

In Memoriam: Mahatma Gandhi

There is not a single country in the whole world where the name of Mahatma Gandhi is not known. Why did Gandhiji become so famous? It was because he dedicated his whole life to the service of the motherland, and service of humanity. In the early days India was made up of a large number of small Princely Kingdoms. Porbandar in Gujarat was one such Princely Kingdom. Gandhiji's father Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Kaba, was a Minister there. Kaba Gandhi was an honest, upright man, a strict disciplinarian, and very hot tempered. His wife Putlibai was an extremely religious person. She was also a very loving person, and immensely hard-working. To these parents a son was born on October 2nd, 1869. He was their youngest son. He was called Mohandas – our Gandhiji. The strict discipline of his father, the religious bent of mind of his mother, all influenced Gandhiji greatly. He was deeply attached to his parents and brothers. The values of truthfulness, honesty, integrity were instilled in him from the very beginning. As a child he was not very brave. He was mortally afraid of the dark, of ghosts and spirits, and also of snakes and scorpions. At night he would cry in fear. The maid who looked after him scolded him very often. "You should be ashamed of yourself", she would say, "What will you do when you grow up?" She then told him that every time he was frightened he should take the name of God Rama. Gandhiji took her advice, and gradually he overcame his fear. Soon it was time for him to go to school as his father was in Rajkot at that time.

Being extremely shy, he did not mix with other children. Mostly he kept to himself. In the beginning he did not like some of the subjects that were taught to him, but with encouragement from his teachers he studied them, and began to enjoy them. From then onwards he took his studies very seriously. One day, the Inspector of Schools, Mr. Giles, came to Mohan's school. He read out five English words to the class and asked the boys to write them down.

Mohan wrote four words correctly, but he could not spell the fifth word 'Kettle'. Seeing Mohan's hesitation, the teacher made a sign behind the Inspector's back that he should copy the word from his neighbour's slate. But Mohan ignored his signs. The other boys wrote all the five words correctly; Mohan wrote only four. After the Inspector left, the teacher scolded him. "I told you to copy from your neighbour," he said angrily, "Couldn't you even do that correctly?" Everyone laughed. As he went home that evening, Mohan was not unhappy. He knew he had done the right thing. What made him sad was that his teacher should have asked him to cheat.

As was the custom in those days, when he was about 13-14 years old, he got married. His wife's name was Kasturba (and she was as old as him). It was at this time that Gandhiji fell into bad company. Because of these bad habits, unknown to his parents, he was once forced to sell a part of his gold bracelet. However, he soon realized his mistake and amply repented his sinful behaviour. He decided to tell everything to his father, but lacked the courage to face him. So instead, he wrote a letter to his father, mentioning all the sinful deeds he had done. He gave the letter to his father, and stood by his bedside, his face hanging down in shame. His father felt miserable when he read the letter. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but he did not say a single word to his son. It was too much for Mohandas to bear. Right then he swore that he would always lead a truthful and honest life, and throughout his life he stuck to his resolution.

During his father's illness Gandhiji nursed him with great devotion and care, but unfortunately his father never recovered from his illness. He died soon thereafter. In 1887, two years after his father's death, Gandhiji passed his High School examination. At that time he was 18 years old. Everyone in the family decided that he should go to England and become a Barrister, so that on his return he could become a Diwan like his father. Respecting their wishes, Gandhiji set sail for England in 1888.

Life was entirely different in England. The style of dressing, eating habits, everything was all new to him. He was totally confused and bewildered for some time. However, he soon got adjusted to the new environment. He had promised his mother that he would not eat non-vegetarian food, or drink alcohol, and he remained true to his word. Many attempts were made to make Gandhiji accept Christianity as his religion, but Gandhiji remained firm. However, he studied the Bible, Gita and Quran and came to the conclusion that the principal tenets in all religions are the same. So whether the person was Hindu, Muslim or Christian, Gandhiji felt that as long as he followed his religion's principles, he attained salvation. He told this to all those who had tried to convert him, and remained a staunch Hindu till the very end.

Gandhiji concentrated on his studies thereafter, and successfully passed his Bar examination. He returned to India in 1891, after the completion of his studies. Eagerly he looked forward to meeting his mother and give her the good news, but he was to be sorely disappointed. For, while he was away in England, his mother had passed away. The news of her death had been withheld from him because his brother thought he would be mentally disturbed and his studies would be affected.

