

THUS SPAKE
Bapu

or dialogues between Gandhi's
spirit and the scribe

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CONTENTS

Preface

Prolegomenon

Part One

1. God

2. Truth

3. Religion

4. Non-violence

Part Two

1. Education

2. Constructive Programme

Part Three

Satyagraha or the Non-violent Direct Action

Epilogue



PREFACE

GANDHI was assassinated on 30 January 1948. But even before that those, who could not have achieved political power without his leadership of the country, had begun to ignore his counsel and to disclaim him. They agreed to the partition of the country which he had vehemently opposed. They thought little of the fundamental values—Truth, non-violence, religion, ethics or morality—so highly prized by him. These values, they considered, were other-worldly. They thought his call to the villages, his rural development plans, and Constructive Programme were a throw-back and regression to the past. They said that his Satyagraha had become redundant and completely irrelevant in a politically free India. The communal violence, which erupted before partition and the events which followed the political independence of India, brought home to Gandhi, his sense of powerlessness over those who wielded political and economic power. His advice was no longer sought and, even when given, was ignored.

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, impressed by the immense progress that Western countries made after the industrial revolution, and particularly by the United States of America during and following the Second World War, embarked on a programme of industrialization. For this, capital was needed. So India applied to the World Bank for a loan of 600 million dollars. The World Bank stipulated the condition that the public sector should be reduced. The Indian Government refused the loan. But after his visit to the United States, the Prime Minister became less radical and his criticism of the US policies less sharp. The 1957 balance of payment crisis took India back to the United States and the World Bank and she accepted both the loan of 600 million dollars and also the condition. India dropped the rule that in joint enterprises 51 per cent control should be in Indian hands, and the most profitable areas of economy previously reserved for the public sector—notably aluminum, drugs, heavy electricals, engineering goods, fertilizers and synthetic rubber—were thrown open to private firms. As a result, the whole course of development was swung completely away from its goal of 'socialism' and towards free enterprise. By inflows of more aid, and yet



more aid, that is, loans with high rates of interest, India's foreign debts have reached colossal proportions, and today she stands on the brink of an economic disaster. The country cannot pursue an independent economic policy and has to pander to the interests of foreign multinationals and foreign governments. Not only has her economic sovereignty been sacrificed, her political sovereignty is also in peril.

As far back as 1909 when he wrote his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi characterized Western civilization as an evil and exhorted his countrymen to keep away from it. Today the whole world knows that industrial civilization, whether of the capitalist variety or the communist, has failed to solve the problems that face mankind. The capitalist society, which provides a semblance of freedom, denies bread to millions; and the communist society, which provides bread, denies even a semblance of freedom. And both of them pose new and serious threats—pollution of the environment, resource exhaustion, ecological imbalances, armament race and a possible nuclear holocaust and total annihilation of mankind. Serious thinkers in the West—Gunnar Myrdal, Jan Tinbergen, Erich Fromm, E.F. Schumacher, Ivan Illich, Alvin Toffler and many others—are at present dissatisfied with both the capitalist and communist models of development and favour a decentralized, self-reliant economy for which Gandhi stood and fought all his life. His idea of bridging the three gulfs—between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, and the city and the countryside—was taken up by Mao to solve the problem of basic needs of the Chinese people. Alvin Toffler, the celebrated American author of the best-seller, *Future Shock*, has come out with a recent book, *The Third Wave*, in which he devotes a whole chapter to Gandhian economy. That Gandhian ideology is fast catching up in the West is shown by the popularity of Sir Richard Attenborough's recent movie 'Gandhi' in this country and, more especially, abroad. The film won eight Oscar awards and was shown to packed houses for months together all over the world. It helped popularize Gandhi and Gandhian thought among the masses as nothing else did previously. With deepening economic crises, pervasiveness of crimes of sex and violence, and the imminence of a nuclear blow-up, the



relevance of Gandhi and non-violence is much greater today than it was when he lived in flesh and blood.

This small book, which lays no claim to originality and scholarship, is not intended for that small group of readers who have access to Gandhi's original writings or the numerous excellent anthologies on Gandhian thought. It is written for schoolchildren and the common man and describes briefly in the author's own words what Gandhi said or, according to this author, would have said, if he were alive today. If it succeeds even in a small measure in spreading Gandhian thought in this troubled world, it would serve the purpose the author has in mind.

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PROLEGOMENON

FOR a period of four years I had been perusing books by Gandhi and on Gandhi. Prominent among those which I read were the *Collected Works*, the anthologies by Nirmal Kumar Bose, V. V. Ramana Murti, G. Ramachandran and T.K. Mahadevan, Bharatan Kumarappa, R. K. Prabhu, Anand T. Hingorani, V. B. Kher and others, and *Gandhi Marg*, the journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation.

It was a mid-winter night. The time was about 10.30 p.m. I was half-way through the eightieth volume of the *Collected Works*. A winter breeze was blowing and, through my window overlooking a neighbour's rosary, the sweet fragrance of roses was being wafted on to me. I fell into a slumber and I know not how long I had slept— or maybe I was dreaming—when my ears caught a faint but a familiar tune. Due to its distance, I could not get the words but the music was sweeter and more melodious than anything I had heard ever before. By the gradual increase of the volume, it became clear to me that the source was moving closer to where I lay in bed. I could now make out the words:

*Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram,
Patita Pavana Sita Ram,
Ishwar Allah Tere Nam,
Sabko Sanmati De Bhagwan,
Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram*

Within seconds a blazing light entered my room and I was enveloped and lost in supernal radiance which emanated from a form which I had first seen in 1918 on the occasion of a political meeting, which I attended during the Rowlatt Act agitation. This form in a physical body completely dominated the Indian socio-political scene till 1948 when an assassin's bullets removed it from our midst and put out the light that had within it shone and had lit up this entire subcontinent and the regions beyond.

I recognized what I had known so well in human shape and tried to pay my obeisance by action and word. But my limbs were palsied and my tongue was



mute. I could neither move nor speak. After a little while, however, after some reassurance from the likeness, my confidence was restored and I came to myself. I prostrated myself before the spirit.

When after Its descension, the One becomes many, the selves forget the Self. In the case of saints, however, the self soon realizes its real Self. And so I guess, it happened in this case. After shedding his various bodies—gross, subtle and causal—Gandhi achieved his emancipation. His emancipated spirit, now like Narad, soars in space—Narad with his *veena* and the Saint of Sabarmati with his Ram Dhun. And he spake to me: "You have for years heard and read what I spoke and wrote. You have been for the last four years engaged in a serious study of my life and works with the sole purpose of putting my point of view before the people of the Indian subcontinent." And he continued:

