

Nagaland Gandhi Ashram, Chuchu-Yimlang commemorates International Day of Non-Violence

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Nagaland Gandhi Ashram (NGA) has maintained a long-standing tradition of observing Gandhi Jayanti or the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi at Chuchuyimlang village on its campus. Although this village is considered to be one of the bigger villages of Nagaland, it is after all a village only. Our programme for the day in the past had always been a modest, low profile, quiet affair. But it is significant in Nagaland context that Gandhi Jayanti was continuously observed at one place in Nagaland for five decades and more.

Mahatma Gandhi was known and respected in Nagaland even before NGA was established. But as the Naga society had remained somewhat isolated from rest of the country, during the British regime, it was not involved in the country's freedom struggle in a major way. Hence the national events like celebration of Gandhi Jayanti was not observed in Naga Hills as it used to be observed in rest of the country.

It is a matter of great satisfaction for NGA that it introduced this tradition at a village in Nagaland and has maintained it till date. The Gandhi Jayanti 2007, however, had greater or special significance. The General Assembly of United Nations by a unanimous resolution had resolved to celebrate Gandhi's birthday as the International Day of non-violence all over the world from 2007 onwards. This is an important development for India and a landmark in the progress of human civilization. NGA wanted that this new significance of Gandhi's birthday is registered in the minds of the people of Chuchuyimlang and thereby in the entire state of Nagaland also. It wanted to celebrate it in a major way. In view of different unexpected circumstances, this event could not be observed at Chuchuyimlang on the 2nd October. It was instead held on the 13th November 2007.

A noteworthy feature of this event in 2007 was that it was not held on the campus of NGA alone. The main item of the day; the public meeting was held in the main assembly ground of the original Chuchuyimlang village. This was the first ever occasion of its kind.

The celebration was a joint event in which the village community participated whole-heartedly in all items. Our Ashram's team of workers at Chuchuyimlang is a tiny team. But it became a very big team on that day as everyone joined hands and helped in many ways with enthusiasm and sincerity. The other feature was the release of peace pigeons. The chief guest and the president together released peace pigeons as a commemorative symbolic gesture. The 3rd feature was that a senior official of the Central Government dealing with the entire NE Region had attended the function as chief guest. An eminent Naga Social Activist and industrial entrepreneur, Shri Bendangnukshi Longkumer presided over the public meeting.

The other three major items held on the same day were:

- (a) Inauguration of the 5-day long Khadi & Village industries exhibition.*
- (b) Inauguration of a rostrum constructed on the local football ground through voluntary donations.*
- (c) Opening of new computer lab at the one-year-old computer-training institute. This synchronized with launching of Post-Graduate Diploma course.*

The dimensions of the entire celebration were big for a Nagaland village and the enthusiasm displayed by the local community and the happiness experienced by all participants made the day very special, and, if one may say so, even unique.

This lengthy introduction is necessary to interpret the significance of this event in Nagaland. It was not observed like other functions held elsewhere.

(A regional fortnightly magazine "North East Window" had deputed a small team to participate. It had carried a detailed account with photographs in its issue of the 15th Dec. 2007. We have reproduced below the entire article).

With the declaration of 2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, as the *International Day of Non-Violence* by the United Nations* starting from this year onward, the Nagaland Gandhi Ashram founded in 1955 by the ever charismatic Gandhian, Shri Natwar Thakkar at Chuchuyimlang, celebrated the event post facto on the 13th of November 2007 with pomp and gaiety. Ever since Nagaland Gandhi

Ashram was established more than fifty years back, Chuchuyimlang, one of the biggest villages of the Ao Nagas under Mokokchung district has been celebrating the birth of Mahatma Gandhi every year with great enthusiasm and with a feeling of nationalism.

The village crammed with people from different walks of life looked small. Dressed in colourful traditional attire, all geared up to welcome the Chief Guest, Shri Naveen Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs (NE), Government of India. The youths, eager to receive the chief guest with a hearty welcome song, were all excited to see the arrival of Naveen Verma accompanied by Natwar Thakkar, other dignitaries and the village elders not only from Chuchuyimlang but also from neighbouring villages.

