

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Our Neighbours’ Heroes” Storytelling Competition
1st Prize Winner (Lower Primary Category)



Participant's Details

Name: Muhd Khalis
Gender: Male
Age: 9-year-old
NRIC: TXXXX557F
Nationality: Singaporean
School: Yishun Primary School

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Hi, my name is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. You may call me Gandhi. I was born on October 2 1869, in a small town called Porbander, Gujarat. During that time, India was part of The British Empire. I was small, shy and not so clever in school. My family's religion is Hindu. When I was thirteen, my parents chose a wife for me. Her name is Kasturba. Like others, Kasturba and I always sulked at first but we became friendly then. Later, when I was nineteen, I asked permission from my parents to go to England to learn about law. My mother allowed me but with some conditions. I must stay away from women, wines and non-vegetarianism and I managed to do so.

I felt that England was so strange and cold. I also felt that I was very lonely and bored in England so I joined a ballroom dance class and started to take violin lessons for some entertainment. But all those still made me feel bored so I just read the *Gita*, an important holy book for Hindus and the Bible in my cabin.

In 1881, I returned to India to meet my family members. Sadly, my mother passed away when I was still in England. Only my wife and our baby son, Harilal, were left. Finding work during those days in India was hard, so in 1883, I accepted a job in South Africa. South Africa was also part of The British Empire. I was shocked to know that British brought in thousands of people from India and other parts of Asia for their farmlands in South Africa where they were treated like slaves. Then, I returned to India to fetch my family and we moved to South Africa to live there for the next twenty years.

In 1899, war broke out in South Africa between the British and the Dutch. Both countries wanted to control the diamond mines, gold fields and rich farmland in South Africa. Although I believed that war was never a solution to any quarrel, I still thought that we, the Indians should be loyal to the British. To the great amazement of the British, I organized an Indian Ambulance Service to take part in the war. My volunteers and I ran on to the battlefields, risking our own lives to carry wounded British soldiers to safety on stretchers. Despite this, once the war was over and the British and the Dutch became friends again, we were treated worse than before. But I continued to urge the Asian people in South Africa to stand up for themselves. I was loved and admired as a politician because I had a very unique belief. I explained that standing up for what is right and true should never lead to any violence. I called this *Satyagraha*, which means

Truth Force. My followers called me *Gandhibhai*, which means Brother Gandhi. I believed that Asians deserved some respect and should speak up against unfair laws. In 1906, I organized a huge meeting for Asians in South Africa. It was a huge gathering for all Hindus, Muslims and Christians. They all vowed that they would never again obey South Africa's unfair laws. They were not even allowed to walk on the same pavements as the British. By the time I left South Africa for good in 1914, some of the laws had been changed. We, the Indians did not have to pay extra taxes, and non-Christian marriages were recognized as legal. My followers and I had fought a battle against a powerful government and were victorious by peaceful methods.

Word had reached India about the remarkable *Satyagraha* movement and when I returned in 1914, thousands of people were there to welcome me. They gave me another name, Mahatma, which means "Great Soul". We had organized our very own political party, called The Indian National Congress. The Congress party was demanding sovereignty over our own country. But I wanted more than political power for us. I also wanted them to become Indian in our ways, learn own languages, dress in our clothes, live simply and help the problems of poor farmers. Soon afterwards, something very terrible happened in the state of Punjab, which made me realize that all of India has to be involved in the freedom movement.

In April 1919, the British Army General ordered the soldiers to fire on a crowd who had gathered peacefully to protest against the government. He was never punished for his cruelty, and this enraged us. I travelled all over India urging everyone - students, rich businessmen, doctors, lawyers, even farmers - to become peaceful soldiers in a determined effort to get the British to leave our homeland, India. Many gave up their jobs or studies and went in to the countryside to spread the message. All over India, people boycotted British goods, and children made bonfires of their foreign clothes and toys. Indians loved me and called me *Bapu*, which means "father". I used to say that I was a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim, and all Indians were my family. People's trust in my goodness and leadership led them to make many sacrifices in order to gain independence for our country.

Although millions loved and admired me, few had the confidence of a non-violent approach. The Indian National Congress, who discussed with the British about independence, thought that violence could sometimes be used to gain power. But I did not agree. I believed that non-violence was the only way. India made an agreement with Britain. India will support Britain in the war against Germany if the British leave India after the war as soon as possible. After the war, Britain felt that we could not run our own country but remembering about the agreement, Britain had to leave India on August 15 1947. India was then divided into two countries - India and Pakistan.

Six months after that, I was walking to an afternoon prayer at a friend's house at New Delhi. I was seventy-eight at that time. Suddenly, a man came up and greeted me. As I folded my hands in *Namaste*, the man pointed a pistol at me and fired. I was dead right after that.

Community from which the hero came from: Indian