

A Gandhian from Australia visits Guwahati

It was a pleasant surprise for me when a few friends approached me sometimes towards the end of February to inform that a Gandhian from Australia was visiting Guwahati in the month of March. These friends belonged to an organization called Friends of Assam & Seven Sisters (FASS). FASS is a non-profit Non Governmental Organization, an international 'think-tank' which is aimed at providing an inspirational energy and a motivating force for overall revival and development of North-east India in all its spheres. By the phrase 'Assam & Seven Sisters' they mean specifically the eight states of North East India: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim. I was informed that the name of the Gandhian under reference was Garvin Brown and a walk by him in Guwahati city had been planned on the 9th of March. These friends wanted me to participate in the proposed walk. I readily agreed to join.

This walk led by Mr Garvin Brown took place on the 9th March as planned earlier. The walk started from Dighalipukhuri, a well-known location. Dighalipukhuri is by the way the Assamese name for an elongated pond, dighali meaning long, and pukhuri meaning pond. A group of people, who had assembled for the walk, started from this location and concluded at the well-known Gandhian Centre, the Sarania Ashram. A prayer meeting was held at the Ashram, and it was addressed by Mr Garvin Brown and a few other notable persons who were present on the occasion.

Sarania Ashram is the headquarters of the Assam Branch of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust where a training centre for the women volunteers in rural development is also conducted. It was at this place that Mahatma Gandhi stayed for three days during his last visit to Assam. Senior Gandhian activists and freedom fighters like Late Gopinath Bordoloi, late Dr. Harikrishna Das, late Dr. Bhuvaneshwar Barua, and others jointly worked with their own hands and constructed a small bamboo hut for Gandhiji's stay during this visit. This hut is regularly maintained and cleaned and has been preserved intact. The inmates of Gram Sevika Vidyalaya assemble at this hut for daily ashram prayers. This hut, the nearby Neem tree where Gandhiji used to sit and spin his daily quota of yarn and even the entire campus is a hallowed place. The meeting took place in a pandal that was erected. It was very well attended. Besides the senior sisters of Sarania and trainees of Gram Sevika Vidyalaya and the teachers and students of Parijat Academy School, senior citizens of Guwahati, both men and women, from different walks of life, were present. The entire atmosphere was charged with noble sentiments and a sense of respect for the venerable Gandhian from Australia, and a sense of curiosity to hear him and to know about him. A few other dignitaries present on the occasion also briefly spoke as arranged by the organizers. The report that appeared in the eminent daily paper, "The Assam Tribune" and the brief report as prepared by the members of FASS has been included in this article. We have also included the self-introductory statement of Garvin Brown, entitled, "My Story." All these together will enable the reader to get a clear picture of the event.

It is very interesting to observe that the interest in Gandhi in the Western world is spreading at an unexpected pace. We at Ishani recently came across the report of a young executive Mr Mark Boyle who had pledged to cover the distance from London to Porbander, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi on foot and without carrying money on his person. The report about this aspiring Gandhian from Britain was carried by BBC in its radio and television. It is true that this enthusiastic individual gave up his plan only after a few days due to his own limitations. But the interesting point to note is that someone in the West thought on these lines, and we hear similar reports from other countries of the world

also. All these developments are a sure indication of the growth of conviction about the need to follow the Gandhian Path.

MY STORY

Garvin Brown (Queensland, Australia)

My name is Garvin and I was born on the 9th of May 1928 in Wanganui, New Zealand.

In around 1932 we moved onto a small dairy farm in a place called Kohi leased to my father for probably minimum cost because he had served overseas in the New Zealand army for over 4 years during what is called the First World War. He also served in Gallipoli.

The years we spent on this farm were very happy days for me as I had a small pony and lots of love. This period was during the great depression which swept the world in 1929. My father worked very hard on our farm as it had been in a very run down position when we moved on to it and it needed a lot of labour to bring it up to standard.



My father told me to always tell the truth no matter what that truth was and even if what I had done was not good he would not punish me providing I told him the truth about what I had done.

I can also remember my father and mother talking about the little children in China who had nothing to eat and who was starving. This stayed in my memory.

I can remember during those depression days thinking to myself “what will I do if anything happens to Mum or Dad because I won’t be able to repay the debt that we owed to the grocer.

In around 1937 we left the farm when my father took a job with the Post Office in a place called Levin where we lived for around 18 months. In early 1939 my father was asked to rejoin the permanent army, which he did and from this he volunteered to go to the 2nd world war. He served around 3 years before he returned to New Zealand.

I finished my schooling in 1946 when I matriculated. I was not a very good student but I loved sport.

I started work in an accounts office, and from 1947 to 1950 I had several (for me) uninteresting jobs.

I wanted to travel to see places like China but the cost of travel in those days was prohibitive. In August of 1950 The United Nations asked New Zealand for volunteers to join the UN forces in Korea, so I joined the army and went to Korea. It was in Korea that I first saw with my own eyes the madness and the sadness of violence. I returned to New Zealand in 1952 and resumed my office working.

I was still unsettled and moved to Australia for a year and then back to New Zealand until in 1960 I finally moved to Australia permanently where I now reside on the Gold Coast of Queensland.

When I was young I can remember hearing on our small radio about Mahatma Gandhi and the work he was doing for the poor and underprivileged and later I saw him on Newsreels at the Movies.

