

Social Experimenter

Life in Ashrams



8 Mar 1999

Gandhi's inspiration for a simple life, living off the land, came from reading John Ruskin, while in South Africa.

As soon as he came to India, he established Sabarmati Ashram.

One residence at Sabarmati is shown in the background in the stamp to the left.

Simply put, Ashram is the Hindi word that means "community".

While in South Africa, Gandhi had initiated community life in two ashrams.

The first was Phoenix, which he started for Satyagrahis in Transvaal.

The second was Tolstoy Farm, an experiment in simple community living, where he was joined by Christian and Jewish community leaders.

Ashram members grew their own food for the most part and did not partake in alcohol and meat eating.

Modern covers with CDS from Sabarmati and the Gandhi Ashram special pictorial cancels. Postage used is 3 Rupees- the prevailing domestic rate.

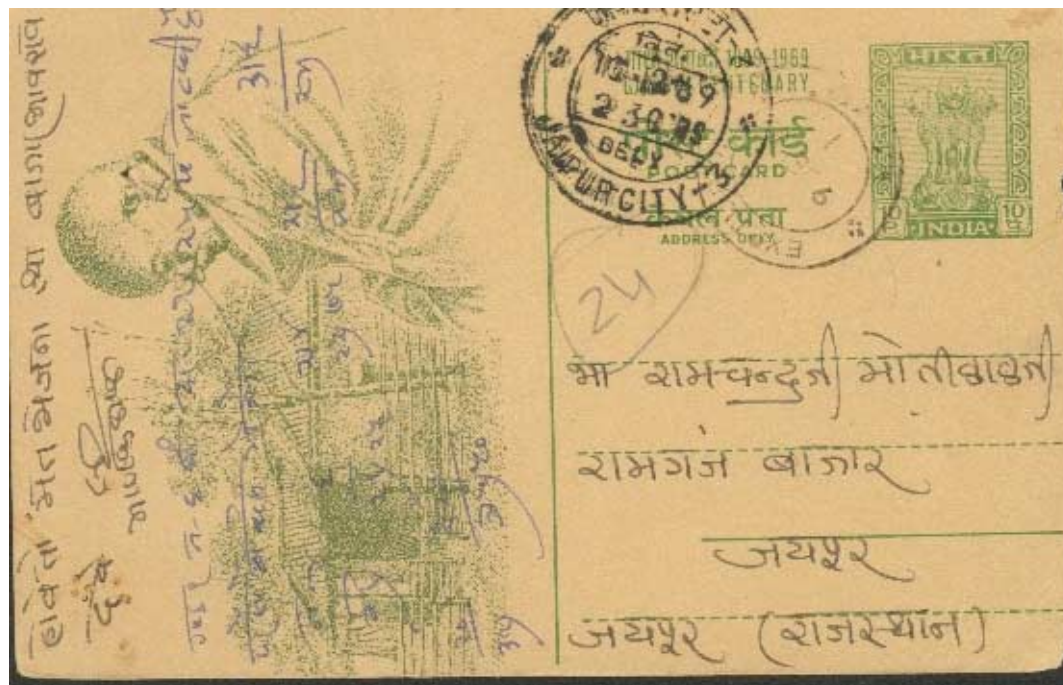


Gandhi shown walking outside
Hridaya Kunj, the simple hut at
Sabarmati.

There were about 25 men and
women resident at the ashram,
besides frequent visitors from
the Indian nationalist movement.



26 Jan 1998



The ashram was also featured in this picture postal card issued by
the Indian Post Office in 1969.

Special Pictorial cancel showing the Hridaya Kunj hut in Sabarmati Ashram.



Another Ashram that Gandhi had his follower to start was in Bihar. This was during the struggle to help farmers in Champaran. Volunteers who helped document the atrocities established and staffed the Bhi teswra Ashram in Motihari.



Sabarmati Ashram and Gandhi in front of Hridaya Kunj, which served as a guest house for visitors to the ashram- shown in preprinted in an aerogramme [left] and inland letter card [right].

Note the "refugee relief" surcharge on the aerogramme. This was for refugees from East Pakistan, which led to war and the liberation of Bangladesh.

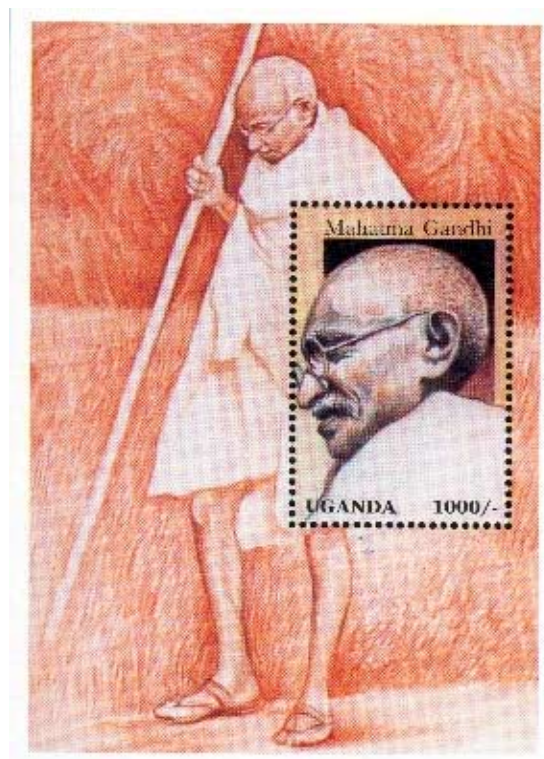


Gandhi's followers then and now have established other ashrams modeled after his simple life.

