

IPRA and SHAMSHIR: AHMEDABAD and CHANDIGARH

Topsy and David Evans were privileged to attend the 2018 International Peace Research Association General Conference in Ahmedabad, India, November 24th to 28th last. David presented a paper on Honour Killings related to Forbidden Marriage in India and Nepal.

The conference was entitled *Innovation for Sustainable Global Peace* and brought together Peace Researchers from all over the world seeking new ways of thinking in culture, politics, and business. Australia lies within the Asia West Pacific Peace Research Association (APPRA) region. Besides the plenary sessions 152 papers were presented at the Sectional Commission Meetings. New friendships were made quickly and it was inspiring to see young people eager to present their current concerns. Frequent reference was made to the road from Negative Peace to Positive Peace,¹ and of peace within (Om Shanti).

Accommodation and transport were not easy but our minder Assoc/Prof Manish Sharma of the Panjab University in Chandigarh looked after us especially well with help with transport, etc. Manish proved to be a special link to our next adventure.

In August 2018 in Adelaide we were involved in a Domestic Violence seminar with SHAMSHIR - A Human Rights Campaign against Sexual Abuse organised by Saru Rana. Saru and her sister Shamsheer founded Shamshir as an international multicultural organisation in Adelaide in 2017. When we mentioned we were going to India, we were invited to go on to Chandigarh to participate in a student seminar at Amritsar. David would give his paper a second time there and Topsy would be given opportunity to talk about her experience with Domestic Violence in Tasmania and its possible relevance to “Life after the Safe House’ In India.



Our time in Chandigarh was completely different. We were cared for in a lovely hotel and a series of most interesting interviews were set up for us by

¹ Galtung, J 1996, *Peace by Peaceful Means*

Shamsheer Rana-Tandon, who, like her sister Saru in Adelaide, is working hard to reduce violence against women. She is well known in Chandigarh, and arranged for us to meet the a senior police officer, a lawyer working in this area, and a female judge who hears many of the cases of such violence.

The original plan for a large student seminar in Amritsar had to be abandoned because there had been a recent bombing incident there and security was tight. We had arranged to meet Manish on our arrival and were able to introduce Manish and Shamsheer. Although they are both part of the Faculty of Panjab University, and have offices within 300 metres of each other, they had never met.

Very quickly they combined to set up an alternative plan. The students at the University were sitting for their examinations, so David, Shamsheer and Topsy all spoke at a much smaller meeting of the postgraduate faculty in Manish's Department. Our presentations were well received and several suggestions were made about how research could proceed along some of the lines we proposed - largely about how to change community attitudes. We were asked if we would consider another visit to Chandigarh next year!

The interview with the police officer was a real reality check. Although very sympathetic to the need to reduce violence against women in the city, he was realistic and pessimistic about the likelihood of changing public opinion that this is the natural order of life - men have the power in society and sometimes need to show this in ways which result in violence. Women are the custodians of honour in the family, and if they step outside the rigid ideas of the family by eloping in an attempt to have a 'love marriage' against socially accepted rules, they lose not only their honour, but the honour of the family as well. He said that India has borrowed the best in laws from around the world, but it is clear that the interpretation of these laws must be considered in the light of traditional belief. All he can do is to warn the family of errant young people that if harm comes to the couple, the Police will know who is responsible and they will be charged. He said that this policy is reducing the rate of Honour Killings in the State of Haryana.

Shamsheer said that she believes that the reduced rates of Honour Killings may be due in part to a possible change in definition of the cause of death. As the reduction in Honour Killings has occurred there has been an increase in the numbers of 'suicide by drinking poison' - often under pressure from family members. A recent article reported on our ABC, has shown that young, recently married Indian women have twice the world rate of suicide.

We had heard that lawyers charge high fees. When we asked about free legal aid for people who could not afford to employ a lawyer he said that if you have a good car, you need to give it good fuel to make it go well - similarly, you can't expect a lawyer who isn't paid well to give good service, so 'free' lawyers need to

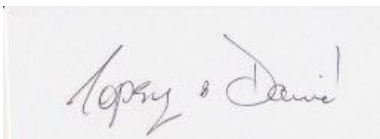
be given extra by their clients. We suggested that we would see that as bribery or graft. He did not agree.

The Lawyer had a similar view. Court cases can take up to 20 years to be finalised, and cost an extraordinary amount of money, with unpredictable outcomes. He always asks clients if this is what they want/can afford or if they can see an alternative way to proceed. The majority of women have to go back to a violent marriage, and eloping couples may opt to leave their families, or 'divorce' and be accepted back into the family. He was very open about frequent 'planting of witnesses' in trials.

The Judge was amazingly frank and helpful. She agreed that the time taken to finalise cases was far too long and she has instituted 'Saturday Courts' with the aim of reducing the backlog of cases. She has asked her fellow Judges to sit on Saturdays and give judgements on some of the less complicated cases. She said that the 30 Judges involved clear up to 1000 cases in a day!!! That is an astonishing over 30 cases each per day.

On the day we saw her, there was a report in the *Hindustani Times* about the decision in a case against a prominent member of Parliament who in 2006 had forced her daughter who had married a lower caste man, to have an illegal abortion. She had died on the way to hospital. The mother and several associates had been charged with her murder and forced imprisonment. The Parliamentarian, who was the Sikh Spokesperson on Women's Affairs, was acquitted.

Altogether it was an amazing fortnight.



Topsy and David Evans



ESLM (SANTRM)

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