

Martyrs day

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MARTYRS DAY The Nation pays homage to the martyrs who suffered and died for the freedom, welfare, and progress of the country, on January 30 every year. It was on January 30, 1948 that Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated a little before the sunset when he was going to attend his evening prayers. Gandhiji was the greatest among the lakhs and lakhs of martyrs and freedom fighters who sacrificed everything for the country's Independence, welfare and progress. Since Gandhiji's martyrdom on January 30, 1948 this day was declared as the Martyrs' Day. Since then every year the Nation pays homage to the Mahatma and other martyrs on this day.

On Martyr's Day, the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, and the three service Chiefs gather at the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat and lay wreaths on the Samadhi decorated with multi-colour flowers. The armed forces personnel blow the bugles sounding the Last Post. The inter-services contingent reverse arms as a mark of respect to the martyrs. A two-minute silence in memory of the Father of the Nation and other martyrs is observed throughout the country at 11 a. m. At Rajghat, in front of the Samadhi of Gandhiji, all-religion prayers are held and bhajans dear to him sung.

January 30, 1948 is the saddest and most poignant day in our history. For on this day, 78-year old Mahatma Gandhi was killed in Birla House (now known as Gandhi Smriti) when he was going to join his evening prayers. This was the biggest tragedy that the Nation faced after we achieved our hard-won Independence under the leadership of Gandhiji. I was a few yards away when this tragedy occurred. Like other days, I was slowly walking behind the Mahatma towards the prayer ground. I saw a well-built, tall young man, clad

in khaki, rushing from the peaceful crowd of men, women and children, who came to attend the prayers, towards Gandhiji.

Gandhiji was then ascending the steps to the prayer ground. The restless young man tried to touch Gandhiji's feet. Gandhiji's grand daughters, Manu and Ava, told him that Gandhiji did not like people touching his feet. They both tried to stop the man and told him not to delay the Mahatma who was already late for the prayers. But the man pushed them aside and the prayer books and other things which they were carrying fell on the ground. The young man, who had a pistol, suddenly fired three shots from close range at Gandhiji. The Mahatma fell on the ground, his white khadi dress soaked in blood.

A man of prayer, Gandhiji remembered God and said, " Hey Ram : Hey Ram. " It was 5. 17 p. m. Men, women and children, who came to join the prayers, were shocked and wept aloud to see the Father of the Nation being killed in front of their eyes. A bleeding Gandhiji was rushed to the room where he was staying. The news of his assassination spread like a fire. Despite one of the coldest nights in India's capital, thousands of people crowded in front of Birla House and wanted to have Gandhiji's darshan. Inside the room there were tragic scenes. Pandit Nehru, our first Prime Minister, wept like a child.

Sardar Patel was seen consoling him. Doctors rushed into the room. They examined Gandhiji. They remained dumb. Slowly, they signified that the Mahatma was dead. This was my worst and saddest reporting of the Mahatma after about four years' tour as the United Press of India correspondent with him in various parts of the country. I wept but I had to do my duty. After flashing the news to my office, I rushed to the room where

Gandhiji's body was lying. Recitations from the Gita and other scriptures were going on. I remained whole night in that room. Lights in the room were switched off. An oil lamp was lit.

There was darkness everywhere. Sitting in the room, I wrote an article titled " That Darkest Night" which was well published. Outside the room, there was a huge waiting and weeping crowd. The people were shouting in choked voice " Allow us to have last darshan of our beloved Bapuji". The entire area rent with repeated cries of " Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai". In order to allow the people to have darshan of the Mahatma, his body was placed on the high table in the adjacent room. A powerful lamp was lit so that the people could have an easy darshan. As the doors of the room were opened, there was a huge rush.

Everybody wanted to touch Gandhiji's feet. An old woman fell down in the rush and fainted. There was so much confusion that the doors of the room had to be closed. Then Gandhiji's body was taken to the roof of the house and placed under powerful light to enable the vast multitude of people have a last glimpse of him. In bitter cold, Gandhiji was given a bath at 1 a. m. The blood-soaked clothes were then removed from his body. I then saw three bullet wounds on his body. Two bullets had pierced through his body. The third bullet remained in his body. The wounds were still bleeding. The scene was tragic.

After the bath, Gandhiji was dressed in khaddar loin cloth presented to him on his last birthday. He was garlanded with a hank of hand-spun thread. He was decorated with flowers and garlands. Gandhiji's favourite Ram Dhun and bhajans were recited. Gandhiji's watch then struck 3. 30 a. m. Everyday, he

was used to hold his morning prayers at that time. All-religion prayers were held that day as well. His grand daughters, Ava and Manu, sang a Hindi bhajan befitting the occasion. This bhajan is as follows: " Karle Sringer, Chatur Albele, (Tujhe) Sajan ke Ghar Jana Hoga, Miitti Orhawan, Mitti Bichawan, Mitti me hi Mil Jana Hoga. Karle Sringer.....

Nahale Dhole Shish Gothale Phir Wahan-se Nahi Ana Hoga Karle Sringer " As the prayers were going on, the first rays of the sun entered the room. That dreadful night, which the whole nation passed in anguish and tears, came to an end. Preparations for Gandhiji's last journey to Rajghat were being made. A mass of humanity had crowded in Delhi on that occasion. The cremation at Rajghat was attended by world dignitaries. Gandhiji, alongwith lakhs of men and women who sacrificed for the country's cause, became a martyr. The cellular dark jails of the Andaman Islands, where the freedom fighters were kept, are full of stories of the martyrs.

The stone walls of the jail echoe the sufferings and torture of the freedom fighters, many of whom were killed inside the jail. The Martyrs' Day is an occasion to remember all our martyrs and work for the country's peace, unity, progress and welfare. During the last eventful phase of his life, Gandhiji worked for establishing peace, amity and brotherhood among people and died while working for this mission. Let us remember his work for peace, amity and brotherhood. (PIB) *Journalist and freedom fighter who was eye witness to Gandhiji's assassination