

# Brief overview of the Shantisena (Gandhi's Peace Brigade)

N. Radhakrishnan  
*Indian Council of Gandhian Studies*

## The Birth of Indian Shantisena

As is fairly wellknown now, one of the last gifts of Mahatma Gandhi as part of his efforts to offer alternative strategies to the problem of violence was to develop what he called Shantisena. It is now known generally as the Peace Brigade or "army of unarmed soldiers." This dream remained practically unanswered until 1958 when formal Shantisena units were formed in India under the initiative of Vinoba Bhave. It began very promisingly and it was involved in conflict resolution activities at the grass-root level adopting peace-building techniques which, in turn, inspired international groups such as the World Peace Brigade, Cyprus Resettlement Project, and Peace Brigades International (PBI). Though some research studies and a few monographs and critical assessments on this subject were produced subsequently in different parts of India, no systematic attempts were made to document the various facets of the development of the Shantisena, which rendered remarkable services under the leadership of such Gandhian activists as Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, G. Ramachandran, and Kaka Kalelkar.

No doubt, like all good things, the Indian Shantisena too had its ups and downs. It appears that, except for a few initiatives here and there, it has almost become a thing of the past, gradually becoming a vanishing act of bravery initiated by a few whose enthusiasm no longer inspires even their own close associates, leave alone others who were never their sympathizers.

## Shantisena of Gandhi's Dream

To Mahatma Gandhi, the Shantisena ideal had a great potential in providing an effective and enduring alternative to the eventual replacement of army and police which, according to him, symbolize the authority of the State and in that sense are an instrument of suppression which can be effective only if violent methods are resorted to. The genius of Gandhi conceived a certain device by which peace-making, peace-keeping, and preven-

tive peace-building will become the core of a well-conceived peace initiative. That is the Shantisena of his dream.

The Shantisena, as suggested first by Gandhi, and later introduced by Vinoba Bhave during his *Bhoodan Movement* (land-gift movement), was an intensive program aimed at providing a series of opportunities to the citizens to realize the objectives of the program. Besides giving them opportunities to know some theoretical aspect, it was out and out practical involvement, not peace making in the traditional sense of the term, but in realization of life situations of a wide range. What young minds particularly need is exposure to various problems and inculcation of values, both in their private and public life.

The Shantisena with its emphasis on (1) nonviolence, (2) character (3) purity of purpose and (4) purity of ends and means, has every potential to become an ideal instrument of social and individual transformation in which soul force should be the guiding spirit. Soul force must mean everything and physique must take second place. It is very difficult to find many such persons in whatever organization, and if it must be effective, its membership has to be small.

As Gandhi held, nonviolence is not merely a personal virtue. It is also a social virtue to be cultivated like the other virtues. Surely society is largely regulated by the expression of nonviolence in its mutual dealings. What one needs is an extension of it on a larger, national and international level. The principal focuses thus are (a) to identify the structures of violence in daily life and how to overcome them, and (b) to foster intra-and interpersonal harmony which will lead to peace per se.

The following are the objectives of the Shantisena program:

1. To keep a well-trained disciplined "task force" of nonviolent soldiers to meet emergent situations close by and distant.
2. To inculcate in students faith in nonviolence and in the supremacy of moral law
3. To introduce into the student community a sense of collective discipline, love for voluntary social service, interest in active outdoor life and an understanding of the unity of mankind.
4. To inculcate faith in the dignity of manual labour through organized manual labour work camps.
5. To evolve collective discipline.

Gandhi prescribed seven attributes for every Shanti Sainik. They are:

1. He or she must have a living faith in nonviolence. This is impossible without a living faith in God.
2. The messenger of peace must have equal regard for all the principal religions of the earth.
3. Peace work can be done singly or in groups.
4. The messenger of peace will cultivate through personal service contacts with the people in his locality.
5. A peace-bringer must have a character beyond reproach and must be known for his/her strict impartiality.
6. The peace brigade will not wait till the conflagration breaks out but will try to handle the situation in anticipation.
7. There should be a distinctive dress worn by members of the peace brigade so that they would be recognized without difficulty.

### Shantisena of Gandhigram Rural University

Dr. G. Ramachandran, a close disciple of Gandhi and founder-Vice-Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural University in Tamilnadu in South India, realizing that youth in the universities should be the first batch to be initiated into this program, put the Shantisena at the centre of the educational experiment he started in Gandhigram. Gandhigram Rural Institute, the first Village University in India, offered rich potentialities for the successful implementation of the program. He had experience, vision, courage and enough academic freedom to introduce innovative programs. He was assisted in the earlier phase by two of the veteran Shantisainiks Dr. S. N. Subba Rao and Sri. V. M. Chandrasekhar who participated in the 1962 Delhi-Peking Peace March to end hostilities between India and China.

Let me reproduce a part of the observations I made in the Introduction to a perceptive study of the Shantisena of Gandhigram University by Dennis August Almeida in his book, *The Training of Youth in Nonviolence as a Way to Peace* (Gandhi Media Centre, 2007).

What cemented the *Guru-shishya* (mentor-disciple) relationship between the great Gandhi-disciple Dr. G. Ramachandran and me, apart from several other aspects, was our commitment to the *Shanti Sena* (Peace Army) of Gandhi. My own interest in Shanti Sena dates back to my childhood days. My father was a Gandhi disciple. He was a good story teller too. He had two favourite themes. Gandhi's heroic initiatives in Noakhali (a province in East Bengal which witnessed large scale death and arson following the Hindu-Muslim disturbance in the wake of the demand for a separate

Pakistan) that made Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, call Gandhi "The One-Man boundary Force," and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Islam-based *Khudai Khidmatgars* (Servants of God) in the North-West Frontier Province, where Ghaffar Khan had become a close disciple of Gandhi.

After my post graduate studies, what took me to Gandhigram University in Tamilnadu and to Dr. G. Ramachandran, its founder, was my keen desire to become a Shantisainik, and to get training in the Gandhian educational experiments for rural reconstruction going on there with commendable commitment in those days under Ramachandranji. Gradually my interest in *Shanti Sena* grew to the level of a passion and it became the most important driving force in all my activities, both inside the campus and in about 100 service villages around the Gandhigram complex of institutions.

