



Gandhi power

*A
local
legacy*

A bust by sculptor Vinay Wagh is a centerpiece of the Gandhi exhibit at the National Civil Rights Museum. The exhibit is seen as a good fit for the museum's efforts to encompass not only civil rights but also human rights.

'Great soul' of India inspired King, exhibit

By Michael Lollar

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Gandhi was inevitable. If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. . . . We may ignore him at our own risk.

With those words, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledged Mohandas Gandhi as the inspiration for King's own

nonviolent resistance movement in the United States.

The words are now part of the co-mingled history of Gandhi and King and part of a video segment in the Gandhi exhibit at the National Civil Rights Museum.

That history of nonviolent resistance is the inspiration for an official visit to Memphis Friday by India's ambassador to the United States.

Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, a

member of India's foreign service for 40 years, will hold an inauguration ceremony for the Gandhi exhibit installed in April for the 35th anniversary of King's death.

Mansingh's visit is at the invitation of the local Indian community, which raised more than \$100,000 to fund the exhibit. When the exhibit cost less to design and build, the community used the rest of the money to set up a community assistance fund through the

Community Foundation of Greater Memphis.

Museum executive director Beverly Robertson said the exhibit is a perfect fit for the museum's expanded focus from civil rights to the broader umbrella of human rights. "Everybody is sort of familiar with the relationship between King and Gandhi, but what I've been really impressed with is the enthusiasm of the Indian community. They stepped up to the plate and said, 'Not only do we want the exhibit here; we're willing to fund it.'"

Architect Uttam Shah, a member of the Indian community, designed the exhibit, which is at the exit from the museum's main galleries. In a compact space at the foot of the exit stairway, it is like a last-minute reminder of King's reliance on the tactics that

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Ambassador Lalit Mansingh visits the National Civil Rights Museum at 3 p.m. Friday. A dinner featuring Indian foods is open to the public: 6:30 p.m. at Woodland Hills in Cordova. Tickets: \$50 per person.

For details or to order tickets, call Madan Birla at 854-7423 or Shaila Karkera, 755-0279.



At the exit of the museum's main galleries is architect Uttam Shah's compact exhibit on Mohandas Gandhi and his campaign of peaceful resistance, a model for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for desegregation in America.

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turned Gandhi into an international hero. Shah said the small space dictated a "concise" retelling of Gandhi's campaign in video segments compiled on DVD and in text on wall panels.

Its goal was to honor Gandhi as the model for King's efforts to end segregation in the United States. The exhibit includes a bust of Gandhi by third-generation Indian sculptor Vinay Wagh.

The brief history explains that the Indian-born legend received his law degree in England, then served as a legal adviser in South Africa where he was denied civil and

political rights as a nonwhite. One winter night on a train from Durban to Pretoria, Gandhi was forcibly evicted from a first-class compartment because of the color of his skin. He then spent 20 years in South Africa organizing and leading a movement of passive resistance and non-violent civil disobedience.

At 45, he returned to India around the time of World War I and spent almost a quarter of a century campaigning against unjust laws imposed by British colonialists. The British government tried to suppress his campaign, imprisoning him and his followers several times. Gandhi persisted, and India won its independence in 1947. He was known by Indians as "Mahatma," a title of

reverence meaning "great soul."

Gandhi's tactics of non-violent passive resistance were the cornerstone of King's civil rights campaign in the United States. Dr. Benjamin Hooks, museum chairman and former national director of the NAACP, is quoted in the exhibit: "Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the pre-eminent gospel of the nonviolent movement. . . . King was a student of the nonviolent movement."

Madan Birla, chairman of the Indian Community Fund of Greater Memphis, said Mansingh's visit will honor the ties between the two civil rights legends.

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