

**Soil, soul and society:
an address by Satish Kumar**



Photography: Kenji Yamamoto

Satish Kumar, speaking at Sansai Gakurin, 21 February 2012



Introduction

Students listened raptly when Satish Kumar spoke at Kyoto University on 21 February 2012. The venue was the tatami-matted, garden-facing meeting room of a gracious Japanese residence that has housed 15 generations of Kyoto University presidents and provides the base – for now, at least – for Sansai Gakurin, an institution established in 2002 to support the research and educational activities of the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies (GSGES). Indian-born Kumar was a Jain monk in his youth before he became a Mahatma Gandhi-inspired peace activist. He gained international acclaim in the 1960s as a result of his historic “peace walk”, a journey of more than 8,000 miles visiting Washington, London, Paris and Moscow, the capitals of four nuclear powers. A world-renowned eco philosopher, Kumar is the editor of *Resurgence & Ecologist* magazine as well as the founder and director of programmes of the Schumacher College International Centre for Ecological Studies in the United Kingdom. He visited Japan from 20 to 26 February 2012 at the invitation of the Namakemono kurabu (Sloth Club) – a Japanese non-governmental organization committed to advocating the principle of “slow life” – and he took time out from a busy book tour to share his vision of “soil, soul and society” with the faculty, students and friends of GSGES. Sansai Gakurin is named after the traditional east Asian triad of ten (天), chi (地) and jin (人) – heaven, earth and humanity. The spirit of the house seemed almost palpable on the day of Kumar’s visit. It was as if the old building extended a welcome to its honourable guest and shared his philosophy for a sustainable, harmonious existence on earth.

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