

GREEN KASHMIR

FIELD TRIP REPORT PART TWO

September 2016

By Amber Badyari: President of Green Kashmir

On Monday 26th September, we departed from the Houseboat, having completed our preliminary survey of Dal Lake, and after having spoken to several key stakeholders, who spoke as representatives of the inhabitants of Dal lake and their way of life.

When planning the Green Kashmir Field Trip several months previously, from the UK, we had always intended to organize two 2-day long introduction to permaculture courses: one either at the University of Kashmir in association with the Department for the Environment, or at the University of Agriculture, both sites situated in the capital Srinagar; and the second course in Ganderbal, a small town on the way to Sonamarg on the Srinagar to Leh highway, and the gateway to Ladakh.



We wanted to go to Ganderbal to visit an organisation that had set up an organic food growing project out in the surrounding countryside, and to hold a two-day introduction to permaculture for the people involved in the organic project. We also wanted to visit an outdoors site for the students from Srinagar to be able to do some practical sessions outdoors. However, when we planned the trip we did not anticipate that there would be a strict curfew in place, due to the unrest in the region. As a consequence of the severity of this curfew all the colleges, universities, and even the schools were closed down, and all the lecturers and students were at home. Therefore, we were encountering a major obstacle to our plans.

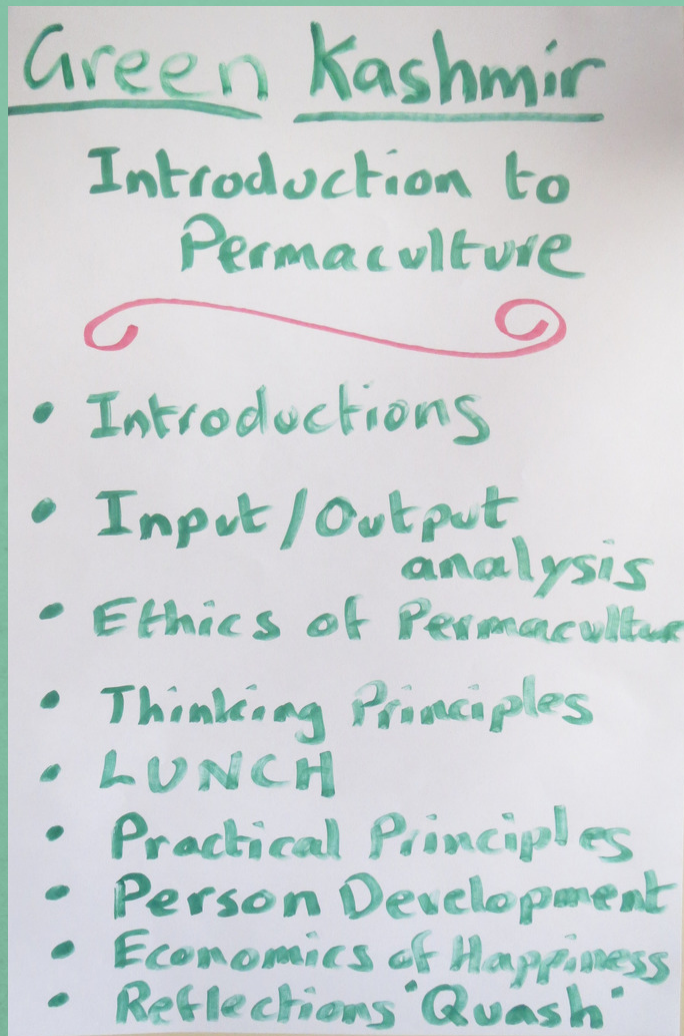
Nonetheless, in permaculture one of the principles is that: 'in the problem lies the solution', and we needed to find a solution. To add to the problem, the very day before we had planned a visit to Ganderbal, to explore the site and the facilities for the suitability of the intended course to be held there, a story broke in the newspaper that there was trouble on the streets there, and that 300 arrests had taken place. This was a strong indication that the area had become dangerous to travel to, and the hard-line decision was made to cancel the visit, and the course that was due to be held in Ganderbal, for the safety concerns of the group, and of the students and volunteers we were intending to take with us.

The Permaculture 'Flower'



In one day we had to turn the whole situation around, and thanks to the project leader Shah's local contacts in Srinagar, he found a new venue, arranged the furniture, had the venue cleaned, invited all the students to the new venue, and gave the location details, made travel arrangements for the students who did not have their own vehicles or means of transport, as the curfew meant that there were no buses or rickshaws available, and made arrangements for food and drink to be prepared for the event. It was an extraordinary exercise in logistics in extremely difficult circumstances but the solution was found and all the plans for the course in permaculture to be taught were put in place before nightfall.

On Tuesday 27th September, we held a meeting for the volunteers to discuss the order of events, and to confirm how the day would be run, and the syllabus for the day's course content was written out to be pinned to the classroom wall. History was in the making: Day One of the Permaculture Course, the first course to be held to introduce permaculture into the Kashmir Valley was taking place. Once at the venue the teaching materials and teaching aids were set up and set out.



