplative way based on the traditions of Christian monasticism and the Hindu tradition of renunciation of the world, 'Sannyasa' (liberation through asceticism). I asked Brother Martin about this in practice. "It's like a tree", he told me:

- The leaves are a symbol of our physical body and individuality. Each of us is a leaf on this tree of life. He calls this **Individual Consciousness**.
- The branches symbolize the religions and denominations we attach ourselves to. He calls this **Collective Consciousness**.
- The trunk is what holds everything together as one – the **Universal Consciousness**.
- The roots are the symbol of God reflecting the **Unitary Consciousness** Hindus call 'Advaita' or non-duality. The central message of traditional Hinduism is 'The whole universe is permeated by God; renounce and enjoy'. God is within all and if God is everywhere then the whole of humanity and creation are in God. Subjectively this means 'I and God are one'. In practice eternal reality is within us - God is my true self.



For Brother Martin, Jesus was the manifestation of God. Jesus reached the pinnacle of Unitary Consciousness, the ultimate stage in the Divine-human relationship 'I and the Father are one' Jesus said. But the claims that Christ made, according to Bro Martin, are not limited only to him; they are valid for all human beings. There is no more external God; the authority is within oneself.

Nepal Dialogue Forum for Peace and Human Rights

<https://pl-pl.facebook.com/nepaldialogueforumforpeaceandhumanrights/>

Birgit Felleisen (Berlin Meeting) writes:

I am a Quaker and I work on Nepal issues for a German network of NGOs. My work email is: koordination@nepal-dialogforum.de. The network I coordinate is Nepal Dialogue Forum, a network of German NGOs who support projects in Nepal and who get together to do human rights and peace advocacy at the German Parliament and other German institutions, the EU and sometimes on UN level, trying to raise awareness for these issues. Our main topics are social inclusion, transitional justice (including human rights and impunity), and economic, social and cultural rights with an emphasis on the right to food.

All the best wishes from Berlin, Birgit.

Nepal Alternatives to Violence Programme (AVP)

<https://www.facebook.com/Alternatives-to-Violence-Program-AVP-Nepal-548791658521597/>

Quakers, through QPSW, have had contacts with AVP (Alternatives to Violence Program) Nepal since 2004. It is a voluntary network that runs experiential training workshops where participants can explore alternative ways of dealing with violence/conflict in their personal, family and professional life. The Nepal co-ordinator is Subhash Kattel, hpdnepal@hotmail.com

Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), Bangladesh

www.gupbd.org

Quakers have had links with GUP (translated as 'People's Development Efforts') since it was first established in 1973 after the War of Liberation. GUP's development activities have expanded over the years and currently it is working in agricultural extension, credit programmes, handicrafts, training programmes, disaster risk management. In 1982 a Peace Centre was established at the main rural base in Rajoir, to offer training courses on peace and non-violence and promote mediation and conflict transformation.



In the 2000's the Settle Quaker Meeting helped GUP to raise funds to re-build the Peace Centre (pictured). Donations were given directly by over 100 individuals, organisations and trusts, and from Quaker Meetings as far apart as Tokyo and Texas. Further information is available at <http://www.settlequakers.org.uk/10.html>.

In recent correspondence from GUP's Executive Director Mr. S.A. Wahab, he wrote that GUP is engaged in two new health programmes: (1) a Health, Nutrition and Education programme funded by the government in 27 villages of Khalia Union, Rajoir Thana: this includes clinics, health and nutrition education, eye camps, and education centres for the very young; (2) Gono Unnayan Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Centre (GPRC), to provide physiotherapy services in the locality and support poor paralyzed and other patients who need physiotherapy at less cost. The Centre started in Feb. 2015, and GUP hopes to make it one of the best physiotherapy centres in southern Bangladesh. **Further information available at the QSAIG website.**

Ekta Parishad news, India

www.ektaparishad.com

Extracts from a letter from Rajagopal P.V., President and founding member, 11th May 2016:

- April/May 2016: Field visit to Hyderabad, Maharashtra (state most affected by drought), and Karnataka.
- After the field visit, to Delhi to organise a march to the Parliament. About 4000 people from 13 states sat in the hot sun in front of the parliament for the whole day listening to representatives of social movements, political parties and also activists coming from different organisations. A document with suggestions to improve the water management system of India was also given to the Prime Minister.
- 24 - 27 May we are doing Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops for Rajasthan. 33 districts of Rajasthan will send 66 people to participate in the TOT. The aim is to have two workers

from each of 500 districts in India trained and through each pair to reach out to 500 young people in every district. About 200 people trained so far.

