



Institute of Social Sciences

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The Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi in association with Oxford University Press hosted the launch of the book titled *Gandhian Nonviolent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: The 1924-25 Vykom Satyagraha and the Mechanisms of Change* authored by Dr. Mary Elizabeth King. The event was organized at the Constitution Club in New Delhi on 12th September, 2015.



Smt. Meira Kumar (Former Speaker, Lok Sabha) releasing the book. Also seen are: From left Mr. Prakash Karat (Member, Polit Bureau, Communist Party of India (Marxist)), Dr. George Mathew (Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences) Dr. Mary Elizabeth King (author), Prof T. K. Oommen (Emeritus Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Prof. Meenakshi Gopinath (former Principal, Lady Shri Ram Collage).

Dr. Mary E. King worked at the centre of the U.S. Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. She is presently a Professor of Peace and conflict studies at the UN-affiliated University for Peace in Costa Rica and a Distinguished Rothermere American Institute Fellow of the University of Oxford, U.K. The book was released by Smt.Meira Kumar, Former Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) India. In her address during the launch, Smt.Meira Kumar mentioned how her father, Mr.Jagjivan Ram, Former Union Cabinet Minister of India and eminent leader of the Indian National Congress, went through several ordeals of caste-

based struggle with regard to temple entry. With reference to prevailing religio-cultural inequities, the need for inclusive justice was highlighted by Smt.Meira Kumar.

The three distinguished panelists included Prakash Karat, Member, Polit Bureau, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Prof.T.K.Oommen, Emeritus Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University along with Prof.Meenakshi Gopinath, former Principal, Lady Shri Ram College.



Smt. Meira Kumar

During his talk, Prakash Karat elucidated on the historical origins of political decisions exercised by leaders during the post-independence era which has had detrimental impact on the societal fabric; something that has been further exacerbated through religious overtones, he said. Mr. Karat opined that the Vykom Satyagraha was a landmark event for social justice in South India and that the significance of the struggle is well brought out in the book by Dr. Mary King. He highlighted that the historical notion of Hindu orthodoxy undergoing a conversion during the Vykom struggle has been negated through research carried out by Dr.King and ended his remarks saying the book not only gives information but ideas to those who read it that the fight for social justice is not over and there exists an unfinished democratic revolution.

Prof.T.K.Oommen in his address jovially stated that the Vykom Satyagraha is like a classic wherein it is a book whose title is familiar to everyone but very few have read it. He stated that one has to profusely thank Dr.Mary King for her efforts in bringing out fresh insights of the Vykom resistance movement. In analyzing the Vykom Satyagraha, she has involved the micro and macro issues of the same without ignoring their assets and liabilities, he said.

Prof.Meenakshi Gopinath eloquently spoke about Dr.King's background in being an advocate for peace throughout the world which has been an inspiration for many. She went on to speak about the various facets of social injustice prevailing in the country that warrants attention from all stakeholders concerned.

Dr. Mary King stressed on the role of creating institutions and their relevance in civil resistance. This was in pursuance of her emphasis on the role played by armaments in contemporary political governance. She spoke at length about how the idea of working on the subject was initially nurtured through the support of Institute of Social Sciences in India. "I spent hundreds of hours in archives with both palace and British original documents, and newspaper morgues,

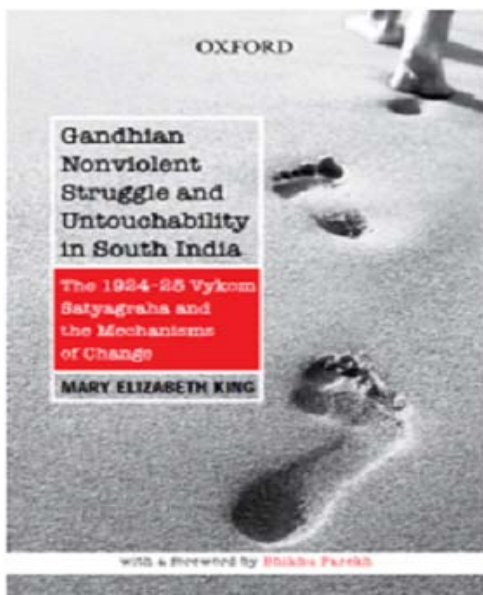


Mary Elizabeth King

in assessing the role of Gandhi, the dilemmas that he faced, and the mistakes that he made. I also interviewed specialist Keralite historians. I have reconstructed a verifiable chronology for what actually happened at Vykom (and its controversial settlement) and in this corrected context, trace the dynamics of civil resistance during this movement” said Dr.King. She mentioned that the Institute of Social Sciences is her second home and that the support from Mrs. Dinoo Mathew, presently a doctoral candidate at the University of Peace, Costa Rica has been invaluable in her efforts for over 10 years. Dr.Mary King significantly drew attention to a recent research finding by her colleagues that in all the resistance movements analyzed from 1900 to 2006, the non-violent ones proved to be twice as successful when compared to the ones resorting to armed means of resistance. She concluded by stating that there needs to be a second wave of investigation and research in the realm of nonviolent resistance and democratic uprising.

In his opening remarks, Dr.Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences welcomed the esteemed panelists and participants who attended the launch. He said the myth and perception that non-violent means of resistance always wins with the stoniest of hearts being melted through the same has been demolished through the book. Dr. Roy opined that it is no ordinary book but a compelling piece of original research.

Dr.George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences moderated the session. Mr.Prasun Chatterjee, Commissioning Editor, Oxford University Press proposed the vote of thanks. The event was supported by The Kerala Centre, New York and was attended by eminent citizens that included academics, civil society activists along with members of the diplomatic corps in New Delhi.



“King’s book is remarkable for its quality of research, fairness of approach, and depth of analysis. I know no other work on the Vykomm Satyagraha that comes anywhere near it.”

-Lord Bhiku Parekh.

(Fellow, British Academy and Labour Member, House of Lords)