

Notes of the Quaker South Asia Interest Group (QSAIG) meeting at Westminster Friends Meeting House, London on October 12th 2019.

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Present: Stuart Morton, Alick Munro, Penny Robbins, Anne Smith, Norman Smith, Liz and Martin Schweiger, Abu Siddique (Bachchu), Margaret Waterworth, Jenny Knox, Ram and Stephanie Ramamurthy, Pat Saunders, Cora Gallagher, Jayant Singh.

A short period of **worship** was held, in which we learned of Andrew Clark's ill health; we held Andrew and Ann Noel Clark in the light.

Introductions and welcome: each person present shared the length of time they had been connected to South Asia, and to Quakers; some added further information about their lives. Two had been born in the region and most people had first encountered the region at least three decades ago.

Stuart Morton briefly updated QSAIG on aspects of the September 2019 **consultation on international conciliation work**, held in Woodbrooke, Birmingham to which he had been invited for one of the three days. This provided on insight into Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) in South Asia. Two indigenous leaders of the Reconciliation Forum in the region spoke to the consultation, one by phone and one as an invited speaker to the event. The consultation brought together younger peacemakers/peacebuilders with an older generation of Quaker peacebuilders/ peacemakers so that learning could be shared and documented. Anne Bennett is working on a report of the consultation. It will help to update Friends on some aspects of this work since the 1989 exercise that produced what became known as the Jordan's document (as it was at Jordans in Buckinghamshire that the 1989 consultation had been held).

Stuart also spoke about the ongoing work of **Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) and its JaiJagat 2020** initiative, the British launch took place in Woodbrooke on October 2nd. The video link to this event is:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K13CABb2uhQ&feature=youtu.be>

and videos produced in India on Jai Jagat 2020 can be found on Facebook at the link: https://www.facebook.com/pg/JaiJagat2020/videos/?ref=page_internal
The main Jai Jagat 2020 website (<https://www.jaijagat2020.org/>) has a host of information - inspirational speeches, the route of the march, and photos of the individual marchers who are making such a commitment.

Stourbridge Quaker Meeting has recognised this large movement as a "concern" of some of its members and of others in Central England Area Meeting. Others in the UK also hold it as a personal "concern". The focus is to bring the voices of civil society to the U.N. The three central pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the eradication of poverty, the removal of social discrimination

and the reversal of ecological destruction. The fourth pillar of JaiJagat2020 is to resolve conflict in nonviolent ways and the JaiJagat march will aim to demonstrate this. The march from India, paralleled in various ways with a variety of time scales in many countries, will arrive in Geneva in September 2020. If you would like more information and perhaps sponsor some young people to become involved see Appendix One of these notes:.

Margaret Waterworth arrived back from India yesterday, 11th October, spoke about the education work that she has been involved with in the Indian state of West Bengal. 88% of children who attend government schools have a poor quality education. Sister Cyril, a Loreto nun, has been very involved in education in India for 52 years. Much of her work is now being undertaken by TDRO, “Trickle down and ripple out”, a group from Dublin. We noted that some children in West Bengal learn four languages: Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and English, all of which have a different script. Margaret noted that Harayana is the Indian state with the best education and oversight. See Margaret’s article in the May 2019 Newsletter: <http://www.gsaig.co.uk/what-we-do/>

Pat Saunders shared an update about “**Scholarship for Street Kids**” the project in Burma which was begun by John McConnell and Erica Cadbury, Friends in Keighley, Yorkshire. see <https://www.s4sk.org.uk/>
Pat is still working on her research into **the historical documentation relating to the river systems of Bangladesh in the 17th century** which it is hoped will provide an helpful source of information for those looking at the shifting water courses in the country, and which it is hoped will have relevance to river changes today in the time of huge climate change.