For me, who had played no mean part in wresting the country's freedom from the British, it was no consolation during my last days on earth to know that my advice was no longer heeded by those who had come to wield political and economic power. After my demise, my teachings also were swept under the carpet and have, ever since, been followed only in the breach. I had set my sights on a simple austere life, and the fulfilment of the basic needs for all; those whom destiny placed at the helm of affairs, and who were charged with the care and welfare of the masses, thought differently and opted for a life of gratification of the senses and opulence for a few. I had worked all my life for a society of near-equals and near-equal emoluments for intellectuals, labourers, lawyers, doctors and barbers; they have brought into being a social order in which a few roll in luxury and the majority are forced to go without food, clothes and shelter. I had advocated a labour-intensive technology and rural and small cottage industries to give employment and a living wage to every one; they have imported and introduced a capital-intensive high-technology and built huge plants which throw millions out of employment. I strove all my life for the eradication of the 'drink' evil, they have all along encouraged the use of alcohol and tobacco so as to swell the revenues of the



state. I had talked for decades about the evils of the Western civilisation, they have been doing everything to promote it; and today people even in remote rural areas are imbibing not its good points but its sinister ways. We were a God-loving, God-fearing people, but we have become Godless. We were, through the ages, a peace-loving people. We are today vying with the Westerners in our preparations for mass violence and warfare. Our educational system is in a shambles. I had expected that, within a reasonable period of time, illiteracy will be eradicated. But, today, we have more illiterates than the total population of the country in 1947. Since independence, things have gone from bad to worse. Dacoities, rapes and murders have increased a hundredfold and rail and bus holdups are everyday occurrences. There is rampant corruption among Congressmen and others everywhere, not excepting those at the very apex. Smuggling, hoarding and black marketing are openly encouraged by those in power. What is unheard of anywhere, the Union Government in Delhi encourages the Congressmen and invites them to lead violent agitations in the States not ruled by the Congress Party. Hunger and destitution stalk the land. But I shall speak about this later. I know well that you have not yourself lived the simple life and adopted the ways which I regard unnecessary for the survival of the human race, but you have been an ardent student of my life and work and are keen to learn and propagate my message among the dispossessed, the sick and the suffering people of this land and the world at large. Knowing all this and knowing also that you are only an average person and not very highly endowed, I have decided to pay you nightly visits and post you with my current views on matters that agitate thinking persons in India and the world outside. You will, therefore, function as a scribe and disseminate my teaching among your own people and the peoples of the world.

For the sake of convenience and ease of comprehension we shall describe my teaching programme under three main parts or divisions; (i) the spiritual part which deals with God, Truth, Love, Non-violence, Religion, Ethics and Morality; (ii) Education; and the Constructive Programme or the training for action, and



(iii) the Political Action which deals with non-violent civil disobedience and takes place only when the occasion demands.

As training for action means learning the use of arms, training for non-violent civil disobedience means the continued and permanent instruction and practice of the items of the constructive programme. Resort to non-violent civil disobedience is made only if and when it becomes absolutely necessary.

I was overwhelmed by what the Epiphany spake, made my obeisance, thanked the Divine Presence for this undeserved act of grace and humbly indicated my assent. Hardly had I done so, the blaze and the form it illumined suddenly vanished from my sight, and I sat up listening to the morning twitter of birds outside my window.

On the succeeding night too my room was relumed with the dazzling light that radiated from the Presence, and enveloped as I was in a mass of refulgence, it took me sometime before I came to myself. Then I lay prone in front of Him for a while, stood up, bowed deferentially and with folded hands prayed for enlightenment on sundry topics that have continued to baffle this scribe and millions like him for many years. This happened on this and every other nightly visit from the Seer.



PART ONE



1. God

THE SCRIBE: There are many subjects on which I would wish to have your views. But first things first. Tell me, Bapu, what your views about God are.

Bapu: Your priority is most appropriate. But it is a difficult question you have asked. Difficult to answer and difficult to comprehend. From time immemorial, it has exercised the minds of mankind and it will continue to do so. For a lucid exposition of my concept of God, let me begin by explaining that for me God is not a person.

The Scribe: But you speak of Rama and you speak of Krishna.

Bapu: Yes, I do. But for me Ram is not Dashratha's son. He is not the Rama of Ramayana. For me he is the Supreme Being. Nor is my Krishna the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. If it was proved to me that Mahabharata is history in the same sense that modern historical works are, that every word of Mahabharata is authentic and that the Krishna of Mahabharata actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and light. Mahabharata is neither fiction nor history commonly so-called. It is the story of the human soul in which God as Krishna is the chief actor.

God is one without a second. He is all. He is the origin and the dissolution of the whole universe. Beyond Him, there is nought; and all nature, lower and higher, *apara* and *para*, is strung on Him as a row of jewels on a thread. He is the sapidity in water. He is the radiance in the moon and the sun. He is the Om in all the Vedas, sound in space and manhood in men. He is the eternal seed of all beings. He is the intellect of the intelligent and the heroism of the heroic.



He is the imperishable *Brahman*—the impersonal, unmanifest, unconditioned Absolute. He is the primordial, unmanifest *prakriti* called *Adhyatma*. He is the manifest *prakriti* with name and form—*Adhibhut*. He is the individual indweller—the self in that form or the *Adhidaiva* and He is also the presiding deity of sacrifice—*Adhiyajna* or Vishnu. He is the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Over-ruler, minuter than an atom, the sustainer of all, of form inconceivable, self-luminous like the sun and beyond the darkness of *Maya*. He is *Avidya*, the un-manifested seed of the manifested and beyond this un-manifested He is the other un-manifested and imperishable, the Goal Supreme. In Him all beings dwell and by Him all this is pervaded (*Isha Vasya Idam Sarvam*). As the All-formed One, He has assumed all the manifested forms in the universe.

He is the *Kratu* (a particular vedic rite); He is the *Yajna*; He is the *Swada* (the food offered to the manes); He is the *Aushadha* (all vegetable foods and medicinal herbs); He is the *Mantra*; He is the *Ajya* or the oblation; and He is the fire into which the oblation is poured.

He is the Father of this world, the Mother, the Sustainer, the Grandfather, the purifier, the One thing to be known, the syllable *Om*, the *Rk*, *Saman* and *Yajus*. He is the God, the supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Origin, the Dissolution, the Substratum, the Storehouse, the Seed immutable. As Sun, he gives heat; He withholds and sends forth rain. He is Immortality and also Death. He is Being and Non-being.

He is the Self in the heart of all beings. He is the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings. He is, as He himself proclaims in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgita* all the *Vibhuti*s. In His *Vishwarupa*, He contains all the forms. He is both *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna*. He is *Kshay* (perishable), *Akshay* (imperishable) and *Purushottam* (the supreme being). He is *Purna Avatar*.

The Scribe: You have given me a long description of God— *Brahman*, *Nirakar* and *Sakar* (without form and with form), *Nirgun* and *Sagun* (without attributes and with attributes).



Bapu: Yes I have, but no words can describe Him. He is indescribable. He is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. To me, God is Truth and Love. God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is the still voice inside—i.e. conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. He transcends speech and reason. He is a personal God to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply *is* to those who have faith. He is long suffering. He is patient. He is also terrible. He is the greatest democrat the world knows. He is the greatest tyrant ever known. We are not, He alone *is*.

The Scribe: Bapu, why do you consider and say Truth is God?

Bapu: When I was last in my mortal body, I was in early youth taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as 'One Thousand Names of God' (Vishnu Sahasranam). But these one thousand names of God are by no means exhaustive. We believe—and I think it is the truth—that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we say that God is nameless; and as God has many forms, we also consider Him formless; and since He speaks to us through many tongues, we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And when I came to study Islam, I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is love, God is love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be God, God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description, I have come to the conclusion that, for myself, God is Truth. But about the year 1930, I went a step further and said 'Truth is God'. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years before. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love had many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found, too, that love in the sense of non-violence (*ahimsa*) had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with Truth, and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of Truth. But in their passion for discovering



truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than God is Truth, I should say Truth is God.

I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who felt delighted to call himself an atheist; but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though, I know, he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say, "Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man and not a God-fearing man". I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed the criticism of many a young man.

Add to this difficulty, millions have taken the name of God and, in his name, committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science, inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp.

And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, viz; God alone *is* and nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the *kalma* of Islam. There you find it clearly stated that God alone *is* and nothing else exists. In fact, the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists—*Sat*. For these and several other reasons that I can give you I have come to the conclusion that the definition—Truth is God—gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth as God the only inevitable means is love, i.e., non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately means and ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love,

The Scribe: Bapu, what then is truth?



