BAPU — MY MOTHER

"Have I not become your mother? I have been a father to many but only to you I am a mother."

— Gandhiji to the Authoress

BY

MANUBEHN GANDHI

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THE LONELY PILGRIM

BAPU — MY MOTHER

BY

MANUBEHN GANDHI

Translated from the original in Gujarati

BY

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AHMEDABAD

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FOREWORD

In the few sketches in this booklet Kumari Manu Gandhi describes a few incidents with Gandhiji. They throw good light upon some aspects of Gandhiji's character and activities.

Manu is a grandniece of Gandhiji. But he had constituted himself her 'Mother'. Shortly after he had entered upon the last great mission of his life — namely, Hindu-Muslim Peace — in Noakhali (East Bengal) in September 1946, Manu joined him and was his only constant companion thenceforth till his martyrdom on the 30th January 1948. As such, these pen pictures will be read with great interest. They were first contributed to the *Bhavnagar Samachar*, a Gujarati weekly of Saurashtra — Kathiawad. They have been rendered into English by her friend Shrimati Chitra Desai.

Bombay, 22-1-1949 K. G. MASHRUWALA

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BAPU — MY MOTHER

I

BAPU AS MY MOTHER

Bapu was a father to innumerable men and women and the guru of many. There were many to whom he ministered as their doctor or even as a nurse. He was a dear friend to many colleagues. Countless people looked up to him as their redeemer. All this is aptly included in the term "Father of the Nation". For me, however, he was a mother. Generally it is not possible for a man to become a mother to any one because he has not been endowed by God with the mother's loving heart which a woman is blessed with. But Bapu appropriated for himself a share of even this divine gift.

So Bapu mothered me. He has, no doubt brought up quite a number of girls but to me he would often say, "Have I not become your mother? I have been a father to many but only to you I am a mother. A father does pay attention to the bringing up of his children but the real education of a girl comes from mother. Such is the way of the world. If a girl does not know some household work, the mother-in-law or the sister-in-law rebukes her saying, 'Your mother does not seem to have taught you anything.' No one finds fault with the father."

I was in the Nagpur Jail in 1942 when Kasturba also was in jail. I was then only fourteen. My

mother had left this world when I was only 12, but by her blessing I got the cosy lap of a mother like Kasturba who never let me feel the want of a mother. I was separated from this mother too, when during the '42 revolution the Government arrested Ba and Bapuji. But by God's grace I got the rare chance of serving this unique and wonderful mother again after nine months when I was transferred from the Nagpur Jail, and once more I was fortunate to lie in that loving mother's lap. When I was at Nagpur I did not even dream that I would be able to meet Ba in this life again, since she used to have frequent heart-attacks after Bapu's fast. But faith is not entirely without its fruit. Everyone was surprised that of all persons I should be called to her side, and they wondered why they who had stayed with Ba and Bapu for years, should have been passed over in my favour.

They argued, "How could this chit of a girl serve Ba?" But ever since my childhood, I had as much faith in Ba and Bapu as I had in God. Ba said "If Manu is available I want none else." Just at that time she had had a severe heart-attack. Dr. Gilder and Dr. Sushila Nayyar also required a helping hand as they had to look after both Ba and Bapu. They asked for me as a nurse. But the Government was in a perverted mood. I cannot imagine how the Government scented danger in sending me to Bapuji when I was a stripling of 14 then, and quite ignorant of the political game. Shri Rajaji and Shri Devadas had heated discussions with Lord Linlithgow and Mr. Tottenham. The former, however, prevailed and at last I was removed to the Agakhan Palace from the Nagpur Jail.

When my father went to see Bapuji during his fast, Ba inquired after me. Ever since he had told her that I had become very weak and had spoilt my eyes, she was waiting anxiously for me as a mother would for her daughter. Ba was standing at the gate when I entered the Agakhan Palace with a pulled down face. Ba was so anxious for me that she requested the Superintendent to take my key and let me in before the inspection of the luggage was finished. It was my rare fortune to be allowed to serve such a loving mother day and night for thirteen months. All my daily work was now done under her guidance as before. My heart bowed to God for all this favour. If Ba could not sleep on account of severe cold or asthma, she would either come and lie down with me or take me to her bed and say, "My child, you must be tired; you can certainly go to sleep. I have called you to my side only because I cannot get sleep. She would pat me and put me to sleep as if I were a baby to be lulled.

On the 22nd February, 1944, God took away this my darling mother from me. That whole day, with tears trickling down my eyes, I stood almost transfixed and gazed at Ba with head on Bapu's lap bidding adieu to this world for ever amidst the holy sounds of *Ramadhun* and the recitation of the *Gita*. Before her death Ba begged pardon of all. She said to me, "My child, you have served me a lot. May God bless you." She said to Bapu, "Now, I am going." Even Bapu could not help shedding two drops of tears. She told my father, "Take Manu away. Let her study further."

Ba's death was the first occasion in my fifteen years of life when I saw anybody on a deathbed, or a corpse and a funeral pyre. And the second occasion was at the time of Bapu's death. People remarked, "How fortunate this girl is to have been with Ba and Bapu till their last breath." But I really doubt if that can be termed good fortune.

For a time I was so depressed that I lost faith in God for taking away from me one, who tenderly mothered me till her last moment. Bapu asked me to sing a hymn. In a reckless spirit of childishness, I said, "I am not going to utter the name of the Lord. He has snatched away my Ba." My experience is that sometimes wonderful results come out of such childishness. On returning from the cremation ceremony that night, Bapu gave me some of Ba's things, such as a pair of ivory bangles, a necklace of *tulsi* — a symbol of Vaishnava faith, the string which she tied in her locks, her saffron and her sandals. He said, "As Ba has earnestly pleaded for you, you are the rightful owner of these things. You have to draw inspiration from them as Bharata did from Rama's sandals which he installed on the throne in the absence of Rama. And how godly was Ba? These five bangles remained intact amidst the huge fire, bearing witness to her saintliness. (There is a custom in Maharashtra, according to which, when a woman passes away before her husband, five glass bangles, a coconut and some sesame and barley seeds are tied with a band on her stomach. We had followed the custom. But all the five green glass bangles had miraculously and inexplicably remained undamaged. One

of them I have kept as a *prasad* of that saintly soul.

The question of my further stay with Bapu was discussed by the Government as I was brought there only for the sake of Ba. I was released by the C. P. Government much earlier but they had allowed me to stay on with Ba as I wanted to serve her in her illness. I used to remain depressed at the thought of a possible separation from Bapu in addition to that from Ba. To console me Bapu wrote a chit to me at 4 a. m. during his silence. All that night I would wake up at intervals with a start. So Bapu and Sushilabehn had often to put me to sleep by patting me. The chit runs thus :

Dear Manudi,

Have you slept well ? I wrote a long letter yesterday to retain you and Prabhavati (Jai Prakash Narain's wife), but surging thoughts would not let me sleep. At last I saw light. It is improper to make such a request. It is not in conformity with the spirit of jail life. We ought to bear far greater separation. You are sensible enough. Forget your grief as you have to do far greater things. Give up this weeping and cheer up. Learn whatever you can after you are out of prison. After all this service rendered by you, your wellbeing is assured under any circumstances. I am really worried about you. You are just like your old self—so innocent, simple and serviceable. Service has become a part of you. But still you have much to learn. You are somewhat silly also. If you remain uneducated, you would regret it and so would I if I continued to live. You know how I would feel without you. But I do not like to keep you any longer here as it would be infatuation. I am certain that the

proper course for you is to go to Rajkot. You would there get the ennobling guidance of Naraindas. There you would probably learn the art of work and certainly music, and whatever else you can pick up. If you stay there at least for a year, you would have a balanced attitude. Then you can go to Karachi or anywhere else. (I was at Karachi with my father, studying in the fifth standard before I went to Bapuji). Gurudayal Mallick is indeed there but he will not stay there for a long time. So there you would get only academic education. That even is useful. All this is there, but what you can gain at Rajkot, you can gain nowhere else. More when I break my silence and don't forget that I am your mother. If you grasp so much it is more than enough.

Blessings from Bapu
Dated, 27-2-'44
AGAKHAN PALACE, POONA.

