



Indian project to add 'great soul' to rights museum

"Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the pre-eminent gospel of the nonviolent movement . . . King was a student of the nonviolent movement."

— Benjamin Hooks

By Michael Lollar
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The Indian community has raised more than \$100,000 to fund a \$10,000-\$15,000 Gandhi exhibition at the National Civil Rights Museum with the rest of the money to become the start of a community assistance fund.

Dr. Manoj Jain, an infectious disease specialist, said he and five

other Indians began meeting several months ago, planning a Gandhi statue and a modest exhibition that would incorporate the inspiration for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s nonviolent protest movement as part of the museum.

Jain and management consultant Madan Birla said that interest and support for the project grew quickly, with members of the In-

dian community showing up for Sunday meetings and donating or pledging far beyond the cost of the exhibition itself.

Birla said they then arranged for money beyond exhibition costs to go into a fund to be disbursed through the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis.

Museum board chairman Dr.

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Gandhi

Benjamin Hooks, former national NAACP director, said the museum's primary mission began with its focus on the civil rights movement in the United States.

But since the museum's dedication in 1991, "the thing that kept intruding on our consciousness has become the human rights movement all over the world."

The museum's new expansion project focused on human rights since the death of King in 1968. So, Mohandas Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1948, has had only scant mention in permanent exhibitions.

Hooks said the proposed Gandhi exhibition has not been presented to the board yet, but he said it is a natural fit for the museum and its expanding focus.

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haps the pre-eminent gospel of the nonviolent movement . . . King was a student of the nonviolent movement. It reflected itself in all of his mannerisms and speeches."

"Mahatma" is an Indian title of reverence meaning "great soul."

Jain said several concepts were considered for the Gandhi sculpture, including seated and standing poses.

Choices were recently narrowed to two, and the final selection should be made this month, Birla said.

He said the statue, to be cast in Bombay, will be small enough to fit into a first-floor alcove of the original museum, visible to guests who use the stairway to exit at the end of museum tours.

If approved by the museum board, the exhibition would debut next April during the observance of the 35th anniversary of King's death.

Birla said concepts range from 27 to 39 inches tall and would be displayed against a

backdrop of Gandhi photos and a plaque with a short biography of the Indian leader.

Jain said most of the money raised so far has come from 35 to 40 donors

out of a community that includes roughly 800 Indian families or more than 5,000 individuals in the Memphis area.

More than 200 members of the Indian community are being invited to an Oct. 20 reception at the museum to expand the fund-raising effort.

Jain said the fund-raising goal is at least \$250,000.

Birla said the Gandhi project "is sort of the first project" in what will be called the Indian Community Fund of Greater Memphis.

— Michael Lollar: 529-2793



Mohandas Gandhi