It is perhaps this passion that brought into my life another highly creative source of inspiration and guidance, in the person of Prof. Glenn D. Paige of the University of Hawai'i. Inspired by Ramachandranji during the latter's lecture tour to Hawai'i in 1975 he had rushed to India to study the *Shanti Sena*. While Prof. Paige, after his visit to India, became the most powerful advocate and supporter of *Shanti Sena* at the international level, Dr. Ramachandran remained the lone voice in India.

After Ramachandranji's departure from Gandhigram in 1979, to those who succeeded him, the *Shanti Sena* was either a convenient instrument to enhance their image and influence, an ornament or an irrelevant vestige of a glorious past. Curiously, Ramachandranji also had done precious little in providing necessary infrastructure and funds for *Shanti Sena* activities. Repeated efforts from our side to get *Shanti Sena* integrated into academic and community life were also frowned upon in the din of euphoria created by the new generation of policy planners and administrators of GRU.

While extraordinary leadership qualities went into the metamorphosis of the Gandhigram Rural Institute into a reputed national centre of rural higher education, the prime place *Shanti Sena* should have automatically received as something unique was neglected. In the new set-up, it had an annual allocation of just Rs. 2000/ (less than 50 US Dollars). Still, my passion for *Shanti Sena*, undaunted by the indifferent attitude of the authorities, continued even stronger until I left the University in 1990 for a national assignment under the government of India in Delhi.

During an interim period in 1989 when I happened to be a part of a three-member Administrative Committee to run the affairs of the University in the absence of the Vice-Chancellor, a *Directorate of Shanti Sena*, with sufficient funds and manpower was created. But alas! It was vetoed and was never al-

lowed to take off. My departure for Delhi in 1990 to take up a national assignment as the Executive Director of the *Gandhi Smriti* and *Darshan Samiti*, which has its headquarters on the hallowed grounds of the erstwhile Birla House where the Mahatma's blood was spilled on 30th January 1948, gave opportunity at GRU to those who always viewed Shanti Sena as irrelevant. Unfortunately the *Shanti Sena* was confined to a Reader "to teach" *Shanti Sena*.

In Delhi and elsewhere in the country, my colleagues and I could plant the seeds of *Shanti Sena*, slightly adapted in the light of emerging realities. There is a young generation which is highly critical of many of the Gandhian initiatives and formulations while the older generation continues to deify Gandhi. In addition, there is also the disturbing fact of mushrooming of several 'senas' in most provinces of India to fight for and protect violently the interests of caste, religious, linguistic and even political groups, thereby devaluing the term *Shanti Sena* in the general perception.

While this is the general scenario, it will be presumptuous to argue that the *Shanti Sena* is dead and gone in India. It lives as a powerful source of inspiration in the hearts of many committed individuals who are not inactive, although not a potent force. The Ramachandran Institute of Nonviolence and Shanti Sena, in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), a small initiative, now in its silver jubilee year, organizes training programs in *Shanti Sena* on a regular basis to children, youth, and adults. It has a training campus at Rangaprabhat Children's Theatre, about 20 kilometers on the outskirts of Trivandrum. An estimated 300 persons are trained in *Shanti Sena* and conflict management every year. In association with Prof. S. Jeyapragasam in Madurai district, an equal number of teachers, students and constructive workers are exposed to the *Shanti Sena* through short-term programs.

It should also be said to the credit of Dr. William Baskaran, who heads the *Shanti Sena* in Gandhigram Rural University now, that with very little official support, he still succeeds in initiating the concept of *Shanti Sena* to a large number of students. I am only sad that Gandhigram University has missed a historical opportunity to carry forward the pioneering experiments in *Shanti Sena*. Let me plead in this context with the authorities of Gandhigram Rural University to provide necessary infrastructure and resources for building up a model *Shanti Sena* unit. Hence I propose the establishment of a *Centre for Shanti Sena, Conflict Management and Human Rights*. Three other distinguished persons whose services in the field of *Shanti Sena* activities deserve special mention are Acharya Ramamurthy, Narayan Desai, and Professor Ramjee Singh.

To many of us, notwithstanding what happens to the *Shanti Sena* in one institution or place, it is both *an instrument and vision for a warless and nonkilling future*.

However noble and powerful as an instrument for conflict resolution, social change and individual transformation, Gandhi's *Shanti Sena* was, it needs to be reinvented and resurrected like many other Gandhian formulations. Without losing hope, it is in this task some of us are now engaged.

### Creative Adaptation and Reinventing of Shantisena

It is precisely this, some of us are doing now in our own way in various parts of the country. The Shantisena Training program has been creatively adapted at the G. Ramachandran Institute of Nonviolence in Trivandrum, a small training Centre founded by me 25 years ago in honour of Dr. G. Ramachandran. The Centre strives to realize the dream of Ramachandranji to make Shantisena an effective instrument of Peaceful Conflict Resolution and service. It organizes general training and short- and long-term training programs in *Shantisena* for children, youth, mothers and others in Peaceful Conflict Management. Others include:

1. Workshops on Nonviolence: Three-day regular workshops for youth in nonviolent leadership. Efforts are afoot to organize these programs in various parts of the country in association with other organizations.
2. Regular Youth Training Programs in Nonviolence: Granted weekend programs in Shantisena and Conflict Management are being offered.
3. Media Watch Group: Media Watch Groups are being set up to monitor and document atrocities on women. The All India Women's Commission, Samatwam and Gandhi Media Centre are collaborating with GRINS in this initiative. A Newsletter, *Sthreeshabdom* is being published by the Gandhi Media Centre.
4. *Nonviolent Revolution*: The quarterly journal in English, *Nonviolent Revolution*, founded by Dr. G. Ramachandran, which had suspended its publication, is being revived with more features.
5. Diploma course in Gandhian Strategies of Conflict Management: A one year diploma course in Gandhian Strategies of Conflict Management in association with S.N. Institute of Management (Ranchi University), Institute of Applied Management, Madurai and Jain Viswabharati, Ladnun is being run under experienced staff.

The Shantisena Training Centre is housed in the Rangaprabhat Children's complex which is essentially a Centre for Performing Arts. Children and Youth in large numbers are being trained in dramatic arts at the Centre.

