

Special Commemorative Edition



No. 06/11

October, 2011

From the Ambassadors Desk

Dear Friends,

On the 2nd day of Autumn when golden leaves were beginning to fall, we commemorated Gandhi Jayanti in a very special way. On 2nd October '11, on the birthday of the Father of the Indian Nation, Dr. Karan Singh, Member of Parliament, President ICCR, author, poet and philosopher, inaugurated Gandhi Centre (Gandhi Centrum), the first Indian Cultural Centre in the Netherlands. In doing so, he brought to fruition a 40 year old, long cherished dream of Government of India, of the Indian and Surinami Hindustani Diaspora as well as of the Embassy. In the presence of H.E. Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, Hon'ble Mayor of the Hague, the event was attended by over 300 persons including 30 Ambassadors (from our neighbourhood Ambassadors of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UAE and Vietnam were present), H.E. Marco Hennis, the Grand Master of the Royal Household of Her Majesty the Queen, Members of the Dutch Parliament, leaders of the Indian and Surinami Hindustani Community, media intellectuals and artists. The realization of this project could not have been possible without my colleagues in the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, and notably its Director General Mr. Suresh Goel as well as the constant encouragement and support of its President Dr. Karan Singh.

This is therefore a special moment for the Embassy. Alexander Solzhenitsyn had said in the "First Circle" for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970 that:

"Everyone has his special time of life when he manifests himself most fully, feels most profoundly himself and produces the greatest effect on himself and on others. Anything that happens afterwards, however outwardly significant, is always a decline by comparison."

That moment was with us on 2nd October '11 at the Hague.

Let me pay tribute to my own colleagues at the Embassy and notably Dr. Pankaj Sharma who was the intermediary for the Embassy on all important issues and the preparatory process leading up to its establishment. This was a short time-frame even by corporate standards! The Committee for the establishment of an Indian Cultural Centre had its first meeting under the Chairmanship of the Ambassador on 30th May and decided that the Centre should be established by October 2011. We were therefore well within our self-imposed deadline! May I also thank each and every member of the Committee for their dedication and hard work. We also met as sub-committees including the Search Committee headed by Deputy Mayor of the Hague Mr. Rabin Baldewsingh, the Programme Committee headed by Mr. Harry Bahl and the Finance Committee headed by Mr. Ram Lakhina. May I particularly thank Mr. Jasbir Singh and Mr. Harry Bahl for their role in locating the premises of the Gandhi Centre and Mr. Dev Gurnani and Mr. Harry Bahl for their contribution to the organisation of a cultural extravaganza on 2nd October.¹

2nd October began with the ribbon cutting ceremony. The traditional prayer "Ganesh Vandana", was followed by Mahatma Gandhi's favourite Bhajans and Patriotic songs sung by Ms. Moushumi Oberoi and Mr. Indroneil Roy; dramatic rendering of an adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's poem based on Kunti Karn Samvad in Mahabharata by Ms. Shoma Chatterjee and Mr. Nilanjan Mukherjee and concluding with a Lecture cum Musical Intermezzi on "Tagore in Netherlands" by the distinguished Dutch Musicologist and Composer Professor Rokus de Groot. Tribute was also paid to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore whose 150th Anniversary is being commemorated through the presentation of a portrait to the Centre by eminent painter and sculptor Dr. Manas Roy.

The Embassy is overwhelmed by the written and oral support for the Gandhi Centre from our Diaspora and Dutch friends as well as from the Neighbourhood. Many interesting cultural activities are being planned including the staging of Badal Sarkar's famous play "Ballabhpurer Roopkatha", musical concerts, organisation of Dutch conversation and Hindi classes as well as yoga and meditation classes. Separately, an exciting new cultural event is being organized. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's original paintings are being exhibited for the first time outside India in the Netherlands in the Van der Togt Museum, Amstelveen from 18 November 2011 to 7 January 2012. Curated by renowned Curator Prof. R. Shivkumar of Shantiniketan, the Exhibition would be accompanied by six masterpieces of Satyajit Ray films as well as an Exhibition of original Kantha art by Ms. S. Dudeja,

¹ **MEMBERS OF ICC Committee:** Awasthi, Ramnath; Bagchi, Pallab; Bahl, Harry (Chairman, Programme Committee); Bains, Gurinder; Bains, H.S.; Baldewsingh, Rabin (Chairman, Search Committee); Bhati, R.K.; Bhattacharjee, Debashish; Chatterjee, Shantanu; Gada, Dennis; Gurnani, R.D.D.; Kumar, Satender; Lakhina, R.L. (Chairman, Administrative & Financial Committee); Madan, B.N.; Mishre, Rambharan; Mackay, William; Maliye, Amita; Mehra, Rajiv; Mukherjee, Bhaswati (Chairperson); Saleh, Wahid; Narayan, Shankar; Rajamurugan, M; Sensarma, Ashish; Sharma, Pankaj; Tewari, Rajendra.

thanks to the support by Secretary (Culture) Shri Jawhar Sircar who would be inaugurating the Exhibition.

