

## **RAM MOHAN BAGAI**

1914 -- 2000

Ram Mohan Bagai arrived at Angel Island in 1915 on the steamer "Korea," at just over one year of age, with his mother Kala, father Vaishno, and two brothers. His parents were one of the earliest Indian families to immigrate to the United States. Vaishno was an advocate of India's independence from British rule and left his home in Peshawar (now Pakistan) to move to the US to help further India's freedom from abroad. The family lived mostly in San Francisco and became naturalized in 1921.

Vaishno took his life in 1928, after his and the family's citizenship was stripped due to the 1923 Supreme Court US vs Thind decision that Indians could not be considered white. This retroactively disqualified them as citizens. But Kala made sure her sons achieved the American education their father dreamed of for them. Ram graduated from Lowell High School and went on to get his AA at San Jose State College, a BA at Stanford University in 1937, and in 1938, an MA in Cinematography at USC.

After Ram's college years, he was drawn to the Indian freedom struggle and spent several months in India, where he met and traveled with Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi as they advocated for India's independence from Britain. His meetings with them made him an ardent advocate of nonviolence and peace.

On his return from India, Ram became a Hollywood journalist, reporting for film magazines such as Mother India, the Bombay Chronicle and Film India. While working for the WW2 effort he met his future wife, Leona in Ohio. After the war he and Leona married at Stanford University Chapel and raised a family in Los Angeles.

In 1946 Ram and his mother Kala were finally allowed to regain US citizenship. Soon he became involved in the formation of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and became President of the Foreign Press from 1950-1951, hosting the Golden Globe awards.

Ram also acquired the rights for a film on Gandhi's life as well as a large film library on Gandhi for his company, Films of India. With this material, he later produced three documentaries for ABC, NBC and CBS. Ram also acquired the rights for several Indian feature films which he distributed in the U.S., designed to introduce American culture to Indian music, dance and food. The rest of his professional career ranged from chemical and process engineering to management training and consulting.