Preserve this letter.

But fortunately I had not to separate from Bapu. I came out of the Agakhan Palace only when he did.

Ever since then Bapu began to bring me up just as a mother would bring up her own daughter of 14 or 15. A girl of that age is generally near her mother and her development requires the company of her mother. Bapu also began taking interest in the minutest details of my life, such as my food, attire, my sickness, my visits and companions, my studies, right down to whether I thoroughly washed my hair every week and he continued to do so till his last moment.

When Bapuji went to Bengal I was at Mahuva. But on my request to go with him to Noakhali, he sent me his permission by wire. Till I went there I used to wear saris. Usually I kept my head covered unlike the latest fashion, but as I bowed down to Bapu on reaching there, the sari slipped off my head and I was not aware of it, because as I put my head in Bapu's lap, he affectionately pulled me and said, "So you have come." The same night at Shrirampur he told me, "Such a Gujarati sari may do for rich women who have nothing else to do but to loll in the rocking sofa and move about in cars. Moreover, a Gujarati sari and a head uncovered is a scene repellent to the eyes and rather flippant. And so one must always be careful like Ba and such other old-fashioned ladies not to let the sari slip off, or to readjust immediately when it does." I could not catch Bapu's real purpose in telling me all this, but he went on, "But you can't be as alert as Ba in this matter. So if you want to stay here, you will wear the Panjabi dress as you did in the Agakhan Palace. It is certainly not becoming to keep the head uncovered in that dress too; but in a girl of your age it may be tolerated. You know I have become your mother and I ought to tell you this. Why do girls move about with uncovered head nowadays? If they cover their heads, how can they show off their hair, made to appear long by woollen podding or false hair? I am one of those who move freely among women. I have had a large share in bringing them forward. Moreover, who else was it but I who taught Ba to wear shoes and socks to make her look like a Parsi lady

during our stay in South Africa? She, poor thing, never knew all these things. There is no beauty in wearing false hair as there is none in paper-flowers which we sometimes see placed in flowerpots. Natural beauty lies in keeping the hair just as had been given by God. (From this talk he suddenly digressed to spiritual matters.) I have no doubt that our women are being molested because of the artificiality that has crept so much into their lives. Jewels of false stones may shine for a time, but are sure to lose their lustre sooner or later. And this craze for false things has affected the purity of our inner self. I can never believe that persons who are foppish in their dress can be pure within. Hence this fall of our women — even their rot. How would they oppose molestation without arms when they are incapable of doing so even with arms? Even so powerful a being as Ravana, who could finish off anyone in a moment, dared not touch Sita, so frail and unarmed. What was the reason? Her purity was so austere. Where do you find that saintliness today? If an attack is made on a woman's chastity nowadays, she simply submits. There have been so many such instances here. Many *goondas* have forced women to submit under the threat of death. Our women have preferred submission to death. Even if we do not believe in the historicity of Rama and Sita, and take the story to be imaginary, how magnificent and noble is the conception! It should be practised by women today. The character of Sita should be truly valued by all our girls. (What a turn Bapu gave to the talk of false jewelry!) And what do they call this newfangled fashion

of painting the nails and lips?" I burst out laughing saying, "Bapu, I would have picked up the names had you asked me to. Lips are coloured by what they call lipstick. I do not know the name for the nail dye." "Oh yes, those poor girls paint their lips and nails, and the result is that they have no time to see how pale and weak they are getting. Our women of old had such blood in the body that their lips and nails were naturally red. But we copied the West blindly. Both men and women are to blame for it. Women by no means escape the blame. One ought to learn many things from the Westerners such as discipline, good manners, becoming modesty, punctuality, energy and drive in action, perseverence, ardent desire to learn new things, sociability etc. We have discarded all these and many other good things and rushed after vanities like powder and puff. I say from housetops that if anyone can bring both self-rule and good rule in the country, it is our women. Just as a house is not a home without a housewife, so also our independence would be incomplete without the co-operation of women. But that co-operation can come only when our women attain purity. Do you know exactly what I mean by purity? I am against our purdah system but certainly there should be modesty. All these good qualities are summed up in the little word 'purity'. Without modesty, internal and external cleanliness, decency, love of truth, freedom from hypocrisy, self-respect, and yearning to serve, there is no purity. The word connotes many more such noble qualities. And there is no doubt that wherever there is purity, there is

God. If our women can secure this weapon, they do not need anything like a sword or a spear. But this weapon of purity requires far more training than the use of iron ones. At the same time it is quite easy to learn this art for him who wants to do so.

"See what a useful lesson I have taught you from an ordinary chat regarding saris and I have done nothing more than I ought to. Your father or grandfather can take up the role of your teacher, but as for me I shoulder the responsibilities of your mother. You have to practise the lesson in your life throughout. So write down in your diary tomorrow, and show it to me." Bapu used to examine my diary and sign it daily. He had that day awakened me at 12-30 and it was 1-15 a. m. when he concluded by saying, "Now you can go to sleep. I woke you up as I could not sleep. It struck me that I was certainly taking a risk in keeping you here and I should warn you."

Such was my dear mother who lost her sleep in worrying over me and who gave me lessons by waking me up when she could not withhold from giving them.

God has now snatched away all the three mothers I had.

Here is a stanza from our Gujarati poet Botadkar, who has sang thus the glories of the mother:

Holy indeed is the Ganga,
But its water knows an ebb,
But mother's love is even
And none so sweet as she.

And really this sweetness of mother's love was my experience too. I found the truth of this stanza in my life. Till their last moments never did the love of any of my mothers fade.

II

MEANING OF SACRIFICE

In the Agakhan Palace I had the good fortune to learn from Bapu various subjects such as Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Geography, History, Science, and Sanskrit; but English he never taught me. Others taught it to me. On account of want of time and Ba's illness, Bapu had to drop instructing me in the other subjects, but he never gave up teaching me Sanskrit, and so it was he who gave me my first lessons in the study of the *Gita*. I have passed through the hands of many teachers in and outside school, but though at times I might have taken a little help from others, Bapu has remained for me the only instructor in the *Gita*.

In the Agakhan Palace, however, I could learn only to read the text of the *Gita* correctly. In Noakhali on the day following our arrival Bapu said, "Twenty-four hours have passed since you came here; now tell me how far you have progressed in the study of the *Gita*. You are here not only to do my work, I want you to pursue your studies as well." I replied, "I have at times tried to study the *Gita* after I was released from jail. But I have not wanted to learn pronunciation or meaning from any one else. I didn't mind having a number of teachers for other subjects but in respect of the *Gita*, I never wished to have any other teacher except you. So without studying it

under anyone I went on with pronunciation and the meaning as I understood them."

Bapu felt pained at this. He said, "This is only your delusion. Why should we not have innumerable teachers to learn a good thing? We should learn even from a child. There is no shame in learning a good thing from another. But now let us start afresh. Let us begin our *Gita* lessons from this very day. As regards pronunciation, there is not much to be done, but it has always been on my mind that I have not explained the meaning to you sufficiently. Daily you must write five couplets from it. You must dissolve the *sandhis* (write every word separately) and give its meaning." I did as I was told and Bapu used to correct what I had written and sign it, inspite of heavy work. He added, "The third chapter is on sacrifice. The study of the *Gita* is also a sacrifice. Let me explain to you in brief what is meant by sacrifice.

"The Lord says that he who eats without performing sacrifice, eats stolen food. This is a statement of great import. To take stolen food is like taking raw mercury — i. e. both are indigestible. He is a thief who spends even a moment without sacrifice. We all must perform this incessant sacrifice. For him who has, by good fortune, his heart in the right place, sacrifice is an easy task. He requires neither wealth, nor intelligence, nor education. Service rendered to anyone is a sacrifice. Only those are not thieves, who have completely dedicated themselves to service; and hence those who render service to a small extent are free from theft to that extent. Thus we all are thieves in some measure at least. Only when we give

up all selfishness is our sacrifice complete. To wipe out the consciousness of 'I' and 'mine' is what is really meant by giving up selfishness. 'This is my brother or sister but that one is a stranger'—such sentiments should be eradicated from one's heart. He only can do this who can dedicate every little thing to the Lord, who can render service knowing himself to be an instrument of the Lord. Such people are always happy and calm. To them joy and sorrow are the same. They utilize their all, body, mind and soul in the service of others. For most of us such sacrifice is only an ideal. If we have the desire to serve the whole world what is the type of work which could be suggested to a number of people for the benefit of many? It is spinning. Spinning can be practised by numerous people as service of others and so it can be considered as service of humanity. Innumerable poor people can be maintained through it. Even the blind can spin and *Ramanama* can be repeated with the drawing out of each length of yarn.

