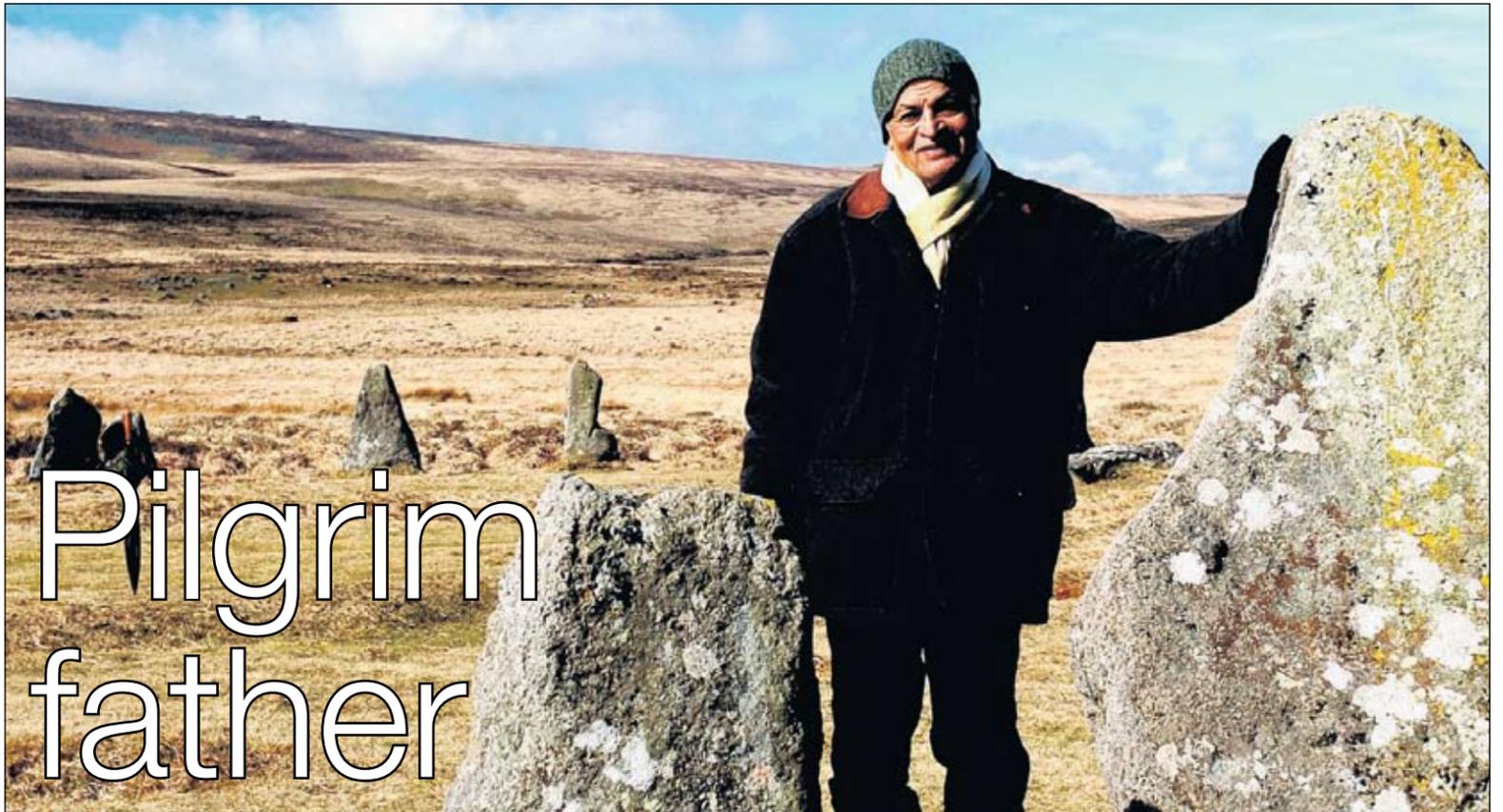


ECOLOGY AN INDIAN JAIN MONK TELLS **FIONA MACDONALD** THAT EDUCATING PEOPLE TO RESPECT NATURE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Seventy-one-year-old Indian-born Satish Kumar became a Jain monk at the age of nine, and then embarked on an 8,000-mile peace pilgrimage at 18. Since 1973, he has lived in Devon and edited the ecological magazine Resurgence. Earth Pilgrim, a documentary about his walks in Dartmoor National Park over the course of a year, will be shown on BBC2 at 8pm this Friday.