Over the weekend we had invited Dilwar, the son of the flower seller Mr Marvellous, to attend the course, as he and his family actually grow the flowers that they sell on Dal Lake, and Dilwar was very interested in the opportunity to come along and learn some new ideas that could help their livelihood. Their way of life is under threat from the environmental degradation, and from the loss of clients to whom to sell the flowers as many tourists who would have stayed on the houseboats over the summer months had cancelled due to the on-going curfew.

The invited students arrived in batches, collected from their home town areas by Amir, who kindly offered to drive to the location where the students live, and to collect them. The prepared food and drink from home for the day arrived too. In permaculture, sharing food is a key demonstration of the value of food, and the significance of sharing, and the impact on the community, and the community spirit, that sharing has. However, arranging food for a group of 24 people when there is a curfew, followed by strikes, holding the city in its grip, is no mean feat when there is a small feast to prepare.



After an introduction by Amber for Green Kashmir, the course got started, and our guest tutor Victoria, permaculture teacher from the UK, got off to a flying start. Due to the nature of the circumstances we were dealing with, the start time was delayed, as it took a long time and great effort to get everyone assembled, however as soon as the course started Victoria had everyone's attention.

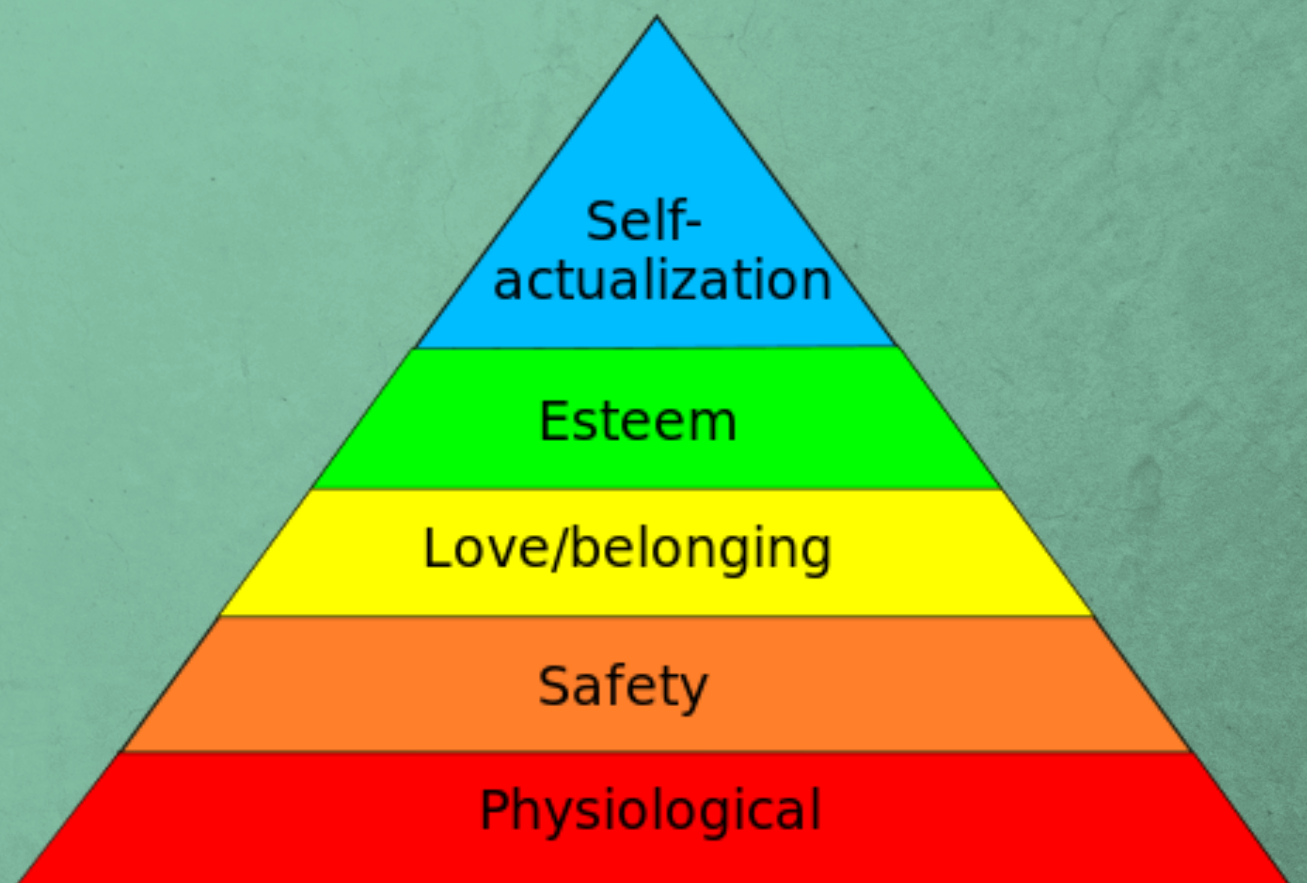




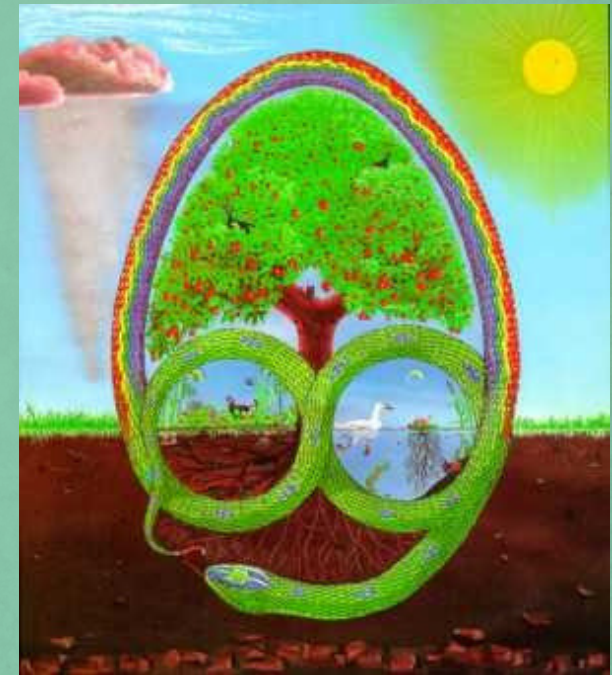