"This is the spirit in which I want to teach you the *Gita*, not merely grammatically. This is merely an instance to explain to you the meaning of sacrifice. Spinning is sacrifice and sacrifice is spinning."

III

LESSONS OF THE GITA

Although Bapu looked after my studies as I said before, I complained to him at times that it was he who hindered my education, since he called me away from Karachi, where I had gone to study. I wanted to pass examinations and had fascination for degrees like girls of today. I am grateful to God however, for having saved me from that delusion. By imparting such instruction to me as cannot be had even in B. A. or M. A. classes, this great teacher has blessed me. All the same this wisdom has dawned upon me only now. When Bapu was alive I complained bitterly about it as I have already said.

Bapu replied, "I want to impart to you both knowledge and wisdom." I retorted, "Mahadevbhai could become your secretary only because he was so highly educated. Have not all others also, who have risen and become great, done so because of their degrees?" Bapu laughed and said, "Those big people are worthless. You had better use the word *upadhi** (i. e. burden) for a degree. A degree is really a burden. I regret having become a barrister and, if you believe me, I am not even conscious of being one. Because of my experience, I would rather save others from that burden. One may learn many languages. But what troubles me is this cramming for

* A pun on the word *upadhi* which means degree as well as worry.

university degrees for which students ruin their health. Today our country needs constructive work. There is immense work to be done in the villages. The whole face of our country will be changed if our students utilize the time spent on studies for some constructive work. It would certainly be a different story if the idea behind all this reading was to gain knowledge. The maxim should be knowledge through reading, and reading on the basis of knowledge. But at present there is the vicious circle of examinations through studying, and studies on the basis of examinations. What then? Ultimately that knowledge is utilized for earning money. Some become doctors, some pleaders, some engineers; and then the mad hunt for employment begins. So all this stupendous task achieves almost nothing. The idea behind all our education is just to get the highest post. I admit there are exceptions to this rule. I certainly do not mean to say that all the forty crores have only this object in view. But this is the main idea behind education; and it is a delusion to believe that service can be rendered only after a certain amount of college education. One can serve under any circumstances. God has endowed him with such powers that man can reasonably find no excuse for not rendering service. But he is so wicked, that he find all possible pretexts to avoid work. If some have money to serve with, others have a healthy body or intelligence. It is only a few who utilize all their capacities for service. We shall get cent per cent marks if we dedicate to the Lord all we have. If one who owns a crore of rupees gives only half a crore, he will get 50 per cent marks; but one who

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has only a pie will get cent per cent marks if he gives that pie away.

"One's service should be untainted. If a person renders service on account of fear or selfishness, that is no service. There is no place for selfishness where everything is offered to the Lord. A man who renders service in this spirit adds daily to his strength. Even work for his daily bread should be a part of service. One who is dedicated to service, renders service through every one of his acts including even trifling actions like laughing, or just playing. His acts will therefore be pure. God endows such devotees with all the necessary strength. Hence these verses in the *Gita*:

अनन्याश्चिंतयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ ९–२२ ॥

As for those who worship Me, thinking on Me alone and nothing else, ever attached to Me, I bear the burden of getting them what they need.

मच्चित्ता मद्गतप्राणा बोधयन्तः परस्परम् ।
कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥ १०–९ ॥

With Me in their thoughts, their whole soul devoted to Me, teaching one another, with Me ever on their lips, they live in contentment and joy.

तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम् ।
ददामि बुद्धियोगं तं येन मामुपयान्ति ते ॥ १०–१० ॥

To these, ever in tune with Me, worshipping Me with affectionate devotion, I give the power of selfless action, whereby they come to Me.

Just ponder over these verses. The last verse of all has deep significance. Unbounded faith is required to realize it; but what I want to impress on you is that all your degrees will not help you in doing God's work. Where would you have been, had you studied enough to have entered a college by now? If I could have my way, I would ask all college girls and boys to throw themselves into this communal fire to quench it. India, which appears like a mere speck on the world map will become as big as an ocean if our students gave up this infatuation for degrees. The wise saying that, 'one should cut one's coat according to one's cloth' holds good not only for small families but for big nations as well. Our customs and activities should conform to the genius of the nation. We would be heading for disaster if we blindly imitated the English. The crow saved himself when he reverted to his own gait and gave up imitating that of the swan. You know that story, don't you? Stories are not only to please. They are meant to convey valuable lessons. Of course there are many bad customs in India, but if she proceeds according to her genius, she will occupy an unimaginably high position. For, there is nothing to match Indian culture. New meanings will emerge as I go on explaining the *Gita* to you. But today it is enough if you digest this much. Write it down. Don't do so for the sake of mere writing. The *Gita* should be learnt with a view to practising its teachings. Today's whole lesson is based on the *Gita*."

I got this lesson on account of my complaint about his coming in the way of my studies. It was an

invaluable one. Kind-hearted indeed was Bapu who gulped down all criticism, as he would honeyed water. We were free to say to him, whatever we thought, without hesitation. How unfortunate it is that only today I realize how childishly impertinent I was to Bapu! How true is the Gujarati proverb, 'Even if children are naughty parents never neglect them!' God alone knows why Bapu insisted that I should write my diary, even if I had to give up a part of my service to him. Perhaps he had a presentiment of his death within a year. The diary, therefore, turned out to be his will and testament for me.

IV

SUPERFLUITY IS VIOLENCE

Gandhiji was to meet Lord Mountbatten on the 30th March 1947 for the first time after he had already plunged in the ordeal of Noakhali and Bihar.

Bapuji declined to go by 'plane offered to him by the Viceroy. He decided to travel by railway, saying that he could not travel in a vehicle which could not be used by crores of poor people, and that the railway would do as well for him.

It was terribly warm and it was a twentyfour hour journey, and as usual there would be crowds of people at every station for *darshan* of their beloved Bapuji. But did he ever mind the discomforts he would have to undergo? He called me and said:

"Now mind you, you are my only companion in this ordeal; and I am going to Delhi for the first time. When I decided to go to Noakhali, I had resolved to do or die there and had relieved myself of all my companions. :But I allowed you to join me in this sacrifice. You are with me here as you were there, Devprakash and Hunar (a Muslim friend) are also here, but they will stay with Mridulabehn, who will look after the work on my behalf. But I am duty bound not to leave you. You also would not wish me to leave you, and so you are coming with me. But remember this will be a severe test for you. You have to take the least possible luggage and choose the smallest third-class compartment."

I took the least possible luggage but chose a double compartment because I thought that it would not be possible for Bapuji to have sufficient rest in a single compartment, as there would be a lot of noise on account of hoards of people coming to have his *darshan* at every station, and as I would have to keep account of collection at every station for the Harijan Fund. I got the luggage put in one of the two compartments and arranged the other for Bapuji's use.

The railway train for Delhi leaves Patna at 9. 30 in the morning. We (Bapuji and I) came to the station at 9. 25. There was an immense crowd but we managed to get into the compartment. As customary with him Bapuji utilized every minute at his command, and collected money for the Harijan Fund in the remaining few minutes. The train left the station exactly at half-past nine.

As Bapuji is used to taking his midday meals at 10 a. m. during summer I went to the other compartment to unpack the luggage in order to prepare meals for him. After some time I came to Bapuji's compartment. He was busy writing. He asked me, "Where were you all this while?" I replied, "I was preparing your food over there." He looked out of the window and asked me to look also. I sensed that I had committed some mistake. I looked out and saw passengers hanging on to the footboards. I got a gentle rebuke. "Did you ask for this second compartment?" he questioned me. "Yes, Bapuji," I replied. "I asked for it as I thought you would be disturbed by my heating the milk on the primus, cleaning the vessels, etc," I added.