Bapu: It is again a difficult question you have asked, but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How then, you ask, different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments, there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way, strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore, we have the belief, based upon experience, that those, who would make individual search about truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance, the vow of Truth, the vow of *brahmacharya* (purity) —for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else—, and the vow of non-violence, of poverty or non-possession. Unless you impose on yourself the five vows, you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience; and it is because we have at the present moment so many people claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever that there is so much of untruth delivered to a bewildered world. All that I can in true humility present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to a zero. Further than this, I cannot go along this fascinating path.

The Scribe: Tell me, Bapu, if the existence of God can be proved by pure reason.

Bapu: In the first place, I consider that no proof is needed to establish the existence of God or Truth. It is by nature self-evident. As soon as you remove the cobwebs of ignorance that surround it, it shines clear. Remember, also, that even



as the sun cannot hide its light, every expression of truth has in it the seeds of self-propagation. Secondly, there are two types of knowledge—*apara vidya* or knowledge pertaining to material world and material sciences, and *para vidya* or knowledge pertaining to God or Spirit. For acquiring the first type of knowledge, reason is a powerful tool, but for the acquisition of God-knowledge, reason is a very minor instrument. You cannot realize wider consciousness unless you subordinate completely reason and intellect, and the body too. Rationalists are admirable beings but rationalism is a hideous monster when it claims omnipotence for itself. Attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone believing it to be God. I plead, not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason. I was taught from my early days to regard Truth as unapproachable—something that you cannot reach. A great English man taught me that God is unknowable. He is knowable to the extent that our limited intellect allows. To me, He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it.

The Scribe: What is the meaning of creation, Bapu? What is the meaning of life? I sometime think that His creative activity is a tragic sport inflicting untold misery and suffering on embodied beings (*jivas*) involved in the cycle of births and deaths (*sansara*). Do you agree, Bapu?

Bapu: No, no, no. It is his sport (*lila*), indeed, but tragic by no means. He is One. He wanted to be many. By mere proximity to His unmanifested power (*shakti*), the living beings and the inanimate nature came into being. A part of Him—an *amsh*—is in them all but He is not contained in them. He transcends them and everything else. It has been as it were a descent into them—an *avatara*. In this way, in a limited sense, they are all His *avatars*. After birth, the *jivas* forget their real nature, identify themselves with the body and do not act in a manner in which they should. This is the cause of their suffering and of the cycle of births and deaths. The meaning of life is to discover one's true nature and to get back to the source. The *jiva* is like the drop of water that has separated from the



source—the ocean. A drop dries up as soon as it enters upon an independent existence; in the ocean, it partakes of the greatness of its parent. Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God; and all his activities, social, political, and religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings, therefore, becomes a necessary part of his endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and become one with it. This can only be done by service of all. Man being a part and parcel of the whole, you cannot find Him or serve Him, except through the service of mankind.

The Scribe: But, Bapu, you almost exclusively devoted all your time and effort to the service of the people and the country in which you were last embodied. Why did you not extend your service to mankind in other lands?

Bapu: My love went forth to everyone everywhere. But my countrymen were my nearest neighbours and they had become so helpless, so resourceless, and so inert that I had to concentrate myself on serving them before I could travel to other lands in the service of other peoples.

The Scribe: Bapu, why do you equate the service of man with that of God?

Bapu: Because God is in all beings, in all men. I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. Though we have many bodies, we have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I do not believe that an individual may gain spirituality while those that surround him should suffer. I believe in *advaita*. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent.

The Scribe: Bapu, men retire into forests and caves to realize God.

Bapu: If I could persuade myself that I would find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would have proceeded there. But I know that I could not find Him apart from



humanity. Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men.

The Scribe: What is God's Law, Bapu? And what is its relationship to God?

Bapu: I have told you before, I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an idea, the Law Himself. He does not, therefore, rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say that He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, He and his Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that he rules our actions and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

The Scribe: Do you, Bapu, feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?

Bapu: Yes, I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom which I have imbibed through the central teaching of the Bhagavadgita that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.

Man is supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power which overrides all our intentions, all our plans, and carries out His own plans.

I call that Great Power not by the name of Allah, not by the name of Khuda or God but by the name of Truth. For me, Truth is God and Truth overrides all our plans. The whole Truth is embodied within the heart of that Great Power.

The Scribe: What is the way of realizing Truth?

Bapu: Non-violence or Love is one way. It is so very necessary because God is in every one of us and, therefore, we have to identify ourselves with every human



being without exception. This is called cohesion or attraction in scientific language. In popular language, it is called love. It binds us to one another and to God. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and love are the same thing.

The way to Truth is a painful and difficult climb, but ceaseless, selfless service of fellow-beings, perfect humility, complete surrender to the will of God, constant endeavour and silent prayer, are trusty companions along the weary but beautiful path that all seekers must tread.

The Scribe: Is perfection possible for embodied beings?

Bapu: In my opinion it is impossible for men to realize perfect Truth so long as they are imprisoned in their mortal frames. They can only visualize it in their imagination. They cannot, through the instrument of the ephemeral body, see face to face Truth which is eternal. That is why in the last resort one must depend on faith.

The Scribe: You have said: "I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world where all else but God that is Truth is uncertain. God is long suffering and patient. He lets the tyrant dig his own grave, only issuing grave warnings at stated intervals." I humbly beg to say that God is not a certainty. If it is, as you say, why does He permit bad people to flourish and not nip all rascality in the bud? Why should He be long suffering and patient? What influence can He wield if He be so? If God allows a tyrant to dig his own grave, why should He not weed out a tyrant before his tyranny oppresses the poor? Why allow full play to tyranny and then allow a tyrant, after his tyranny has ruined and demoralized thousands of people, to go to the grave? The world continues to be as bad as it ever was. Why have faith in that God who does not use His powers to change the world and make it a world of good and righteous men? There are numerous people alive who are troubled by such doubts. They wish to believe in God but, not finding any foundation for their faith, they are unable to do so. How can one enlighten them and change their disbelief into belief?



Bapu: Your argument is as old as Adam. I have no original answer for it. But I permit myself to state why I believe. I am prompted to do so, because of the knowledge that there are people who are interested in my views and doings.

There is an indefinite mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it though I do not see It. It is this unseen Power which makes Itself felt and yet defies all proof, because It is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses; It transcends the senses.

Yet it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or how he rules. And yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In a tour in Mysore, I met many poor villagers and I found upon enquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some God ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler, I, who am infinitely lesser than God, and also lesser than they than their ruler, need not be so surprised if I do not realize the presence of God, the King of kings. Nevertheless I do feel, as the poor villagers felt in Mysore, that there is orderliness in the universe, there is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind Law, for no blind Law can govern the conduct of living beings, and, thanks to the brilliant researcher Sir J.C. Bose, it can now be proved that even matter has life. Law and the Lawgiver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver because I know so little about it or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation, whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever-changing, ever-dying, there is underlying all that change, a living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and recreates. That informing Power or Spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.



And is this Power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For, I can see that in the midst of death, life persists, in the midst of untruth, Truth persists, and in the midst of darkness, light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God, to be God, must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in the smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization more real than fine senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses, it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence, but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.

Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself.

This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith. And since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and, therefore, in the supremacy of the world law, the law of truth and love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to truth and love.