We studied input and output analysis, permaculture ethics, thinking principles, practical principles, personal development, and watched the video 'The Economics of Happiness', followed by some reflection. The first day was well received and was concluded with some interactions with the tutors and the team and with a group photo of the first day's attendance.



On Wednesday 28th September, day two of the introduction to permaculture course was attended by some extra students who were unable to make the first day. We were delighted to have both brothers Umar and Merief with us on this day, as well as Mr Majid, an experienced life-long campaigner for community based projects. Jenny Lynn, psychotherapist, mental health practitioner and vegetable grower started the day by telling a story about a baby elephant that was chained. The story was well received by the group and was followed by a group discussion on the symbolism of the story, followed by work in pairs to share personal stories and experiences that the story may have touched on.



Maslow's Theory



The symbol for permaculture

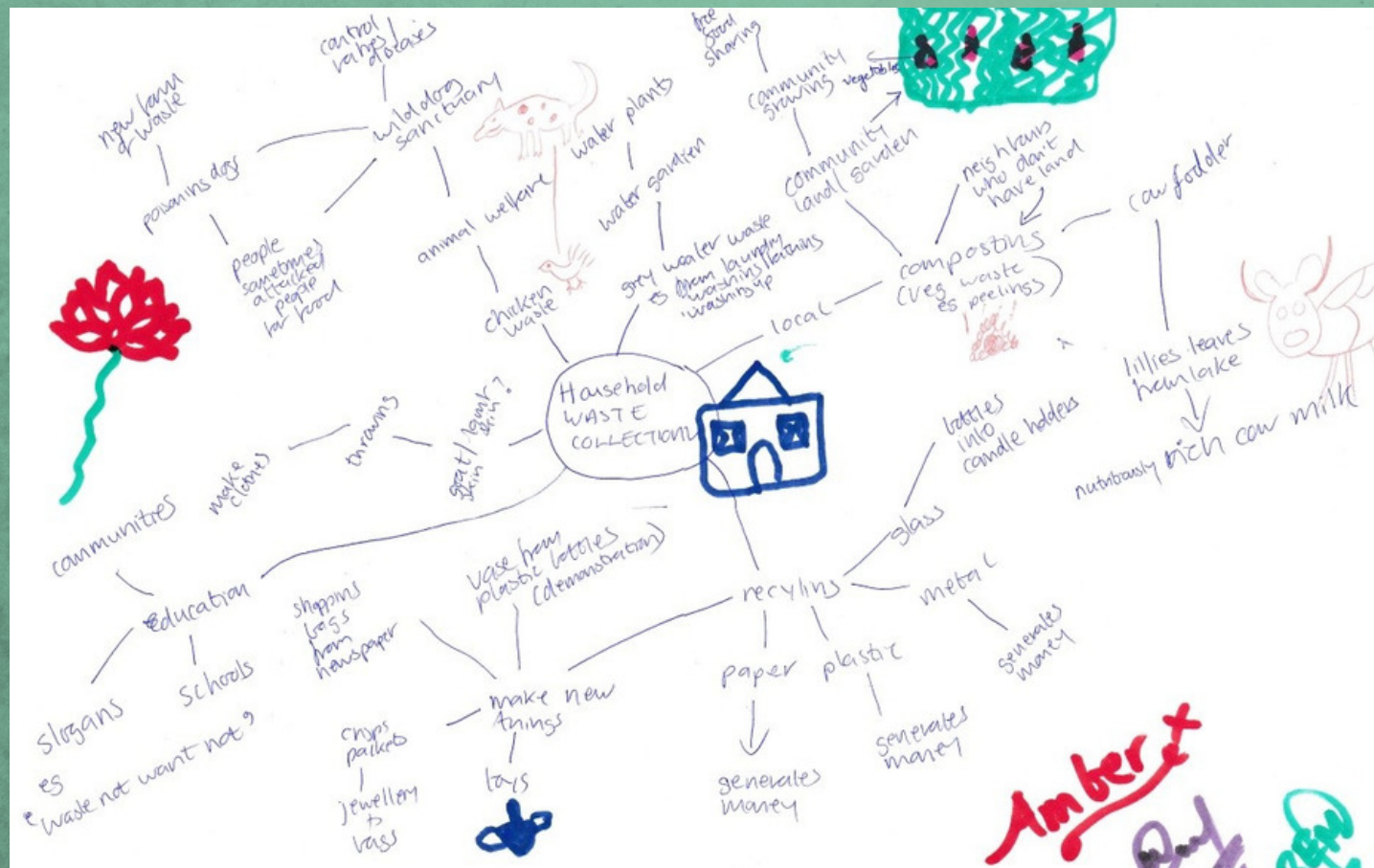
Jenny also led a learning session on Maslow's theory using a chart. In this theory, if you are stuck in survival mode, you will not be able to find the creativity and problem solving skills to unlock the solutions to the problems you might be facing. This was a very useful teaching tool. The students were also given the opportunity to watch the video: 'The Garden at the End of the World', about the work of Rosemary Morrow, the leading permaculture teacher on the benefits of permaculture in conflict zones, and a mentor to Green Kashmir. The video is set in Afghanistan and depicts the widows and orphans and Mebhooba's Promise. The group found this video very moving and responded with concern for the suffering of other people.



