

**Quaker South Asia Interest Group
24th October 2009**

held at The Penn Club, Bedford Place, London.

Present

Stephen Petter
Rob Gallagher
Pat Saunders
Stuart Morton
Anne Smith
Stephannie Ramamurthy
N Ramamurthy
Penny Robbins
Nicola Jolly
Ruth Baker
Eleanor Nesbitt
Liz Schweiger
Martin Schweiger

Apologies

Jenny Knox
John Smithson
Sue Smithson
Barbara Bowman
Dilawne Chet Singh

What's up in my patch?

Stephen Petter Continued support for the Sangham School near Dehli which has experienced problems with increasing land prices driving competition for the land it is on and control of the school. After some serious harassment there has been support for the school from villagers. Friends of Sangham Foundation in the UK have been fund raising. Copies of the Annual Report are available.

Stephen plans to travel to India overland using public buses and trains. Stephen drew our attention to Jenny Cavanagh's expertise in micro credit schemes.

Pat Saunders Settle Meeting has continued to raise funds for GUP a Quaker associated NGO in Bangladesh. £23,000 has been raised for the Peace Centre Library, which will be dedicated to the memory of Md Aatur Rahman who founded GUP. The opening is expected to be in January 2010.

 Studies on Climate Change in Bangladesh show a mismatch between the information in the public domain and the science. It could be that sea level rise will be slower than expected, however a 2 or 3 metre rise in sea level will be disastrous for at least 18,000,000 people. The rise in sea level may be driven by the embankments that have been put up over the last few years which impede drainage.

 It should now be possible to go by train all the way from Kings Cross to Dhaka, Bangladesh.

N Ramamurthy Recent visit to Delhi for Nagaland peace work arranged by QPSW. Much of that work is still too sensitive to describe. There have been severe floods in Andhra Pradesh, where a season's rainfall fell in 24 hours. The prompt action of local police saved the lives of 700 children.

Penny Robbins As convenor of the Overseas Peace Building Group of QPSW which has kept her very busy. There is activity in East Africa and South Asia. Work for former Yugoslavia has now been passed to an Interest Group. The emphasis has moved from putting people in place to do particular work to networking. This is a policy shift, part of the Framework for Action with more involvement of Friends House and Local Meetings. The idea is to help local people to do what they want to do.

Martin & Liz Schweiger Still selling GUP Batiks, including a recent batch to the newly refurbished Doncaster Meeting. In February 2011 a visit is planned to Bangladesh.

Rob Gallagher After an interval of 10 years he is planning a visit to Dhaka in February 2010 to take part in a seminar hosted by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to mark 400 years of Dhaka as a capital city. His talk will focus on the evolution of transport in Dhaka and what is likely to happen in future. This will also provide an opportunity to seek short term work.

Nicola Jolly Currently undertaking a PhD in Birmingham University on Mahatma Gandhi and inter – religious relations. This was inspired by reading of Gandhi's opposition to his son wishing to marry a Muslim woman. Over time his opinion did change but he remained wary of the personal problems such marriages could cause for the people involved.

Ruth Baker Long term involvement with the China Special Interest Group. Also active in the Naga conciliation group.

Stuart Morton Several pictures were projected showing the many interesting people involved in peace work in South Asia.

Naga People: 6 visits in the past year to Chang Mai meeting various people involved in Nagaland, slowly building trust that Quakers can bring spirit led wisdom to the peace process. The delicate situation means that all work must be sensitive to all others involved, Quakers are not a third party to any talks, but they may enable them to take place.

Networking for Peace: A lot of work is being undertaken by different people and the Quaker role is about being a catalyst and a connector. American Friends Service Council have lost a lot of funding with the recession, resulting in a withdrawal from Afghanistan. However they have left in place the Afghan Friends Co-operative Organisation (AFCO) which is led by Abdu Khalek, a Dhari speaker who is making great strides in learning English and is a very able peace worker.

A newsletter of the South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA) was tabled; documenting several projects that seek to break cycles of violence. The Crisis of Democracy is a common theme across South Asia. SAPA take a tripod approach, considering the grass roots people, non violence and better regional connections. Movements among people matter more than NGOs. Politics can divide people but when they do get together across South Asian countries there is a strong feeling of family. There will be a march on Dehli in October 2012 which will set off from different Indian states.

It is suggested that a march in support may be made in London to the Indian High Commission and QSAIG may wish to take part.

Eleanor Nesbitt

Invited speaker, Professor at Warwick University and 2003 Swarthmore Lecturer. 3 weeks ago she gave the George Richardson Lecture at Woodbrooke which was called "Interrogating the experience of Quaker scholars in Hindu and Sikh studies". This will be published in Quaker Studies in January 2010. Seven Quaker scholars were asked three questions. The questions were "What was your spiritual journey?", "What has been your professional journey?" and "How did these journeys connect?". Those interviewed were Rex Ambler, Owen Cole, Kim Knott, Shirley Firth, John Hick, Kathryn Lum and Mary Searle - Chatterjee. Common themes that emerged were justice, marginalised people, truth, peace, alternatives to violence and to a lesser extent simplicity. There was also some input from Eleanor Zelliot a Quaker who has published on the Dalits and has a 2 volume festschrift. There is a noticeable contribution from Buddhism to the spiritual life of Quakerism.

It was good to note that in his 80s John Hick has applied for, and been accepted, into membership of the Society of Friends.

The Annual General Meeting was held.

We note from the Treasurer's report that last year SAIG had an income of £104 – 75p and an expenditure of £250 – 78p, with a current balance of £384 – 00p. Subscriptions remain at £10 per year with concessions at £5 per year. All members are encouraged to seek new QSAIG members.

Next Meeting:

10am on 23rd October 2010.

12 Montagu Place, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS8 2RG

Kim Knott will be invited to speak about her Hindu studies.