Special pictorial cancel for one such ashram, called the Kocharab Satyagraha Ashram, is shown on a postal card.



Gandhi shown walking outside "Seva Gram ["service Village"], as ashram in Central India near Wardha, where he spent his later years through the 1940s.



Stamp from the above SS used for airmail postage rate from Kampala, Uganda, to the USA.

5 Oct 1997

Gandhi and His Fasts



28 Mar 2000

If one has any doubts about who pays attention to the fasts- here's an anecdote.

In an entry in her diary dated Saturday 27 February 1943 [while in hiding], Ann Frank wrote: freedom loving Gandhi of India is holding his unpteenth fast". She'd heard it on the BBC!

Stamps showing Gandhi fasting for eliminating "untouchability" early upon his return to India and later to appeal for communal harmony.



29 Oct 1998



29 Oct 1998

Gandhi's fasts ranged from efforts to force decisions on the governments and common men.

Issue from Micronesia, showing Gandhi fasting for peace in Calcutta [1948].

Artist's signed folder for Ann Frank issue from Israel.



Partition of India



3 Aug 1995

This stamp shows an imagined image of Gandhi dancing in the streets to celebrate independence.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. To Gandhi, the tragedy of partition overwhelmed any euphoria over independence.

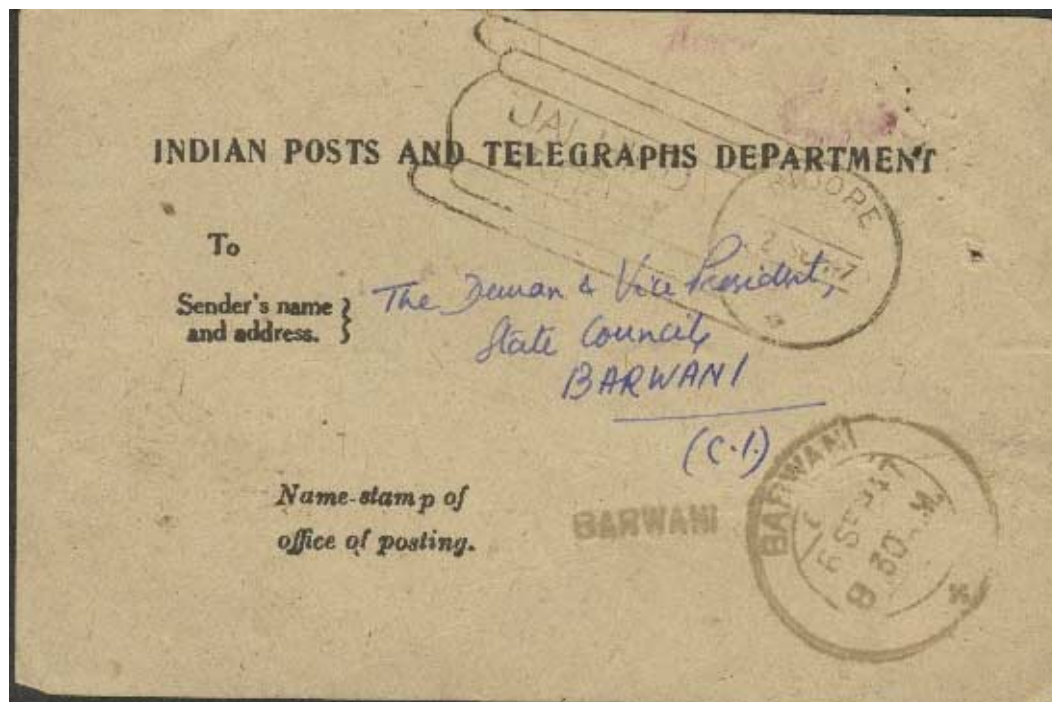
He was alone in his ashram, spinning and meditating on that day.

13 Mar 2000



The stamp in the cover above mentions that Gandhi was celebrating Independence with Nehru! He was not, as mentioned above.

The picture is from the 1946 meeting of the Indian National Congress, popularized in several stamps shown earlier.



Independence was moved up several months and there was no time to prepare commemorative stamps.

A commemorative cancel was used on August 15th.

This return receipt card was cancelled with the special mark in the princely state of Indore and mailed to another princely state of Barwani.

A cover with multiple special cancels and the postage rate from a former British Indian province to a princely state.