Here is a link to the video: 'The Garden at the End of the World'
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4BYQ4stG7w
 or if you would like to watch this video now from the Green Kashmir website then please go to the Permaculture Video Library page.



After lunch, there was a discussion about the potential of right livelihoods, and regenerative business enterprises proposed by the group, that could reflect some of the permaculture ethics and principles being taught, followed by another opportunity to work in groups to put together permaculture presentations.





After the presentations of the group projects, a certificate ceremony was held where Victoria, the tutor, handed out certificates to the successful students. This ceremony added extra value to an already very valuable and successful two-day course. After the trauma of living under a curfew for the last three months, it was great for everyone to get out, to meet with other students, to share ideas, to learn and to gain a sense of community, and a shared positive experience.



At the end of the day there was another group photo of the successful candidates after completing the two-day course.

On Thursday 29th September, three of the delegates from Green Kashmir drove across the city to the airport side of town to meet with Dr Shah, the ex-dean of the Kashmir University of Agriculture, and director of the Green Scan consultancy. Dr Shah welcomed us into his office, and showed us around the grounds of his beautiful gardens where the fresh fragrance of lemon balm reminded us that Kashmir was once known as 'paradise'. Dr Shah has been the guiding light behind several NGO's, and is passionate about the environment. He generously offered us to enter into a partnership with him, and the use of his office, and resources when in Srinagar. He also gave us some sound advice once we had informed him of our plans for introducing permaculture practices into the Kashmir Valley.



Dr Shah suggested that we make a plan of all the areas that we want to work in, and then choose those options that we can make a success of: 'if it is not essential then abandon it.' Currently Dr Shah and his colleagues at the Green Scan consultancy are working on a project to support the local shepherds, known as *Goujars*, to sustain their way of life and their livelihoods. We thanked Dr Shah for his generous offer to share his resources, and his office in Srinagar with us, and said that we would keep in touch with developments. Dr Shah also mentioned the practice of keeping kitchen gardens that is popular with Kashmiri families, as well as an important aspect of permaculture that Green Kashmir aspires to encourage, and support, as local vegetable growing is a key practice of permaculture.



Meanwhile back at the house Victoria had been making very valuable use of her time teaching back yard composting in the community. She demonstrated how to prepare a trench and how to put the dust from sweeping the yard, which contains minerals, and the first of the autumn leaves into the trench, with vegetable matter from the kitchen not used in cooking. She then recovered the trench and watered it and mentioned that this piece of soil would have more nutrition in it next spring when the new growing season would start.



A stray dog that the family had been feeding brought her puppies to us to be looked after. There is a concern about the welfare of the stray dogs in the city, as well as the risk of disease that they may carry. Green Kashmir would like to do a partnership with TOLFA (Tree Of Life For Animals) who run a dog sanctuary in India: www.tolfa.org.uk



Aubergine drying in the autumn sun to be kept for use in the long winter months.

Victoria also collected autumn leaves and put them into the chicken coop. Upon our return, we instantly noticed that this addition to the chicken coop had made the chickens behave in a more natural, and contented way; they were scratching the soil and the leaves and pecking for small insects, etc. This was a great practical learning opportunity for all of those involved: working in harmony with nature and not against it, and mimicking nature in order to create harmony with our shared environment. Keeping free range chickens is an enterprise that Green Kashmir would like to have as one of our projects to encourage chicken rearing in the community.



