

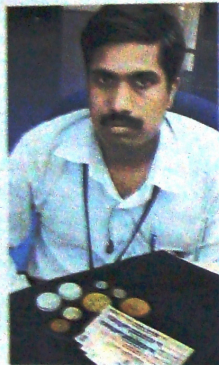
# Keeping alive memories of the Mahatma

Rajesh's thematic collection on Gandhiji ranges from first day covers to coins to stamps from all over the world.

ROHINI RAMAKRISHNAN

He started collecting stamps at the age of six when he saw other kids do it. He admits that it was a blind hobby. At that time his pocket money used to be anything between 50 paise to one rupee, but definitely not more than that. But the seeds of passion for philately had been sown. For M.L. Rajesh of Gummidipoondi, it has now become almost an addiction to literally "hunt" for stamps, currency notes or coins depicting the Mahatma. His thematic collection includes first day covers, old photographs, articles from foreign newspapers and more.

He started to attend philately exhibitions and discovered that there were stamps on Gandhiji published by other countries. This stirred many pertinent questions in him. "If other countries published stamps on the 'Father of our Nation' and collected them, why not me, an Indian citizen?" And



**THE MAN :** And his passion. PHOTO : R. SHIVAJI RAO



this relentless search has been on for the past six to seven years.

## Collector's delight

His search brought him closer to the character of the national leader and his struggle and victory. He realised that the world appreciated the great man — for over 100 coun-

tries have published stamps on Gandhiji — the only leader who is honoured thus by the world.

He has in his collection 42 stamps issued in India and 21 from the U.S., 25 from Europe, 31 from Africa and 28 that have been released in various countries in Asia.

They depict the Mahatma as a young man, with the *charka*, with

various leaders, on the Dandi March and others that include a caricature of him. Heavy silver coin with his profile stamped on is another item that Rajesh has searched for far and wide. He approaches the Reserve Bank of India specially to help him locate collector's items. This includes the currency note which is a special

feature of his hobby.

The currency serial numbers of the note have the date of birth of Gandhiji and they have denominations ranging from Rs. 5 to Rs 1000. Likewise he has collected the dates of birth of other Indian leaders as well as the date of Independence and Republic days in all denominations.

Special covers on Gandhiji issued in India and abroad, inland covers, books and three telephone cards with the picture of Gandhiji issued abroad are in his collection.

The search for the Mahatma has not been easy for Rajesh and has been quite an expensive one too. But he smiles as he says that he has introduced his kids to the hobby, shows them the stamps and talks to them about it. "Having a hobby is a healthy habit," he says, hoping that his kids as well as others will be inspired by his collections, and especially the one on Gandhiji. "Let's not forget him," he says, "he is our national wealth."