

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson on first visit to South Africa

RAJMOHAN Gandhi walked in the shadows of his famous grandfather this week when he arrived in Durban for his first visit to the country which spirited Mahatma Gandhi into world fame.

Between numerous meetings with relatives and academics, the 48-year-old author and former politician retraced the steps of his grandfather at Pietermaritzburg, where Gandhi's racist reception on a train led to his formulating the acclaimed principles of Satyagraha (non-violent struggle).

Mr Gandhi, the son of Mahatma Gandhi's fourth son Devetas said he was visiting South Africa to acquaint himself with all that was happening in the country.

He is a journalist, author of several books and the research professor at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi.

VASANTHA ANGAMUTHU

The fact that his visit coincides with the centennial celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in South Africa was, he said, coincidental: "I have wanted to visit the country, but decided to do so only when it was clear that the whole (political) system had changed. This was the earliest that I could come after that assurance," he said.

Mr Gandhi's interest in South Africa was not necessarily a result of his family links, he said.

"There are several reasons why I am interested in this country. One is, of course, the links my grandfather had with the country. But even if Gandhi had not been my grandfather, my interest in South Africa would have been aroused. My interest has been increased by the most unexpected turn of events."

Mr Gandhi said he regarded the present venture in South Africa as one of the most crucial experiments in the world today: "If the talks succeed and elections are held peacefully and a democratic government is put in place, that will be something sensational. If that does not happen it will be a setback for civilisation."

He hopes to visit Indian townships to get a feel of the dynamics of the Indian population here.

Mr Gandhi had this advice for the Indian community: "It must move from ensuring its own acceptability and survival in South Africa to true interaction with other cultures and races, especially the African community. Know thy neighbour. To deprive the majority of Indians of the riches of such interaction will lead only to a fear of the future and insecurity."



RAJMOHAN GANDHI
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