

## **Mahatma Gandhi's ideas alive at Ashram Gandhi Puri on Bali**

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My house at Ashram Gandhi Puri at Klungkung on Bali is surrounded by plants, animals and nice people. Cows graze with their calves on the green in front. In the evenings flying dogs make their way on the terrace and in the morning I wake up by the crowing of numerous cocks. At night I'm surrounded by the chirping of whimsies and sounds of many unidentifiable smaller and bigger animals. On the ashram compound are coconut palm trees, papaya bushes and many different plants whose botanical classification I don't know. The eleven ashramites are of the age 15 to 25. They're happy, relaxed and have the right balance of playfulness and seriousness. The responsibility they show and the implicitness they organize the prayer meetings (puja, aarti) on their own impress me deeply.

The eight male and three female ashramites stay upto seven years in the ashram and are taught by BR. Indra Udayana in vedic rituals and ceremonies as well as the values of truth, nonviolence and compassion as preached and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi. Apart of their regular school and college training, which takes place outside or on the ashram compound, the ashram campus is fully maintained by them and they also built new buildings and furniture, attend to visitors and guests and teach Yoga externally.

This is the daily routine of the ashram members. Guests are recommended to attend but it's not compulsory:

04:30 Get up  
05:00 Morning prayer with fire ceremony (Agnihotra, Homa) and Gandhian thought session  
06:45 Hatha Yoga  
08:00 Breakfast  
08:30 Work duties, School / College class  
12:00 Noon prayer / meditation  
12:30 Lunch  
13:00 Free time / study  
18:30 Evening prayer with fire ceremony (Agnihotra, Homa) and bhajans  
20:00 Dinner  
20:30 Study  
23:00 Lights off

After the afternoon freetime and study period the ashramites and sometimes also BR. Indra Udayana, who is respectfully called *Guruji* (revered teacher) and who cares for his disciples like a father or an elder brother, go down to the river for a bath. The 16 to 18 years old girls beyond reach of vision from the 15 to 25 years old boys and young men. The water is with 25°C pleasantly warm. Due to the current the water splashes on the bodies and gives a massage like in a whirlpool. During the bath cloths are washed in the traditional style. Afterwards, all walk back uphill to the ashram refreshed and exhilarated. The 10-15 min walk leads through paddy fields, dark forest aisles and narrow paths.

I was impressed that the timings of the daily schedule are not strictly kept as in most other ashrams and communities. The evening prayer (Aarti) begins when all are present. The youths - boisterous a minute ago - now celebrate the evening prayer which contains many *bhajans* (religious songs) in Sanskrit. They're sung full of devotion and with perfect pronunciation, just like in any Indian temple. Guruji joins the evening prayer during its session and leads ongoing a discussion with his children, as he fondly calls the ashramites, about religious subjects and also talks about the problems of the day and the programme of the following day.

After the prayer dinner is prepared jointly. Normally, it consists of rice, a vegetable, coconut powder and papadam (crispy flatbread). During meals and inbetween they drink exclusively water. After dinner the students do their homework until max. 23:00.

The next morning, ashramites and their guests, interest provided, get up at 04:30 to attend the morning prayer service at 05:00. Sanskrit prayers are followed by vedic rituals incl. a fire ceremony. Guruji releases a *Thought for the Day*, a quotation by Mahatma Gandhi, which then is jointly recited along with select principles of Gandhi such as *Gandhi's Power* and the *Seven Social Sins*. Afterwards is time for morning toilette and cleaning of the campus incl. buildings. Breakfast consists of rice, vegetable and fruits but meals vary depending on the season and food donations the ashram receives from its well-wishers.

Ashram Gandhi Puri is administered by the Indra Udayana Vedanta Community, which so far runs another ashram in Bali's capitol Denpasar with 9 members and one in Singaraja, where 25 ashramites live. Soon another community will be inaugurated in Karangasem, in an old palace that has been made available to Indra Udayana by the former King of Karangasem, who also funds the project. On the nearby island Lombok another ashram is situated consisting of 30 members.

The ashram members are mainly High school and College students from poor and needy families from Bali and surrounding islands. Normally, they stay in the ashram for seven years and receive a training and education that enables them for a prospective career. The meanwhile c. 60 alumnis of the Indra Udayana Vedanta Community gather annually on 6 September, the birthday of their guru, BR. Indra Udayana, at Ashram Gandhi Puri for *Guru Dakshina* (Well-wishing of the revered teacher). Several of them occupy high and well-paid posts, who express their gratitude to their guru and his community by regular donations, which enables the community to provide stipends to poor students for their stay in the ashram.

The property of the ashrams in Denpasar, Klungkung and Singaraja were provided by the family of BR. Indra Udayana, who was Bali's Top Model in 1990 and belongs to the royal family. Meanwhile, he himself leads a simple and non-possessive life but his projects are supported generously by his family and well-wishers from Indonesia and abroad. The furniture of the ashram are all hand-made, donated or come from bulk rubbish. It is impressive how naturally the youths and young adults adopt this life of voluntary simplicity and give visitors and guests an insight to it. By this they not only set an example to neighbouring villages but also inspire social movements allover Bali for an eco-friendly life in harmony with nature, social justice and small-scale income generating projects. More and more they're recognized and consulted by Bali's politicians for the community tackles and solves internal and external

problems in a nonviolent Gandhian tradition and their overall experience can benefit the society on the whole.

The ashram follows the tradition of the institutions established by Mahatma Gandhi, from where they also adopted the eleven vows: Satya (Truth), Ahimsa (Nonviolence), Brahmacharya (Control of Senses), Asteya (Non-stealing), Aparigraha or Asangraha (Non-possession), Sharira or Shrama (Physical labour or Bread Labour), Asvada (Control of Palate), Abhaya (Fearlessness), Sarva Dharma Samanatva (Equal respect for all Religions), Swadeshi (Duty towards Neighbour), Asprishyatanivarana (Removal of Untouchability). In addition and in accordance with Balinese culture and tradition the ashram practices a number of ceremonies and rituals which are manifested in the holy scriptures of Hindus, the Vedas. To interested visitors and guests an opportunity is given to experience the day-to-day life of this exemplary institution, unique of its kind. The best time for a visit is the dry period between April and October but throughout the year temperature varies only between 35°C (max. daytime) and 20°C (min. night).

This is the official website of Ashram Gandhi Puri:  
<http://www.ashramgandhipuri.or.id>

Ashram Gandhi Puri has also a page on GandhiTopia:  
<http://www.gandhitopia.org/profile/agp>

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