

DREAMCATCHER

Sharing our dream for the children of the world

Vision for the Gandhi Institute

By Arun Gandhi

"We make a living by what we get, We make a life by what we give" – Anon.

What broke Gandhi's heart was that India declined to address the massive problem of poverty at the time of independence in 1947. The argument was that with industrial growth, wealth will percolate and poverty will be eliminated. Sixty years later, poverty still continues to be as rampant in India as it was in 1947 in spite of its recent phenomenal industrial growth.

Gandhi's concern for the poor is reflected in what has now become popularly known as Gandhi's Talisman. He said:

"I will give you a talisman, whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much for you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest human you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words will it lead to Swaraj (self determination) for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away."

According to India's 2001 census report there are, among the 500 million poor, more than 90 million children under the age of 14 who are, like their fathers and forefathers, born into dire poverty and will be forced to earn their livelihood from the age of five, if not earlier. Their hope of ever breaking the cycle of poverty is as hopeless as an average person's chances in the United States of winning a multi-million dollar jackpot.

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The First Project – AVANI School

By Cathy Pezdirtz

Avani School in the Kolhapur District of Maharashtra, India has been chosen as the first project of Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute (GWEI). This small residential school was founded by Anuradha Bhonsle, a graduate of the prestigious Tata School of Social Sciences, to educate, shelter, and feed some of the thousands of children in the area who work long hours in manual labor or begging on the streets.

The school incorporates many of the principles of GWEI: education in a community environment, the importance of human rights and dignity, preparation for life work through vocational training.

At present, the school has 30 residents, but plans are underway for moving the location and expanding it so more students can be accommodated. Avani School will also be renamed The Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School in honor of the late wife of Arun Gandhi, founder of GWEI. For many years Sunanda was an active supporter of Avani School.

Through GWEI's current fund raising efforts, we have recently approved and allocated \$20,000 (USD) to AVANI to support the school's immediate need to maintain ongoing operations and care for its children.



Vision for the Gandhi Institute from Page 1.

From begging for a living in infancy these children graduate to street-side jobs like washing cars, or as shoe-shine and busboys in roadside restaurants until the boys are picked up by gangs to be trained for criminal activities like picking pockets or breaking into homes, leading to murders and robbery. Girls, of course, are picked up by scouts to feed the ever-demanding prostitution market in the cities. Some are simply kidnapped, while others are lured with offers of lucrative jobs as domestic help. Once they are in the city they all end up into prostitution and are lost to their families forever.

The Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute has embarked on an ambitious multi-pronged program to help eradicate the scourge of poverty and human degradation. Gandhi said: "Poverty is the worst form of violence," and must be tackled on all fronts to ensure human rights and human dignity to those who are victims of societal exploitation.



The priority of the Institute is to rescue children from the poorest sections of Indian society who are the first to become victims of criminal gangs; the second priority is to build an institution that serves as a shelter as well as a learning institution where the rescued children will receive basic education—reading, writing and arithmetic—plus vocational training so they are equipped to earn a livelihood through honest and diligent service. The third priority will be to help the graduates of this Institution establish a small business or find them a suitable job.

The fourth priority is to work with the impoverished parents of these children to see how best the Institute can help the family get out of the vortex of poverty that consumes them.

All these priorities, while easily defined as clear steps on paper, are, in reality, so closely enmeshed that it would be virtually impossible to address one without focusing on the other. For instance, the Institute cannot rescue children without first establishing an institution to house and educate them and book education will be meaningless without the vocational component. All of this will be contingent upon the Institute's ability to set up a network to help rehabilitate the children and their families in decent, lucrative jobs.

**And then,
of course,
in the final analysis,
we cannot do any of this without
funds to make it all happen!!**



The Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School

By Tushar Gandhi

In the first issue of *Dreamcatcher*, the AVANI school in the Kolhapur District of Maharashtra was introduced as a model from which the Gandhi Worldwide Educational Institute may learn and propagate our mission. We have recently approved and allocated \$20,000 (USD) to AVANI to support the school's immediate need to maintain ongoing operations and care for its children. However, the school's single all-purpose room infrastructure as it exists today, even with this immediate infusion of capital, is not sufficient for providing a sustainable long-term solution to the children of the AVANI school.

To this end the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute, in conjunction with AVANI and the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation of India, is next focusing on constructing a self-sustaining school for the impoverished children of Kolhapur—the **Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School**.

The primary reason for establishing the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School is to provide a safe, secure and healthy environment for children in peril. To achieve this objective, five acres of land have been purchased in the village of Vashi on the outskirts of Kolhapur. We intend to create a campus of dormitories, playgrounds, dairy, vegetable gardens, and fruit orchards surrounding a non-curriculum school which will provide nonconventional and vocational education. Initially, adequate facilities will be created to house the rescued child laborers being cared for by the volunteers of AVANI. In the first phase, separate dormitories for girls and boys will be built and equipped with a non-curriculum school focusing on vocational education, teaching life skills as well as basic educational studies in a "learning by doing" method.