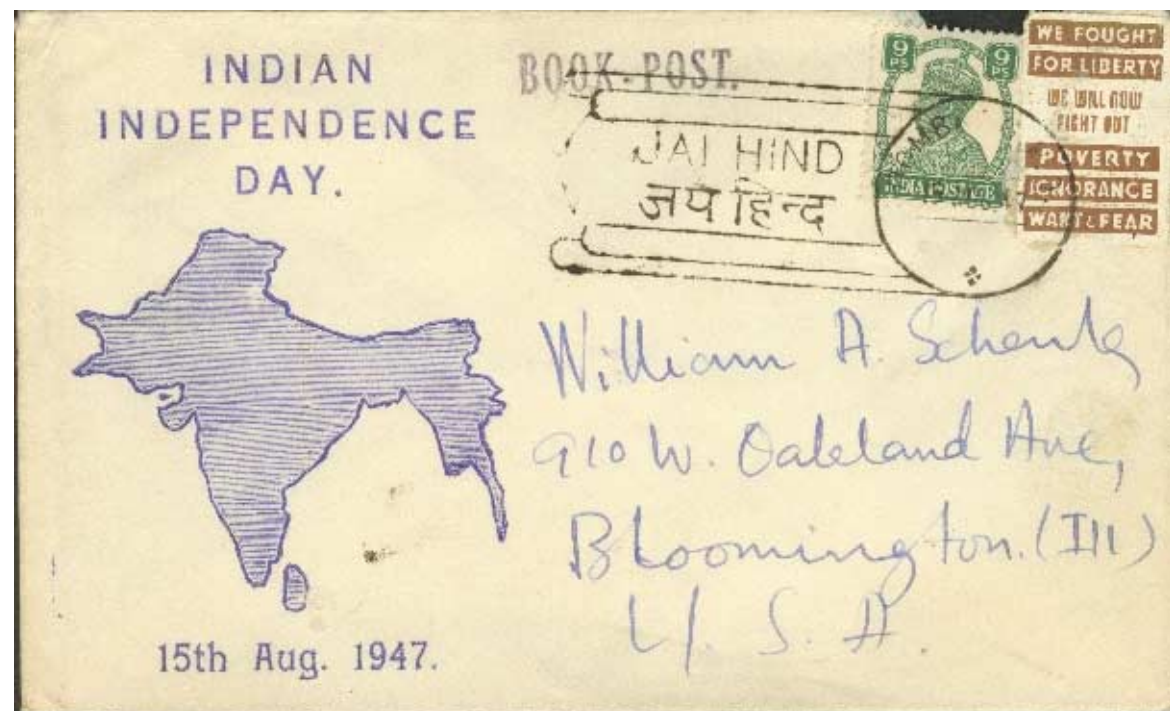
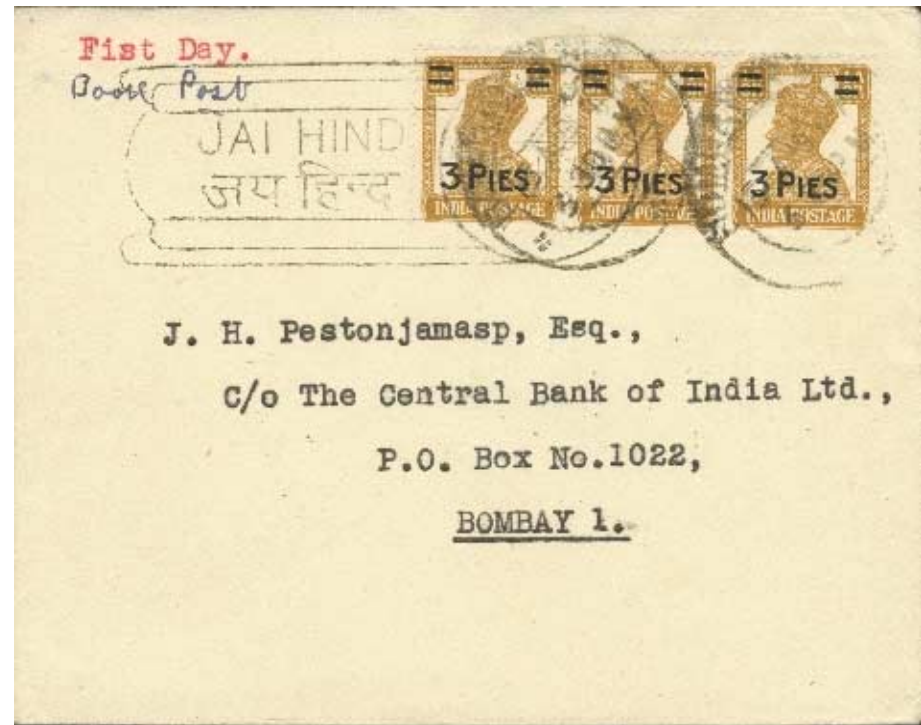


The slogan cancel says "Jai Hind", which in Hindi means "Victory to India".

Note the use of British Indian stamps with the commemorative independence cancel.

This cover was mailed to Bombay and is marked "first day" not for the stamps, but for the cancel.

It was actually "only day" - guess the user meant - first day of Independent India.



Interesting Cinderella tied to a postage stamp in this letter mailed to the USA.

The euphoria of independence is evident, with the cachet inaccurately showing India, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon and Burma all as one in the map!

Burma and Ceylon were separate entities and achieved independence later.