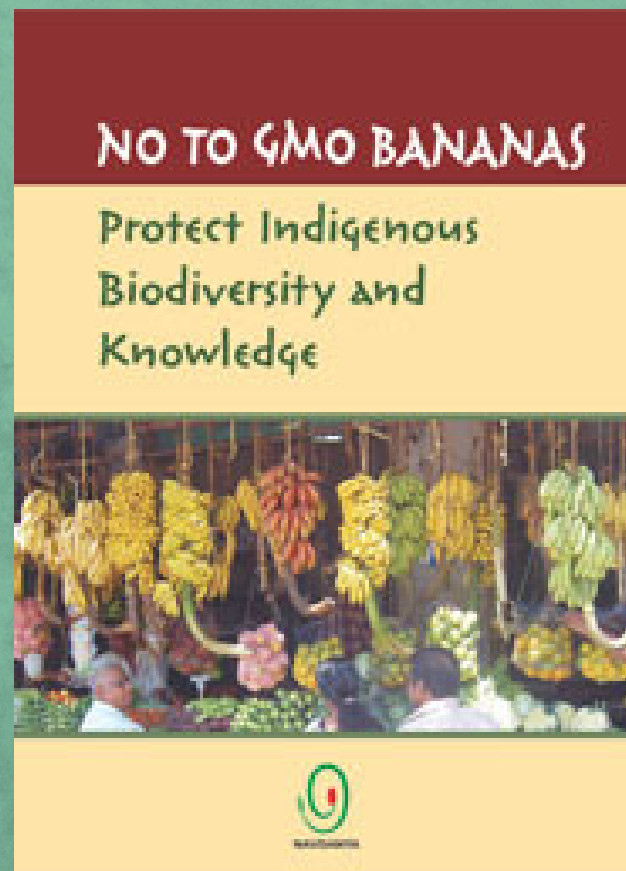
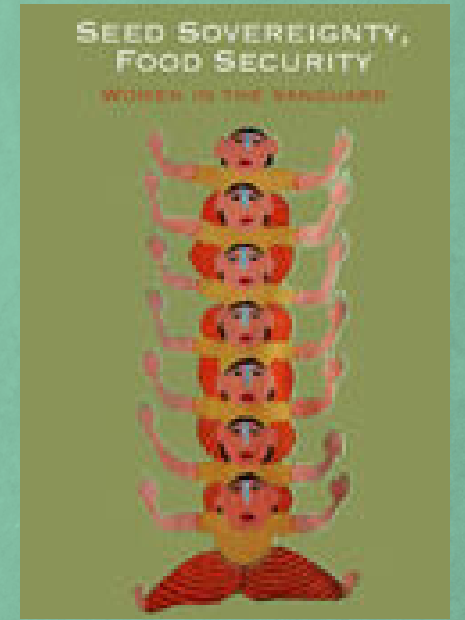
This evening was our last evening together in Srinagar before returning to Delhi for our onward flights to the UK so we shared a special meal together that had been lovingly cooked at home during the day.