After qualifying as a Barrister, he set up his practice as a lawyer in Rajkot. As he did not get much work there, he shifted to Bombay (now Mumbai). Even in Bombay he did not get any cases. Finally, he got one case. He prepared

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for October 2009

October 7

Commemoration of 140th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi
(Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, i.e. 2nd October, is observed by the UN as International Day of Non-Violence)

"Gandhian philosophy and its influence" – A talk by Dr. Kumar Rupasinghe, Foundation for Co-Existence

Discussants: Mr. Lynn Ockersz, Associate Editor of The Sunday Island; Mr. S. Chandrasekaram, President, Mahatma Gandhi Sabha, Matale

Floor would be thrown open for questions after comments by the discussants

Venue & Time: ICC 4.30 p.m.

October 9

Film: Richard Attenborough's GANDHI
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration:3 hrs

October 16

To mark the Diwali Festival "The Sam" – Moment of Pleasure in Music by Nrithiya Nipun Ms. Moksha Samarasooriya & her students & Shasthrapathi Mr. Ranga Perera

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

October 21

Film: Sampoom Ramayan (In Hindi)
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration:3 hrs

October 30

Bharatha Natyam Recital by the students of the Indian Cultural Centre trained by Guru Ms. Subashini Pathmanathan
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis)

well for it, but in court he was unable to present it satisfactorily. Disappointed, he felt he would never make a successful lawyer. Just at that time Gandhiji's elder brother managed to get him a case. He was asked to represent Mr. Abdulla, a rich businessman in South Africa. After much deliberation, Gandhiji agreed to accept the case. He left his homeland and set sail for Africa in 1893.

Although there were many Indians staying in Africa at that time, all the power was in the hands of the British people. They considered themselves superior, and treated the Indians and the natives in a most insulting manner. Gandhiji undertook Abdulla's case and handled it very well. The Indians were very impressed, and wanted Gandhiji to stay on in Africa. However, he was treated very badly by the British people. Wherever he went, he had to face insults and rudeness. At times, he was even physically assaulted. One day, when he was travelling from Durban to Pretoria in the first class compartment of a train, a British man boarded the compartment. On seeing Gandhiji, the British man got furious. He called the Railway officer, and both ordered him to get out of the train. Since Gandhiji had purchased a first class ticket, he refused to do so. However, they ignored that fact and summoned the police. They pushed him out of the compartment and threw his luggage out of the window. Gandhiji had to spend the whole night on the platform.

This was only one of the many humiliating experiences Gandhiji had to face. Though he had decided to return to India on the completion of his work in Africa, but the plight of Indians there disturbed him greatly. He resolved to stay on and fight the unjust and inhuman laws that were imposed on them. For, everywhere there was discrimination. There was one set of rules for the Indians and natives, and a different set for the British people. Gandhiji realised that to fight against injustice it was vital for the people to have unity amongst themselves. He tried very hard to bring about this unity. He organized many meetings, and made the people aware of the situation. In response, people appointed him as their leader, and agreed to be guided by him.

Since all the power was in the hands of the English people, Gandhiji realised that to fight them it was necessary to use an entirely different method. It was then that he thought of the novel idea of 'Satyagraha', a non-violent protest against injustice. His movement aimed at fighting the many unjust laws that were imposed on them, and for it to be successful, he was prepared to face all hardships and obstacles. It was no easy task. He suffered much humiliation,

Contd.

SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo



ICCR

Indian Cultural Centre

133, Baudhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 4, Sri Lanka
Telephone: 2500014, Fax: 2598674
E-mail: icc@sltnet.lk
ICCR Website: www.iccrindia.org

October 2009

Past Events

15th -20th August

Performance by renowned artistes Hari & Chethna and their ensemble from India



Renowned Kathak dancers Hari & Chethna and their ensemble from India captivated the Sri Lankan audience with their performances. Their visit to Sri Lanka, included performances in Colombo at Kularathne Hall, University of Visual and Performing Art & Indian Cultural Centre in Kandy at the E.O.E.Perera Theatre, Faculty of Engineering, and University of Peradeniya and in Nuwara Eliya at the Nuwara Eliya Town Hall. Hari & Chethna and their troupe's visit was sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.