"What a lame excuse? This is what is called blind (undiscerning) love. You do know that with a view to save me trouble I was offered a special train if I did not choose to go by a 'plane. How many trains would be held up and what a lot it would cost to run a special train? How can I afford it? I am a greedy fellow. You asked only for a second compartment, but had you asked for a saloon you would surely have got it. But would it become you? Your request for a spare compartment is just like asking for a saloon. I know that you do all these things out of deep love but I want you to rise to greater heights. Be sure that I never want you to go down; and you must not shed tears like that. Now the only way of repentance is to remove all the luggage into this compartment and to request the station-master to see me at the next station."

I was shivering all over. I removed the luggage indeed but was worried about Bapuji, for, it often happened that he abandoned a meal as vicarious suffering for a mistake, however small. At the same time he would do all his usual voluminous work such as writing, reading, spinning, teaching me, etc. in the train.

At last we reached the next station. I called the station-master. Bapuji acquainted him with the situation. "She is my granddaughter," he said; "but she is a simple soul. She does not understand me fully as yet. Hence she occupied two compartments. It is not her fault. The fault is mine, for there must be something lacking in my training of her. Now we both have got to repent for the mistake and so we have vacated the other compartment. I would partly be relieved of my pain if you use it for the passengers hanging on to the footboards."

The station-master tried to plead with him, but Bapuji would not listen to him The station-master offered to attach another bogie for the passengers. But Bapuji said, "Of course, you ought to get an extra bogie attached, but you should utilize this compartment too. To use what is not essentially required is violence. Do you want to spoil this girl by letting her misuse the comforts she gets?" The poor station-master was non-plussed and had to comply with his wishes.

Bapuji was the father of the nation. How could he ever bear to travel in comfort when his children had to hang on to the train? Thus they got sitting

accommodation and I learnt a valuable lesson, namely, to avail as little as possible of comforts for myself. Of course I was deeply hurt by the rebuff I received at the time; but today, I realize its immense value. Thus did he build up his own life by attending to the minutest details, and howsoever little I may have been able to learn from him, it is bound to help me all my life.

V

BAPUJI'S REGULARITY

Bapuji's pilgrimage on foot from one village to another in Noakhali used to begin every day exactly at 7 a. m. He would get very annoyed even if there was a delay of only two minutes. Once it took me five minutes longer to get ready as certain things could be packed only after he was ready, whereupon Bapuji said, "See, the *kirtan* singers and village people have been standing outside for long and still you are not ready. You have stolen five minutes of five hundred people and how can this be ever tolerated? I am going; you can come afterwards. I don't like this waste of time. Don't think that you can follow me daily like this. You can indeed overtake me by running since you are young and I am old and thus absolve yourself. But that would be a crime. All the work should be done regularly; and when people have been told seven as the starting time, and there is delay even of two seconds I am deeply hurt."

VI

BAPUJI'S THOROUGHNESS

Narayanpur is a village in Noakhali. Bapu reached there at seven in the evening. We put up at a poor weaver's place. On arrival at his destination, it was usual for Bapu to have his feet washed with hot water and to do a bit of writing. Meanwhile, I would arrange for his massage and bath. Bapu never used soap for his bath; he used instead a rough stone. This stone had been given to him years ago by Mirabehn. I had, however, inadvertently left it behind in the village where we halted last. I remembered it when I was arranging for the bath. I told Bapuji that I had left somewhere the stone he used for his bath and that it might be at the weaver's. "I don't know what to do now," I added. Bapu thought for a while and replied, "You have no doubt committed a mistake; I want you to go back and find the stone. Ask Nirmalbabu to prepare my meals. And you go alone and look for the stone. Once you do so, you will never forget it next time." I suggested with some trepidation, "There are many volunteers here. May I take one of them?" "Why?" asked Bapu. To this I could not reply. The forests of coconut and betel-nut trees were so dense in Noakhali that a stranger might easily lose his way. Moreover, those were days of communal trouble. It was a lonely way and the few houses there were those of Muslims only. How could

I go alone? But I had to as I had committed an offence. And so I set out without answering him.

I asked myself what I would do if some *goondas* were to pounce upon me on the way. But with *Ramanama* (the name of the Lord) on my lips and following the footprints I went back the way we had come.

On reaching the village with great difficulty, I could locate the weaver's house in which there lived only an old woman. How could she ever know that the stone was so precious? And so she had thrown it away. After a good deal of trouble I found it and I was overjoyed. Immediately I started off for Narayanpur. At one in the afternoon I reached home which I had left at half-past nine in the morning. I was terribly hungry. But greater than this hunger was the pain at the thought that I had been deprived of serving Bapu for the time being due to this lapse on my part. Placing the stone in Bapu's lap I burst into tears. Bapuji told me, "Today you have been put to the test. Whatever God does, he does for our good. On the very first day I had warned and explained to you at length till a late hour in the night that it needs courage to join me in my sacrifice. If you falter even a little, you will be considered unsuccessful. So you can return to Mahuva if you like, but once the pilgrimage has begun you will not be allowed to go anywhere. Thanks to the stone you have had your first test so early. You have passed. You have no idea how happy I feel. The stone has been my cherished companion for the past twentyfive years. Whether in prison or in palace it has been with

me. Had it not been found it would have pained me and Mirabehn as well. Moreover you have learnt a good lesson to be always careful with every useful thing. One should not be careless and think that as many such stones are available one can easily replace a lost one. I said, "But Bapu, if ever I took *Ramanama* with all my heart it was today. My heart trembled as I went along that deserted path." Thereupon Bapuji laughed and said, "Oh yes, one remembers the Lord only when one is in trouble!"

VII

BAPU THE MISER

Once there was a slight delay in heating the drinking water in the morning. I could not light the fire on account of damp weather. So tearing a piece of the border of my sari I dipped it in kerosene. Bapuji observed it from behind. When I was preparing to light it Bapuji said to me, "Will you show me the piece you are going to use for lighting the fire?" I showed it to him. Bapu opened out the folded piece which was long enough to be used as a tape. He said, "Wash this piece and put it in the sun to dry. Is it proper to use for lighting the fire a long piece of cloth which can serve as a tape? Do you know how miserly I am? Where is the harm if we were to get the hot water a little late? What a lot of kerosene was wasted in soaking this long piece, and would it not have been burnt had I not seen it?"

I said, "Bapu, now why should we be so miserly?" He replied jokingly, "You are a daughter of a generous

father. But I have no father who will give things to me." Then, suddenly becoming serious he said, " There is always some meaning even in my jokes, which, if you can understand, I shall be satisfied." At last the piece was washed and dried and I was made to use it as a tape. I was taught to light the fire with the straw that was lying nearby. Bapuji always felt great joy in teaching such small things even in the midst of his multifarious and momentous activities in the service of the nation.

VIII

LOVER OF CLEANLINESS

Bapuji was always very particular about cleanliness. He was certainly keen about external cleanliness but inner cleanliness was one of his unique requirements. Whenever he found anything done in an unclean manner, then rather than find fault with the person concerned, he would teach him cleanliness by doing the thing himself.

Noakhali was full of narrow paths; some were so narrow that Bapu and I could not walk abreast. So he used to keep a staff for support. Bapu could not bear to see dirt anywhere and yet sometimes he had to walk along very dirty tracks. Once he began cleaning up with leaves some spittle, excreta, rubbish etc. I was taken aback for a while. The villagers also looked on in amazement.

I protested in a fit of anger, " Bapu, why do you put me to shame? Why did you start cleaning this yourself instead of calling upon me to do it when I was just behind?" At this Bapuji laughed and said,

" You have no idea about the enjoyment I derive from such work. And is it not less troublesome for me to do it than ordering someone else?" " But the people are watching you." Bapu said, " You will see that from tomorrow I shall not have to clean such dirty roads, for, the people will realize that this type of work is not derogatory. And I would be pained if they were to do it only to please me." I said, " Suppose they clean it only tomorrow, then what?" Turning the tables on me he said, " I shall send you to inspect it and if the road is dirty I myself will come to clean it. To clean the unclean is my dharma."