The Last Fast



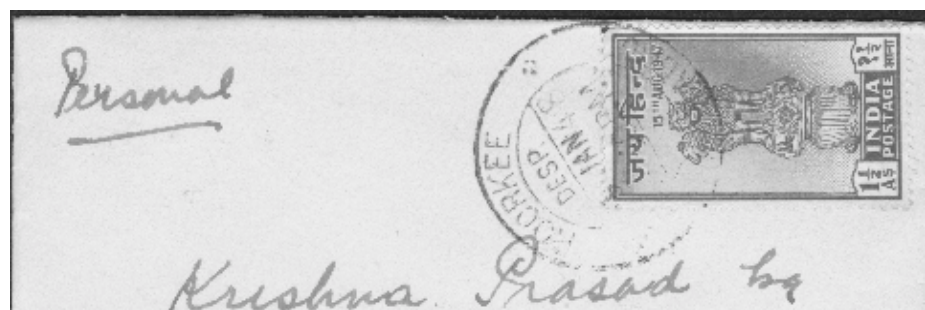
These were propaganda slogans used by the Delhi and Calcutta post offices during the last of Gandhi's many "fasts".

Over five months had passed since the partition of the south Asian subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the two nations were still embroiled in gruesome and bitter civil wars.

In an effort to influence the frenzied masses, 79-year old Gandhi started fasting on January 13th.

The first cover, official mail from Calcutta to New Delhi, still carries British India's official franking "GRI" and was mailed on the 15th. It carries the special slogan mark in English and Hindi.

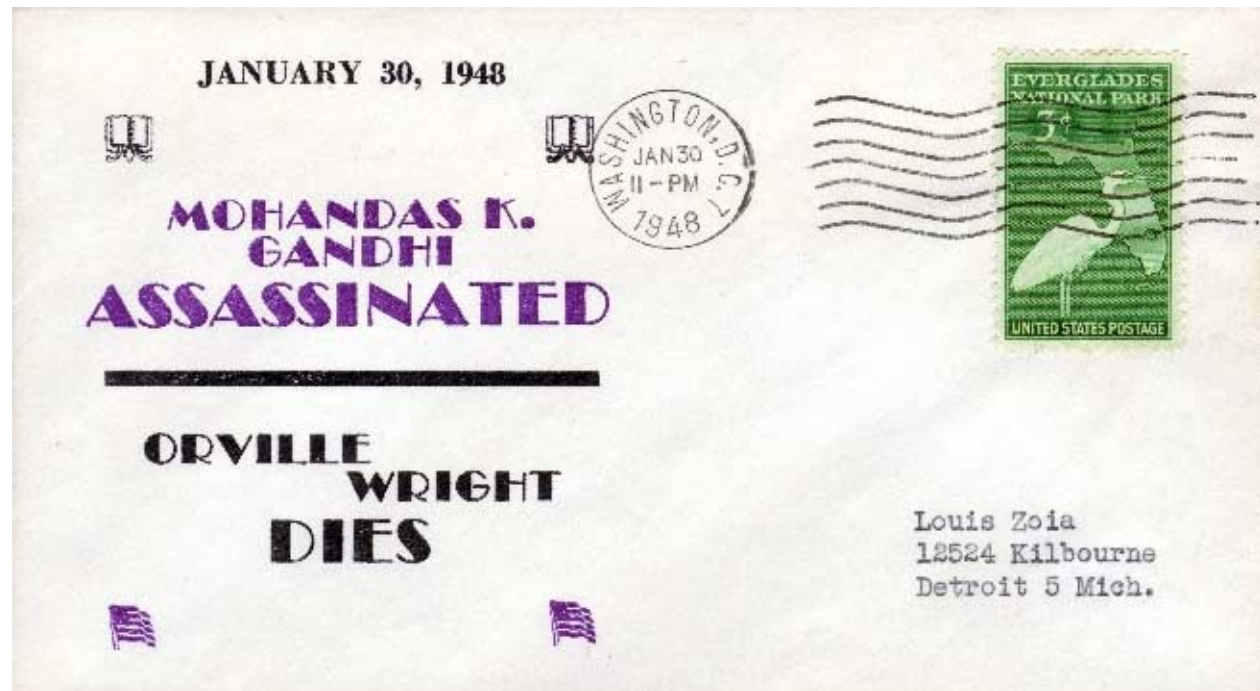
The English slogan reads "COMMUNAL HARMONY WILL SAVE GANDHIJI".



The second cover from Roorkee, was also mailed on the 15th, with the slogan mark on the obverse. The stamp used was the 1½ anna issue commemorating India's independence (first free Indian issue) and the propaganda slogan was only in English.

The Hindi slogan more emphatically states that "IT IS ONLY THROUGH COMMUNAL UNITY THAT GANDHIJI CAN SURVIVE". Delivery markings on the back indicate that it arrived in Delhi three days later, the day Gandhi ended his last fast.

The Assassin's Bullet



Gandhi was killed by a Hindu fanatic on January 30th 1948.
Event cover also shows that Orville Wright died the same day.



Only stamp to show Gandhi laying in rest after his death.

Mourners and dignitaries from all over the world attended the funeral and sent condolences.