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BREAKING NEWS . . .

Montblanc Presents Donation For Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School

The board of Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute has just learned that Montblanc, known for generations as a maker of sophisticated, high quality writing instruments, has donated \$140,000 (USD) to the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation for the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School. The donation came in conjunction with a new pen Montblanc has created to commemorate M. K. Gandhi.

During a ceremony to launch the new pen in Mumbai, India on Tuesday, September 29, Montblanc presented a check for the school to Tushar Gandhi, president of the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation. The contribution will be added to other donations as construction begins on the first of the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School buildings. Five acres of land were purchased earlier this year for the school, which will eventually include both educational and residential buildings for 300 students.

For several years, Montblanc has supported UNICEF's efforts to bring literacy to the children of the world. Montblanc's gift for the new school, together with the contributions of other caring donors, means that a group of children in India will not only learn to read, but will be lifted out of a life of hard labor, begging, or the sex trade to a self-sustaining future.



The Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School from Page 3.

In the second year of its existence, these facilities will be expanded so that the Home and School will be able to accommodate 300 children.

The campus will be environment-friendly and as self-reliant as possible. After conducting wind direction and strength surveys, if viable we will erect windmills for lifting water from the Bore Well and to generate electricity. We will also harness solar energy for outdoor lighting and for heating water. We will harvest rain water and create steep wells which will regenerate subterranean water. As far as possible we will recycle and reuse water.

Although we will take measures to be environmentally friendly, the main objective of the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School will be to provide the best possible facilities for the children whom fate and the economic susceptibilities of their parents deprived of a healthy and secure childhood.

To teach animal husbandry to the children, a functional dairy will be created housing buffaloes, cows and goats for milk. Their waste, along with human waste, will be used to generate bio-gas.



Natural compost fertilizer byproduct will be used as fertilizer in the vegetable and fruit gardens, which will provide nourishment for the children.

Educationists and child psychologists will be engaged to develop a curriculum for the children so that they will be equipped with knowledge and skills by the time they become adults, to be independent and self-reliant. They may have been deprived of a childhood before they come to the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School but when they emerge from the school as young women and men they will have abilities which will ensure that they will be able to enjoy life to the fullest.

While the primary objective of the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School is to care for children in peril it will also strive to work with the parents of the children so that they too can better their lot and acquire skills and trades. The parents will be involved in the upbringing of the children so that the family ties don't break down.

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The Sunanda Gandhi Memorial Home and School from page 4.

The Sunanda Gandhi Home and School will also benefit neighboring communities by providing health services, trade and craft training, and opportunities for women.

If funds permit, the adjoining land will also be acquired and a centre to train rural educationists and health workers will be established. A guest hostel will be built which will provide hospitality for volunteers who offer their time and skills to help the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial and its residents, the rescued children who were in peril.



With the help of caring donors, Avani School will continue to lift children like Monali out of dire poverty and back-breaking work to an environment of learning in a community setting.

Monali's Story

By Cathy Pezdirtz

I was eight years old when I came to Avani School. I remember how Miss Bhonsle found me.

Like every other day of the week, I was working at the brick kiln with my mother. We are part of a nomad clan and very poor. My father is almost always drunk, so my mother has to work and, even with my help, she made just enough money to buy food for one person each day. So, we were always hungry and sometimes I felt dizzy and weak.

That day, someone who knew about Avani School saw me carrying heavy bricks to dry in the sun. I couldn't carry as many as some of the older boys. One boy who is thirteen could carry 88 pounds on his head—back and forth, all day long, from the baking center to the drying area. We tried not to breathe when we were close to the baking center ovens. Some people have died from the carbon monoxide fumes that come from the coking coal.

Earlier that day I worked in the kneading area. This is where we mixed the water, straw, clay, and the ash and coal dust to make the brick material. We stood in the mix (it came all the way to my thighs) and kind of stomp around in it to mix it up. I had a cut on my foot that day, and since we don't have shoes, every step I took made me feel like crying.

But, here I am at Avani School. It was hard to leave my mother, but she knew it would be better for me here. For the first time, I'm learning to read and write. And I'm trying my best, because I want to be a police constable when I grow up.



Namaste: A Pilgrimage that Changed My Life

By Hal Edwards

Chair of the Board of the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute

My life has not been the same since my visit to India in 2008 with Arun Gandhi and his Gandhi Legacy Pilgrimage. We visited the world's largest slums, often adjacent to million-dollar apartment complexes; we rocked and rolled through the warm dark nights in a packed overnight train into the middle of simple farmland far away from the bustling of Mumbai or Delhi where we visited projects. One day I found myself open-mouthed before the absolute sublimity of the Taj Mahal. The next day I dialogued through a translator with a migrant grandmother who lived in a village of sugar cane shanties. I sometimes closed my eyes as our bus driver swerved around camel or oxen-pulled wagons on a busy highway. I ate meals seasoned by spices that commanded one's attention. I encountered ten thousand opposites coexisting side by side in every conceivable circumstance.



