

Gandhi's Mauritius Visit

Dr. Shobhna P. Jain

SKUB Smiti Arts & Smt .N.C. Zaveri Comm.College, Pipaliya, Gujarat, India

ABSTRACT

A Century ago Mauritius was honoured by the fortuitous visit of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi's visit to Mauritius in 1901 took place at a crucial period of Mauritian history. No one knew at that time that after his return from Mauritius, Gandhi would emerge as the greatest spiritual leader of the world. His visit in 1901 is termed as fortuitous, because no one really knew about his journey to Mauritius for it was not preplanned. But contrary to this, the arrival of SS Nowshera, the steamer was scheduled. The Scott & Company had given a communique about arrival of the steamer in "Le Cerneen" dated 24th October, 1901. It said that the ship was to arrive at Port Louis Harbour around 31st October 1901, and his departure was fixed for the 8th October 1901 for Colombo. The company in addition had informed the Public to contact its office for freight, transportation of goods for passenger's arrangement. S.S. Nowshera came Mauritius on Tuesday, when Christian communities were preparing to celebrate All Saints, All-Souls days-only two days later. This could have been the reason for not having any information of M. K. Gandhi's arrival in our midst in the local press on 30th & 31st October 1901. Again as 1st, 2nd & 3rd November were public holidays, no paper appeared three days. Hence all the papers were to appear as from 4th Nov., & in The Standard of date, the news of Gandhi's arrival appeared for the first time. It's clearly stated in that, Gandhi has arrived by the S.S. Nowshera yesterday, that he has rendered great service to the Indian's in South Africa. For that he was given a big farewell on his departure by the Indians over there. It also said that the Indians over here intend to celebrate him.

Keywords : Communique, Christian communities, Mauritius

Gandhi's Activities in Mauritius

In his autobiography, he said : "So I sailed for home. Mauritius was one of the ports of call, and as the boat made a long halt there, I went ashore and acquainted myself fairly well with local conditions. For one night I was the guest of Sir Charles Bruce, the Governor of the Colony". [1]

Gandhi did not know intimately Mauritius on 29th October, 1901 by the steamer Nowshera. He was a guest of Mr. Ahmed Goolam Mohammed, a muslim trader in port Louis. He paid a visit to the Supreme Court on 5th November in the company of Henry Bertin, a leading attorney, who introduced him to member of the Bar. On 9th Nov. Gandhi was invited by Sir Charles Bruce to Le Re'duit, to participate in a banquet given on the sixtieth birthday of King Edward VII. On 13th Nov. The muslim traders gave a banquet in honour of M. K. Gandhi at

Taher Bagh. Mr. Gandhi the Indian Barrister, who has made a name for himself at Natal, delivered a very important speech at a dinner which was given to him the other day by the Indian Mohammedans.

The dinner was presided by M. Goolam Mamode Ajum, Junior. Several European gentlemen were present and Mr. Gandhi spoke in English and in Indian [Gujarati]. "He said that he had the greatest pleasure to find himself in such distinguished company. The Indians in Mauritius are the principal Labourers of this country, which owed its prosperity to their patient labour and great endurance.

He said that the Indians should mix with politics, because it was their right and their duty; but that to do it properly.

In a speech he admonished his countrymen to give prompt attention to the education of their children. He

left on the Nowshera on 15th November. Before leaving for Bombay, some two and a half dozens of entries have been unearthed from the pages of the local press, revealing his visit to Mauritius inter-alia that illustrates his farewell party in South Africa, his visit to, Supreme Court, his participation in a social function at the Governor's place at le reduit , Six years after this historic visit it was Gandhi who inspired another young Indian barrister, Manilal Doctor to come to Mauritius in 1907.

The Impact of Gandhi in Mauritius

In fact, the impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian Community of Mauritius is not due to visit of M.K. Gandhi to Mauritius in 1901. Instead it is due to the activities of Mahatma Gandhi of much later years. Since 1920's Mahatma Gandhi had played a prominent role in the struggle for the Independence of India. From 1920 to 1948, Gandhiji's every political activity, his social moves, were fully publicised in the local press. Marching on the way to Gandhism , Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam achieved Independence for Mauritius on 12th March 1968. When he was asked to choose a specific date for Independence, he opted for the "Salt March" a historic day in memory of Mahatma Gandhi's greatest Political move.

Moreover, in order to propagate Gandhi's Philosophy, SSR created the Mahatma Gandhi's Institute, with the help of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India in 1970. This institute is operational in Moka since 1975, and in its premises, there is a life-size statue of Mahatma Gandhi. Every year on 2nd October, a Special Ceremony is organised and the statue is garlanded followed by a memorial lecture on Gandhi's Philosophy, given by eminent local or foreign dignitaries.

There are Gandhi Bhawan at Laventure, the Old People Gandhi's home at Petit Raffray, and the Gandhi Ashram at Vacoas, where Gandhi's birthdays are commemorated every year .The Government of Sir Seewosager Ramgoolam had encouraged the local Government, which allowed the District and Village Councils, as well as Municipalities to name streets', roads, squares and gardens bearing the name of Mahatma Gandhi, and today dozens of such places can be located in Mauritius.

Book written on Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius

In 1943 Ramkhelawan Boodhun wrote a book on Mahatma Gandhi entitled, "The Spiritual Triumph of Gandhi Maharaj". In 1968 on the occasion of the birth centenary commemoration of Gandhi and the other dedicated souls "The local Hindi writers Association published in 1970,a book called "Gandhi Smiriti" , and in the same year Deolal Thacoor published his book," Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius". Pandit Basdeo Bissoondoyal wrote, "Mahatma Gandhi: A New Approach" in 1975. Whereas Dr. K. Hazareesingh wrote" Les Pensee's de Gandhi"[The thoughts of Gandhi] in 1980 Uttama Bissoonsdoyal, too produced a book in 1988 under the title," Mahatma Gandhi and other Essays'. Pahlad Ramsurren wrote, "Mahatma Gandhi and His Impact on Mauritius" in 1995 with a view to project a wide perspective of Gandhism in Mauritius.

REFERENCES

- [1]. "Zamana" [Hindi paper issue of 13 Jan.1954
- [2]. "Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius" 1969 Deolah Thacoor
- [3]. "Gandhiji Bole' The' " 1984 Abhimanyu Anuth
- [4]. "My Experiments with Truth" trans. by Mahadevbhai Desai.