- The Non-Resident Indian group in the Middle East who are called **Eka Pravasi** have launched a video channel, currently on U-tube and soon as a TV channel, to support the aspirations of the ordinary people. For further information, see: <http://www.pravasidarshan.com/>
- May: Training YMCA trainers in non-violent action.
- June 1-15 is a yatra (footmarch) through the drought-affected areas of MP, UP and Telungana States. I will be visiting many Shramdan (work camp) projects organised by local people to retain the every drop of water coming with the monsoon. Jacques and Yatish bhai from Bombay will support some these actions.
- Youth for Water is our call for urban youth. Those who are interested will go and work with the villagers for a week or two. They will receive food and accommodation and achieve a certificate at the end of their stay. Aneesh is co-ordinating this programme.
- Preparations for the long march in Bihar in 2017.
- 2019-20: The Million March and Geneva March are being planned – these are both very demanding actions especially when the Indian Government is blocking support from the international agencies.
- Idea for a 'People's University': This will change the concept of university as something at a distance from the people to something that will be among the mass of the people. It will change the idea that university means huge infrastructure to university as life; that learning is not only from books but also learning from life and life-related experiences. Some of our friends are working on the concept – what are your views?
- Second idea is for a 'People's Parliament, with a cabinet. This will help many senior social leaders to articulate and act on the people's agenda and interface with the elected Government on various issues. Please share your experience so that we can incorporate this in our process.

Krishna Alathur and wife Beena, India

[Email: krishnaalathur@gmail.com](mailto:krishnaalathur@gmail.com)

They live in Kerala and met QPSW through its South Asia programme. Krishna is connected to **Ekta Parishad** (Unity Forum) in India and was a senior leader in the 2012 Jansatyagraha march. In March 2016 they visited France to conduct yoga workshops and Krishna wrote: "I take this opportunity to share my experience from my school visit here. I was speaking about India and presented the concept of peace and non-violence – how it was applied by Gandhi and also about non-violent internal processes which is very important. It was well appreciated by teachers and students, and we were really getting warm reception for lunch, stay and dinner in many families." On returning to India they have started a new study programme on yoga for students aged 10-18 years – a 6-month programme with classes held every Saturday, with parental co-operation. The course includes Karma yoga – farming, cleaning, etc; Jnana yoga – on life style and internal and external disciplines; Hatha yoga – training on asanas, pranayama and meditation.

Some News Items from Bangladesh and India

The following are some brief news headlines compiled by Rob Gallagher. They are drawn from a longer letter written to QSAIG in April 2016 and available at the QSAIG website.

Bangladesh

- **Earth tremor, 13th April 2016:** Bangladesh was shaken by an earth tremor with epicentre in Myanmar. Over 60 people were hurt, mainly rushing out of buildings in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. Several buildings tilted. The tremor highlighted the country's vulnerability to earthquakes: experts reckon that a 7.5 magnitude earthquake could destroy 140,000 one to four-storey buildings in Dhaka (built without iron rods), and a further 80,000 multi-storey buildings.
- **Lighting kills 64 in two days, May 2016:** Major storms across the country killed over 64 people in lightning strikes in just two days. The annual average is around 120 people, compared with about 28 per year in the USA.
- **Attacks on religious minorities, political activists and foreigners:** During the past nine months there have been numerous attacks on individuals from religious minorities (particularly Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Shia priests), political activists and 'bloggers', and also foreigners. These attacks culminated in the storming of the café/restaurant in Dhaka by five armed young men on 1st July and the massacre of 22 guests and staff, mainly foreigners (including nine Italian and six Japanese men and women).