In celebration of the 62nd anniversary of India's Independence day celebration Hari, Chethna & their troupe presented "Samarpan"- glimpses of Kathak dance form at the Kularathne hall on 15th August to a packed audience. The event was presided by the High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka Shri Alok Prasad and the Minister of Transport of Sri Lanka Hon. Dullas Alahapperuma and Mrs. Alahapperuma graced the occasion as Chief Guests. The troupe also presented a lecture cum demonstration at the Indian Cultural Centre on 20th. The "Samrpan" – kathak dance recital was repeated in Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and at the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo on 16th, 17th & 19th.

Hari & Chethna and their troupe's performances received rave reviews at all places.

21st August

Panel discussion on Life & works of eminent Indian Play Wright Habib Tanvir
Talk by: Mr. Parakrama Niriella, Playwright
Discussant: Mr. Dhramasiri Bandaranaike, Film Director



The Indian Cultural Centre organised a panel discussion on Life & works of eminent Indian Play Wright Habib Tanvir on 21st August at the Indian cultural Centre. The talk on the subject by Mr. Parakrama Niriella, Playwright. Mr. Dhramasiri Bandaranaike, Film Director also further discussed on the subject. The seminar was followed by an interactive sessions in which the audience also shared the comments and views. The discussion was followed by a reception.



25th August

Bharatha Natyam Recital Ms. Amali Nisansala Perera



Shasthrapathi Amali Nisansala Perera presented a brilliant Bharatha Natyam recital at the Centre which kept the audience spell bound. Her recital included Deepanjali, Ashtapadhi, Patham, Keerthanam and Thillana. The evening was very well enjoyed by the dance lovers gathered at the Centre.

28th August

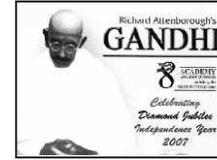
An evening of Indian Classical Music by Ms. Rupashika Ranatunga



Visharad Rupashika Ranatunga and her students presented an evening of Indian classical instrumental and vocal music recital. The evening commenced with a vocal item by Visharad Rupashika Ranatunga and Visharad Sadhana Ranatunga, in which they sang a Vilambit Khyal followed by a Chota Kheyli and a Ghazal Geeth. This was followed by two bhajans by the students, an instrumental item by a group of violinists, a harmonium solo and a vocal item (bhajan, tharana) and concluded with an instrumental item. The evening was a treat for the music lovers.

Films in October

Richard Attenborough's - Gandhi

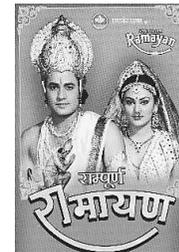


Gandhi was not a ruler of nations, nor did he have scientific gifts. Yet this small modest man did what others before him could not. He led an entire country to freedom – he gave his people hope.

Gandhi, the man of the century, is explored in his breathtaking, unforgettable motion picture. After 20 years in the making, this masterpiece epic garnered eight Academy awards in 1982, including awards for the best picture, best director, best actor and best original screenplay. In stirring details Gandhi's life and principles explored on the screen with vivid scenes, such as the horrific massacre at Amritsar, where the British opened fire on 15,000 unarmed men, women and children, and the dramatic Dandi March or Dandi Yatra to the sea where Gandhi led thousands of his fellow Indians to prove that sea salt belonged to all and was not just a British commodity. The film has a distinguished cast, including Academy award winner Ben Kingsley as Gandhi, Candice Bergen, Martin Sheen, John Gielgud and Trevor Howard. A vision of the heart and soul of a man, GANDHI is a classic epic, as timeless as Gandhi himself.

Starring: Ben Kingsley, Candice Bergen, Edward Fox, John Gielgud, Trevor Howard, John Mills, Martin Sheen, Ian Charleson, Athol Fugard, Gunther Maria Halmer, Saeed Jaffrey, Geraldine Jams, Alyque Padmasee, Amrishi Puri & Roshan Seth.