What could be more appropriate in an increasingly troubled world than to have our Gandhi Centre here in the Netherlands? Gandhiji's philosophy and ideology are more relevant today than ever before. Non violence is a creed for the strong and noble minded. The Gandhi Centre will serve as a window to our ancient civilisational and cultural heritage and will interact with our host country with whom our relations go back 400 years. This newsletter gives glimpses of the inauguration of the Centre. I invite you all to participate fully in all its activities.

Warm Regards,

Bhaswati Mukherjee

(Bhaswati Mukherjee)
Ambassador

Prelude

Having located a beautiful building in the historic and picturesque area of Scheveningen and in conformity with Dutch traditions, an Open House was organized to welcome the neighborhood and disseminate future activities of the Centre. About 100 persons attended the event. The Community warmly welcomed the establishment of the Centre and conveyed their appreciation for the initiative taken by the Indian Government.

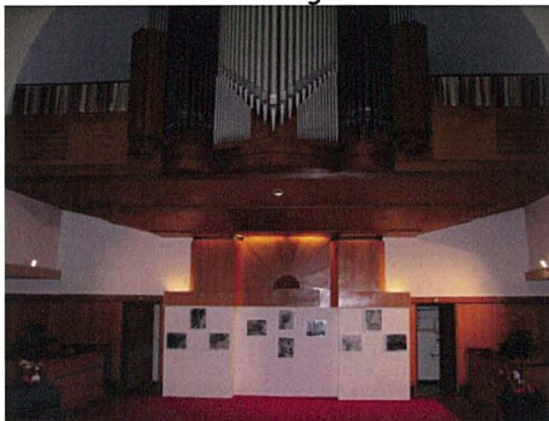
Glimpses of the Gandhi Centre



Building at Tesselsestraat 65-67,
The Hague



Ambassador welcoming the neighbourhood
on 17th September



Gandhiji's photos on back wall of stage



Hussein's digital painting of Mother
Teresa, courtesy National Museum, Delhi

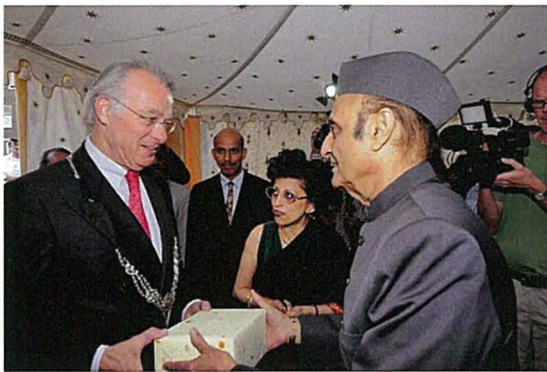


Shri Jasbir Singh welcoming the
neighbourhood on 17th September

The Official Inauguration of the Gandhi Centre

In a befitting tribute to the ideals and message of peace and non-violence propounded by Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhiji was honoured in the Netherlands in a special way through opening of an Indian Cultural Centre named "Gandhi Centre" in The Hague on the occasion of his birth anniversary on 2nd October 2011.

The Centre was inaugurated by H.E. Dr. Karan Singh, MP and President of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in the presence of H.E. Mr. Jozias van Aartsen, Hon'ble Mayor of The Hague and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.



Dr. Karan Singh presenting a Memento to
H.E. Mr. Jozias Van Aartsen, Mayor of
The Hague



Mayor of The Hague being welcomed by
Indian Ambassador



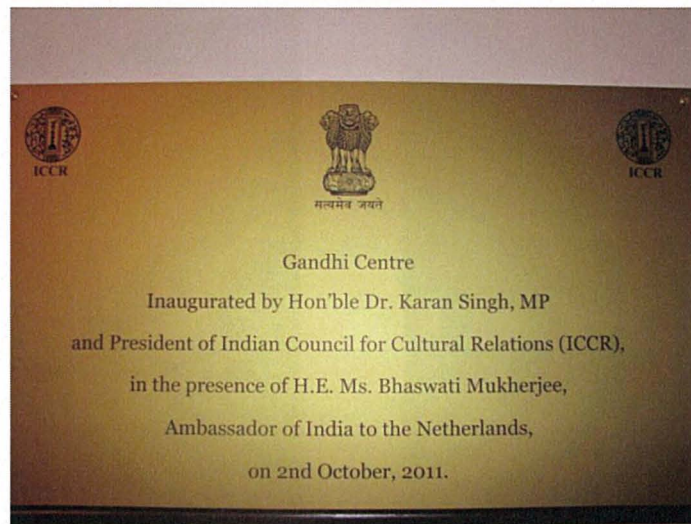
Dr. Karan Singh lighting Ceremonial Lamp



Mayor of The Hague lighting Ceremonial
Lamp



Cutting of Red Ribbon by Dr. Karan Singh and HE Mr. Jozias Van Aartsen, Mayor of the Hague. Navya Kala our young member presenting the Scissors.