The attacks have followed a regular pattern: several attackers carrying machetes and sometimes guns attack an individual at a quiet location and hack them. At least 40 have been killed so far, not including the recent Dhaka massacre. The attackers claim to support IS and are typically young men of the region, thought to be linked with militant Bangladeshi organisations such as the Harkat ul Jihad al Islami (Huji) and Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). These organisations began a spate of terrorist attacks in 1999 which lasted until 2005. They targeted secular activists, movie theatres, religious shrines and mainstream political parties. Bangladesh-origin British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury was also one of the high profile victims of Islamist militant attacks, surviving a grenade attack in Sylhet in 2004.

Unfortunately, the killings have not only been carried out by the terrorists. Deaths in police custody have risen dramatically. Commonly termed 'shoot-outs', the familiar explanation is that the 'suspect' is shot during a clash between police and protagonists. According to the human rights NGO **Ain O Shalish Kendra**, the number of extrajudicial killings and deaths in police custody was 128 in 2014 and 192 in 2015. The Daily Star's editorial commented:

“Such horrifying statistics show that law enforcers, who are supposed to be a disciplined force in charge of protecting citizens, have been abusing their authority and committing these crimes with impunity.” *Daily Star, 19th April, 2016*

The attacks and extra-judicial behaviour have left people feeling very insecure, and the overall situation has changed from great political tension between the main parties

(expressed in hartals, blockades, etc.) to nervousness about personal security, particularly for the religious minorities, liberal activists and expatriates.

- **Other headlines:** Despite the shocking attacks and killings that have taken place recently, it is worth keeping in mind the wider context of life and death in Bangladesh. A recent research programme looking at different sectors in Bangladesh produced the following statistics about mortality from different causes:
 - 80,000 deaths per year from TB (nearly one-tenth of all deaths annually)
 - 150,000 deaths annually from indoor air pollution, mainly due to cooking over open stoves (firewood and dung)
 - Between 45,000-63,000 people die prematurely each year in Bangladesh due to arsenic in drinking water
 - An estimated 18,000 people die annually in road accidents (WHO, 2011)

Most of these deaths are preventable.

India

- Extremism and intolerance have been on the rise in India too. In September 2015 a Muslim man was killed by a Hindu mob after (unfounded) rumours he had eaten beef. This was in a village just 45km from Delhi. Two weeks later another Muslim man was beaten to death by a village mob because he and four colleagues were transporting cows in a truck. Police arrested the four survivors for alleged cruelty toward the animals.
- I was working in India at the time and my Indian colleagues were shocked, and also saddened that Prime Minister Modi did not explicitly condemn the attack.
- 24 of India's 29 states have banned the slaughter of cows. About 81 percent of the country's 1.3 billion people are Hindu and 13 percent are Muslim. Nevertheless, India is the world's largest exporter of beef. Gandhi faced this issue (of banning the slaughter of cows) and said:

“[A ban on cow slaughter] will mean coercion against those Indians who are not Hindus. We have been shouting from the house-tops that there will be no coercion in the matter of religion. We have been reciting verses from the Koran at the prayer. But if anyone were to force me to recite these verses I would not like it. How can I force anyone not to slaughter cows unless he is himself so disposed? It is not as if there were only Hindus in the Indian Union. There are Muslims, Parsis, Christians and other religious groups here.

The assumption of the Hindus that India now has become the land of the Hindus is erroneous. India belongs to all who live here. If we stop cow slaughter by law here and the very reverse happens in Pakistan, what will be the result? Supposing they say Hindus would not be allowed to visit temples because it was against Shariat to worship idols? I see God even in a stone but how do I harm others by this belief? If therefore I am stopped from visiting temples I would still visit them. I shall therefore suggest that these telegrams and letters [calling for a ban] should cease. It is not proper to waste money on them.” *Excerpt from Gandhi's prayer discourse, July 25th, 1947*

<http://thewire.in/12170/what-mahatma-gandhi-said-to-those-who-wanted-beef-banned-in-india/>