And it turned out just as he had predicted. On the following day when I went back to see the road, I found it dirty, but instead of telling Bapu I cleaned the road myself. Then I reported, " Bapu, I have cleaned the road. The villagers joined me and have promised that hereafter they would clean it themselves and I need not go." Bapuji said, " You have robbed me of the merit of doing a good turn. I wanted to clean the road myself, but it does not matter now. Two things have been accomplished : first, that they would observe cleanliness, and secondly, if they adhere to the promise they would learn to be truthful." The road was kept clean ever afterwards.

Referring to the above incident Bapu said to me after a few days, " Do not think that only the people of Noakhali have the habit of committing nuisance and spitting in the lanes and the bypaths. People of our Kathiawad also have the same habit of dirtying the roads. This bad practice prevails in many parts of

India. More so in Kathiawad. I had a desire in my youth to eradicate this unhygienic habit but as fate would have it, I could not stay long enough in Kathiawad. Your anger for me was uncalled for. Just as one's hunger is satisfied only when one oneself eats, so is the rule with me as regards cleanliness. I derive intense pleasure when I clean things myself."

IX

RAMANAMA

At Amki I could not get goat's milk for Bapu. I tried my best to procure it but failed. So I had to inform Bapu who said to me, "What does it matter? For goat's milk the white juice of the coconut will do as well and fresh coconut oil will serve the purpose of ghee."

Bapu showed me how to prepare them and accordingly I gave them to him. As he usually took eight ounces of goat's milk he took the same quantity of coconut milk too. But he could not digest it and so had an attack of diarrhoea. The frequent motions made him weaker and weaker till in the evening when he was coming back to the hut he felt a reeling sensation and was about to fall. Generally symptoms like yawning, perspiration, coldness of hand and feet etc. would precede such a reeling sensation in his case. I thought from his yawns that he was about to feel giddy but I was mistaken. Bapu who was walking with my support was already collapsing. I held his head with care and shouted for Nirmalbabu. He came and

we both helped Bapuji to bed. Then it struck me that I should call for Dr. Sushilabehn who was in a village near-by; I feared that I would be taken for a fool if Bapuji's illness suddenly took a serious turn and if I did not call for her in time. I wrote a chit and just as I was giving it to Nirmalbabu for despatching, Bapu woke up from his trance and called out, "Manudi," (that was Bapu's term of endearment for me), "I do not like your calling Nirmalbabu. As you are still young, however, I can excuse you. But at such a time I expect you to do nothing else but take *Ramanama* with all your heart. As for myself I was already engrossed in taking His name. I would have liked it immensely had you started taking *Ramanama* instead of shouting for Nirmalbabu. Now don't inform Sushila or call her. The real doctor is Rama. As long as Rama needs service from me, He will keep me alive. When He does not, He will call me back to Himself."

A shiver passed through my body when the words "don't inform Sushila or call her" struck my ears. I snatched the chit from Nirmalbabu and tore it to pieces. Bapu saw this and remarked, "So you had already written to her." I had to admit the fact. Then he said, "Today the Lord has saved us both. On reading the chit Sushila would have left her work and immediately run to us. I would not have liked it at all. That would have made me angry with myself and you. Thank God, I was tested today. I am convinced that I shall not die of sickness if *Ramanama* has penetrated deep down into my heart. This rule is for everybody. One has to suffer

for one's mistakes and in that spirit I passed through the pain. One should have *Ramanama* on one's lips till one's last breath, but it should not be repeated parrot-like ; it should spring from the heart as was the case with Hanuman. When Sitaji presented a pearl necklace to him he broke the pearls to see if the name of Rama was written in them. We need not care to find out whether the incident actually happened or not. We may not be able to make our bodies as strong as that of Hanuman but we can certainly make our souls as great. One can realize the devotion of Hanuman if one is intent on it. If one cannot reach that height it is enough if one makes a sincere attempt. Has not Mother *Gita* taught us to make every effort and leave the result in the hands of God ? We should try our very best to follow that teaching.

"Now you have understood what my attitude is towards the sickness of anybody, be it you, me or anyone else." And that very day he wrote to an ailing sister : " There is only one panacea in the whole world and that is *Ramanama.* But His name could only prove effective if the rules pertaining to it are strictly adhered to. But who cares to do so ? "

Strangely enough the above incident occurred on the 30th of January 1947 exactly a year before his death.

That unshakable faith in *Ramanama* remained with him till his last breath. I did not then imagine that on the same day a year later, I should have the heart-rending experience of hearing *Rama, Ra . . . ma* as the last audible words of the great departing soul. Mysterious indeed are the ways of the Lord !

X

IMPORTANCE OF SMALL THINGS

Since the time that he sent his companions to different villages, Bapu was overburdened with work. It was difficult even for six persons to cope with Bapu's office work alone. Now it had to be managed by two, Bapu himself and Nirmalbabu. But Nirmalbabu was unacquainted with the work. Moreover, he could manage only the Bengali and the English correspondence. Gujarati, Hindi and Marathi were foreign to him and Bapu had to look after all that correspondence. Then so many came to see him and he had to go through the Hindi and English post-prayer talks also for the Press as press-reporters could not interpret him accurately. The most difficult work was that of packing up the luggage daily and seeing that not the smallest thing was left behind. Of course though it was I who was managing this Bapu always saw that everything went on all right. One may wonder what luggage Bapuji would carry on his pilgrimage on foot, which would be difficult for anyone to pack. He always carried his daily requirements with him, as he did not want to be a burden to any one. And these did not mean merely pencil and paper for writing. Here is a list of things which we were

asked to take : From needle and thread to the cooker with all its paraphernalia such as pincers, cooking pan etc. Then there were vegetable knife, earthen bowl, wooden spoon, bucket, tumbler, commode etc. These were our companions not because they could not be obtained owing to the ravages of fires in Noakhali but because Gandhiji liked to use his own things. So they found their way even to the palaces of Shri Birlaji. In addition, there was a separate arrangement for his office requirements. Such was the handbag from which the loss of the smallest chit of paper would bring Bapu's work to a standstill. This bag contained sundry important things such as letters from Pandit Jawaharlalji, the Sardar and the Viceroy, Bapu's copy of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, Bible, *Quran-e-Shareef* and his *bhajanavali* (book of hymns). It also contained rough drafts of letters by Bapu on the back of those he got by post. I had to look after this valuable bag and if anything was lost from it, the responsibility was mine. Still Bapu would say, " If anything is lost from there you may escape blame, but how can I ?" This shows the burden of his worry for the smallest thing in it. Again nothing should be left ill-arranged simply because our stay was to be very short at a particular place. Unawares Bapu may inspect my arrangement. Here is an excerpt of a letter which I chanced to read : "It is impossible to cope up with the work here. How poor is the extent of my *ahimsa !* Somehow my work goes on. All round there is conflagration. It is only through God's grace that my work goes on. My truth and non-violence are being weighed with the finest weight

— not that which weighs a pearl but by one which is too heavy for weighing even a hundredth part of a hair. All round there is exaggeration and untruth as if truth had entirely deserted us. Violence stalks the land under the guise of non-violence and *adharma* in the name of *dharma*. But my truth and non-violence can be tested only under such an ordeal. And I am here to go through the test."

Such was Bapu's plight in his great work at Noakhali.

To cope with this tremendous work he used to get up at 2 a. m. and wake me also. To get up so early and that too in such cold was a trying situation for me, but never for Bapuji. Half in jest once I said to him, "Bapu, I would light a candle to God as a mark of thanks if either you wake up late or make some mistake in looking at the watch."