At the national level several massive initiatives were undertaken during the 50th anniversary of Gandhi's Martyrdom when from five different places connected with Gandhi's life in India, several thousand youth who were well-oriented and well-trained in nonviolent leadership were involved in a national program called *Gandhi Smriti Sadbhavana Jyoti Yatra* (Gandhi Memorial Flames). It was reported that over a million youth participated in this program which covered 18 provinces in India in about 45 days. What the distinguished freedom fighter and Gandhian Dr. B.N. Pande said about this initiative well sums it up:

This was a major program of mass involvement reminiscent of some of the pre-independence initiatives in which I had the privilege to be part of. My failing health prevented me from joining physically any of the Yatras in 1998 but I could experience through innumerable sources the waves of enthusiasm this remarkable step has generated. I have no hesitation in describing the Gandhi Smriti Sadbhavana Yatras from Porbandar, Champaran, Noakhali, Vaikam and Jallianwalabagh as the biggest youth mobilization campaign since independence. I congratulate Prof. Radhakrishnan and his team on this historic initiative.

Several noble souls helped, guided and encouraged us in these programs. The Honorable President of India, Sri. K.R. Narayanan, Vice-President, Shri. Krishnan Kant, Prime Minister and Chairman of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Smriti Shri I.K. Gujaral and several others encouraged and supported us with their direct participation in these programs. Among several thousand prominent persons who participated in these programs both in the states and at the national capitals included governors, chief ministers, union ministers, Gandhian constructive workers, vice-chancellors and others.

Dr. Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO was one of those dignitaries who received one of the five Gandhi flames on their arrival at the martyr's column at Gandhi Smriti on 30th January. Over forty Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries in a rare gesture assembled at Gandhi Smriti on the 31st to pay the International Community's homage to Gandhi (From the Foreword, *Gandhi Smriti Sadbhavana Jyoti Yatra*, edited by N. Radhakrishnan and Savita Singh, 1998).

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### Ahimsa Samvaay (Nonviolent Training & Resource Centres)

In a historic development, the G. Ramachandran Institute of Nonviolence associates with the Jain Viswabharati, Ladnun (Rajasthan) which, under the inspiring leadership of His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya the present Head of the Terapanth Jain community, has established five *Ahimsa Samvaay Kendras* (Nonviolent Training and Resource Centres) at Delhi, Jaipur, Rajsamand, Madurai and Trivandrum. His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya has also emerged as the most outstanding promoter of Nonviolence and Champion of Harmony. Over several decades this illustrious seer has been holding the flag of *Ahimsa* for individual empowerment and societal transformation besides uncompromisingly and untiringly campaigning for value-based changes in society through individual empowerment. His commitment to nonviolence as a way of life and the ceaseless efforts he undertakes to spread the brilliance of *Ahimsa*, have made him a living legend and a worthy successor to his mentor, the great and venerable Acharya Shri Tulsi.

The training programs in nonviolent value creation and leadership these Centres have been organizing under the general guidance of Acharya Mahapragya are attracting children and youth in all the five Centres. Besides various programs of interaction at each of the Centres regular fortnightly or monthly training programs in nonviolence are being held. Thanks to this brilliant initiative training in nonviolence has been put on the national agenda. As the General Convener of this innovative training program which is a creative adaptation of Gandhi's Shantisena, I have supreme satisfaction that what was lost in the Gandhigram Rural University is being revived at the National level with great application. A wonderful team of very dedicated nonviolent trainers led by Prof. S. Jeyapragasam, Dr. S.L. Gandhi, N. Vasudevan, and Sanchay Jain under the inspiring guidance of Prof. Muni Mahendra Kumar and Surendra Choraria (Chairman of Jain Viswabharati) are fully involved in the new efforts.

### *Community Peace Centres & Shantisena*

Another significant program being contemplated and which is expected to be launched in January 2008 is setting up of 100 Community Peace Centres—a joint program of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and G. Ramachandran Institute of Nonviolence. This will be a pioneering effort of linking educational institutions in community peacebuilding, peace-making and peacekeeping initiatives.

The focuses of these Community Peace Centres are: linking community with educational institutions; inculcating values in children and youth; bringing academics and activists together; developing conflict-free zones; and contributing to sustainable development.

From training youth in nonviolent leadership and conflict management, the attention of those who are associating with these are focused on larger issues highlighted by efforts to establish a Department of Peace and the Violence-Free India Campaign.

### Conclusion

One of the lessons I learnt from my four decades of passionate involvement in the Shantisena is that like many Gandhian formulations, the Shantisena needs to be creatively adapted and reinvented. In this, one has to forge effective networking, besides constantly upgrading strategies. Instead of getting stuck up with the historical Gandhi, Gandhian intellectuals, institutions and practitioners have to go beyond the moss accumulated around Gandhi over the decades and earnestly try to discover the revolutionary Gandhi. Partnership-building is very important in this and the current focus is to involve as many institutions, organizations and individuals with a view to broaden the base.

The Jain Viswabharati (Ladnun), the Jain Viswabharati University (Ladnun), the Indira Gandhi National Open University (New Delhi), Shobit University (Meerat), the Wardhaman Mahaveer Open University (Kota), Bhandup Educational Society (Bombay), the Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal, Center for Experiential Learning (Madurai), Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Karnataka), the Gandhi Darshan Kendra (Chennai), and the Anuvibha (Jaipur) besides the Gandhi Bhavans and Centres of Gandhian Studies in various Universities have evinced interest in the new initiatives and it is hoped that the current interest will lead to the re-emergence of the Shantisena ideal of Gandhi to effectively control killing and violence.



# The Shanti Sena of Gandhigram Rural University

Dennis August Almeida  
*University of Rhode Island*

*While the rest of the world is engaged in a serious bid to evolve nonviolent alternatives I see in Gandhigram a model for the rest of humanity.*

Robert Goheen, U.S. Ambassador to India  
Former President of Princeton University

This report draws upon field research conducted in 1986. The Shanti Sena was not an idea that Gandhigram gave birth to. What was novel and remains revolutionary, is GRU's steadfast commitment to integrate the concepts of the Shanti Sena (knowledge, insight and skills of nonviolence and peace making) with academia. "Gandhigram," in the words of past Vice-Chancellor Dr. Aram, "is the only university in the country and perhaps the world which by its charter and constitution has established a Shanti Sena" (Aram, 1984: 224). The communion of theory and practice is as old as the hills; the training of youth in nonviolence and peace—their practical involvement—as a learning process is profound.