Plaque commemorating the opening of Gandhi Centre

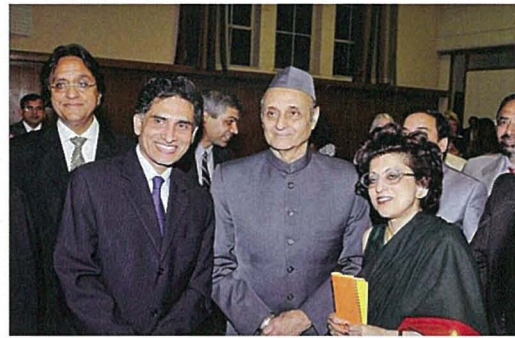
The solemn inauguration ceremony was attended by a distinguished audience of over 300 persons including Ambassadors and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps, the Grand Master of the Queen's Household, Members of the Dutch Parliament, leaders of the Surinamese Hindustani Community, media, intellectuals and artists.



Welcoming our guests.



German Ambassador to Netherlands looks on.



Ambassador of Pakistan HE Mr. Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhary with Dr. Karan Singh



Ambassador of Peru HE Mr. Allan Wagner at the event.



Ambassador with Ms. Erica Terpstra, M.P.



With Mayor of The Hague, Grand Master of Royal Household, President, ICCR and Others

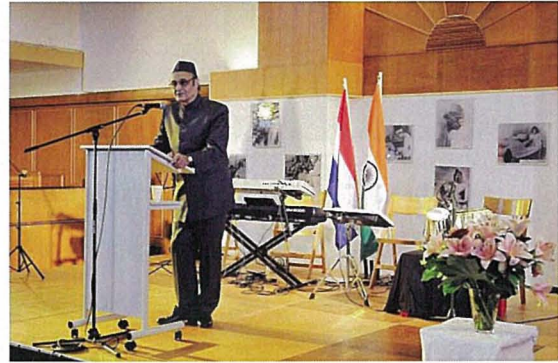
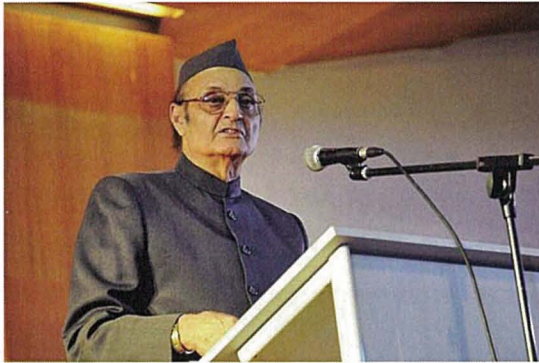


Our distinguished Audience

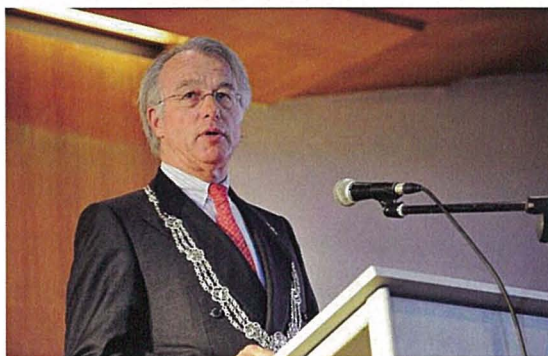
During the brief introduction by Ambassador Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, she recalled the significance of the fulfillment of a 40 year old dream.



In his inaugural address, Dr. Karan Singh referred to the significance and relevance of Gandhiji in today's world and expressed the hope that the Centre would flourish and meet the aspirations of the Indo-Dutch community. Dr. Singh underlined the importance of Cultural Centres as effective instruments for fostering cultural relations and people to people contacts.



In his address, the Mayor of the City of The Hague, H.E. Mr. Jozias van Aartsen said that the opening of the Gandhi Centre in The Hague on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary heralded a new chapter in the history of contacts between the two countries. He said that The Hague, which is an international city of peace and the Hindustani capital of continental Europe was proud to have the Gandhi Centre. He referred to the statue of Mahatma Gandhi which had been unveiled in The Hague in 2004 as a homage to the Mahatma and which was also a monument reminding of the Hindustani immigration which took place in two waves - first from India to Surinam and then from Surinam to the Netherlands. He concluded by quoting Mahatma Gandhi and said "I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." He assured fullest cooperation of The Hague Municipality to the Gandhi Centre.