Bapuji burst into laughter and said, "God is not so susceptible to bribe as you." And really God did not seem to care at all for my votive offering; and lo! no sooner did the hour of 2 a. m. strike than fondly slapping me on the head he woke me up saying "get up Manudi, see, God was not tempted by your offer." Then he asked me to light the lamp which he would always have put out on going to bed every night. Thereupon I told him, "Bapu, we sleep at about 10 or 11 p. m. and we get up at 2 a. m. and so why not keep the lamp burning dimly?" Bapu said, "That is true but who will give me so much kerosene? Neither you earn for me nor do I earn myself. It is quite natural for you to think like that, because your father in Mahuva is earning. And moreover,

do you realize that I have two purposes served in having the lamp put out? One is that the moment you light the lamp sleep is shaken off, so that you don't doze when I dictate anything to you, and second, so much of kerosene is saved. Thus I can kill two birds with one stone, but do you know the meaning of the proverb?" I gave him the generally understood meaning but he gave me a different interpretation. He said, "One stone (one way) and two birds (two jobs). What is that way by following which two jobs are always accomplished? Two did not literally mean only two jobs. But two here may mean two or a hundred. Here in Noakhali thousands have been ruined. This leads me to think that we should not let even one moment go waste. Sleep, food etc. we should have just enough to keep us going."

Here he made a reference to poet Lalit's devotional song beginning with

'आजनो व्हावो लीजीये रे, काल कोणे दीठी छे?'

"Strike the iron while it is hot. Take time by the forelock," he proceeded. "Who knows what will happen the next moment? That is why I am saying all this to you just now at 2 a. m. If the Lord wants to take away either of us He may do so. It is all in His hands.

"So this verse needs to be fully understood and assimilated. Then what is that golden path by pursuing which we can achieve all purposes? That path is the Path of Service — that is, service of one's neighbour, or service of the Lord. Devotional marks on the forehead or telling the beads of the rosary does not connote the service of the Lord. To put such a mark and then to stab another — as is happening nowadays

—that is sheer hypocrisy. But as saint Narsinha Mehta has said, 'Devotion means absolute self-surrender (lit. offering of one's head).' So remember if you cannot serve with your body, then you must do so with your mind, getting up, sitting, eating, drinking, playing, laughing all the while. We must pray for the wellbeing of the whole world and render whatever service falls to our lot. If you understand even this much you have learnt a good deal. See, what deep meaning our proverbs have. Even through these little jokes I have taught you a valuable lesson."

And thus this great teacher spoke to me for about 20 minutes in the stillness of the night at two o'clock in a low tone in order not to disturb any one else.

XI

CHANGE OF HEART

The huts in Noakhali are made of mud and coconut leaves. There are very few buildings of brick. The few that were there were burnt to ashes during the communal disturbances.

Bapuji's headquarters in Noakhali was in a village called Shrirampur. The house was made of mud and its roof was thatched with coconut leaves. Everyday we had to move from one village to another. Many huts had been destroyed by fire, and when it rained, it came down in torrents, so that it was impossible to spend the night under the trees. Bapu might

walk on foot during his tour but where was he to stay? This was the problem that worried friends.

Among them, Satishbabu who managed the whole Gandhi Camp was the most worried. But being resourceful he constructed a folding-hut which was at once artistic and useful. It had doors and windows, light planks of wood for sleeping on, some straw with a mat thereon in case the ground was rough. There was also a small bathroom at the back. Bapu knew that Satishbabu was making a folding-hut but he did not realize that he was making a hut which he later described as " palace-like ".

Bapu used to stay at Shrirampur. His real tour, however, began from Chandipur, a village two miles off. The area which was greatly devastated was about seven to eight miles from Shrirampur. As this would be a very long distance for Bapu we halted for the night at Chandipur. This village also was not immune from the disturbances.

Before he started from Chandipur some ladies came and put the auspicious mark on his forehead and then our prayers began. Bapu had instructed me beforehand to sing *Vaishnavajana to tene kahiye* and substitute Christianjana, Parsijana, Sikhjana, Muslimjana and Harijanajana for Vaishnavajana at every repetition of the first line and he too joined in the song. This song was not sung daily but only on special occasions. He discarded his sandals in Chandipur. The reason he gave was: " When we go to holy places like temples or *masjids* or churches we put off our sandals

and I have to go to *Daridranarayana*. I am going to people whose kith and kin have been looted, where innocent ladies and children have been slaughtered and where they have not sufficient clothes to cover their nudity. To tread on such ground and to meet such people is, to my mind, a pilgrimage; so how is it possible to keep on my sandals?" While Bapuji said this, his heart was stirred to its depths like buttermilk in the process of churning. Even now his pathetic voice rings in my ears. Bapu's feet were even more tender than our palms; so his feet were often pierced by thorns and they became cracked.

Exactly at 7. 30 a. m. he commenced his pilgrimage, through betelnut and coconut forests with one hand on my shoulder, a bamboo stick in the other and the song "Walk On Alone" of the Poet Rabindranath Tagore on his lips:

"If they answer not to thy call walk alone,
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,
O thou of evil luck,
Open thy mind and speak out alone.
If they turn away and desert you when crossing
the wilderness,
O thou of evil luck,
Trample the thorns under thy tread and along
the blood-lined track travel alone.
If they do not hold up the light,
When the night is troubled with storm,
O thou of evil luck,
With the thunder flame of pain ignite thine own
heart and let it burn alone."

This song in Bengali was sung everyday before setting out, and then all day long we went on singing hymn after hymn and *Ramadhun*. On the way Bapu saw places where bones were scattered about, huts had been burnt down and people had been killed; his heart was broken, only the hymns gave him some solace.

On 7th January, 1947, at 9. 30 a. m. we reached Masimpur where devastation had been indeed great. As there was no place for Bapuji to stay, the folding-hut was put up. Entering it, Bapu observed minutely every nook and corner, up and down and sat down on one of the wooden planks and I started washing his feet. For a few moments he was silent and then said, "Have you marked what a lot of trouble Satishbabu has taken on this *palace* of mine?" He has made it all in such small parts that even children can carry it from place to place. So overflowing is his love for me! How can I exclusively enjoy his boundless love? So I have decided against this *palace* being carried to any other village. It can be used either as a hospital or for some other such purpose. I can be comfortable anywhere. Even if there is no house there are so many trees here to give us shelter. Let God do what He wills. Why should we worry about it? I have told all our workers who have gone into the villages that they should depend for all their necessities on the villagers only. They should look upon themselves as members of the villager's family. They should not think that they were somebody and that they had gone to serve and oblige the villagers. If they entertained any such ideas they would not be able

to carry on for a long time. If they fell sick they should use only such medicines as may be available locally or be prescribed by the local physician or in the last resort depend upon the five elements (earth, fire, etc.). This rule applies to me as well.

The next day Bapu did not allow us to carry the folding-hut. Thereafter he used to stay with one of the villagers. This stood him in good stead, for, it enabled him to live with people of all sorts of both the communities, Hindus, Muslims, weavers, potters, barbers, blacksmiths, traders, Brahmans, Harijans etc., so much so that he stayed even with the people who had indulged in killing in Noakhali. Bapu's presence helped thus in bringing about a change of heart. And it seemed as if people too thought that by extending hospitality to Bapu, they got an opportunity to atone for their sins in this very life and thus get themselves absolved. And there was a glow of happiness on Bapu's face in spite of so much pain. Many people said in so many words that they did not mind the outrage of Noakhali as Bapu's feet had sanctified their villages!

XII

RECEPTION WITH COSTLY GARLANDS

In Devipur the local workers and the people had arranged a grand reception for Bapu. We came to know later that they had spent about Rs. 200 on it. Usually Bapu was welcomed by the women-folk of the village with an auspicious mark on his forehead. Sometimes they used also to decorate the village with coconut leaves. Bapuji took no objection to such decorations, because it did not involve any expenditure except labour with their own hands.

In Devipur, however, the decoration was made with flowers, coloured paper, silken, silver and gold threads, bought from Chandpur. They had also small lights of ghee and oil. Bapu saw this and became serious for a while. He then asked me to gather information about the local leaders, the population of the village etc. Subsequently I informed him that there were 300 Hindus who were mainly Brahmans, Kayasthas and Shudras, and 150 Muslims. Bapu called the leader and asked him in an angry tone, "From where did you get all this?" The leader answered, "Your visit is a blessed occasion for us and so we Hindus only collected Rs. 300 by giving according to our purse, with 8 annas as the minimum subscription, to buy flowers and other decorations." Bapu was all the more enraged and said, "All these decorations

and flowers will soon fade away. It makes me feel that you are all cheating me. My visit has emboldened you to put up this big show only to add fuel to the fire of communalism. Don't you realize that I am thrown into the fire myself? I would not mind it so much, had these garlands been of yarn as they would have served two purposes—one of decoration and the other, of utility when the yarn is converted into cloth. There seems to be an overflow of money in this village or else you would not have thought of these decorations in such hard times. This is not the way to show your love for me if that is your object. If you have real love for me, do what I say. I cannot imagine how you could think of wasting your money like this after this terrible holocaust.