The children of Avani at lessons at the current school site in Kolhapur.

All this, and much more, deeply impacted my perceptions of reality. I was taken to new depths of a very special word, *namaste*, among these very beautiful and forgotten people. Namaste means, "God within me greets God within you." This entire pilgrimage followed in the footsteps of Gandhi, and I can easily say it was a transforming experience.

The roots of my interest in Gandhi go back more than half a century, when during college days in 1954 I read E. Stanley Jones' book, *A Christian Interpretation of Mahatma Gandhi*. The energy I received from my first contact with Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence was electric. Later, the movie, *Gandhi*, found me speechless and unable to get up out of my seat long after the credits rolled.

Then, in the early 90's, I read an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* on Gandhi's grandson, Arun, and I felt an inner nudge to contact him. That was on a Thursday. The following Tuesday Arun happened to be in Chicago and we had our first lunch together, the beginning of a significant

friendship that continues to deepen over the years. Arun, Sunanda, Betsy and I spent the next fifteen years growing and sharing in a variety of ways. When Arun asked me to serve as Chair of the Board of the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute, I said "yes" because I honor the integrity and genuine nature of Arun and his family. They continue to model and proclaim Grandfather Gandhi's wise and compassionate legacy of love and nonviolence.

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Namaste: A Pilgrimage that Changed My Life from page 6.



Arun Gandhi and the children of Avani .

Being in India with Arun on his annual Gandhi Legacy Pilgrimage, I visited with hundreds of Indian men and women, boys and girls enveloped by poverty. I saw great masses of people living together in an intensity I never dreamed of.

A highlight of my visit was a project that Arun and Sunanda have supported for several decades. The project, Avani, is all about thirty little children from a simple rural area in the belly of India, all but forgotten to the world. Avani is about children who would inevitably be abandoned and abused in a variety of ways without having the safety net, the nurturing and the educational and vocational guidance provided by Avani. (I hope you saw the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*; it does reflect this reality quite realistically.)

As I looked into the faces of these children at Avani, after seeing countless other young children living

and begging on the streets or doing endless hard labor in the vast sugar cane fields and brick kilns along the highways, I realized that the Avani project is but one small drop of practical hope. India's unbelievable tsunami of poverty, fanned by government corruption and corporations that exploit the poorest of the poor, keeps these children invisible.

Mother Teresa, like Gandhi, lived in the very heart of these people. Someone asked her, "Mother, why do you spend your life here among a handful of people while there are

countless more just outside your door dying? That does not look like success." Mother responded, "God did not call me to be successful; I am called to be faithful to the few who are given to me."

I find this to be so important as I walk with Arun and with each of you who are called to donate one small drop of practical hope into a very large bucket of need. Thank you for co-creating new beginnings with us as we build something together.

**Interested in joining the
Annual Gandhi Legacy Pilgrimage?**

You can obtain details by going to:

<http://www.gandhiforchildren.org/gandhilegacypilgrimage.html>



You can help change the lives of exploited children in India.

Add your name to our mailing list, send a donation as you are able, or make a monthly commitment. Your gifts will be used to support projects focused on building, furnishing and maintaining schools which will educate these children as well as provide vocational training for them and their family members.

- () Please add my name to your mailing list.
- () Enclosed is my gift of \$_____.
- () I am making a monthly pledge of \$_____.

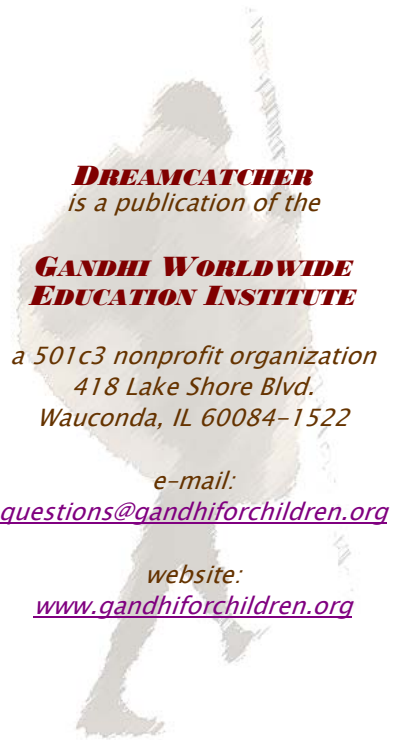
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DREAMCATCHER
is a publication of the

**GANDHI WORLDWIDE
EDUCATION INSTITUTE**

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Presort STDUS Postage Paid Wauconda, IL 60084-1522 Permit No. 34

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