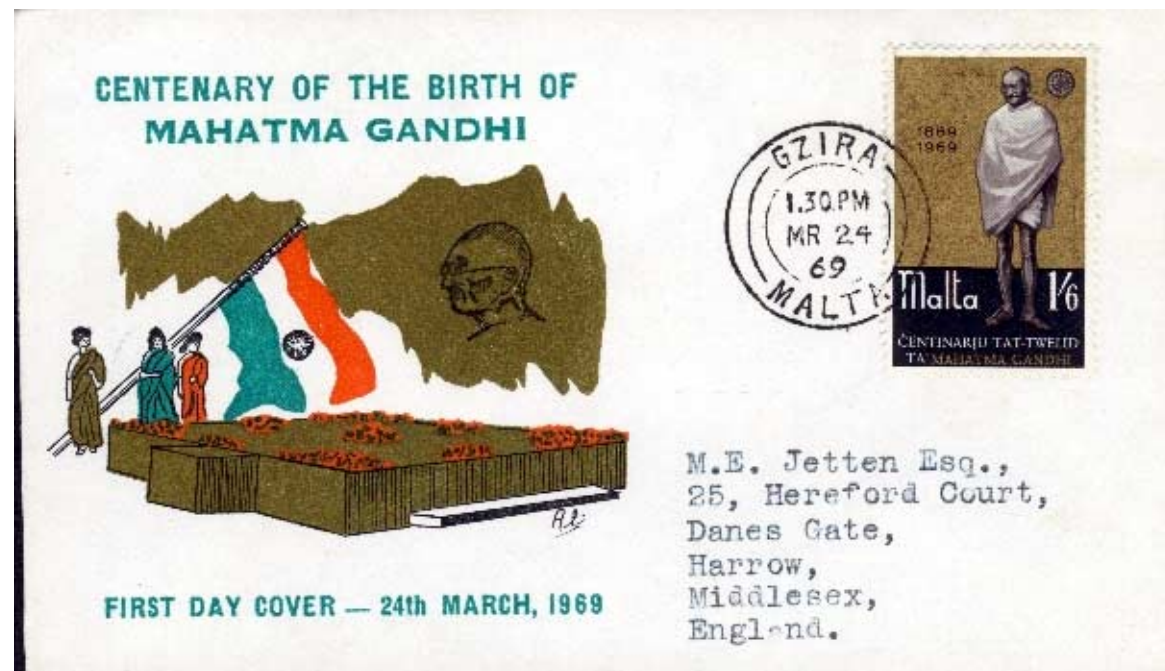
Cancel on card showing the only personal possessions Gandhi had on his death.



Stamp showing the last meeting between Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, held the day before the assassination.

Gandhi was pressing the leaders of the Indian National Congress for normalization of relations with Pakistan.

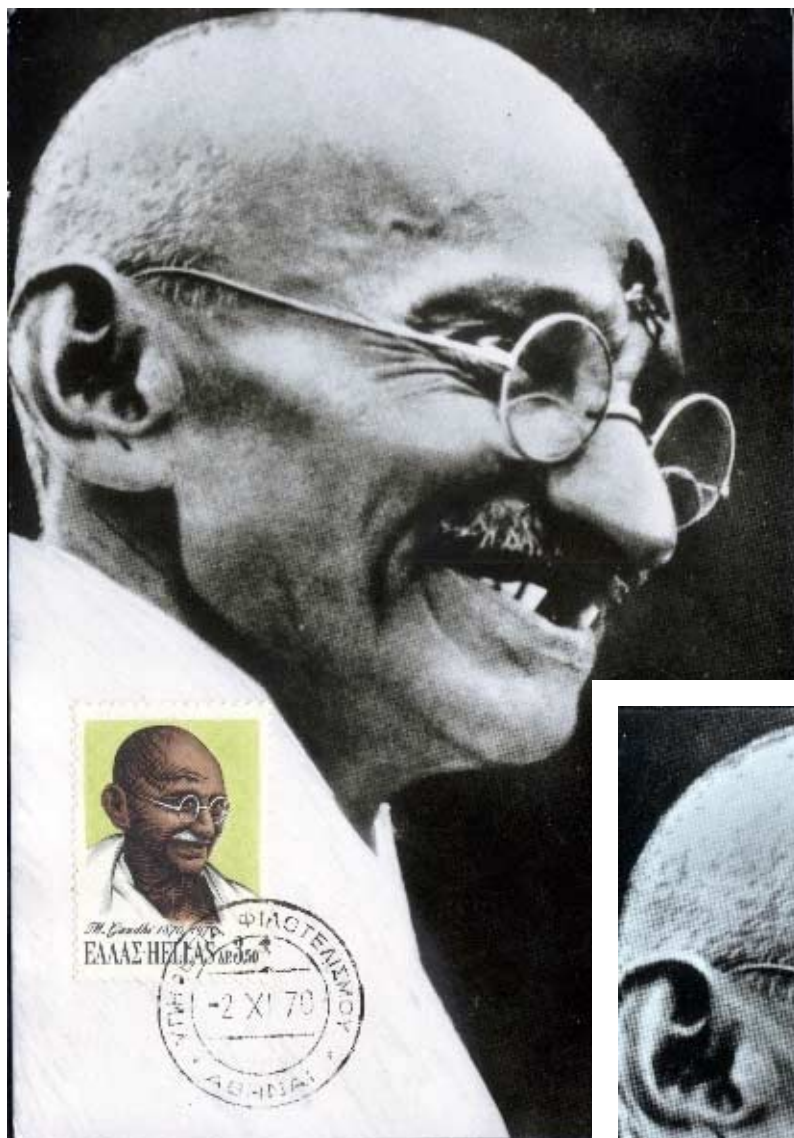
29 Oct 1998



Cachet of FDC shows the funeral site- known as "Rajghat" outside New Delhi.

