

Mrs. Gedong Bagoes Oka

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India-1994

Mrs. Gedong Oka was born on 3rd October, 1921, at Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia. She completed her course at the Dutch Teachers Training College at Batavia (Jakarta) in 1941 and took a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature in 1964 from the State University of Udayana in Denpasar. Since 1941 she has been in the teaching profession. She became Principal of the Government High School in Singaraja in 1963 and later was the Udayana University as Lecturer in English at the Udayana University till 1977. Even now she is a Hon. Lecturer on the staff.

Her social activities included the founding of the Kosala Wanita Foundation for the welfare of women and children in 1951 of which she was the President till 1969 and the PTIP, an association in Bali to fight T. B. of which she was the President from 1970-76.

She was a member of the Indonesian Parliament and Congress from 1968-71, Executive Director of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace since 1976 and a member of the Advisory Board of Bina Desa, a national umbrella body for the non-governmental organisations in Indonesia since 1984.

After reading Gandhiji's autobiography in 1956, she delved into Gandhian literature and became convinced that Gandhiji should become better known in Indonesia because she felt firmly and sincerely that Indonesia could progress in peace and according to her own identity only by following Gandhian principles. She accordingly founded in 1970 the Bali Canti Sena Foundation with the objective of promoting Gandhian ideas to start with in Bali and hoping to gradually cover the whole of Indonesia. Seminars, workshops and long weekends were spent with students for this purpose and as a further step, the Gandhian Ashram was founded in 1976. Gandhiji's autobiography was translated in Indonesian and distributed free of charge to teachers and social workers.

The Canti Dasa Ashram is a bee-hive of constructive activities, brief details of which are given below:

1. Public Health: Every suitable village in Bali has a community health centre. The Ashram runs 3 such centres in contiguous villages each of which is within walking distance of the villagers' homes. Nature-cure and acupuncture treatment are also offered.

2. Rural Development farming: "Rishikriti" or "non-violent" farming, whatever it costs is used for growing rice and vegetables. After 16 years, farmers are starting to plant indigenous Bali Paddy leaving the "miracle rice" to the fellow farmers who are more interested in making money. Chemical fertilizers and pesticide sprays are not used for Bali Paddy and though its yield is smaller, its health and nutrient is a preventive against various diseases and ailments.

3. Ecology: The Ashram has educated people about the evil effects of plastic litter to the soil with the result that at present their own compounds are free from this litter. A movement for similar treatment of public grounds and public places is in hand.

4. Education: Nearly 50 children are undergoing schooling in the Kindergarten class. Free lunch is offered to the children and this has resulted in improved health even after barely 3 months of attendance. Cleanliness is also improving.

5. Voluntary programme: This programme has enabled participants from overseas to come and live in the Ashram for 2-3 months. Only such persons as are conversant with the skills and have genuine interest in the principles of Ahimsa and Sathya are allowed. Through this programme the idea of "belonging to the one world" has been promoted.

In the course of 8 years, the Ashram has become aware of its potential for training and inducing people to lead a holistic life seeking peace of soul and harmony with nature and our fellowmen. It is not only a practical training ground for the preservation of Gandhian values, but also a take-off for people who are interested in the propagation of such values to spread the message of Gandhi elsewhere in Indonesia. From that point of view Madam Oka's single-minded determination and commitment for the propagation of Gandhian values as a panacea for the evils of the world and for peace and harmony among all people is a landmark in dedication to moral values which will survive for all time.