But the foregoing does not answer your argument. I confess I have no argument to convince you through reason. Faith transcends reason. All I can advise you is not to attempt the impossible. I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be co-equal with God. I am therefore humble enough to recognize evil as such. And I call God long-suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that he has no evil in Him and yet if there is evil, He is the author of it and yet untouched by it. I know too that one can never know God if one does not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble experience.



The Scribe: You speak in paradoxes and, I must confess, you somewhat baffle me. You recognize evil as such and say God is patient and permits evil in the world. You also say that if evil exists, He is its author. Do you not think these are reasons enough for young men today and some older people, too, not to make an easy supposition of God? They ask if he exists and is benign, as you say, why is there so much suffering in the world? And if He is all-powerful, why does He not prevent this suffering? For want of suitable answers to these questions, it has become fashionable among them to discard the idea of God. You have time and again talked of your living faith in a living God. Can you expatiate further on this matter?

Bapu: I can lay no claim to having realized the existence of living God. But I do have a living faith in a living God even as I have a living faith in many things that scientists tell me. It may be retorted that what the scientists say can be verified, if one follows the prescriptions given for realizing the facts which are taken for granted. Precisely in that manner speak the Rishis and the Prophets. They say, anybody following the path they have trodden can realize God. The fact is that we do not want to follow the path leading to realization and we won't take the testimony of eyewitnesses about the one thing that matters. Not all the achievements of physical sciences put together can compare with that which gives us a living faith in God. Those who do not want to believe in the existence of God do not believe in the existence of anything apart from the body. Such a belief is held to be unnecessary for the progress of humanity. For such persons, the weightiest argument in proof of the existence of soul or God is of no avail. You cannot make a person, who has stuffed his ears, listen to much less appreciate, the fine music. Even so, you cannot convince those who do not want the conviction about the existence of a living God.

Fortunately, the vast majority of people do have a living faith in a living God. They cannot, will not, argue about it. For them, "IT IS". Are all the scriptures of the world old women's tales of superstition? Is the testimony of the Rishis, the Prophets to be rejected? Is the testimony of Chaitanya, Ramakrishna



Paramahansa, Tukaram, Dhyandev, Ramdas, Nanak, Kabir, Tulsidas and others of no value? What about Rammohun Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda—all modern men as well-educated as the tallest among the living ones? I omit the living witnesses whose evidence would be considered unimpeachable. This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Indeed, even the so-called realization has at the bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. In the very nature of things, it must be so. Who can transgress the limits of his being? I hold that complete realization is impossible in embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living, immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings. God is not outside this earthly case of men. Therefore, exterior proof is not of much avail. He cannot be perceived through the senses, because He is beyond them. To feel Him one must withdraw from the senses. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate strains which are unlike and infinitely superior to anything we perceive or hear with our senses.

You want to know why, if God is a God of mercy and justice, He allows all the miseries and sorrows we see around us. I can give no satisfactory explanation. It may be that what we mistake as sorrows, injustices and the like, are not such in truth. If we could solve the mysteries of the universe, we would be co-equals with God. Every drop of the ocean shares its glory, but it is not the ocean. Realizing our littleness during the tiny span of our earthly life, we close every morning's prayer with the recitation of a verse which means: "Misery so-called is no misery nor so-called riches, riches. Forgetting (or denying) God, is the true misery, remembering (or faith in) God, is true riches."

The Scribe: Bapu, is God good? Did He make man in His own image?

Bapu: Yes, God is good but not in the same sense as X is good. X is comparatively good. He is more good than evil, but God is wholly good. There is no evil in Him. Unfortunately for us man has fashioned Him in his own image. This arrogance has landed mankind in a sea of troubles. God is the supreme alchemist. In His presence all iron and dross turn into pure gold.



Again God lives but not as man. His creatures live but to die. But God is life. Therefore, goodness and all it connotes is not an attribute. Goodness is God. Goodness, morality, and ethics conceived apart from Him are lifeless things and exist only whilst they are a paying policy. For man to imbibe them, they must be cultivated in their relation to God because we want to reach and realize God. All the dry ethics of the world turns to dust because apart from God, they are lifeless. Coming from God, they come with life in them. They become part of us and ennoble us.

The Scribe: One more question about God, Bapu. If God only is, and there is nothing else besides Him, if the One through His own *Lila* (play or action) becomes many—beings and things—and if the Unity devolves into plurality which in turn is evolving back into Unity, if the many that have originated from the levels of their own development struggling to get back to Him, if there is a part, an *amsh* (fraction) of Him in all, why do we not see others in ourselves and ourselves in others? Or all in Him?

Bapu: You do not see yourself in others or others in yourself or all in Him because you do not know how to see—you do not really see.

The Scribe: Please tell me how I should see.

Bapu: What you see are only the superficial things, the differences, the separateness. These are unreal.

The Scribe: I do not understand. Please explain this to me.

Bapu: A rich person does not see himself in the poor because he looks so different from himself owing to the economic distance between them, a Brahmin or a high caste person does not see himself in the untouchable because of the social distance, a fair-skinned person does not see himself in a darker one because of the difference in colour. Similarly, a more evolved or a better educated person refuses to see himself in a less evolved or less educated or illiterate person owing to the difference in their levels of consciousness or education. There are economic differences, social differences, differences of race, religion and



colour. There are differences of other kinds. We make much of these and create distance between ourselves. This leads to a gulf between the rich and the poor, between the country-and the city-dweller, and between the rich and the poor in the same country, and between people of one country and another.

The Scribe: Bapu, how can this distance be overcome or this gulf bridged?

Bapu: By paying no attention to these superficial things—the superficial differences, but by focusing one's attention on the reality.

The Scribe: Please tell me what the reality is.

Bapu: The reality is that all of us—men, women and children, rich or poor, socially well-placed or otherwise, country-or city-dwellers, belonging to one country or another—are members of the same family, the human family. And all human beings have a divine spark, a spirit, a soul in them. And it is the same in all.

The Scribe: But then why are these beings different? Why do they look different?

Bapu: They are not different. They only look different to those who are ignorant, those who are superficial observers.

The Scribe: Please explain.

Bapu: The real substance is one's self, the spirit, the soul, the *jiva*—call it by whatever name you wish. It is the same in all. It is a part of Him. It is only differently clothed. The core is the same. Only the sheaths are different. Those who see the difference, they only see the sheaths, the apparel. See through them. Then you will see the kernel, yourself in others, and others in yourself and all in Him, because all selves and the Self, *jivas* and Brahman are one. When you see in this manner, you really see.

The Scribe: Now I understand what you mean but only theoretically. Can one experience it or live it?

Bapu: Yes, you can. Reduce and obliterate all these differences between the rich and the poor, between the countryfolk and the urbanites, between those who go



to schools and colleges and those who don't. Reduce and obliterate the disparities between the inhabitants of one country and those between country and country.

The Scribe: But how do we do this?

Bapu: By reorganization of society, by proper education of children and adults, by emphasizing perennial values such as truth and non-violence, and by fighting exploitation, social injustice, and iniquity wherever they exist by well-thought-out campaigns of constructive work and, satyagraha whenever there is need for it. If you do this, you will reduce and abolish the differences and the disparities which prevent you from seeing things in their proper perspective. You would then see the oneness, the unity behind the apparent differences, the plurality. Once you see this unity, there will be no 'other'-ness. When there is no 'other', when you alone are, there will be no room for fear, greed, anger or hate. When these cease, there will be no exploitation and no violence; and what takes their place would be selfless service, and kinship and love of all which extends slowly beyond the family, friends, village, state, and country.

The Scribe: You are talking of an ideal state but is it easy to achieve?