Although aspiration toward the ideals of the Shanti Sena are shared by all those involved, be they organizers, students, faculty or administrators, most do not think that it is an ambitious process. We shall see.

The Shanti Sena programme, it should be noted, is never aimed at the impossible. It has never visualized imparting all skills to students who will become perfect peace-loving citizens or soldiers of peace overnight or even in a short span of one or two years. Two or three years of partial or cursory involvement in this programme along with the main burden of preparing for diplomas, certificates or degrees would hardly give him all the training. But the impressive aspect of the programme has been *to provide an opportunity* for the people to know what it is like to be a peace-loving person [emphasis mine] (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 32).

The credit for establishing the first student-based Shanti Sena goes to Dr. Ramachandran who, from the commencement of Gandhigram has kept the Shanti Sena at the hub of the educational and constructive programmes that it conducts in the surrounding villages (Aram; Radhakrishnan, 1984: 9). Every student enrolled at GRU is a Shanti Sainik and is inculcated with the concepts and ideals of the Shanti Sena. Each takes its pledge:

1. To observe truth, nonviolence, and non-possessiveness to the utmost of one's ability;
2. *Nishkam Seva* (disinterested service) without desire for results;
3. Avoidance of all party politics and power politics, while endeavoring to win the utmost possible cooperation from every individual, regardless of his party affiliation;
4. Not to recognize distinction of class or caste and to respect all religions equally; and
5. To give one's whole thought, and as much time as possible, to serve the community around (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 5-6).

Although all inmates of GRU as well as faculty members “and other workers showed remarkable realization of the role of the Shanti Sena in [their] everyday life” (Aram; Radhakrishnan, 1984: 9) and within the Gandhigram community, it wasn't until the Chinese aggression in the early 1960s, during the border clashes with India, that the Shanti Sena became firmly cemented as the essence of GRU (Personal conversation with Dr. G. Ramachandran, at GRU's Guest House, 22 September 1986).

Dr. G. Ramachandran, who had been nurturing the Shanti Sena since its birth at GRU, showed great leadership amid an atmosphere charged with militarism by eschewing the attempts of the state and central government to replace the Shanti Sena with the National Cadet Corps (NCC) during the Chinese aggression (Aram; Radhakrishnan, 1984: 11). “There is no compulsory conscription in India, but military training was compulsory for boys in most Indian universities” (Desai, 1972: 15). Because of Dr. G. Ramachandran's efforts, the NCC training programme was not implemented at GRU, its place having been given to the Shanti Sena. Also, it was only after the “coming together of the Gandhigram community” to resist the government in its attempts to establish a NCC that the two-tiered programme, which had already been designed, was implemented at GRU (Ramachandran, conversation, 22 September 1986).

## Gandhigram Community Shanti Sena

Every student by virtue of enrollment at GRU is part of a general body that convenes at general rallies to renew commitment to Shanti Sena ideals, and to undertake extensive group constructive activities, such as campus cleanup, under the supervision of the Chief Organizer (Aram; Radhakrishnan, 1984: 9). “The main objective of this exercise is to maintain a community which is aware of the great potentials of non-violence—a community of students, teachers, constructive workers who can be, if need arises, pressed into emergent situations” (Radhakrishnan, 1984).

## Shanti Sena Leaders Training Programme

Each year 150 men and women student volunteers who exhibit keen interest in the Shanti Sena are selected to constitute a task force which will undergo an Intensive Training Programme, the objectives of which are:

1. To keep a well trained, disciplined task force of nonviolent soldiers to meet emergent situations in and around;
2. To inculcate in those students faith in nonviolence and the supremacy of moral law;
3. To introduce into the student community a sense of collective discipline; love for voluntary social service, interest in active outdoor life and an understanding of the unity of mankind;
4. To inculcate faith in the dignity of manual labour;
5. To evolve collective discipline (Radhakrishnan, 1984).

The Intensive Training Programme for the student leaders of the Shanti Sena will form the core of this section which will be presented in an outline format and later, where it serves as a backdrop for the concluding section, it will be reflected upon in an expository style. Before examining the Leaders Training Programme it would be best to present the organizational setup of the Shanti Sena of GRU.

## Organizational Setup of the Shanti Sena

The Advisory Committee sits as the apex body that advises and sets guidelines for the conduct of the Shanti Sena and the constructive programmes it undertakes in the villages. The new Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Devendra Kumar (as of September, 1986) is the Chairman of this committee, and serves also as the Patron or Commander of the Shanti Sena. The re-

remainder of the standing committee consists of the Chief and Assistant Chief Organizers of the Shanti Sena, the Deans of Faculties, the head of the Department of Extension and one student representative. The Chief Organizer, Dr. N. Radhakrishnan, a senior English faculty member, is the executive chief of this Advisory Committee and is under the direct supervision of the Vice-Chancellor (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 30).

The day-by-day running of the Shanti Sena is entrusted to the Chief and two Assistant Chief Organizers, who coordinate all activities with the help of the student Captain and student organizers. The two Assistant Chief Organizers are Mr. M.S. Prabhakaran, a reader in the English department, and Mr. William Phaskam, a lecturer in the newly created Shanti Sena certificate course. Mr. William Phaskam is also doing graduate work at Madurai Kamaraj University in the Department of Gandhian Studies and Ramalinga Philosophy. His thesis topic is "The Shanti Sena in Historical Perspective, with special reference given to GRU" (Personal recorded interview with Mr. William Phaskam, 14 October 1986).

Chief Organizer Dr. N. Radhakrishnan, a devoted disciple of Dr. G. Ramachandran, is the heart, soul, and mind of Gandhigram's Shanti Sena. He has visited over twenty universities in various countries including the U.S.A., South Korea, Japan, England and Costa Rica, where he has lectured, conducted seminars, and delivered papers on the concept of the Peace Brigade ("Japanese award for Indian scholar," *Indian Express*, 24 September 1986). It was at a breakfast in his honor, hosted by the then acting president of the University of Hawai'i, Albert Simone, at his College Hill home that I first met Dr. Radhakrishnan, and where the seed for this thesis was first sown.