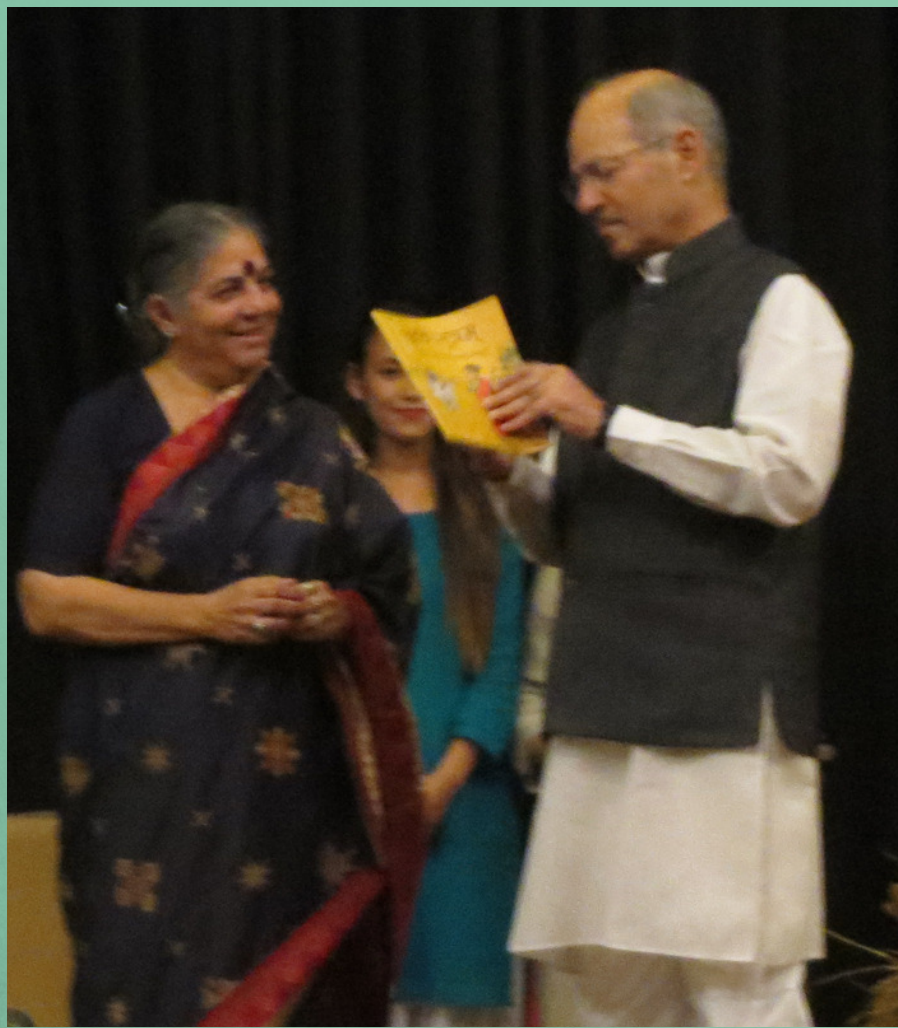


On Friday 30th September, we set off to the airport to catch our flight to Delhi but as this was a Friday the curfew was in strict force and our journey was repeatedly interrupted by checks from the military patrolling the streets during the enforcement of the curfew, and also by the J&K police. In order to move around safely during a curfew, it is necessary to be in possession of a curfew pass. These passes need to be applied for at the local police station but fortunately for us, in our case, our e-tickets for our flights acted as our curfew passes, and these e-tickets were checked rigorously at each armed checkpoint. We made our flights on time and arrived in Delhi for the afternoon, struck again by the unusual heat and humidity that Delhi was experiencing for the time of the year.



On Saturday 1st October, the Green Kashmir delegation was delighted to have the good fortune to be able to attend the Bhoomi 2016 festival Healing Our Planet, Healing Our Body hosted at the India International Centre in New Delhi by Navdanya, in collaboration with the Institut Francais India, and SOL. Navdanya is a network of seed keepers and organic producers spread across 18 states in India, and Navdanya means nine seeds, symbolizing the protection of biological and cultural diversity. Navdanya is part of a movement for Earth Democracy and their founder is **Dr Vandana Shiva**.





During the festival, the delegation attended a series of talks, including an address by the Indian minister of Agriculture, and were able to enjoy a dance performance by local school children as part of the opening ceremony. The talks were very diverse covering subjects like biodiversity, organics, ayurvedic medicine, GMO crops, and a moving story about the Punjabi farmers who committed suicide when the crops failed, and they were unable to pay back loans taken out to buy GM seeds, and the disturbing story of the increase in cases of cancer in the villagers and farmers in the Punjab linked to the use of fertilizers in the cotton fields of the Punjab.



navdanya.org

During lunch the Green Kashmir delegation had the opportunity to speak with Dr Vandana Shiva and to acknowledge her work, whilst introducing the work of Green Kashmir to her, and an update of the field trip to Kashmir that the delegation was just returning from in Srinagar during the curfew. Dr Vandana Shiva generously offered to do a partnership with Green Kashmir, and suggested **an organic food festival in the springtime in Srinagar**. She asked us to stay in touch and to work towards this joint project.



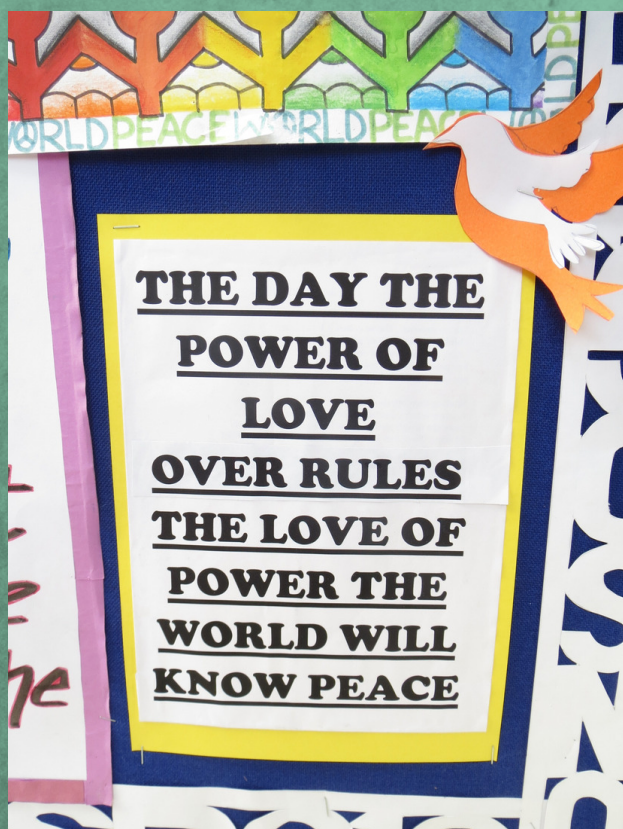


We stepped outside for a short while to find some tea, and to take a short walk, and found that we were right next to the 12-day campaign **International Day of Peace to International Day of Non-Violence** hosted by the UN Information Centre for India and Bhutan. We were delighted to see a lot of artwork from the school children related to the environment, ecology and sustainability and took lots of photos to remind us of the diversity and creativity of the children's work.