Bapu: You are quite right. It is not easy to achieve. But are any worthwhile objectives easy to achieve?

The Scribe: And have you given thought to the length of time it may require?

Bapu: It may require decades, may be a century; but what is a century in the vast time cycle? That it will take a long time should make us decide to start working on it right now. This is all the more urgent if you look into the prevailing chaos in this country and elsewhere. I think time is not far when people will be compelled to apply their minds to an approach we have discussed tonight.

The Scribe: Now I see why you exhort people to identify themselves with others, to see themselves in others and others in themselves.

Bapu: If you do, then try acting on it. Mere intellectual exercises have little value. Try to put it into action.



2. Truth

THE SCRIBE: What is Truth?

Bapu: There is a story in the Gospel in which a judge inquired, 'What is Truth?' But he got no answer. The holy books of the Hindus tell us of Harishchandra who sacrificed his all at the altar of Truth and let himself, his wife and his son be sold to a *Chandala* (tax-collector at the crematorium). Imam Hassan and Hussain lost their lives for the sake of Truth.

The fact remains, however, that the question posed by the ancient judge has not been answered. Harishchandra renounced his all for the sake of Truth as he knew it and so won immortal fame. Imam Hussain gave up his dear life for Truth as he understood it. But Harishchandra's 'truth' and Hussain's 'truth' may or may not be our truth.

Beyond these limited 'truths', however, there is one absolute Truth which is total and all-embracing. But it is indescribable because it is God. Or, say, rather God is Truth. All else is unreal and false. Other things, therefore, can be true in a relative sense. He, therefore, who understands Truth, follows nothing but Truth in thought, word, and deed, comes to know God and gains the seer's vision of the past, the present and the future. He attains *Moksha* (liberation), though still encased in the physical frame.

The Scribe: The observance of Truth, as defined by you, seems to me extremely hard, if not impossible.

Bapu: You are perfectly right. The most difficult vow to keep is the vow of Truth. Out of lakhs who may strive to follow Truth, only a rare person will succeed completely in the course of his life on earth.

Take my own example. My only consolation is that I never claimed anything beyond a sincere endeavour to keep this vow. It never happened that I told a lie deliberately. I do not remember having deliberately told a lie at any time in my life, except on one occasion when I cheated my revered father. It had become a part of my nature to speak the Truth and act in accordance with it. But it was



impossible for me to claim that Truth, which I perceived but dimly, had become a part of my life. I was not beyond indulgence in unconscious exaggeration or self-praise or taking interest in describing my achievements. There is a shade of untruth in all these and they will not stand the test of Truth. In this sense, I certainly lapsed from Truth. A life wholly filled with the spirit of Truth should be clear and pure as a crystal. Untruth cannot survive even for a moment in the presence of such a person. No one can deceive a man who always follows Truth, for it ought to be impossible that untruth will not be exposed in its presence.

When somebody uttered a lie before me, I became more angry with myself than with him because I then realized that untruth still existed somewhere deep in me.

The word *satya* comes from *sat* which means to be, to exist. Only God is ever the same through all time. A thousand times honour to him who has succeeded through love and devotion for this *satya* in opening out his heart permanently to its presence. I had been striving to serve that Truth. I possessed, I believe, the courage to jump from the top of the Himalayas for its sake. As I advanced towards it, I perceived my weakness ever more clearly and the knowledge made me humble. It is possible to be puffed up with pride so long as one does not know one's own insignificance. But once a man sees it, his pride melts away. Mine melted away long ago. I can very well understand why Tulsidas called himself a villain. This path is for the brave alone; the timid had better not tread it. He who strives for all the twenty-four hours of the day ever meditating on Truth, whether eating, drinking, sleeping, spinning or easing himself, doing anything whatever, will certainly have his whole being filled with Truth. And when the sun of Truth blazes in all its glory in a person's heart, it will not remain hidden. He will not then need to use speech and to explain. Or rather, every word uttered by him will be charged with such power, such life, that it will produce an immediate effect on people.

Truth cannot exist without love. Truth includes non-violence, *brahmacharya* (continence), non-stealing and other rules. It is only for the sake of convenience



that the five *yamas* have been mentioned separately. The man who commits violence after knowing Truth falls from Truth. That a man who has known Truth can be treacherous is as inconceivable as that darkness may exist despite the sun shining overhead.

If a few persons practice Truth sincerely, or I would say, if even one practices perfect Truth, events can change for the better within weeks. Truth shines with its own light and is its own proof. In these evil times, falsehood, exploitation, corruption, violence and other crimes are much more rampant than when I was in body. It is difficult to follow truth in such circumstances. But, as I said before, it is not impossible. Even if a few fearless and courageous Indians, willing to sacrifice their all, can get together and decide to pursue this path with utmost conscientiousness, these evils can be eradicated and the country can come out of the approaching disaster.

The Scribe: Individuals, groups and parties often plan and act secretly. What is your stand on secrecy?

Bapu: Secrecy is suppression of Truth. It is falsehood. When governments become oppressive and use repressive measures to contain popular agitations by minorities or a whole people, when fundamental rights are abridged and taken away, when mails are censored and telephone lines tapped, when curbs are put upon peaceful assemblies or the press, people often resort to secrecy. They talk inaudibly or in whispers to each other when strangers or suspected spies are around. They dissemble, they communicate in codes or ciphers and plan or plot against their oppressors secretly. All this is born of fear.

People should act openly and fearlessly and speak the Truth. Newsmen—journalists and editors—should also act likewise. If people speak the truth and act openly, expensive secret service departments maintained both by governments and private organizations would become completely redundant.



3. Religion

THE SCRIBE: What is your concept of religion?

Bapu: Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the Truth within and whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker, and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself. There is no religion higher than Truth and righteousness. For me personally, religion was my life, how I lived, sat, talked and behaved in general; the sum-total of all these in me constituted my religion.

The Scribe: What is your definition of morality?

Bapu: True morality consists in finding out the true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it, not in following the beaten track.

No action which is not voluntary can be called moral. So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and as a matter of duty. Any person who is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral. It also follows that all good deeds that are prompted by hope of happiness in the next world cease to be moral.

The Scribe: What is the relationship between religion and morality?

Bapu: True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil.

As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel, and incontinent and claim to have God on his side.



I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality.

The Scribe: Can desires and motives which are selfish in nature be moral?

Bapu: No, this is not possible. All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral. The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind.

The Scribe: You were essentially a man of religion. Why then did you enter politics?

Bapu: During my embodied existence, I made repeated declarations that my ultimate objective was self-realization which is the same thing as God-realization, but I did not see how this could be achieved by separating religion from practical affairs or politics. Religion, which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion. And that is why I put a religious matter before people in a practical form.

I cannot think of politics as divorced from religion. My political Guru was Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and from him I learnt to spiritualize politics and I have never regretted having done so. Indeed, religion should pervade each one of our actions. Do you see not the magnitude of the havoc that decay of ethics, morality, and religion in social, economic; and political affairs, has wrought everywhere and particularly in this country after the achievement of independence? For me, religion ceases to have use if it serves no purpose in every walk of life.

The Scribe: But there are more religions than one.

Bapu: True, there are different religions and sometimes their teachings are disparate but all these different roads converge toward the same end.

Religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonises them and gives them reality.



The Scribe: If true religion transcends all existing religions, then the latter must be wanting in some respects. If that be so, is any one of them more meritorious than the others?

Bapu: Religion of man's concept is imperfect, liable to error and always subject to a process of evolution and reinterpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise.