In keeping with the importance that Gandhi stressed on the role of women in a nonviolent society, and his opinion that they make better Shanti Sainiks than men, a woman student is designated the Captain of the Shanti Sena. In the words of Gandhi, "I do believe that it is woman's mission to exhibit *Ahimsa* at its highest and best" (Gandhi, *Harijan*, 5 November 1938). She, along with a few other student leaders—men and women—constitute the Student Advisory Committee; a committee with little formal powers other than coordinating student activities such as welcoming new members and organizing meetings.

### Recruitment and Selection

At the commencement of each academic year circulars are prepared for new incoming students, requesting them to submit applications if they show

interest in undergoing Leaders Training. A preliminary selection is then made from a pool of applicants by an interviewing board consisting of the Chief Organizer, staff members, and one or two student leaders who are presently undergoing the training. After a trial period of two months, a final selection is made based on the students' aptitudes and interest they have shown (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 9). Be that as it may, however, some students that I talked with joined or were recruited by other students because their friends were Shanti Sainiks or because a boy or girl that they were attracted to was a Shanti Sainik. Also, and just as important, was the fact that the Shanti Sena student leaders as a group conducted more student activities; i.e., fun, and offered more opportunities for socializing than any other group on campus—two perfectly legitimate reasons for college-age youths anywhere to give for joining just about anything.

Soon after the beginning of the academic year, usually in the second week of July, a two or three day orientation programme in the format of a mini-work camp is held for the newly selected student prospects. Joining in this orientation camp are the Vice-Chancellor, some important faculty members, current leaders of the Shanti Sena, and the staff in charge. "The aim of this programme is to initiate the students into the basic concepts of the Shanti Sena and provide meaningful discussion and prepare them to face the hard realities that exist outside the campus" (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 10).

What is important during this orientation camp is that an atmosphere of friendship, understanding and trust be developed among the recruits and between them and the current Shanti Sena leaders and organizers. This atmosphere is critical to the functioning of the Shanti Sena as a group when it is called into emergent conflict situations.

Furthermore, general organizing, the day-to-day functioning and all the work, from the preparation of food in the kitchen to the recording of meetings, is undertaken by the campers themselves, which builds cooperation and a sense for collective discipline. This type of communitarian organization is not unlike the running of a U.S. Marine Corps bootcamp, or a training camp that a member of an ROTC unit would attend during the summer. The principles underlying the organization of these mini-camp orientation programmes are:

1. There should not be any paid labour for the camp and all items of work including the preparation of food should be carried out by the campers themselves;
2. There should be sharing of duties and responsibilities;

3. There should be a free atmosphere which should bring [out] the best of everybody and everybody should feel thrill of being together (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 11).

Two student Shanti Sena leaders spoke to me with fond memories of their orientation camp that they had attended together. What was conveyed to me, or what I sensed from our conversation, was that a collective growth, beyond the personal, was obtained during their camp experience. The sharing of work and responsibilities must have led to the beginning of esprit de corps, because the student leaders of the Shanti Sena are a visible entity on the campus of GRU. Radhakrishnan, speaking about the camps stated:

Even a short stay together of people from different walks of life, of communities, from different regions and different intellectual and material attainments will forge at least a small amount of emotional integration. Besides bringing people of different temperaments together, such study camps will help people to come closer, to know each other and to some extent, get over narrow and sectarian outlooks of life. It will definitely broaden the outlook of those who attend the camp (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 32).

### Village Placement

Following the orientation programme the Shanti Sainiks are then placed in some villages around GRU where they spend a week working in constructive activities similar in nature to the seventeen items of Gandhi's constructive programme. The work-week gives the Sainiks the opportunity to advance some of the skills that they acquired at camp. It gives them a preview of the type of activities they may be called upon to undertake in some of the conditions under which they may be performed.

For the villagers this cultivates an awareness of the Shanti Sena, its activities and, most importantly, they begin to get acquainted with the Shanti Sainiks. This begins the process of friendship and trust building—important to the nonviolent soldier who, unlike the soldier of war, works better in times of conflict when he is known by the people. The post-camp week is not all work; part of the time is spent in camaraderie, such as group singing. Mr. William Phaskam remembers participating in a dramatic skit that was performed in a village to draw the attention to the evils of alcohol. In Mr. William's words, "We chose alcohol, but it could have been against untouchability, corruption, the dowry system, or other social evils" (Phaskam,

recorded). Upon returning to Gandhigram each new Shanti Sainik takes *The Pledge of the Shanti Sainik*:

I Believe

- (i) In the establishment of a new society based on truth and nonviolence;
- (ii) That all conflicts in society can be and should be solved, more so in this atomic age than ever before, by nonviolent means;
- (iii) In the fundamental unity of man;
- (iv) That war blocks all human progress and is a denial of a nonviolent way of life.

Therefore, I hereby Pledge that I shall

- (i) Work for people and be prepared, if need be to lay down my life for it;
- (ii) To do my best to rise above the distinctions of caste, sect, colour, and party because they deny the unity of man;
- (iii) Not to take part in any war;
- (iv) Help in creating the means and conditions of nonviolent defense;
- (v) Devote regularly a part of my time to service of my fellowmen;
- (vi) Accept the discipline of the Shanti Sena.

The orientation camp followed by the work-week serves as an epitome of the type of programmes and activities that the Shanti Sena will engage in during the academic semester. A general outline of the various programmes and activities follows below. These programmes are arranged in a phased manner throughout the semester, keeping in mind the main academic burdens of preparing for classes, exams and diplomas. "The programmes are usually arranged before or after the regular class hours or weekends, holidays, semester breaks or summer holidays" (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 12).