We already knew about the Green India policies in place from the central government of India, and the Green Teacher initiative before our trip but it was impressive to see how much the school children are being involved in this education to protect and cherish the environment and the unique place of people in this role. It is through these ground-breaking initiatives that we as an NGO hope to be able to speak to the central government of India to help secure a place in this dialogue for the school children of Kashmir and the environment and the ecosystem of Kashmir.



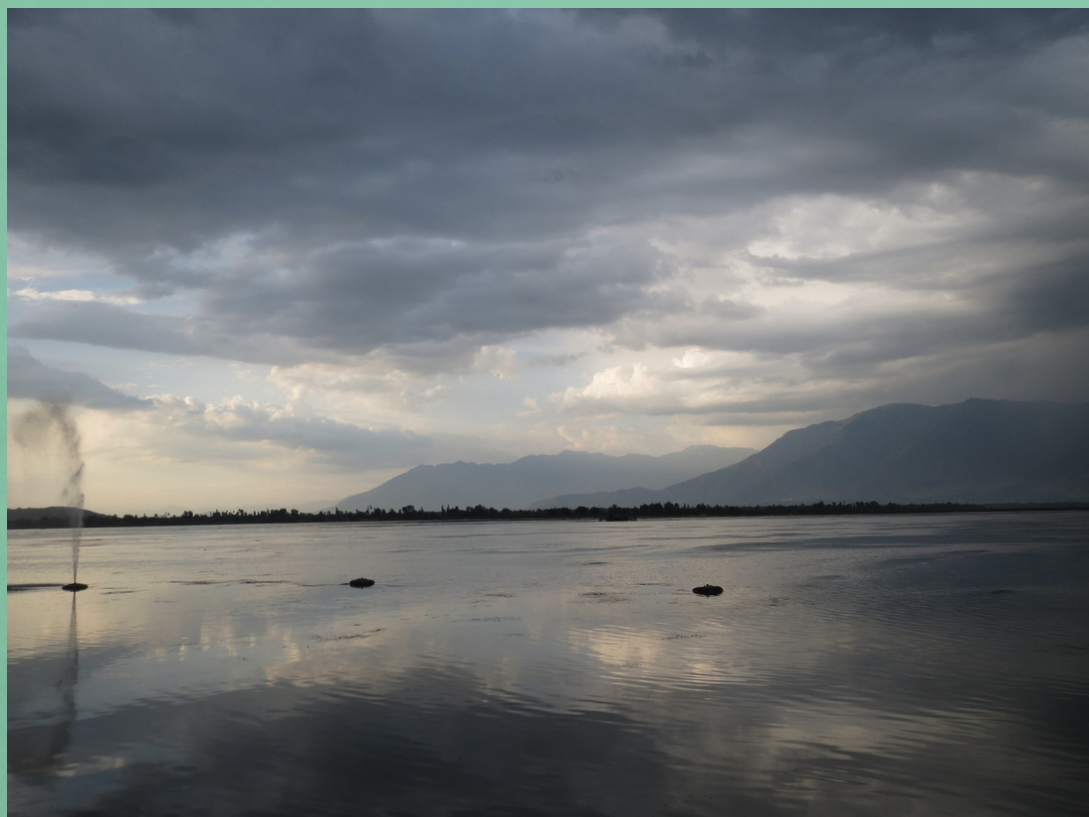


Mahatma Gandhi

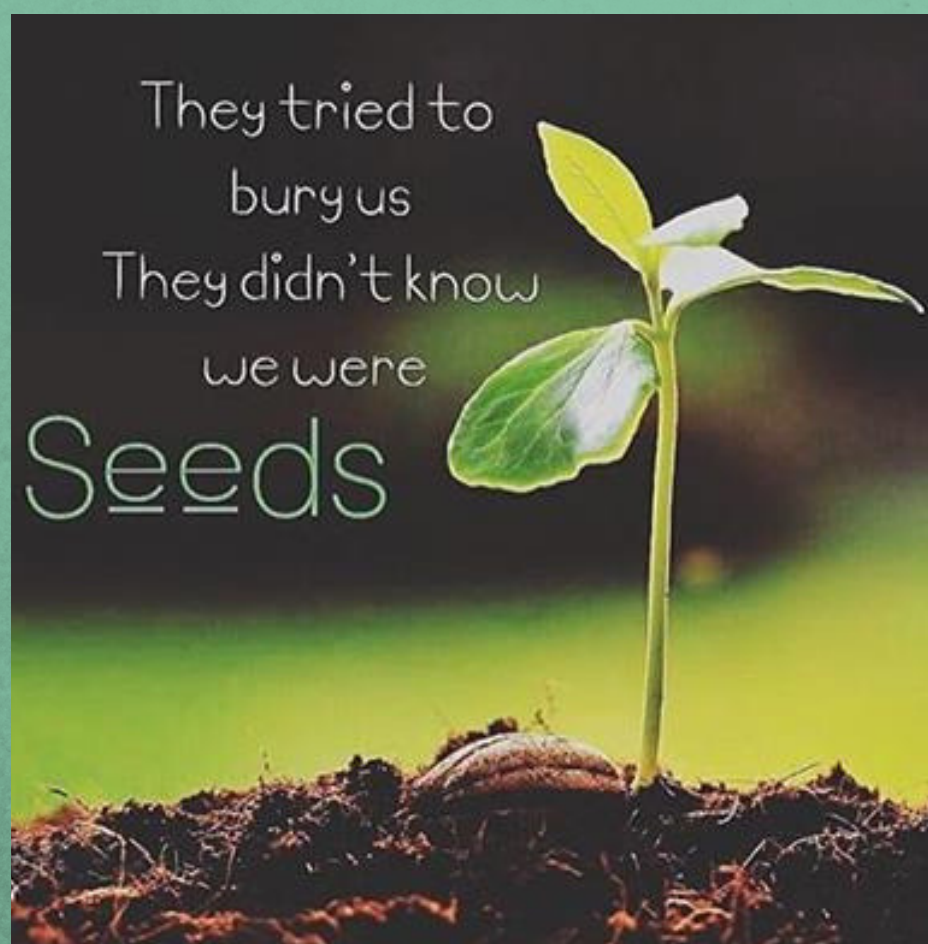
That evening the members of the Green Kashmir delegation from the UK came together to celebrate their last night together in India, and the end of a successful field trip where much information was collected and recorded, where interviews, surveys and reports were carried out and video footage and photography was used as evidence of our activities. We came away having successfully carried out a 2-day introduction to permaculture in the most trying, difficult and dangerous of times in Kashmir, and we made connections with farmers, growers, lawyers, journalists, shikara men, houseboat owners, flower growers, academics, young students, humanitarian NGO's, and well known experts like Vandana Shiva. We laid the foundation for permaculture in the Kashmir Valley and left with new permaculture students and new partnerships in place with the promise of arranging a group of people from the course to be supported to attend the International Permaculture Conference and Convergence in Hyderabad in India in November 2017.