The Scribe: Could you give us an example of how religion has been evolving in the course of time.

Bapu: This is easy. Take Hinduism. It is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the Koran or the Bible. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The Gita itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *Karma*, *Sanyas*, *Yajna*, etc. Not that what the Gita has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the Gita put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teachings of Hinduism as interpreted in the Gita, to give an extended meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry Gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning in the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was to be of our baser self, to please not angry Gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the Gita is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The Scribe: If all religions are good and all of them have faults, why is there an obsession in some followers of labelled faiths for converting other people to their own faith?



Bapu: I have said time and again that this practice should cease. It should be everybody's aim to make a Christian a good Christian, a Muslim a good Muslim, and a Hindu a good Hindu. Proselytization of 'heathens' or 'Kafirs' by offer of baits or other equivocal measures must be deprecated and shunned.

The Scribe: How do you view the work of foreign missions or foreign money in this context?

Bapu: I have admiration for the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals and other welfare institutions with the help of foreign money by foreign missions, if the motive is purely altruistic. But if the motive is to use them as measures for unsettling the faith of poor and ignorant persons in the religion of their forefathers, I am totally against it.

The Scribe: In view of some recent conversions in Tamil Nadu, please enlighten me further on this subject.

Bapu: After a long study and experience, I came to the conclusion that all religions are true, that all religions have some error in them and that all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith. Therefore, no thought of conversion is possible. The aim of fellowship should be, as I said a little while ago, to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Muslim to become a better Muslim, and a Buddhist to become a better Buddhist. The attitude of patronizing toleration is false to the spirit of international fellowship. If I have a suspicion in my mind that my religion is more or less true, and that the other's is more or less false instead of being more or less true, then though I may have some sort of fellowship with him, it is of an entirely different kind from the one I need in the international fellowship. Our prayer for the other must not be 'God give him the light thou hast given me', but 'Give him all the light and truth he needs for his development'. Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion.



God has created different faiths just as He has the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour's faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God's house there are many mansions and they are equally holy.

The Scribe: Bapu, you have so often averred that you are a *Sanatani* Hindu. Please elaborate on this and tell me why you call yourself a *Sanatani* Hindu.

Bapu: I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu because:

1. I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *avatars* and rebirth.
2. I believe in *Varnashram Dharma* in a sense which in my opinion is strictly Vedic, but not in its present popular and crude sense.
3. I believe in the protection of the cow in a much larger sense than the popular.
4. I do not disbelieve in idol worship.
5. Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, and having been born in a Hindu family, I chose to remain a Hindu, as, after careful examination, I found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me, in as much as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith, not merely to respect all the other religions, but also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths.
6. The doctrine of non-violence or love is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism which in my view includes both Jainism and Buddhism.
7. Hinduism believes in the oneness, not merely of all human life, but in the oneness of all that lives.
8. I claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu, because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures sufficient enough to satisfy



the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not diminished my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life and enabled me to understand more deeply many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

The Scribe: There is a lot of confusion about *Varnashram Dharma* in Hinduism. What is your unambiguous and clear-cut view on this controversial issue?

Bapu: *Varna* is the functional organization of society into four occupational divisions based on heredity, training, and aptitude. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. I do not believe that inter-dining or even inter-marriage necessarily deprives a man of the status that his birth has given him. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower one. All are born to serve God's creation—a *Brahmin* with his knowledge, a *Kshatriya* with his power of protection, a *Vaishya* with his commercial ability and a *Shudra* with his bodily labour. This, however, does not mean that a *Brahmin* for instance is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a *Brahmin* predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing again to prevent the *Shudra* from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others for their special qualities for service. But a *Brahmin*, who claims superiority by right of knowledge, falls and has no knowledge. And so with others who pride themselves upon their special qualities. *Varnashram* is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy.

The Scribe: Is the *Varnashram* system, as you have defined and described it, practised in Hinduism today?

Bapu: No, it is not. Those who call themselves *Brahmins* have given up the pursuit of learning. They have taken to various other occupations. The same is true more



or less of other *varnas*. *Varnashram* of the *Shastras* is today non-existent in practice.

The Scribe: How is caste system different from *varna*?

Bapu: I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The existing innumerable divisions with the attendant artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonials are harmful to the growth of religious spirit, as also to the social well-being of the Hindus and also their neighbours. The sooner there is fusion between these subdivisions and sub-castes, the better.

The Scribe: Please throw some further light on *varna*, the caste system and untouchability.

Bapu: *Varna* was an extremely useful and functional division of society according to occupations. Broadly speaking, even the present-day society the world over can be divided into *Brahmins* (the learned professions), the *Kshatriyas* (defence and police forces or the protectors), the *Vaishyas* (those engaged in trade and commercial callings), and the *Shudras* (the service men and workers). A modern amended version of *varna* could be even today a boon for mankind.

The caste system is a hindrance but not a sin. But untouchability is a sin, a great crime; and, if Hinduism does not destroy this serpent while there is yet time, it will be devoured by it.

The Scribe: Bapu, you have made an in-depth study of Hinduism. Tell me if there is any sanction for untouchability in it.

Bapu: I was born in the *Vaishnava* sect and I dearly love its *siddhas* and *siddhantas* (norms and principles). Nowhere either in *Vaishnavism* or Hinduism have I seen it laid down that 'bhangis', 'dhobies', etc., are untouchables. Hinduism is hemmed in by many old customs. Some of them are praiseworthy, but the rest are to be condemned. The custom of untouchability is, of course, to be condemned altogether. It is because of that that for two thousand years now, Hinduism has been burdened with a load of sin in the name of religion. I call such orthodoxy hypocrisy.



The Scribe: But there are verses in Manusmriti and other scriptures that favour this practice.

Bapu: It is no good quoting verses from Manusmriti and other scriptures in defence of this orthodoxy. A number of verses in these scriptures are apocryphal, a number of them are quite meaningless. Then, again, I have not so far come across any Hindu who obeys or wants to obey every injunction contained in Manusmriti. And it is easy to prove that one who does this will, in the end, be himself polluted. The *Sanatona Dharma* will not be saved by defending every verse printed in the scriptures. It will be saved only by putting into action the principles enunciated in them—principles that are eternal. All the religious leaders with whom I have had occasion to discuss the matter have agreed in this. All the preachers, who are counted among the learned and who are revered in society, have clearly announced that our treatment of 'bhangis', 'dhobies', etc., has no sanction other than the custom to which it conforms. To be truthful, no one really follows this custom. We touch them in the trains. They are employed in mills where we touch them without the least compunction. They get admission in schools and colleges. Society puts no hindrance so far as these matters are concerned. In English and Muslim homes, they are politely welcomed. And we have no hesitation in touching Englishmen and Muslims. In fact, we feel a pride in shaking hands with many of these untouchables when they are converted to Christianity. Then we dare not treat them as untouchables. Thus it is impossible for a thoughtful Hindu, even if he feels differently in the matter, to uphold a tradition which it is not possible to follow.

The Scribe: If this be as you say, why do Hindus despise the untouchables? Why do they hate them?

Bapu: I see no vital reason for this. There is nothing lowly in the occupations of untouchables. Doctors as well as our mothers perform similar duties.

The Scribe: But they cleanse themselves afterwards.



Bapu: Yes they do. But if 'bhangis', etc., do not do so, the fault is wholly ours and not theirs. It is clear that the moment we begin lovingly to hug them, they will begin to learn to be clean. Moreover, we should not forget that the function of removing garbage and filth is a necessary and sacred function and its performance can impart grace even to a *vaishnava*. Those who pursue this vocation are not, therefore, degraded but entitled to social privileges equal to those pursuing other callings; their work protects the society against a number of diseases. They, therefore, deserve the same respect as doctors.