#### *Intellectual aspect*

- a) Discussions/Seminars/Workshops/Debates/Inter-University Dialogues and Essay and Elocution Competitions on topics such as the following:
  - Peace movements in the West - past and present
  - The concept of the Shanti Sena Ideal
  - The work of the Shanti Sainik
  - Experience in Peace Making
  - The training of the Shanti Sainik
  - Importance of inter-religious prayers
  - Peace propaganda among the people
  - The methodology involved in peace education

- Conflict resolution; varieties of conflicts facing them; attributes of a peace worker
  - Armament race and its consequences
  - Jai-Jagat, the one-world idea
- b) Creative expressions:
- Painting, poetry recital and composition and other forms of creative arts

*Practical*

- a) Shareerashram (manual labor) programmes
- b) Marching and drilling
- c) First-aid
- d) Home-nursing for girls
- e) Yogasana
- f) Cycling for girls
- g) Group games for boys and girls
- h) Lessons in group singing
- i) Fire-fighting
- j) Traffic controlling
- k) Trekking

*Extension activities*

- a) Organizing children's clubs/youth clubs/women's clubs in villages
- b) Organizing blood donation clubs
- c) Organizing Peace Marches
- d) Organizing cultural programmes for villagers
- e) Village sports
- f) Saturday Rallies
- g) Organizing Adult Education Centres in Villages
- h) Socio-economic survey
- i) Organizing Village Shanti Sena (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 12-13)

**Tolerance, Manual Labour and Social Identification**

Besides exposure to conflict resolution, emphasis is laid upon three aspects that are of paramount importance to the methodology of peace education with practical involvement: tolerance building respect for manual labour, and cultivation of social identification.

Religion is looked upon as a common denominator among all groups and inter-religious prayer forms an integral part of the training that a Shanti Sainik receives. An interreligious prayer begins all programmes that the Shanti Sena conducts. "The prayer, it has been found over the years, creates a strange feeling of oneness and togetherness. It is aimed at creating necessary awareness in each member that while religion is a personal matter.... religions are different roads converging to the same point. It need not make any difference if we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal" (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 15). For Gandhi God was truth—not merely abstract ideals but a living reality that one could enter into a dialogue with. "He is a personal God to those who need his personal presence. He is embodied to those who need his touch....He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men" (Gandhi).

Inter-religious prayer is the foundation upon which tolerance is built. Each Friday, after classes and just before sunset an inter-religious prayer meeting is held in a large roofed outdoor auditorium. One of the Fridays that I attended we sang three nondenominational songs, one of which was the anthem of the U.S. Civil Rights movement: *We Shall Overcome*. This was followed by readings from the *Koran*, *Bible* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* (all were spoken in English). Religious tolerance is a requirement for spirituality—it spills over into social tolerance and breaks down the walls of ethnocentrism (Personal conversation, Ramachandran, 24 September 1986).

In keeping with a basic Gandhian tenet the Shanti Sena emphasizes the importance of manual labour. A book that had a profound effect on Gandhi was Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (See M.K.Gandhi, *An Autobiography*). From reading it Gandhi learned—among many things—the importance of "bread-labour" and realized that physical labour is equal in importance to the functioning of society as is intellectual work. Group physical labour performed in service of community (Constructive Programme) builds a stronger bond among the Shanti Sainiks and, just as important, brings them closer to the villagers—India's "starved millions."

"The youth will also learn that the hands which they use very often for destructive purposes can be used for creative and productive purposes" (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 16). Furthermore, Radhakrishnan believes that an individual will develop nonviolent thoughts and actions through creation—be it the digging of a latrine or teaching a child to read. This same individual will not turn to violence to destroy it for he or she knows the value of creation (Personal conversation with Radhakrishnan).

The Shanti Sena cultivates social identification by resolving to overcome social ignorance and apathy through a well-reasoned process involving train-

ing and discussion with practical application and example (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 16). Social ignorance comes about when people cannot identify with their so-called opposite numbers; this in turn leads to apathy. “Apathy is a case of non-identification with others, a lack of trust in development, a lack of social development. It is this apathy that we see as the greatest danger to peace. Apathy and violence are very close; in fact we call apathy “frozen violence” and relate it to the effect of passively accepting injustice over a long period” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 17-8).

Apathy and social ignorance cannot be remedied by theory alone; therefore what is emphasized is training that will create among the Shanti Sainiks an awareness of the structural conditions which lead to violence. To kill someone is a direct act of violence; but people are killed every day or are driven to using violence themselves by “structural violence” which encompasses within itself issues like social justice, economic equality and conditions such as malnutrition, lack of water, exploitation of human labour and simple neglect. In the process of the constructive work carried out in the villages surrounding Gandhigram, the concept of peace has broadened for the Shanti Sainiks and the vast amount of their time is given to tracking down the sources of structural violence so that violence can be dealt with at its roots. Remember that a basic tenet of the Shanti Sena is that social justice and nonviolence cannot exist without each other. The following Constructive Programme of Gandhigram’s Shanti Sena as a Task Force is focused primarily at weeding out the roots of structural violence.

### GRU's Shanti Sena as a Task Force

The meaningful work that the Shanti Sena accomplishes as a task force within the villages surrounding GRU is like the work of that most astounding program in the history of the world—Gandhi’s Constructive Programme. And it serves as the nonviolent training for Gandhigram’s Shanti Sainiks. Below are only *some* of the areas that the Gandhigram Shanti Sena has been concentrating on.

- *Organizing blood donors' club.* After educating the villagers that it is not at all dangerous to donate blood, the Sainiks prepared a list showing the respective blood groups of the people willing to donate blood in times of need. The list was then forwarded to the hospitals.

- *Medical check-ups.* With the help of medical personnel from neighbouring hospitals the Shanti Sainiks provide periodic medical check-ups “in areas which are not covered under any medical scheme” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 21).
- *Tree planting.* In times of economic hardship, especially between harvest seasons, villagers who are starved for money go off into the nearby countryside and hills to chop trees to sell for firewood. To contest against this, a never ending tree-planting movement has been started by the Shanti Sena. “The tree planting does not stop with planting the saplings but they are taken care of by the members of youth clubs started by the Shanti Sena” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 22).
- *Homes for the homeless.* In collaboration with GRU's extension department, a group of 150 young men and women Sainiks who were “assisted by the staffers in charge camped in a village for 21 days in 1969 helping the villagers in laying foundations and raising walls for 75 semi-permanent houses for a group of landless tribals” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 22-23).
- *Youth against disease.* A group of Shanti Sainiks led by the Chief Organizer spent 15 days working with Baba Amte among the lepers. It was a valuable experience for the Shanti Sainiks to have associated themselves with the noble efforts of this “saintly social worker.” They came away with the realization “that real service lies in serving such people” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 23-24).
- *Trench latrines for the villagers.* To improve the sanitation of 30 service villages the Shanti Sena in 1973 undertook to provide 300 trench latrines. “This was followed by frequent village visits by the Faculty of Sanitation to educate the villagers in the use of these latrines” (Ibid.).
- *To the rescue of people in distress.* As an emergency task force the Shanti Sena plays a very effective role in helping and rescuing people who are victims of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and famines. “Every Shanti Sainik who is trained in first-aid with the help of the medical personnel of the University or College finds his job easy in dealing with emergency situations” (Ibid.). The following features are distinctive of this emergency task force:

- a) A volunteer does not carry any weapons.
  - b) The members are easily recognized from their uniforms.
  - c) Every volunteer will carry bandages, scissors, needle and thread, surgical knife, etc. for rendering first-aid.
  - d) He knows how to carry and remove the wounded.
  - e) He knows how to put out fires, how to enter a fire area without getting burnt, how to climb heights for rescue work and descend safely with or without his charge.
  - f) He will be well acquainted with all the residents of his locality. This is a service in itself (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 24-25).
- *Watch and ward duties.* Nonviolence is an empowering democratic process that helps people assume responsibility for their own lives especially when problems arise that would normally call for police intervention. The entire policing of GRU “is done by the Shanti Sena during normal times and even during extraordinary circumstances” (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 27). Even during a visit from the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to Gandhigram the state police force was not allowed on campus and security was provided by the Shanti Sena along with several policemen stationed at various sites throughout the campus.

### Training in the Use of Traditional and Modern Mass Media

Through mobile libraries, peace marches, dramatic skits against social evils, the establishment of non-formal education centers, and the showing of documentary films the Shanti Sena has realized the importance of folk and modern mass media. But for Radhakrishnan this realization has not been fully utilized. Upon returning from Great Britain where, under a bursary awarded him by the British Council he underwent courses and training in Mass Media and the Theater Arts (“Japanese award for Indian scholar,” *Indian Express*, 24 September 1986), Radhakrishnan became more convinced than ever that “Art can eliminate violence from the heart of man” (1984: 26). He emphasized further:

Mass media facilities and man's innate urge to listen to stories and tell them and to sing and hear good songs... and dramatic performances should be exploited to the fullest possibility....This aspect has not been fully utilized. This untapped rich and potential area, if exploited, will make the peace educator's job easier (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 27).

The technological power of mass media, with its instantaneous generation of events throughout the world by telecommunication has yet to be exploited, has yet to play an important role in the training of youth for peace. The ubiquitousness of film, an industry that is well organized and highly funded, has the potential of reaching and affecting more people than 10,000 books on peace, nonviolence, love and religion. The mass of people reached and affected by the movie *Gandhi* is a witness to this potential (My reflections while studying).

Colonel Bjorn Egge of the Norwegian Army served in the Congo as part of the United Nations peace-keeping force and believes, as Radhakrishnan does, that the ability of music to soothe emotions in times of conflict has not been fully examined. Colonel Egge "was deeply impressed by the effectiveness of the Nigerian police (not soldiers) who had served in the Congo; simply moving about with their night sticks behind their backs, and with *the wonderful music of their band*, they had been extremely effective in keeping peace and preserving order" (Bristol, 1965: 327; emphasis mine).

A list of reasons gathered from past uses of folk and modern media can be given for the effective use of such facilities in campaigns for peace:

1. They are sure to motivate people towards the efficacy of this programme.
2. They draw the attention of the masses towards the programmes you are planning.
3. They stimulate the awareness of the participants.
4. They involve individual participation.
5. They are concrete methods of teaching because they appeal to success.
6. They are vehicles for rural communication.
7. They enrich the aesthetic side of the youth's personality and awareness (Radhakrishnan, 1984: 27).

Radhakrishnan, and perhaps Colonel Egge, is [are] guided by the belief that music is a powerful force, that it unites people, induces them to new ideas which can spark and nurture change. This sounds very compatible with nonviolence.

### Shanti Sena and Conflict Resolution

As intended by Gandhi and implemented by Vinoba Bhave the job of the Shanti Sena is twofold: the vast majority of the time will be spent in the selfless service of the constructive programme and when need arises the Sainiks will respond to conflicts and outbreaks of violence. This also holds true (as the above task force work of GRU's Shanti Sena has shown) for the Shanti Sainiks of Gandhigram.

The Shanti Sainiks' time spent in the selfless work of the task force when contrasted with the actual time spent as a peace-bringer in conflict situations shows a definite lack of symmetry. This was well intended by Gandhi who believed that the work of the constructive programme was the training of the nonviolent soldier from which he or she obtained the discipline, courage and character to be able to use nonviolence effectively against violence. This is not unlike the lack of symmetry in time spent by a member of the United States Marine Corps in training, planning and preparing for war, when contrasted by the actual time spent killing.

Throughout the academic semester the work of the task force is sandwiched between classes, exams, and breaks, but there are times when the Shanti Sainiks are called into conflict situations from which they gain experience in conflict resolution.

Many of these situations are well documented and the following are only two of a list of the many well recorded conflict resolution situations that the Shanti Sena of GRU has been involved in, from which the author could have chosen. The first example was excerpted verbatim from a paper Dr. N. Radhakrishnan presented at Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea. I quote it primarily because it highlights the female Shanti Sainiks—whose potential as nonviolent soldiers and peace-bringers has yet to be plumbed. It started out as a small inter-communal conflict involving two sections of the same religion (caste Hindus and Harijans) in the town of Villupuram near Madras in 1976:

Some unpleasant thing happened between two youths of the two communities but in no time it assumed devastating proportions which eventually led to the fleeing of almost the entire Harijan population from the village. The caste Hindus who wielded considerable economic clout felt that they had succeeded in driving all of their opponents from the town. Tension was mounting gradually and echoes of what happened in this place were heard in other parts of the state as well.