Special cancel on this cover also shows Rajghat.

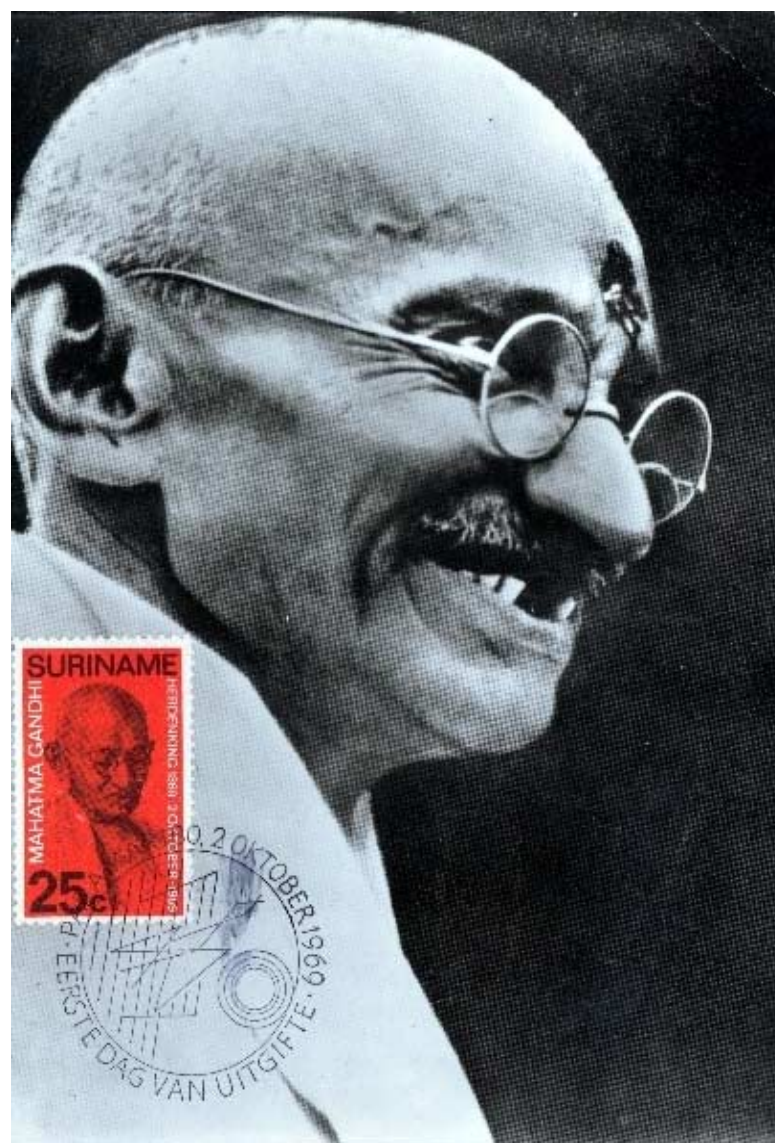




Not photogenic at all.

These two Maxim cards show a picture of Gandhi that is untouched. The flesh and blood man who was all "soul", even when his body was falling apart.


The black background lends itself to the appearance of a mourning card and appears appropriate to show at this juncture.



A Life Condensed

Now that the life was out of the body, it was time for one and all to condense all his experiences into sound bytes.

His entire life could be compressed into a simplistic narrative in a single page, as shown in this post office bulletin from Malta.

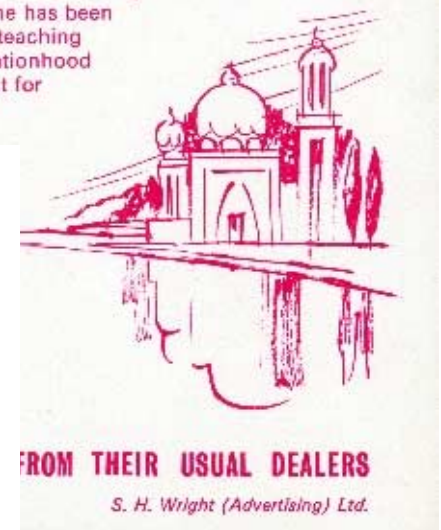
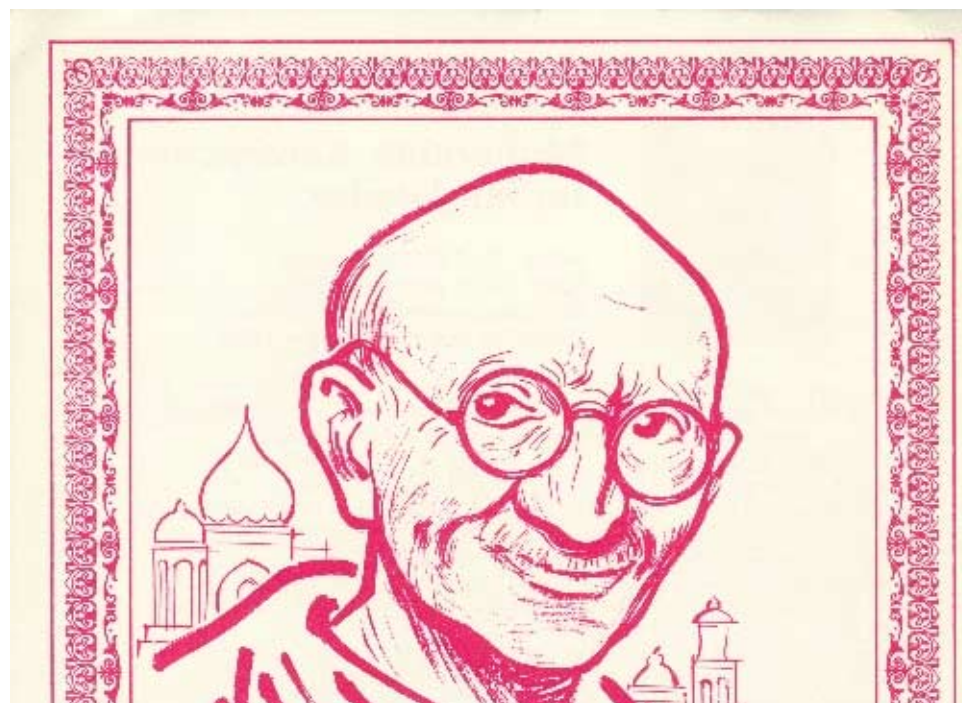