Pilgrim father

Generally, we go into nature either for a kind of holiday, for entertainment or to look at nature as an object. An Earth pilgrim is someone who goes into nature with a reverential mindset and for a sense of connectedness.

Most people think nature exists purely to be exploited by humans, but an Earth pilgrim has an attitude of ecological humility. As Hindu pilgrims go to the Ganges in India, we go into nature with respect. And we receive so much in return: clean water, oxygen from the trees, food from the soil.

So we need to show gratitude rather than thinking it is our right to take everything. If we change our way of looking at nature, then environmental problems such as global warming will disappear. I say in the documentary: 'I don't look to the sky to find heaven. My heaven is here on Earth.'

Even though I've been walking on Dartmoor for 40 years, I learn new things every time I go. The more I walk, the more I can appreciate the profound beauty, generosity and economy of nature. The system is so beautifully designed, I become a student of nature; it's a different kind of Bible, of Koran, of Shakespeare.

The intricacy, the beauty and the organisation are so wonderful that

you wish humans were able to mimic nature – we'd be much better off. Half of humanity goes to bed without food and we think we are advanced. But we have such a bad economic, political and social design.

Nature's design is so adequate – a flower never complains that a honeybee took too much nectar. I find this well-balanced, beautiful dance every time I go on Dartmoor. It's almost a mystical experience.

Inner change

It might seem as though it's easier for me to feel this way because I was a monk from the age of nine but everyone can access that state of mind. The main advice I give is to go out and experience nature at least one or two days a week. Don't read newspapers or watch TV indoors but, whatever the weather, go out walking. You will have a transformative experience.

Every school and university should make it obligatory that, for one day a week, nature is the classroom. Not sitting in front of computers but sitting under a tree without cameras or notebooks, just observing. Then I think we'd have more Newtons and more Buddhas.

Scientists always saw the Earth as a kind of machine, like a clock. But it doesn't work like a clock, it works like a living system, a self-

organising, self-connecting system. That is the old spiritual, mystical view – and it is now a scientific view, according to Gaia theory.

Ecology and economy go hand in hand. Those two words come from the same Greek root 'oikos', which means home. Ecology comes from 'logos', meaning 'knowledge of home'. Economy means 'management of home'. How can you manage a home without knowing it? Everyone talks about 'economy, economy, economy' – but economy cannot be without ecology.

Our education system is 50 years behind. It is still teaching young people that fossil fuel-based mass production and economic growth without concern for ecology is the paradigm. But the industrial system of production and distribution is what's causing global warming. So, education needs to change to embrace ecology.

Human resources

As an Indian Jain monk, I always had a reverential view of nature. But coming to the West, I learnt a bit more Western philosophy and science, and tried to see a balance between the two. There is a value in an analytical, scientific, empirical, evidence-based understanding but there is also a value in human intuition and human spirit. If you can put those two together, then the meaning and the matter become one.

In my peace pilgrimage, I walked 8,000 miles. And what I learnt is how the Earth and humans are one. I learnt ecology by walking on the Earth. It's not academic knowledge, it's experiential.

My walking for peace was a kind of activism. No one can be 100 per cent ecological or non-violent, but as far as possible I am mindful I need to be the change I want to see in the world, as Mahatma Gandhi said. That's activism – being aware and putting your ideas into practice.



Land of learning: Kumar's time on Dartmoor has been educational