This time it was thought that the women volunteers of the Shanti Sena should be allowed to take a leading role on the basis of the past experience that women are better peace workers than men on certain occasions. What was happening now would be ideally suited to the women trainees to try out. Hence a team of 15 members led by the present writer left for the scene of conflict to take up peace work. There were only two men in this group of 15. It should be admitted that when the intention of taking a peace team to the scene of violence was announced over two hundred students expressed their willingness and out of this more than half were women. As we feared, what awaited these girls at Villupuram was a hostile atmosphere. The caste Hindus had a lurking suspicion that our team was there to find fault with them and force them to agree to a compromise which would result in the eventual return of the Harijans to their moorings. The first experiences were rather very much distressing. But these girls did not give up hope. A few voluntary agencies from other places were also on the scene. We thought it was better to work together and with this aim in mind a meeting of all the agencies was held at which it was decided that the Shanti Sainiks would exploit the power of persuasion and would work through the women of the village—an effective method to influence men. To cut a story short, in the next three days they succeeded in persuading three of the section leaders to attend a public meeting which eventually led to the formation of a peace committee. It was a multi-pronged attack in which several agencies were involved.

While the local leaders were persuaded to adopt an attitude of reconciliation, the Harijan leaders were contacted by more acceptable and influential political bosses to come down to the plain and accept the compromise formula. The final settlement under which the Harijans returned after eleven days of anxiety was really a great moment in the lives of all those who participated in the programme. The people who returned after eleven days of anxiety, harassment and fear were greatly relieved to see that their houses were by and large safe and their cattle and other belongings they left behind intact. In a conflict of this nature there would always be the tendency to take away the property of the fleeing party. It must be admitted here that the Harijans who flew out of the village did not have much to be taken away but whatever they had was found to be intact. The women volunteers stood sentinel to the property of the people who had left the village. There were tears of gratitude in the eyes of the poor women and appreciation in the caste Hindus when on the 12<sup>th</sup> day the party boarded the train back to Gandhigram (Radhakrishnan, 1986: 13-4).

The following example of conflict resolution is excerpted from a recorded interview with Sri V. Padmanabhan, the Managing Trustee of the Gandhigram Trust, who is also the head of the extension department at

GRU. It was chosen because of the creativity it employed to end a very volatile conflict and because it called into play many aspects and departments of GRU. What is not explained in the text is that when the conflict first broke out a group of Shanti Sainiks rushed to the village and camped there for five days, attempting to foster a genial atmosphere while the Harijans and members of the Gandhigram extension department created a solution.

It was sometime in 1981, the few religious from Subbealeaburan came to us with a problem. They all belonged to the untouchable group in the village, what they call in India as Harijans. A boy from one of the Harijan families had an affair with one of the caste Hindus girls in the village. So the Harijans got together and decided to consummate the marriage. With that in view, they went and approached the father of the girl. The father of the girl took serious objection to their approaching him for an alliance in his family. He said how the Harijans dare get the courage to go and ask for an alliance in the family of the caste Hindus. And he was so worked up that he gathered all the caste Hindus families in a meeting and decided that no one should give work to any of the Harijans in that village on their farms.

And, at this stage they [Harijans] came to Gandhigram. Their request was that they should be given some non-formal employment in the village. There were four options. One was to lodge a complaint in the police, and have a confrontation of the caste Hindus. Another was to rehabilitate them, in some non-formal activities.

We asked the Harijans what they would prefer. They said we would be able to sustain a fight with the caste Hindus. Ultimately we'd be defeated, though temporarily we may gain. So they said let us have some permanent solution. And the permanent solution they said could be if Gandhigram could organize a weaving center for the women and girls, they could help them to get an occupation.

We asked them why they preferred weaving. And they said that in that village weaving is one of the main occupations, and already Gandhigram had given some work to about 60 families from the weavers' community. So we agreed, and we introduced a new type of loom called the semi-automatic Nepal loom, that made the learning of weaving very easy. We developed their skill, and within six months they could stand on their own legs. Of course we provided the raw material for weaving and we took back the cloth, finished the cloth, and arranged for the marketing of the cloth.

This really helped the Harijans to come out of the clutches of the caste Hindus and they were able to be on their own. They were so much satisfied. But they were so much concerned that they should not go back to the village and be part of the community, that they saved some 30,000 rupees from their weaving areas, bought the land a little away from the vil-

lage and requested Gandhigram to get some government assistance to put small houses for them. Gandhigram arranged to get some 2,500 rupees per house from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, and we constructed 25 houses for the 25 families there. As work progressed, more and more women from the Harijan community wanted to learn weaving. Today with the help of the state government, we have got the product sanctioned, to which some 30 girls are employed in spinning, and some 40 girls are employed in weaving.

About 70 people are employed in spinning and weaving, and another 30 in the pre-weaving processes. So nearly 100 people are getting their sustenance from khadi production. And now, the caste Hindus are not able to control or do anything harmful to the Harijans—they're on their own. The initial advantage that the caste Hindus had is gone. Farm wages have also gone up, because they'll have to get labor from outside. So the contact between caste Hindus and Harijans has not only been peacefully solved, it has improved the lot of the Harijans and their style of function. They are not now under the bondage of the caste Hindus (Personal recorded interview with Sri V. Padmanabhan, 25 September 1986).

I will close this exhibit of Gandhigram's Shanti Sena with a short story, a story proudly told to me one evening by Radhakrishnan while we broke bread together. It was based upon a letter that Gandhigram received from a businessman who owns a furniture store in a northern Indian city:

One evening while a young couple was being shown some furniture by a salesperson, their young child defecated on a showroom rug. Once it became known, the couple immediately starting arguing and blaming each other. The salesman, caught up in the emotion of the exchange, was also at a loss for an effective redress. Meanwhile a young fellow who had been observing the conflict suddenly came forward with a dustpan, and with a piece of paper scooped up the source of the conflict and rendered it harmless.

The owner who from a distance had also been observing, went over to offer his gratitude to the young fellow. Engaging him in a conversation, the young fellow explained that what he did, he did because he saw a need for action and besides, he didn't feel that it was a degrading task. Pressed further by the owner he elaborated, but only because he was asked to, that he had done similar tasks as a member of the Shanti Sena while attending Gandhigram Rural University.

With both of his sons already graduated from college, the owner further stated in the letter that he would sincerely recommend Gandhigram to his friends or any young man expressing interest in attending a university. A rather large donation accompanied the letter applauding GRU's product.

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