The Scribe: You have assigned a special place in Hinduism to cow protection and you have said that you believe in it in a much larger sense than the popular one. Could you please dilate on this?

Bapu: Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of cow means the protection of the whole dumb creation of God. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow.

The way to protect her is to die for her. It is a denial of Hinduism and *ahimsa* to kill human beings to protect a cow. Hindus are enjoined to protect the cow by their *tapasya*, by self-purification and self-sacrifice.

The Scribe: But do they do so?

Bapu: No. The present-day cow protection has degenerated into a perpetual feud with the Mussalmans, whereas cow protection means conquering Mussalmans by our love. A Mussalman friend once sent me a book detailing the inhumanities practiced by the Hindus on the cow and her progeny. How we bleed her to take



the last drop of milk from her, how we starve her to emaciation, how we ill-treat the calves, how we deprive them of their portion of the milk, how cruelly we beat them, and how we overload them. If they had speech, they would bear witness to our crimes against them which would stagger the world. By acts of cruelty to our cattle, we disown God and Hinduism. I do not know whether the condition of the cattle in any other part of the world is so hard as that in India. We do not blame the others for this. We may not plead poverty in our defence. Criminal negligence on our part is the only cause of the miserable plight of our cattle. Our *pinjrapoles* (cow homes), though they are an answer to our instinct of mercy, are a clumsy demonstration of its execution. Instead of being model dairy farms and great profitable national institutions, they are merely depots for receiving decrepit cattle.

The Hindus will be judged not by their *tilaks* (prayer marks), not by the correct chanting of *mantras*, not by their pilgrimages, not by their most particular observance of caste rules, but by their ability to protect the cow.

It will now be understood why I consider myself a *Sanatani* Hindu. I yield to none in my regard for the cow. I made the Khilafat cause my own, because I saw that through its preservation full protection could be secured for the cow. I did not ask my Mussalman friends to save the cow in consideration of my service. My prayer ascended daily to God Almighty, that my service of a cause I held to be just may appear so pleasing to Him that He may change the hearts of the Mussalmans and fill them with pity for their Hindu neighbours and make them save the animal held by the Hindus as dear as life itself.

The Scribe: Hinduism has many flaws and even depravities. How then do you justify your love for it?

Bapu: I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moved me as no other woman in the world could. Not that she had no faults. I dare say she had many more than I saw myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond was there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of Gita or the Ramayana of



Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the Gita was my solace. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. There is an interest which I take in them and which I take in no other. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism. I have said I do not disbelieve in idol worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No one considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol worship a sin.

The Scribe: Is Hinduism an exclusive religion?

Bapu: I do not think so. It has room in it for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or *dharma*, and so it lives at peace with all the religions.

The Scribe: Is there one book, Bapu, that can be to the Hindus what the Bible is to the Christians or the Koran to the Mussalmans?

Bapu: Yes there is. But it is not the Vedas or their philosophical parts, the Upanishads, it is not the Puranas, not even the Bhagavata. Early [in my childhood, I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials, the tribulations and the temptations of life. The Vedas did not supply that need if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi for which I was not ready then. But the Gita, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the *Shastras* and the Upanishads. This decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the Gita. My first acquaintance, however, with Gita began in 1888-89, when contact with two English friends made me read the



book. I say "made me read", because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the Gita with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the Gita unaided. The friends of course were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the Gita. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it.

I have since then read many translations and many commentaries, have reasoned and argued to my heart's content, but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Today the Gita is not only my Bible or Koran, it is more than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago, but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me.

The Scribe: Bapu, you have made a translation of the Bhagavadgita. What prompted you to undertake this task when so many translations were already available?

Bapu: This is a valid question. I am no scholar of religious texts as B.G. Tilak, the author of *Gita Rahasya*, was. My knowledge of Sanskrit is very limited, and I have no *special literary* gifts in Gujarati. How could I then dare present the public with my translation? In the first place, my rendering is designed for women, the commercial *class*, the so-called *Shudras* and the like, who have little or no literary equipment, who have neither the time nor the desire to read the Gita in the original and yet who stand in need of its support. Secondly, mine is not a strictly literal translation. I have given greater importance to the spirit of the text. Thirdly— and this is a unique feature of this translation—at the back of it has been my endeavour to live the Bhagavadgita, to enforce its meaning in my own conduct for almost a lifetime. I am not aware of a similar claim made by other translators of enforcing their meaning of Gita in their own lives. Fourthly



and lastly, mine is not a mere translation. It is also in some respects a new interpretation.

The Scribe: What, then, according to you, is the message of the Gita?

Bapu: I have the answer to your query in some detail in my *Anasakti Yoga*— my introduction to the Gujarati rendering. This is available in English translation also. I would repeat portions of it and what I have said elsewhere for your enlightenment.

Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the Gita, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the heart of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description *of the* internal duel more appealing. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the Gita. A study of the Mahabharata gave it added confirmation. I do not accept the Mahabharata as a historical work in the accepted sense. The Adi Parva contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman and subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons described there may be historical, but the author of the Mahabharata has used them merely to drive home the religious theme. The poet has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary, he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries. In this great epic, the Gita is the crown. Its second chapter (the last 19 verses), instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, describes how a perfected man (*sthitaprajna*) is to be known. Among the characteristics of the perfected man of the Gita, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

Krishna of the Gita is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never



lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an after-growth.

In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service for mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth. There is an Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine". And therefore he who is the most religiously inclined has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

This belief in incarnation is a testimony to man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This realization is the subject of Gita, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the Gita appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the Gita even at the risk of repetition.

That matchless way is the renunciation of the fruits of action. This is the centre round which the Gita is woven. This renunciation is the central sun round which devotion, knowledge, and the rest revolve like planets.

The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action, i.e., from the taint of sin? The Gita has answered the question in decisive language: "By



desireless action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e., by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by intellectual feat. It is obtainable only by a constant heart churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the Vedas from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the Gita insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. And, mind you, the Gita's assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of a man of steady wisdom, the sage, the *sthitaprajna*. Gita's devotee is one who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egoism, who is selfless, who is alike in heat and cold, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated his mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, and who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence, at the same time, of strong attachments. We thus see that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself.

It must be remembered, however, that a mere learned man who performs no service is not a man of knowledge; he is only a *pandit*. Similarly a person with a soft heart who keeps on telling beads and leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking, etc., and not for performing a loving service, is not a true devotee. A man of knowledge or *bhakta* must perform action. The Gita says: "No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world will perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?" But Janaka's action was selfless and without attachment. His very breath was sacrifice and



service of mankind, for how else could he placidly say when his capital was burning, "even if Mithila turns to ashes, nothing that is mine is destroyed?" And yet no one misunderstood him. While the name of Nero is a by-word for diabolical heartlessness, Janaka's name is held in reverence until today and the words in which he uttered his detachment are still remembered. He had achieved the state when every thought on his part meant the service of mankind and he might have retired to live a life of meditative calm but he ruled his kingdom instead.

While, on the one hand, it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other, it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work, whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in the term 'action'. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he be acting? The manner in which the Gita has solved the problem is to my knowledge unique. The Gita says: "Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work."

This is the unmistakable teaching of the Gita. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is to be expected to follow, the means thereto and the capacity for it. He, who being thus equipped, is without desire for the result and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

Again let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The Gita reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, one who renounces reaps a hundred fold. The 'renunciation' of the Gita is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over the result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses—ever distracted, He



says good-bye to all scruples; everything is right in his estimation and therefore he resorts to means, fair and foul, to attain his end.