"And moreover, you are a Congress worker, a public worker, and you say you have read my books; you are an M. A. and you have been to prison; you wear this short khaddar dhoti, and still you have used all this foreign silk and ribbons. I only want to impress upon you that all this is very painful to me. This makes me think of my fellow workers and wonder whether they who are known today as servants of the people, will also start receiving and giving costly garlands if appointed to honourable posts in future.

"I realize today that even now I cannot say for certain that every one of my workers would ever be simple and that he would not swerve from his ideal even if he owns a numbers of cars or big bungalows. It doesn't matter. This incident has made me more vigilant, more awake. I do not find fault with you; you merely disclosed your real self. Who can help that?

But through this incident God shows me where I stand. I wonder what more is still in store for me to see."

How could those poor workers have anticipated that Bapu would suffer such unbearable pain through their action? The worker in question went away downcast and removed all the decorations within half an hour. Bapu asked them to make a reel of all the threads used in the garlands. The reel thus made was a big one. It was given away to the people for sewing purposes. The thread was long enough to make about 20 reels of the usual size. But for Bapu all this thread would have gone to waste. Thereafter Bapu was welcomed only with hand-spun yarn, and 50 yards of cloth woven out of it was distributed to the poor. Indeed Bapu was a real friend of the poor.

XIII

BAPU'S REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT

We were at Calcutta with Bapu at the time of the attainment of freedom after years of slavery.

The Hindus of Noakhali feared an outburst of disturbances on the 15th August 1947, and hence Bapu went to Calcutta from Kashmir to reach Noakhali on that day.

At the time Bapu reached Calcutta, there was an outburst of communal violence there and so, Shri Prafulla Ghosh, the then Prime Minister of Bengal, asked him to stop there for two days. Bapu agreed to do so. Though the outrage took a turn for the worse,

Bapu decided to adhere to his original programme; and we packed up accordingly. But just then Shri Shaheed Suhrawardy came to see Bapu and said, "You please proceed to Noakhali after you have quelled the local riots. Nobody but you can quench the fire that is aflame here." Bapu replied, "I cannot do anything single-handed. I am prepared to be your secretary, but as I have promised to go to Noakhali, I ought to proceed. I am prepared to stay here and quell the riots, provided you take up the responsibility about Noakhali. But for bringing peace here you shall have to stay with me all along and live like a fakir."

After thinking for a while Shri Suhrawardy said, "All right, I shall send a man to Noakhali and try my best." Bapu said, "Trying your best won't suffice. You give me your answer after mature consideration; because, just as I have said that I shall go on a fast unto death if anything happened in Bihar, so also I shall be justified in taking the same course for Noakhali if further disturbances take place there."

These talks were held on the 13th August. How cleverly Bapu can find a way out! He put all the blame for the outrage at Noakhali and the great responsibility for future peace on the people there and so Shaheed Saheb was baffled for a while. For him it was not a difficult task. The Muslims of Noakhali, who were responsible for the devastation and had great charges against them, had been acquitted and they were used to obeying Shaheed Saheb. Bapu had indeed a wonderful method of getting work done

by the guilty person himself, by putting all the responsibility for future good behaviour on him. Thus Bapu would venture to hand over all that he has, to a servant who daily steals, and thus appeal to the best in him, and awaken his sense of honour and responsibility.

The next day Shaheed Saheb came with his group. All of them promised, "We will see that there is perfect peace in Noakhali and we will be on the guard to prevent future trouble. But you please stay here." Thus Bapu accomplished his work in Noakhali without stirring out of Calcutta. Muslims went to Noakhali and offered every kind of help to Hindus in order to allay their fear. Suhrawardy Saheb agreed to stay with Bapu day and night. They both agreed not to have any interviews without the presence of the other and to issue joint statements only. On the 14th afternoon we went to stay in Haidari Mansion, Beliaghata, where Muslims dared not go.

The building was so dirty that we had not experienced such discomfort even in the Noakhali tour. There was only one room and numerous people came for *darshan*. Bapu could not get even a moment's peace. Some young men were angry with him on the day we went to stay there. They said, " You are an enemy of the Hindus. You have come here only because a few Muslims have been killed. Where were you up till now ? " Bapu smiled in reply and calmed them down by saying, " You are all youths. But to me you are like children. Even my youngest son Devadas is older than every one of you. Why can't you realize that I,

a Hindu by birth, a Hindu by action, can never be an enemy of the Hindus ? Who was it but I that went to Noakhali ? I was going there today too. I want help from you. I can't do anything single-handed. It is in your hands to be either protectors or destroyers. I would be pleased if you destroyed me. I am old. I don't wish to live long. I have served enough. I have come here merely to calm you down if you listen to me. I am a servant of both Hindus and Muslims. To me all religions are the same. Now see, have I not done my work in Noakhali without going there this time ?" He then related the story narrated above.

Could it have been Bapu's premonition when he said, "It is in your hands to be either protectors or destroyers" ? For in the end the Hindus turned out to be his destroyers !

Those young men were pacified and they themselves then began to spread Bapu's message of peace. And in Calcutta, which was till then the scene of mutual slaughter between Hindus and Muslims, people of both the communities came together in a lorry to Bapu, with sky-rending shouts of *Hindu Muslim Bhai Hain* (Hindus and Muslims are brothers), *Hindu Muslim Ek Ho* (Let Hindus and Muslims unite), at 11. 30 p. m. i. e. just half an hour before the clock ushered in the day of freedom. This noisy atmosphere of warm fraternization continued for the whole night. Bapu could not get a wink of sleep, as not only men but also women and children of both the communities came together. It seemed as

if they came for *darshan* of the Father of the queen of freedom, begging forgiveness for their misdeeds and taking a vow not to behave so in future. Every city celebrated this great day with blazing lights, processions etc.. But Bapu's way of celebration by creating permanent unity within half an hour, surpassed them all. And ever since there has not been any untoward incident in Noakhali, though it must be added that Bapu's followers have been there ever since.

On that day Bapu had asked us to fast but I objected and said, "Bapu, shouldn't you give us sweets at least today?" To that he replied, "You are certainly aware that I ask you all to fast on occasions like marriage, birth or death and especially so on auspicious occasions. Besides, from today we shoulder a far greater burden of responsibilities. Just as when we fast on *ekadasi* (a holy day) our minds are drawn more towards devotion, so also we shall become more conscious of our responsibilities by observing a fast on this day. Moreover, the spinning wheel is the weapon of freedom and we can hardly afford to forget it. The observance of silence is equally important, for, through it we pray to the Almighty to keep us always awake to our responsibilities. All this is necessary to save us from pomp, luxury and pride when we get power. From today we should become more and more humble."

Bapu's face was serene. Within half an hour he had brought about an unimaginable change in the whole atmosphere and yet there was not an iota of pride on his face. On the contrary he said, "What can

any man do single-handed? Why do you congratulate me alone? This achievement is due to the co-operation of you all."

Bapu and the rest of us observed the day by spinning and a fast. He addressed thus all the local Ministers who had come to him for his blessings, "You see, from today onwards you wear a crown of thorns. Even after getting power you should remain as simple as you are today. Take care that pride does not possess you; for power is a great allurement. Don't go in for pomp and luxury. Do not be tempted by the glamour of authority. You have to set an example to the public of simplicity, humility, non-violence and tolerance. Villages have to be uplifted. The down-trodden have to be raised. Never give up truth. Now starts your real test. During the British days, in a sense, there was no test for you; but from today a series of tests begins. May God give you complete success in them!"

The 15th August, 1947 was a Friday and it was on a Friday that he died as a victim to a Hindu's fury. Alas that he is no more with us to advise us! Let us remember his wise words and pray to God to give us strength to follow them, as a means of repentance for that crime of murder committed by us on him.