Cultural Programme



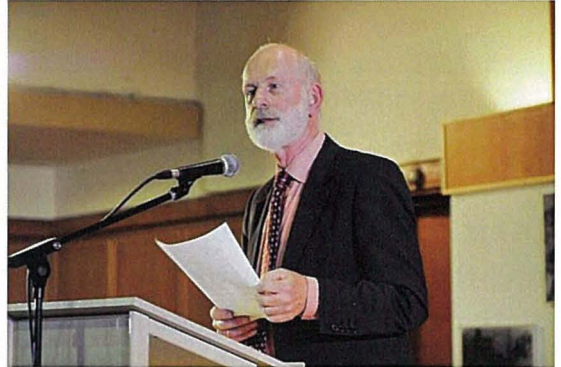
Moushumi Oberoi singing Gandhiji's favourite Bhajan



Vedic Chants by Delft University Students



Nilanjan Mukherjee and Soma Chatterjee staging Kunti Karna Samvad



Lecture by Prof. Dr. Rokus De Groot from Leiden University.



Gurudev's portrait being presented by renowned artist Dr. Manas Roy



Delft University students being given flowers

Media Coverage

The establishment of Indian Cultural Centre in The Hague engaged the attention of Indian Diaspora, mainstream Dutch community, Dutch government and media. The event was widely covered by the electronic and print media and the wire agency ANP. Leading Dutch national newspapers, De Telegraaf and Ad Den Haag and a regional paper, Reformatorisch Dagblad, carried articles in their September 8, 11 and 30 issues. Ad Den Haag reported that the residents of The Hague would soon be able to delight in Indian culture consequent opening of Gandhi Centre in Tesselsestraat. The paper reported that the Gandhi was the ultimate exponent of cultural diversity and of the strength and resilience of cultures to thrive in juxtaposition to other cultures, so symbolic of the city of The Hague. The paper further mentioned that the keenly awaited Centre by over 200000 strong Indian community, would organize Yoga and meditation lessons, Ayurveda, art, and Indian language lessons. The Centre's plans to offer scholarships to students interested in studying in Indian music, languages and performing arts has found mention in the press coverage. The De Telegraf reported that with this Centre, the Indian Government wants to strengthen relations with the Netherlands. Electronic media also covered the inaugural event. OHM TV interviewed Dr. Karan Singh and a host of persons from the large number of guests that attended the inauguration by Dr. Karan Singh, MP and President, ICCR.

Indian media also covered the event. Antrarashtriya Sahyog Parishad (ARSP) and India News Abroad requested the Embassy for press release and images of the inaugural event. As this issue goes to press, more news items about coverage by Indian wire agencies and newspapers are trickling in.

Our Future Plans

The opening of the Centre fulfills the long standing aspirations of the 200,000 Indian and Surinami Hindustani community in the Netherlands as well as the Indian Embassy and Government of India. It is the 36th Centre established by ICCR worldwide and will act as an important platform for developing and maintaining contacts with Dutch friends including students, teachers, academicians, cultural personalities and artists to project the rich and diverse cultures of India and the Netherlands. A library containing substantial collections of Indian films, documentaries and other multi-media material

related to India and Indo-Dutch heritage will be a part of the Centre. The Centre would organise regular lectures, panel discussions, seminars, and performing arts on subjects of contemporary and cultural interest, aimed primarily at promoting Indo-Dutch relations. Another important element of the Centre's activities would be teaching of Yoga, Meditation, Ayurveda, Art, Indian languages, etc. The Centre would also offer scholarships to Dutch students to learn Indian Music, Languages and performing Arts and also sponsor visits of experts from both sides and support other cultural exchanges.

Close on the heels of inauguration, Indian Associations and organizations have approached the Centre for staging a famous play by Badal Sircar, a musical concert for paying tribute to Jagjit Singh and for organizing Hindi classes. Among the important events in the pipeline on Centre's own initiatives are mounting of "The Last Harvest" an exhibition of Tagore's paintings to be curated by renowned curator Prof. R. Sivakumar of Shantiniketan, "Soil" a cross cultural exhibition of four Indian and four Netherlands artistes to be jointly curated by Sushma K. Behl with active support of ICCR and a Film Festival in April 2012. The Programme Committee of Gandhi Centre comprising officials of the Embassy and leaders of Indian and Surinami Hindustani Community under the Chairpersonship of Ambassador is going to meet soon to finalize the events.

Access our website at: <http://www.indianembassy.nl> for more news !



Mayor of The Hague leaving Gandhi Centre



After the event: Dr. Karan Singh, Mayor of The Hague, Ambassador, Mr. Hari Bahl and Mr. D. Gurnani