In the early 1940's I picked up a paperback book from an alternative bookshop by Louis Fischer "Gandhi His life and message for the world"

This book brought back all my memories of my early years and I found myself unable to put the book down it went straight to my heart. From that book I went to Tolstoy's the kingdom of God is within you and books written by Henry David Thoreau and many others. It was a turning point for me, but you know I then went through many years of TALKING about Gandhi and it wasn't until November of 2003 that I had the guts to DO something. I organized a Mahatma Gandhi Awareness day on the Gold Coast at which around 90 people attended. (I was assisted by an Indian lady)

Then in March of 2005 I participated in the 75th anniversary of the Dandi Yatra. Then a friend of mine sent me a copy of a story in "Outlook Magazine" about a man called Uttam Teron of Parijat Academy who had started a school in his own home for underprivileged children from surrounding villages. I contacted Uttam and we have since that date become very close friends.

I am walking in India for underprivileged children and world peace to endeavor to (as Gandhi would put it) enter the hearts and minds and conscience of people to hopefully bring about change in their outlook.

In our world according to statistics there are 28 thousand little children under age 5 who die needlessly each day because of our inaction. My Walks therefore will be for 28 k's.

I have no idea what I can achieve but I know so well that my conscience will never be at ease until I do something positive for the suffering millions.

Presently I am walking every day (rain excepted) and am averaging around 100 k's per week. I also go to a gymnasium several days a week to ensure my fitness levels stay up.

I remember well Gandhi's words "We must step down from our pedestals and go and live with the people who are suffering and experience their hardships and sorrows.

Sincerely,
Garvin

Stress on Gandhian Principles

By A City Correspondent

GUWAHATI, March 10 – Garvin Brown, the 79-year-old Gandhian from Queensland, Australia who is in Assam to promote the cause of the underprivileged children on Sunday said before mediapersons that the solution to all the untold sufferings and problems afflicting the world lies in embracing the Gandhian principles.

Calling upon the media to contribute towards bringing peace in the strife-torn world, Brown, an ardent believer in Gandhism said that the media had a big role to play in ushering the

desired and positive changes. Stressing the need for revolutionary changes so that all discrimination could be done away with, Brown asserted that these changes for which everyone was waiting for is possible only through the ideals propounded by Gandhi.

Brown has been relentlessly working for propagating the ideals of Gandhi in Australia, and in 2003, he organized a Mahatma Gandhi Awareness Day on the Gold Coast through the assistance of an Indian. He participated in the 75th anniversary of the Dandi Yatra, and has made it his mission to further the cause of the down trodden through Gandhi's potent weapon— the walks.



“Gandhi belongs to the entire world and if he is forgotten, the miseries of the world will multiply,” said Brown recalling that when Gandhi was assassinated, it was the flag of humanity that had to be lowered.

True to his philosophy, Brown declined the luxurious accommodation in the capital city and he is staying at Parijat Academy, a school for the underprivileged children located near Deepar Beel. He led a charity walk today for raising funds for the down trodden children of the North East.

“Children all over the world are suffering and our efforts should be united to give a new dawn to these children,” said Brown adding that he was walking in India to enter the hearts and minds and conscience of the people to bring about a change in their perception.

He further said that the North East, witnessing rising conflict should accept ‘Ahimsa’ and give up ‘Himsa’.

He urged the rich and the fortunate of India to step down from their pedestals and experience the hardships and sorrows of the suffering as Gandhi urged.

Source: The Assam Tribune

Garvin Brown's Charity Walk in Guwahati

It was sometime in July 2006, I received an email from Garvin Brown , Queensland Australia. Seventy eight years old Garvin introduced himself, mostly talking about the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on him. He mentioned that he would be undertaking a walk from Coast of Queensland to Sydney covering a distance of around 950 kms to raise awareness about the teachings of Gandhi. Garvin also mentioned about his desire for a charity walk in Assam. I was pleasantly surprised but at the same time I was apprehensive and not sure. Garvin replied with a quotation of Gandhi,

IF YOUR MOTIVES ARE PURE THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT THE END RESULT IT WILL HAPPEN.

As time progressed, I began to see the outpouring of support from all over the globe to the selfless work of some of the followers of Gandhi namely Uttam Teron of Parijat Academy , Late Jugal Bhuyan of Prajnalaya , Biju Barborbaruah of Asha Darshan among others. In my last trip to Assam, I also observed the tremendous goodwill of people of Assam on these efforts. It was a remarkable day, the 9th of March when Garvin Brown came all the way from Australia and undertook the Charity walk.

Please find the photos of the walk compiled by Wahid Saleh.

[http://picasaweb.google.com/Parijat.Academy/
Parijat Academy Garvin Brown Chairty Walk at Guwahati 09032008](http://picasaweb.google.com/Parijat.Academy/Parijat_Academy_Garvin_Brown_Chairty_Walk_at_Guwahati_09032008)

Wahid da, always an inspiring figure, has also put the route of the walk through Google map.

There is also an article on the walk at Assam Tribune online

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=mar1108\State6>

It is worthwhile to mention that Mr. Jayanta Barman of Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters (FASS) took all the care for the successful management of this walk where a number of eminent persons of Guwahati participated.

Sincerity, credibility and dedication are the keys for success in any endeavor. If someone has these qualities, he or she is going to achieve his goal no matter the obstacles that come on his way. Garvin Brown's Charity walk is a symbol of goodness of human being.

Sincerely,
Ankur Bora (Austin, Texas)

(Received by e-mail from FASS)