XIV

BAPU'S GLORIOUS BIRTHDAYS

I have used the word 'birthday' here in the plural as Bapu's birthday falls on the 2nd October according to the English calendar and on the 12th day of the dark half of the month of Bhadarva according to the Indian calendar, and so both these days are celebrated. In the year 1947 the 2nd of October came first.

Now we shall have to celebrate his birthdays without the light of his presence. Bapu had prophesied on the 2nd of October 1947 that his next birthday would see India either transformed or him no more alive. Who could then have thought that his prophecy would prove so tragically true ?

At 3. 30 a. m. on the 2nd of October 1947, we got up for prayers. Many inmates of the Birla House had already assembled. One by one we bowed to Bapu. By way of joke I remarked, " This is not fair. It is you who should bow to others on your birthday, but today, instead of you bowing down, you are quietly accepting our bows ! " Bapu replied, " Yes, the ways of Mahatmas are contrary to those of the world. Haven't you all raised me to the pedestal of a Mahatma ? It doesn't matter if the Mahatma is only a counterfeit coin; but once the word is applied, he is above the rules of ordinary courtesy ! "

At that time Bapu was suffering from severe cough, cold and fever. The cough at times was so violent that a bystander could hardly bear to look

on. Bapu, however, instead of resting for a while, began, immediately after prayers, his daily correspondence and writing for the *Harijans*.

The kind of cough he had, had a periodic duration of three weeks. The doctors, therefore, requested him to take pennicilin injections so that he may have some relief during the period. There was a tussle between the doctors and Bapu about this.

He said, "And what about *Ramanama*? *Ramanama* saturates my heart. I am sure my cough will vanish tomorrow; and if it continues for your three weeks' period, I am prepared to proclaim to the world that I was found wanting in the matter of *Ramanama*".

A doctor argued, "Maybe, but how can you dismiss summarily all these laborious researches in science? Bring me your most perfect devotee of *Ramanama* and I will infect him with cholera."

Bapu said, "That is only a presumptuous claim of science. Science has yet a long way to go to get at truth. But I am sure that one who chants the Lord's name with real faith can never fall ill. Disease as such will be rooted out if people become so pure. You are mistaken. Tomorrow some one may suggest that I should take liver orally or by injections. Should I then take such foreign articles? India is a lazy country and the laziest community in it is that of doctors. They cannot prepare anything here. They simply believe in remedies manufactured elsewhere. What a pathetic situation! India—a beggar country! Nature has provided us with everything and yet we have to stretch our hands to foreigners. I feel extremely pained about

it whenever I think of it. I have done my best. Only when fortune favours India, her condition will improve. I am fed up now. My only desire now is to disappear from the world quietly, with *Ramanama* on my lips. It is *my* lack of ability that I am unable to impress upon people the full import of the potency of *Ramanama*. Today I am in a potter's kiln with flames all around me. Just as you doctors are making researches in science, so also I am in search of *Ramanama*. If I succeed, well and good; if not, I shall die in the attempt. That today, taking advantage of this 2nd of October, you have all come to console me lovingly, is a fine indication of your love for me; but personally, my only desire now is either not to be alive on my next birthday so that I may not have to see this fire, or to see a changed India. So please pray for what *I* wish instead of for my long life."

These were the words he uttered at 5.30 a. m. on the 2nd October, 1947.

It is generally believed that on a happy occasion we ought not to say anything ominous or weep or get angry whatever may be the provocation. Today I find that there is some significance in that belief.

At 7 a. m. that day we went out for our morning walk with Bapu. On the road he was annoyed with an Englishman who attempted to take his photograph. Bapu disliked photographers as a class since they had harassed him often enough. That day he felt it all the more. "This is a day for prayer," he remarked sharply and added. "None of these things please."

Kripalaniji, Suchetabehn and many others came up to greet Bapu. We had observed a fast and so had Bapu. I said, "Bapu, why should *you* observe a fast today?" He replied, "This day should be observed as the birthday of the Spinning Wheel, i. e. of the God of Service. So we should fast on His birthday and try to become purer by repeatedly offering prayers to Him, 'O Spinning Wheel, keep us at Your feet.' My fast today is by way of a vow of service through the Wheel, not as a celebration of my birthday which you want to make much of."

As usual Bapu finished his massage, bath, etc., at 8.30 a. m. Mirabehn had artistically arranged flowers in the shape of ॐ, हे राम! and a Cross just in front of his seat. Putting our garlands of yarn round his neck, we all again bowed to him. Then there was a short prayer attended by Jawaharlalji, Indira Gandhi, Ghanshyamdas Birla and family, Sardar Patel, K. M. Munshi, C. H. Bhabha, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, and many others, who crowded the room to overflowing. When they dispersed after the prayers which were from the texts of all religions, Bapu had a sudden attack of severe cough. A friend remarked, "Bapu, you have not yet been cured of your cough." He replied, "I shall be free from cough if the Lord favours; if not I should like to die of it. I have no desire now to live for 125 years. Today you must all pray to God either to take me away from this fire or to grant good sense to India. I had never been so downcast in any of my numerous fights with the British. But what am I to do today with my own kith and kin? People try to kill their own brothers nowadays. I don't

want to live to see this fratricidal war." Everyone who had come for prayers left at 10 a. m. But others continued to flock into the room for Bapu's *darshan.* Gadgil, Devdas Gandhi and his family, Bhatnagar, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Sir Datar-Singh, Arthur Moore, Shanmukhan Chetty and Prof. Abdul Majid, were among them. Then at 11.40 a. m. came the Sardar, Manibehn, Ganeshdatta, H. L. A. Aung, High Commissioner for Burma, and Dr. M. Oung Sieu, High Commissioner for China. The High Commissioners had brought with them their Prime Ministers' letters and fruits. At last, at about 12.30 p. m. Bapu could snatch some rest, but only for fifteen minutes; for the stream of people started again. We had mass spinning for an hour from 2 to 3 p. m. Lady Mountbatten came at 4.10 and left at 4.35, and then came Humayun Kabir, Shridharani, and Monsieur and Madame Logier (of France).

The rupees offered at Bapu's feet made quite a heap. Some ladies had given even ornaments.

We passed the whole of that 2nd October very very happily. There was a fine programme on the radio that night. "Bapu," I pleaded, "please do listen to the radio at least today." He said, "What is there in the radio to listen to? Why not listen to the music of the *rentiyo* rather than to the *bhajans* of the radio?" (A pun upon the words 'Radio' and '*Rentiyo*' which means in Gujarati the spinning wheel). Nearly a thousand telegrams came from India and foreign countries.

The Gujaratis of Delhi had collected a fund to be given to Bapu on his birthday according to the Hindu calendar. As Bapu's health was bad, the Sardar

had a go at him, " Why did you agree to attend the meeting of the Gujaratis when you are suffering so severely from cough ? But you are so greedy that scent of money from any place will make you rise up even from your deathbed to go there. Such funds are sure to be subscribed even otherwise. Why then should you go, coughing so violently all the time ? But I know you won't listen." We all had a hearty laugh over it. So sweet were the relations which subsisted between Bapu and the Sardar. Some of the audience then asked the Sardar to address a few words to them. He cut them short with a joke, " Is this *my* birthday that I should speak ? It is the Mahatma to whom you give all these funds and why should *I* be asked to speak ? You know Bapu is a *bania* and *banias* are always greedy. See how soon he regained his energy to cheat you all even with his severe cough and weakness. (There was an outburst of laughter at this sally.) But now my only request to you all is, please do let him have some rest. "

Bapu reminded the people to galvanize the charkha programme.

The birthdays of Bapu will be as dark this year (1948) as they were glorious in 1947. But, just as we content ourselves with the dim light of an earthen oil-lamp rather than be in utter darkness, so will repeated reminders and an attempt to follow him, give us light in the darkness of his absence from us. Let us remember his favourite prayer ' Thy name is both Ishwar and Allah; pray show everybody the right path ', and send our respects to Bapu through the prayer. Let us also repeat his wish uttered on the

Charkha Day of 1947, that either India should become pure or that he should not live; and let us pray to God and to him to show us the right path, and to forgive us our sins and enable us to begin a clean chapter in our life.



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