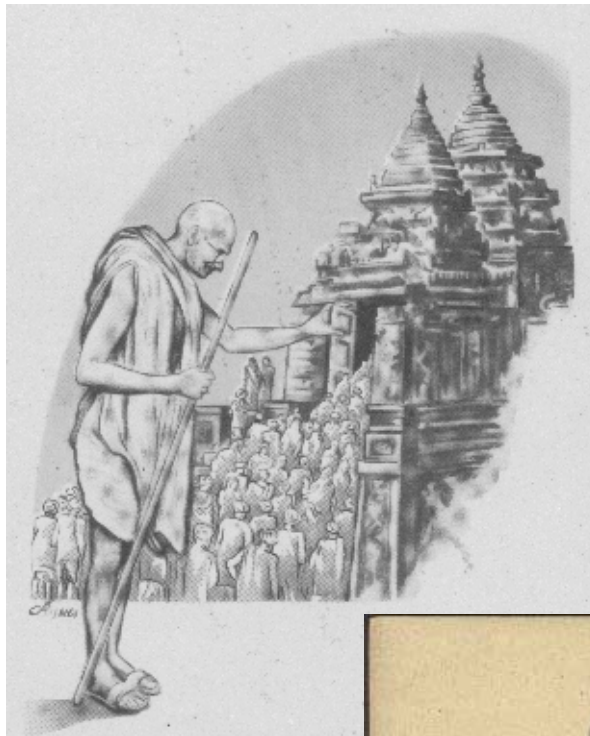
GANDHI

Mohandas Karamchand: Indian Leader

Born 2nd October 1869
Died 30th January 1948
Educated in India and London
Called to the English Bar 1889

In 1893 he gave up a successful and lucrative Bombay legal practice to live on £1 per week in South Africa where he spent 21 years opposing discriminatory legislation against Indian Settlers. In 1914 he returned to India and, while supporting the British in World War I, took an increasing interest in the Home Rule movement (Swaraj) of which very soon he was the leader and master of the Congress organisation. The years following were spent in ceaseless agitation and civil disobedience resulting in periods of detention until, in 1937, he assisted in the constitutional compromise under which Congress members accepted office in the new provincial legislatures. During the Second World War, after failing to obtain complete Independence as a condition of support for Britain, he was arrested for concurring in civil disobedience to obstruct the war effort. In 1946 he negotiated with the British Cabinet Mission a new constitutional structure and in May 1947 hailed Britain's decision to grant India independence as "the noblest act of the British Nation". His last months were darkened by communal strife between Hindu and Moslem. He was assassinated in Delhi by a Hindu fanatic. In his lifetime Mahatma ('great soul') Gandhi was venerated as a moral teacher, a reformer who sought an India as free from caste as as from materialism, a dedicated patriot who gave the Swaraj movement a new quality. In Asia, particularly, he has been regarded as a great influence for peace whose teaching had a message not only for India—of whose nationhood he became the almost mystical incarnation—but for the whole world.





Inside of presentation folder from the Gandhi memorial issue of India, with another one-page "bio" of his complex life.



India has, through the ages, produced many great men and women; but none, surely, greater than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He was great in the nobility of the truths that he preached; great in the magnitude of his public achievements and great in the simplicity and selflessness of his personal life.

As a young man seeking justice for the Indians in South Africa he evolved the method of action that will for ever be associated with his name - Satyagraha, passive resistance. With this he returned to India, where his countrymen were striving to free themselves from British rule. He gave them his gospel of truth and non-violence, put courage into their hearts, stealed their will to revolt, and led them ultimately, after years of suffering and sacrifice, to their goal of Independence.