Sampoorn Ramayan



Made in the 1980s, Dr. Ramana and Sagar's Sampoorn Ramayan was the first serial on the great epic "Ramayana" on Indian television and earned wide appreciation and acclaim as a beautiful portrayal of the epic

In Memoriam: Mahatma Gandhi.. Cond..

faced many problems, but he did not give up. It was during this time that war broke out between the British and the Dutch settlers in Africa. It was known as the Boer War. Gandhiji and other Indians gave whatever help they could to the British. The British won the war, and taking into consideration the help Gandhiji had rendered to them, they gave the Indians more privileges. They also agreed to abolish the unjust laws that were imposed on them. Gandhiji felt very happy that his stay in Africa had served some useful purpose. Thinking that his work was now over, he decided to return to his motherland. The people were very reluctant to let him go back. They were very keen that he should settle down in Africa itself. Finally Gandhiji told them that he would go to India, but come to Africa whenever they called him. Only then did the people agree to let him go. They gave him a grand farewell, and showered him with many expensive gifts. However Gandhiji did not accept anything. He donated everything to the local organisations.

During his long stay in Africa Gandhiji visited India sometimes, where he met many important leaders and sought their advice. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was one such leader who rendered assistance to Gandhiji in many ways. Gandhiji admired him tremendously, and looked upon him as his mentor. It was largely due to him that Gandhiji joined the mainstream of Indian politics.

In the meantime, all over India, agitations and uprisings against the British rule were on the increase. In 1920, Lokmanya Tilak died, and Gandhiji became the leader of the Freedom Movement. Under his guidance, the people went on Satyagraha to fight against injustice. He was arrested and imprisoned many times, but that did not deter him and his loyal followers. They continued their fight for freedom with even greater fervor. Gandhiji was greatly respected for his simple living, high thinking, and fearless attitude. The British too were greatly impressed by him and called him for negotiations regarding India's freedom. Since it had been decided that the freedom struggle would not stop until full freedom was granted, the negotiations did not serve any purpose. Various forms of Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience movements were launched at that time. The 'Swadeshi Movement' (to use locally-made goods) was one of them. Gandhiji advised and encouraged people to use Indian goods and wear *Khadi* (hand spun cloth). He himself wore Khadi clothes, and would sit to spin on his *Charkha* (Spinning wheel). People stopped buying British made goods. Instead, they lit bonfires of these goods. The Government tried its best to suppress all these demonstrations and agitations, but were unsuccessful.

Meanwhile in Europe, the Second World War had broken out. The British looked towards India for help, but Gandhiji launched the Non-cooperation Movement. Jawaharlal Nehru and many other Indian leaders joined the movement because they all had immense faith in Gandhiji. The British Government thought it would please the Indians by granting them partial freedom. Once again they began negotiations with Gandhiji, but he made it clear that he and his people wanted nothing less than complete freedom (Independence). To make this demand stronger, the Indian National Congress passed the Quit India resolution in 1942, wherein they demanded that the British leave India immediately. Angered by this resolution, the British again imprisoned him and his wife Kasturba, who died in jail.

Around this time Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose formed his 'Azad Hind Fauj' in Japan. Many Indians in the British Army left it and joined Netaji's Army. The British Government realised that it was now impossible for them to continue their rule in India. They released Gandhiji and other leaders from prison, and once again began negotiations with him. Finally, on 15th August 1947, India attained freedom and for the first time the Indian tricolour National Flag fluttered on the Red Fort in Delhi.

However, India had to pay a heavy price for its freedom. What was once a large single geographical entity, now comprised of two new nations – India and Pakistan. It was during this period that Hindu-Muslim riots broke out all over the country. People of both communities were killed brutally and there was large scale bloodshed all around. Gandhiji put his life in danger, pleaded with the people and made ceaseless efforts to stop the senseless killings.

After independence, Gandhiji concentrated his efforts on the betterment of the downtrodden people. He went from village to village and advised the people that for the good of the country it was necessary for everyone to work together in unity and harmony. Equal opportunities and equal status was what he wanted. Although Gandhiji strived so hard for unity, there were some people who were under the misconception that Gandhiji favoured the Muslims. On January 30, 1948, when Gandhiji set out to attend a prayer meeting in Delhi, he was shot dead by an assailant. His last words were 'Hey Ram'. The Great Mahatma's life had come to an end! The news shocked everyone. Not only India, but the whole world mourned the death of the great man – a real Mahatma, who had dedicated his entire life to the service of humanity and had taught the importance of truth and nonviolence. The most befitting tribute that we can pay to him is to follow the path he had shown to us.

Source: India Perspectives