The day began with the inauguration of the Rostrum at the local Football Ground that was made possible with the initiative of Natwar Thakkar and constructed purely through voluntary donations from different quarters. Later, the Chief Guest launched the Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications (PGDCA) course and also inaugurated the new Computer Laboratory of RIeLIT (Regional Institute of e-Learning and Information Technology) established last year in collaboration with Nagaland Gandhi Ashram. A five-day Khadi & Village Industries exhibition organized by the Khadi & Village Industries Commission was also declared open as part of the celebration. The drive from one end of the village to the other was long and tiring but the chief guest, who seemed to enjoy the warm welcome and the affection shown by the people, didn't seem to be at all tired. The hospitality of the people and the pleasant weather made a deep impression on him.



The main public function was held at the village assembly ground Impang Among. On the occasion, pigeons were released as sign of peace and non-violence. Shri Naveen Verma expressed his gratitude to Natwar Thakkar for having invited him and thanked the people in general for the warmest welcome he had ever received during his 25 years of service. He called upon the people to adopt Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and ideologies which will lead to ushering in peace in the state and also urged them to make the best possible use of all the various developmental advantages that the people are offered.

He assured that he would render every possible help for the uplift of the village and ensure that the makeshift helipad be transformed to a full-fledged helipad and get it registered. The helipad was used on two occasions when the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai visited Chuchuyimlang on 5th November, 1978, and the then Member Secretary, Planning Commission and present Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, visited the Nagaland Gandhi Ashram in 1982. But since then the helipad had worn a deserted look with only the wild grass grown all over the place. He also added that fund would be provided to build a stadium for the villagers, which is the need of the hour.

Impressed with the scenic beauty of the place, a tourist spot, he expressed his desire to re-visit the village but as a tourist next time and expected the same cordiality.



It was a great sight to see the chief guest and the distinguished guest storming from one stall to the other, fascinated by the talents of the young entrepreneurs at the exhibition sponsored by KVIC, Nagaland. Naveen Verma stood mesmerized at one point seeing the grinder used to grind the local tapioca manually, displayed by the Department of Agriculture, Government of Nagaland. The Cane and Bamboo Technology Centre, Guwahati, participated in the exhibition with various items of the 'Green Gold'. The Khadi clothings displayed by the Khadi and Village Industries Sangh, Dimapur had the highest number of buyers. There had been displays of various products which will definitely draw great demand in the market if the right platforms and avenues are provided. Unfortunately, the talents often go unnoticed and unexplored due to negligence by the government and the ignorance of the people.

The musical drama performed by RIeLIT students reminded one of the sacrifices that Gandhiji made and the most successfully adopted weapon 'non-violence' he used in the course of which we Indians were set free from the clutches of Britishers. This play discreetly depicted the cultural diversity and conveyed the message that despite such diversity, we still can co-exist peacefully under one roof as one.

Finally, Natwar Thakkar highlighted the various socio-economic developments that took place in the village then and now and thanked the village council for constantly supporting him and his team of

workers in all endeavours of the Ashram. He also thanked the participants who rekindled the spirit of nationalism in the minds of the people through their musical drama and cultural dances.

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(Courtesy: The Northeast Window, Vol. IV, Issue 8, Dec.15, 2007)

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**In its 103rd Plenary Meeting*
United Nations General Assembly

Adopts 2nd October (Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi) as International Day of Non-Violence

*Adopting a text on the International Day of Non-Violence, contained in document A/61/L.62, the United Nations General Assembly decided on 15 June 2007 in its 103rd Plenary meeting, **to observe the International Day, with effect from the sixty-second session, on 2 October each year.** Bearing in mind that non-violence, tolerance, full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, democracy, development, mutual understanding and respect of diversity, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, it invited all Member States, United Nations Organizations, regional and non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate the International Day in an appropriate manner and to disseminate the message of Non-Violence, including through education and public awareness. It further requested the Secretary General to recommend ways and means by which the United Nations system and the Secretariat could, within existing resources, assist member States in organizing activities to commemorate the Day.*

Introducing the text, Anand Sharma, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, said the idea of promoting the resolution originated from the Declaration adopted at the "International Conference on Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment – Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century", which articulated a collective yearning to address hunger and poverty. He said the wide co-sponsorship of the draft resolution reflected the universal respect that Mahatma Gandhi commanded, noting that his mode of non-violence brought down colonialism and inspired leaders such as Badshah Khan. The draft was simple but significant, reaffirming the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence. Promoting non-violence in such a manner would significantly contribute to the realization of the goals set out in the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

Courtesy: Indian Committee of Youth Organizations (ICYO) Newsletter No. 2007/39 (June).