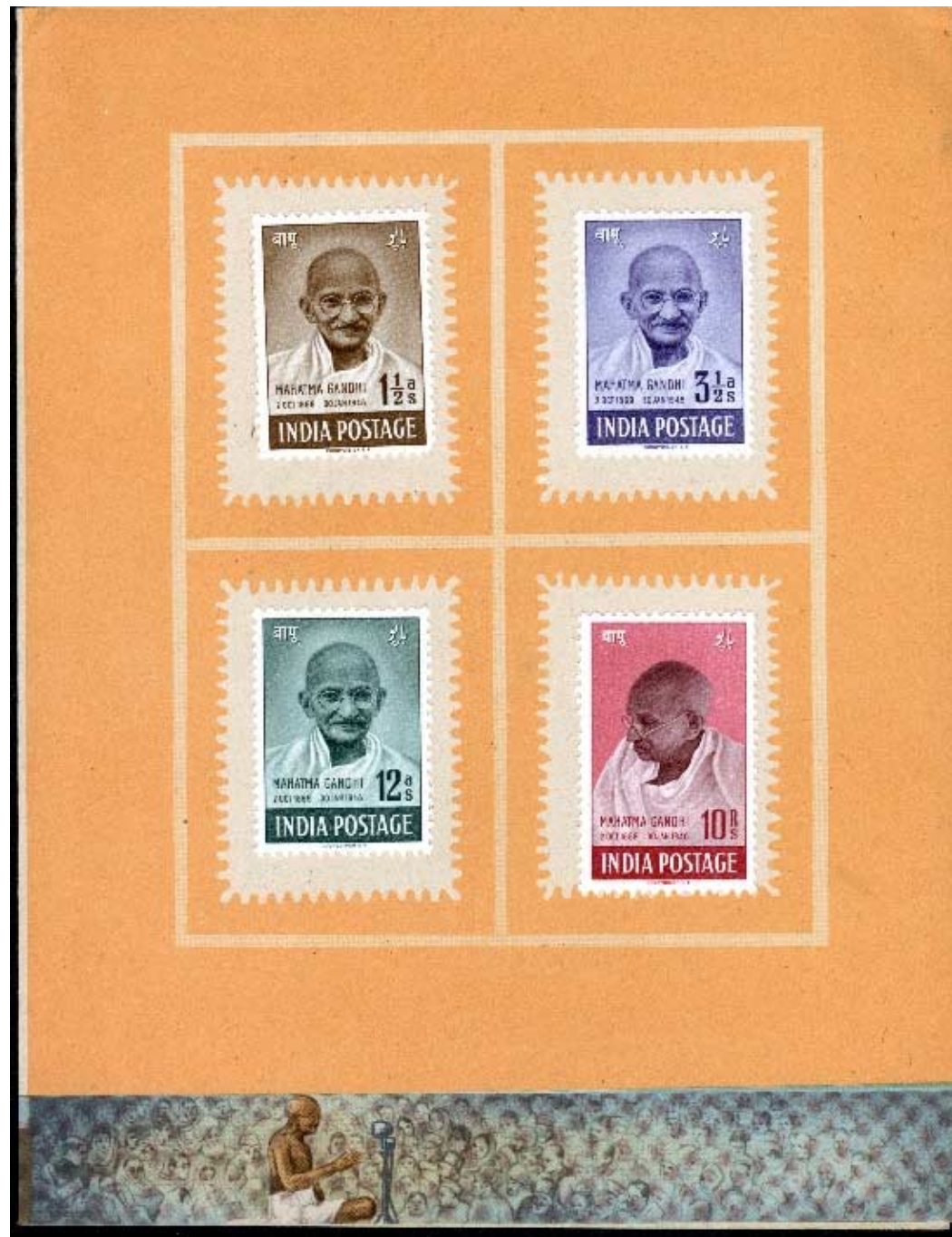
To Mahatma Gandhi, national liberation did not, however, mean only the breaking of the chains of political slavery. It meant also the elevation of the 'Untouchables', the Harijans, the lowest of the lowly, to a place of honour and dignity. And it meant the entire programme of economic betterment, of self-help and self-sufficiency, that was epitomised in his advocacy of the Charka.

Towards the end, his life was almost wholly devoted to the promotion of better relations between Hindus and Muslims. Holding all religions in respect, he saw them not as barriers between one community and another, but as the supreme solvent of barriers, binding men together in mutual charity and tolerance.

He was born at Porbander, in Kathiawar, in 1869, 79 years ago, but he belongs not to Kathiawar or to India, but to the whole world. In an age shaken by violence and greed and fear, millions in every country acknowledged him as foremost amongst those who showed them the way to a sane and ethical mode of life.

On January 30, 1948, in New Delhi, an assassin's bullet put an end to his life. But his memory is imperishable; it will be as a beacon and an inspiration so long as men continue to fight for truth against falsehood, for freedom from tyranny, and for justice and brotherliness against violence and oppression.

Indian Philatelic Memorial



15 Aug 1948

The first set of Gandhi stamps, issued on the first Anniversary of India's independence. Originally intended to be issued on Gandhi's 80th birthday (2 October 1949), the first set of Gandhi stamps were released prematurely six months after Gandhi's assassination, on the first anniversary of India's independence. Until today, these are the only Indian stamps to contain descriptive text both in Devanagiri (Hindi) and Arabic (Urdu) script, reflecting on Gandhi's relentless struggle for communal harmony and religious tolerance. Both languages refer to the late leader as he often was- as Father.