**Suu Kyi: A Woman Inspired by Gandhi**

**Introduction**

The below articles are about a woman, Suu Kyi, who lives today (2014) and who was inspired by Gandhi. Suu Kyi lives in the country of Myanmar, also called Burma, in Asia. She uses Gandhi’s philosophy and strategies to fight for the rights of the poor and oppressed in her country. The first article shows what one of her protests was like; the second article is written by her and explains her beliefs.

**Suu Kyi: Following Gandhi and not giving in to fear**

One day, a group of people were marching towards Rangoon. Despite warnings from the military they wanted to gather for rallies in the Burmese capital. There was only one thing on their minds: to demand their rights through protest. But they were stopped. A fleet of soldiers stood in front of them, pointing their rifles. Words were not necessary. They did not need to be told that another step forward would mean bullets ripping through their bodies. There was a moment of silence and then a boy came forward. Ripping his shirt open, he stood facing the rifles as if telling them, "Go ahead - shoot me!" It was in that moment that the officer ordered the soldiers to lower their guns. "Have we come to the point where we shoot little boys?" he said, watching the boy.

The soldiers knew Suu Kyi was leading them. They had orders not to let her reach the capital and here she was - standing right next to the boy. But they let her go. They let the crowd march to Rangoon, where she addressed a half million people for the first time. That was August 26th, 1988 - that was the power of Aung San Suu Kyi.

**On the path of non-violence**

Suu Kyi is a true Gandhian, an epitome of non-violence. Like Gandhi, she too went to England for further education. And like Gandhi, she also enter politics not by choice, but rather by circumstance. From the very beginning, her struggle for democracy has been nonviolent and peaceful. Today, after more than two decades and after repeated defeats at the hands of the military, her belief in these principles has grown even stronger.

In 2009, when she was sentenced to house arrest yet again, this time for 18 months, she said, "It is possible for you to achieve your goals fast by using all kinds of ways that might be open to you. But then this could mean that in the end you just top the goals themselves. But then when you reach where you think you wanted to get to, you find that it's a completely different scenario from what you had imagined because along the way you have created the kind of process that is barred to corrupt the end itself."

[Aung San Suu Kyi] is the daughter of a soldier - the man who is considered to be the founder of modern day Myanmar. She spent years under house arrest. And she is a true Gandhian. Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is a class apart.

Source: Bhatia, Isha. Suu Kyi: Following Gandhi and not giving in to fear

<http://www.dw.de/suu-kyi-following-gandhi-and-not-giving-in-to-fear/a-6630071>. March 2011.

**“Freedom from Fear”**

by Aung San Suu Kyi, 1990

It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it. Most Burmese are familiar with the four a-gati, the four kinds of corruption. . . And it would be difficult to dispel ignorance unless there is freedom to pursue the truth unfettered by fear.

With so close a relationship between fear and corruption it is little wonder that in any society where fear is rife corruption in all forms becomes deeply entrenched.

Public dissatisfaction with economic hardships has been seen as the chief cause of the movement for democracy in Burma, sparked off by the student demonstrations 1988. It is true that years of incoherent policies, inept official measures, burgeoning inflation and falling real income had turned the country into an economic shambles. But it was more than the difficulties of eking out a barely acceptable standard of living that had eroded the patience of a traditionally good-natured, quiescent people - it was also the humiliation of a way of life disfigured by corruption and fear.

The students were protesting not just against the death of their comrades but against the denial of their right to life by a totalitarian regime which deprived the present of meaningfulness and held out no hope for the future. And because the students' protests articulated the frustrations of the people at large, the demonstrations quickly grew into a nationwide movement. Some of its keenest supporters were businessmen who had developed the skills and the contacts necessary not only to survive but to prosper within the system. But their affluence offered them no genuine sense of security or fulfilment, and they could not but see that if they and their fellow citizens, regardless of economic status, were to achieve a worthwhile existence, an accountable administration was at least a necessary if not a sufficient condition. The people of Burma had wearied of a precarious state of passive apprehension where they were 'as water in the cupped hands' of the powers that be.

Emerald cool we may be

As water in cupped hands

But oh that we might be

As splinters of glass

In cupped hands.

Glass splinters, the smallest with its sharp, glinting power to defend itself against hands that try to crush, could be seen as a vivid symbol of the spark of courage that is an essential attribute of those who would free themselves from the grip of oppression. Bogyoke Aung San regarded himself as a revolutionary and searched tirelessly for answers to the problems that beset Burma during her times of trial. He exhorted the people to develop courage: 'Don't just depend on the courage and intrepidity of others. Each and every one of you must make sacrifices to become a hero possessed of courage and intrepidity. Then only shall we all be able to enjoy true freedom.'

. . .There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear.

Saints, it has been said, are the sinners who go on trying. So free men are the oppressed who go on trying and who in the process make themselves fit to bear the responsibilities and to uphold the disciplines which will maintain a free society. Among the basic freedoms to which men aspire that their lives might be full and uncramped, freedom from fear stands out as both a means and an end. A people who would build a nation in which strong, democratic institutions are firmly established as a guarantee against state-induced power must first learn to liberate their own minds from apathy and fear.

Always one to practice what he preached, Aung San [my father] himself constantly demonstrated courage - not just the physical sort but the kind that enabled him to speak the truth, to stand by his word, to accept criticism, to admit his faults, to correct his mistakes, to respect the opposition, to parley with the enemy and to let people be the judge of his worthiness as a leader. It is for such moral courage that he will always be loved and respected in Burma - not merely as a warrior hero but as the inspiration and conscience of the nation. The words used by Jawaharlal Nehru to describe Mahatma Gandhi could well be applied to Aung San: 'The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view.'

Gandhi, that great apostle of non-violence, and Aung San, the founder of a national army, were very different personalities, but as there is an inevitable sameness about the challenges of authoritarian rule anywhere at any time, so there is a similarity in the intrinsic qualities of those who rise up to meet the challenge. Nehru, who considered the instillation of courage in the people of India one of Gandhi's greatest achievements, was a political modernist, but as he assessed the needs for a twentieth-century movement for independence, he found himself looking back to the philosophy of ancient India: 'The greatest gift for an individual or a nation. . .was *abhaya*, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind.'

Fearlessness may be a gift but perhaps more precious is the courage acquired through endeavour, courage that comes from cultivating the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one's actions, courage that could be described as 'grace under pressure' - grace which is renewed repeatedly in the face of harsh, unremitting pressure.

Within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure. A most insidious form of fear is that which masquerades as common sense or even wisdom, condemning as foolish, reckless, insignificant or futile the small, daily acts of courage which help to preserve man's self-respect and inherent human dignity. It is not easy for a people conditioned by fear under the iron rule of the principle that might is right to free themselves from the enervating miasma of fear. Yet even under the most crushing state machinery courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man.

The wellspring of courage and endurance in the face of unbridled power is generally a firm belief in the sanctity of ethical principles combined with a historical sense that despite all setbacks the condition of man is set on an ultimate course for both spiritual and material advancement. It is his capacity for self-improvement and self-redemption which most distinguishes man from the mere brute. At the root of human responsibility is the concept of peffection, the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it, and the will to follow that path if not to the end at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitations and environmental impediments. It is man's vision of a world fit for rational, civilized humanity which leads him to dare and to suffer to build societies free from want and fear. Concepts such as truth, justice and compassion cannot be dismissed as trite when these are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power.

Source: Suu Kyi, Aung San “Freedom from Fear” in *Freedom from Fear and other writings*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.