

'Gandhi, Tunku Abdul Rahman shared similar values'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Mahatma Gandhi and Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, who were the founding fathers of their respective nations, believed that independence is meaningless without the spirit of service.

Both leaders, who shared common values and characteristics in their struggle for independence from British colonial rule, had demonstrated great interest and concern for the well-being of their people.

"During Gandhi's visit to the Indian state of Orissa, he insisted on meeting lepers. He shook hands with each of them, patted their heads and spoke words of comfort to them," Tunku Sofiah Jewa, who is Tunku's paternal niece, said.

"Similarly, my uncle Tunku and his wife Sharifah Rodziah adopted two infants of leper parents, and every year he made it a point to send food to lepers."

The advocate and solicitor said this in a pre-recorded speech in conjunction with the 152nd birthday anniversary of Gandhi, which was celebrated as the International Day of Non-violence on Oct 2. The transcript of her speech was made available to Bernama.

The event was jointly organised by the Indian High Commission in Malaysia, in collaboration with

➤ Both leaders considered independence meaningless without spirit of service, says niece of Father of Malaysia

Malaysia-India Heritage Group, to forge mutual understanding on culture, history and heritage of both countries.

The Malaysia-India Heritage Group was formed in 2018 under the stewardship of Prabhakaran S. Nair, with a view of exploring overlapping areas of interest in the heritage of both Malaysia and India and to promote mutual appreciation of the timeless common legacies of the two countries.

Tunku Sofiah Jewa also drew some interesting parallels between her uncle and Gandhi, saying both were reluctant politicians. She elaborated that Gandhi kept out of politics after some years of active involvement with Congress, whereas Tunku kept on refusing offers to contest for the presidency of Umno.

The accomplished writer, who has a number of law publications to her credit, also narrated an interesting story of her uncle on what made him change his mind about joining politics.

She said one day Tunku, who was the then deputy public prosecutor, went to Kedah for a court case and heard voices sounding like that of his father Sultan Abdul Hamid calling out his name in the courtroom.

"After the case was over, Tunku went to his father's room in the old palace nearby, reclined on his father's rocking chair, and fell fast asleep. He then dreamt of his father.

"Putra, bela lah rakyat' (Putra, look after the people). Tunku woke up then, but since he was very tired, he fell asleep again.

"And can you imagine whom he saw in his dream? It was none other than the greatest of Indian nationalists, Mahatma Gandhi and also the then Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

"The signal was clear for Tunku. He knew at once that, like it or not, he was destined to lead his people to freedom. Tunku became president of Umno. And the rest, as they say, is history," she added.

She said on Oct 29, 1962, Tunku,

being Malaya's first prime minister, paid homage to Gandhi at Rajghat (where Gandhi was cremated), by laying a wreath of honour.

"In Tunku's own words - 'Gandhi's name will be cherished not only by Indians but by all who love freedom. He (Gandhi) has been the fountain of our inspiration in our fight for freedom,'" shared Tunku Sofiah, quoting her uncle.

"If we are truly serious about commemorating Gandhi's birth anniversary, let us remember what he had said on his last birthday: 'If you really want to celebrate my birthday, it is your duty not to let anyone be possessed by madness; and if there is any anger in your hearts, you must remove it'.

"Likewise, it is interesting to add what Tunku had said on his 64th birthday: 'It will be a lovely birthday present for me if you will only give some thought and attention to my advice on the need to live together in peace, goodwill and harmony.'"

Both Tunku and Gandhi, who shared a common title of the Father of the Nation, were called to the Bar at the Inner Temple: Gandhi in 1891 and Tunku - almost 60 years later - in 1949. A few years ago, both leaders were honoured by the Society of the Inner Temple in London on its 400th year anniversary celebrations.