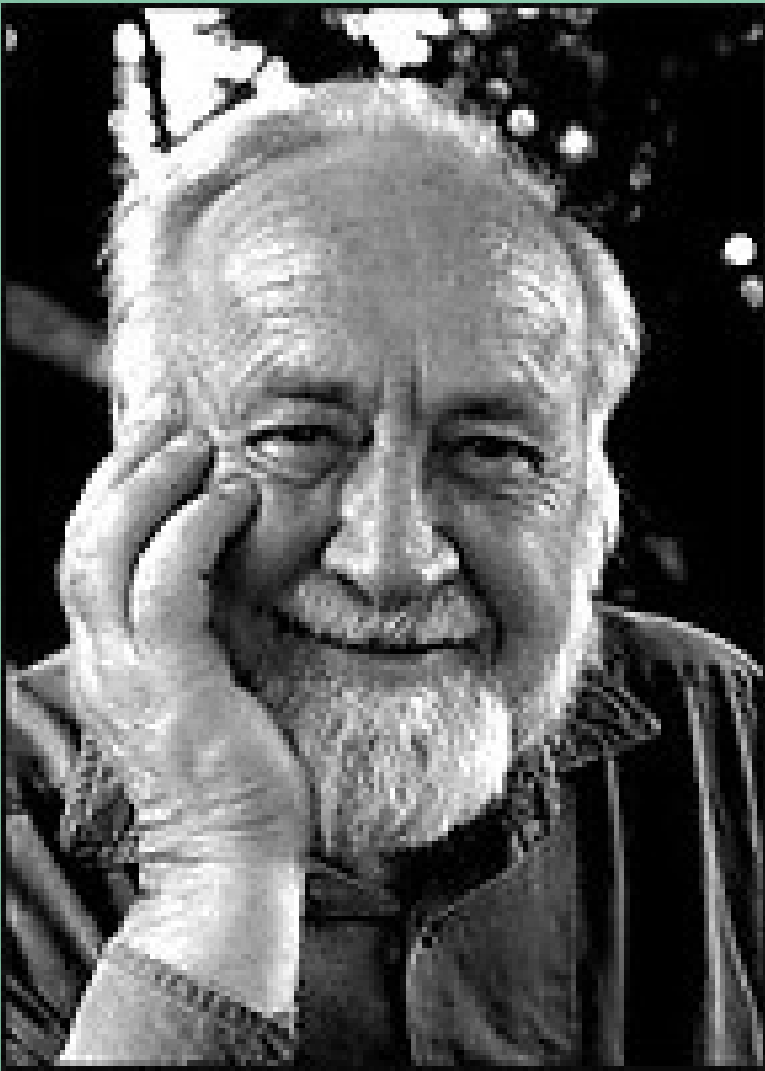
Stepping stones across the water in Shalimar Bagh Srinagar, Kashmir



On Sunday 2nd October, we boarded our return flight to the UK and said our goodbyes to India and to Kashmir, as we concluded what we hope will be the first of many trips to India, and to Kashmir with the aspiration of putting the practical principles of permaculture into practice with the active hope of finding non-political solutions grounded in earth care, people care and fair share, to the Kashmir situation.



Dedicated to the memory of Bill Mollison the father of Permaculture.



The chinar leaf is the symbol of hope to the youth of Kashmir.