Alick Munro spoke about **Bhopal and the continuing concerns caused by the leak of chemicals of 2nd December 1984**. Union Carbide sold to Dow Chemicals who have merged with Dupont. These are not the only businesses leaving sites in a toxic state with contaminated soil and water supplies. He spoke of restorative justice. A Meeting for Clearness was held last week, leading to a possibility of shaming Du Pont and others including the government of Madhya Pradesh state into helping to clean up the site, and looking at the Public Health aspects. See the article by Alick Munro and Annie Murray in the May 2019 QSAIG Newsletter. <http://www.gsaig.co.uk/what-we-do/>

Bachchu (Abu Siddique) said **Bangladesh** is concerned about the younger generation in Bangladesh. Many of them are falling into the trap set up by dishonest politicians, who are mostly ruling party members. They are using the young people, mainly college and university students, to commit violence for both personal and party benefits. The economy of the country is in disarray; the price of daily commodities often fluctuates a great deal, e.g. recently, 1 kg. of onions went up to £3. To save the young students from the clutch of the politics of violence, Bachchu wishes to recall the measures taken by two Quaker Friends, Bernard Llewellyn and Beryl Roach. In 1954 in East Pakistan, (as Bangladesh

was previously known) they encouraged students from the cities to spend time in the rural areas helping them to understand rural life. They also introduced ways of practising reconciliation and mediation. He greatly valued this early Quaker intervention.

Bachchu brought several copies of his **published biography of Dr. Suji Kumar Brahmochary**, the founder director of Institute for Indian Mother and Child (IIMC), West Bengal, India, published in January 2018. It is entitled: "The Luminary- Life and Work of an Indian Social Monk".

Bachchu is planning **a biography of Ataur Rahman**, the founder of Gono Unnayan Procheta that has been close to Quakers for more than four decades. He hopes to emphasise Ataur's thoughts, feelings and the work motivation. Bachchu is also planning an exhibition on this theme. He will send a questionnaire to those present who have said they would be willing to contribute to the development of this memoir which will also, Bachchu plans, to involve people in a dynamic dialogue about a deeper approach to development and change in society. Bachchu has gained the consent of Ataur's widow, Dolly, and his two sons.

Pat Saunders remains concerned about British government aid that supports the Bangladeshi government in a model that has a strong emphasis which encourages trade with the UK and from which the UK would be a substantial beneficiary. This is part of an ongoing issue about the quality of British "aid". She noted that casinos are not allowed in Bangladesh but 60 have been discovered and the criminal class benefit from this. Bangladesh is now in serious debt to China.

Norman Smith spoke of his completion of his book "Marjorie Sykes". He has collected material from many sources. It can be seen in Friends House Library, the British Library and Woodbrooke library and will be particularly useful for scholars doing research as it brings many of Marjorie's papers and articles into one document.

Jennifer Knox spoke about Sri Lanka and the continuing unpeacefulness in the country. The right wing Buddhist party continue to be in a dominant position and not only Tamil, but now also Muslim people, are suffering under this oppression. Some people in these minorities are disappearing bringing back traumatic memories of the civil war that "ended" in 2009 with huge violence that ended the lives of many Tamil civilians in the Government's major campaign to eliminate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Liz and Mike Watson from Skipton Meeting are at present serving Quakers in New Zealand. **Tracey Martin, who lives in Leeds**, and who has attended QSAIG meetings in the past, is now the Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW)

tutor assisting in the preparation of QPSW workers before they take up short term positions on behalf of QPSW.

Convener's report.

The report was circulated prior to the meeting. Stuart Morton said the number of hours needed for the Convener's role was very variable. Stuart also drew out some points from the Questionnaire he had sent out to the QSAIG mailing list. Five replies were received for which he was grateful. This discussion enabled us to later appoint officers for 2019-2020 as stated in the QSAIG minutes. Stuart is stepping down as Convener as of November 1st 2019 and will help to induct the new convener.

Future events:

Yearly Meeting / Gathering 2020 will be held August 1st to 7th at Bath University where it is hoped that **QSAIG would host a table at the Group's Fair**, and possibly **a Special Interest Group meeting for Jaijagat2020** if the JaiJagat2020 UK Group decide that would be helpful to the initiative.

Cora Gallagher and Liz Schweiger are willing to help with refreshments at the **next QSAIG meeting to be held at 12 Montagu Place, Leeds LS8 2RG at the home of Liz and Martin Schweiger on 17th October 2020**. A simple lunch will be provided.

QSAIG's relationship with the wider Quaker world:

1. QSAIG is a Quaker Recognised Body (QRB) within Britain Yearly Meeting. QSAIG is required to report to Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), the present staff link being Judith Baker. It is our normal practice to send copies of the AFGM minutes and notes of the annual meeting to our staff link. We are also required to respond to any requests from our staff link in a timely manner.

2. Alick Munro as the former link person from BYM's Quaker World Relations Committee on QSAIG, has reported that Ann Floyd is willing to be the link to QSAIG from that committee. *(Stuart Morton has, since our meeting) received written confirmation of this from Ann Floyd*.

3. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has a concern for India – the ICG = India Collaborative Group and Jayant Singh is a coopted member of that , as he belongs to a different Yearly Meeting- New York Yearly Meeting

4. Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) with its head office in Friends House, London, has a number of "Sections" one being the Asia-West Pacific Section (AWPS). Ronis Chapman, the Secretary, lives in Australia.

5. Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) has a Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC). QSAIG has welcomed the link with QWRC through Alick Munro whose term of service has come to an end. He is being replaced as a link by AnnFloyd. (See diagram in Quaker Faith & Practice (edition 5) next to 8.05 for QWRC position in BYM.)

6. The Quaker U.N. Office (QUNO) in Geneva involves people from across the Quaker world. See <https://quno.org/> for further information. QUNO in Geneva run Webinars every few weeks.

7. The China Group (Quakers) is to be laid down at the end of October if no one comes forward to convene the group following the death of Ruth Baker in January 2019. The China Group minutes will be archived in Friends House.

What is the value of QSAIG? Points emerging included:

- Enjoy meeting, gaining updates from the experience and connections of those present and feel less isolated
- A focal point for individuals/groups interested in the region
- A network that can also bring in 3rd parties
- Friendship- we can hold one another “in the Light”
- We continue to carry a history of some Quaker involvements in the region
- Knowledge based group- with a variety of languages from the region known by some members of the group
- QSAIG is officially recognised by BYM and has a direct link to Friends House and its knowledge/systems/one link staff member in QPSW. This link has a potential for mutual help – staff to QSAIG- QSAIG to staff.
- We have an official entry into a space in Britain Yearly Meeting should we wish to use it e.g. to conduct a Special Interest Group normally once every two years, to have a table at the “Groups’ Fair”.
- Advertising in “The Friend” weekly publication is accepted as normal should we choose to use it. We also have enhanced credibility to have an article and/or news submitted to the editor “The Friend” when the issue is South Asia related.

- Having working groups (“concerns” developed by Friends in BYM) directly linked to, but not accountable to, QSAIG e.g JaiJagat 2020, “Action for Bhopal”

The future of QSAIG:

We discussed how to attract young people to QSAIG and discussed looking at the effects of climate change in Asia, a global issue to which many young people are strongly committed. Bristol Area Meeting has a youth worker. The key is to find what they are interested in and hold a dialogue with them. There needs to be mutuality.

Lee Lester is based in Sheffield to serve Yorkshire and encourage young people. She led the teenagers at Easter Settlement 2019.

Quakers had a presence at the Glastonbury festival which was well received.

We discussed asking a Young Person to come and speak at our next meeting in October 2020.

We wondered whether we might have two QSAIG “Secretaries”, one in South Asia and one in GB?

All should consider supporting the editor of the Newsletter- could everyone find material to suggest to the editor enabling our newsletter to have a diversity of ideas and sources.

| Other non Quaker groups e.g. Non Government Organisations (NGOs), community efforts that are working with values that are close to our own values – how can we connect and broaden our network and also our effectiveness?

APPENDIX ONE:

The JaiJagat 2020 UK Group writes:

How do we follow this up? There are 3 main areas where we need your help!

1. The international marchers need funds:

They have enough to get them to Turkey. Action Village India, who have supported Ekta Parishad for many years, have agreed to send funds raised here in the UK to a special bank account in Belgium organised by Association Jai Jagat 2020 International. This means that we can claim gift aid for donors who pay tax.

Any fundraising ideas or contributions would be very welcome.

2. We are looking for **Partners, Stories and Ideas for Solutions to present to the United Nations in September 2020 in Geneva, focusing on the **Four Pillars of Jai Jagat 2020** which are:**

- Eradicating Poverty

- Removing social discrimination
- Reversing Ecological Destruction
- Resolving Conflict using Non-violence

3. Plans for events:

The organising group for Jai Jagat 2020 UK will be meeting on October 22nd and November 19th to work on an outline of **activities over the coming year** and to discuss our part in the **walk from Lyon to Geneva in September 2020**. It will at the cost of sponsoring young people on the walk. Your ideas are welcome. If you have any ideas, thoughts or suggestions, then please get in touch and share them with us. Contact Stuart Morton Email: stuartm46@gmail.com if you need further information

Stuart Morton
Notetaker- assisted by Liz Schweiger