From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit, the author of the Gita discovered the path of renunciation of fruit and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good, that one cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters, that there is no place for religion in such pursuits and religion is only for the attainment of salvation. In my opinion, the author of the Gita has dispelled this illusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the Gita teaches us that what cannot be followed in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the Gita, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation, murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple and from that simpleness springs peace.

Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow Truth and *ahimsa*, when there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth and *himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish *ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the age of the Gita. The Gita had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out in the second chapter.

The Scribe: But if the Gita believed in *ahimsa* or non-violence or if it was included in desirelessness, why did its author take a war-like illustration?

Bapu: When the Gita was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*.



In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the Gita as to his limitations of *ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is always able to express them fully. In this, perhaps, lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the Gita. The author has himself extended the meaning of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible that, in the age prior to that of the Gita, offering of animals as sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the Gita sense. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body labour for service. Verse 12 of the same chapter designates a person who returns nothing for the gifts he receives from others, a thief. Body labour and bread labour are identical and if each one laboured for his bread and no more, there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sanyas* undergone, in the Gita, a transformation. The *sanyas* of the Gita will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sanyas* of the Gita is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the Gita, by extending the meaning of words, has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted that, according to the letter of the Gita, it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after a lifetime's unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teachings of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.

The Scribe: It is said that in the Bhagavadgita, Krishna has encouraged Arjuna to slay his relations. Also there are verses in it, and even chapters, such as the first and the eleventh, which are in conflict with the teaching of *ahimsa* or non-violence. How do you explain this?



Bapu: I have already given you the answer. Arjuna's relations are the Kauravas—the baser impulses within him and He exhorts Arjuna to slay them by becoming a man of steady wisdom, a *bhakta* or one who is beyond the *gunas* of *prakriti*—a *trigunatita*. If even this does not satisfy you, let me refer you to verse 5 of chapter X, verse 2 of chapter XVI, and verse 14 of chapter XVIII. In the first verse, Krishna declares that *ahimsa*, even-mindedness and other attributes of creatures flow verily from Him. In the second verse, *ahimsa* is a cardinal virtue among the twenty-six present in those of the divine heritage. And in the third verse, non-violence or *ahimsa* is praised as an austerity of the body. If Krishna really encouraged Arjuna to slay his relations, why was it necessary for Him to extol non-violence or *ahimsa* as He has done?

Again we, who believe in the teachings of the Bhagavadgita, do not draw our swords against our relations whenever they perpetrate injustice but we win them over by our affection for them. If the physical interpretation is accepted, we sin against it in not inflicting physical injury upon our relations whom we consider to have done injustice. Everywhere in the Song Celestial (i.e. the Gita), we note the following advice given to Arjuna: "Fight without anger, conquer the two great enemies—desire and anger, be the same to friend and foe. Physical objects cause pleasure and pain, they are fleeting; endure them." That one cannot strike down an adversary without anger is universal experience. Krishna's advice to Arjuna could, therefore, have been only to fight the baser impulses within himself.

The Scribe: Bapu, your arguments against the teaching of violence in the Bhagavadgita are very cogent. I am inclined to agree with you. Now, is there any sanction in the Bhagavadgita for the practice of untouchability?

Bapu: No. None whatsoever. In the Gita the Lord teaches us: "The wise look upon a Brahmin endowed with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a pariah (dog-eater) with equal regard. They see the underlying self everywhere."

The Scribe: You claim you are a *Vaishnava Sanatani* Hindu, yet at one time you took Bible classes at the National College, Gujarat. How do you explain this?



Bapu: My association with Christians is a long one. I have also made a sympathetic study of the Bible, the Koran and the literature pertaining to Judaism and Zoroastrianism. My conclusion is that all religions are good but all suffer from imperfection. I lectured to students of the National College on the Bible because the students of the college wanted to study the Bible. But some orthodox Hindus did not like my teaching the Bible to those to whom in their opinion I should have taught the Gita or the Upanishads. They even accused me of being a Christian masquerading as a *Sanatani* Hindu. I, however, took it not only as a libel but also as a compliment. It was a libel because there were people who could believe I was capable of being secretly anything, i.e., for fear of being that openly. There was nothing in the world that could keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge was a compliment, in that it was a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. So my position was that though I admired much in Christianity, I was unable to identify myself with orthodox Christianity. I must tell you that Hinduism entirely satisfied my soul, filled my being and I found a solace in the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads that I missed even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I did not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount did not leave a deep impression on me; but I must confess that when doubts haunted me, when disappointments stared me in the face, and when I saw not one ray of light on the horizon, I turned to the Gita, and found a verse to comfort me, and I immediately began to smile in the midst Of overwhelming sorrow.

The Scribe: Bapu, what should be the relationship between the State and the labelled or denominational religions? Should it favour or extend patronage to one of them?

Bapu: The State should not in my view be partial to any established faith; followers of different religions should be free to practice their religions in their own way. If religions are truly interpreted and pursued, all conflicts would cease, all clashes would end, and true harmony would prevail.



4. Non-violence

THE SCRIBE: What is your concept of *ahimsa* or non-violence? Has the practice of *ahimsa* in the past made the Indian unmanly?

Bapu: It has two aspects. In its negative aspect, it means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrong-doer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill-will. It, therefore, does not prevent me from withdrawing from his presence a child whom he, we shall imagine, is about to strike. Indeed the proper practice of non-violence requires me to withdraw the intended victim from the wrong-doer, if I am in any way whatsoever the guardian of such a child. It was thus most proper for the passive resisters of South Africa to have resisted the evil that the Union Government sought to do them. They bore no ill-will to it. They showed this by helping the Government whenever it needed their help. Their resistance consisted of the disobedience of the orders of the Government, even to the extent of suffering death at their hands. Non-violence requires deliberate self-suffering and not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer.

In its positive form, non-violence means the utmost love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of non-violence, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active non-violence necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. A man cannot deceive the loved ones; he does not fear or frighten them. The 'gift of life' is the greatest of all gifts. A man who gives it in reality disarms all hostility. He paves the way for an honourable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift. He must, therefore, be himself fearless. A man cannot practice non-violence and be a coward at the same time. The practice of non-violence calls for the greatest courage. It is the most soldierly of a soldier's nature. General Gordon has been represented in a famous statue as bearing only a stick. This takes us far on the road to non-



violence. But a soldier who needs the protection of even a stick is to that extent so much the less a soldier. He is the true soldier who knows how to behave and stand his ground in the midst of a hail of bullets. Such a one was Ambarish who stood his ground without lifting a finger, though Durvasa did his worst. The Moors, who being powdered by the French gunners rushed into the gun's mouth with 'Allah' on their lips, showed much the same type of courage. Only theirs was the courage of desperation. Ambarish's was due to love. Yet the Moorish valour, readiness to die, conquered the gunners. They frantically waved their hats, ceased firing and greeted their erstwhile enemies as comrades. And so the South African passive resisters in their thousands were ready to die rather than sell honour for a little personal ease. This was non-violence in its active form. It never barter away honour. A helpless girl in the hands of a follower of non-violence finds better and surer protection than in the hands of one who is prepared to defend her only to the point to which his weapons would carry him. The tyrant, in the first instance, will have to walk to his victim over the dead body of her defender; in the second, he has but to overpower the defender for it is assumed that the canon of propriety in the second instance will be satisfied when the defender has fought to the extent of his physical valour. In the first instance, as the defender has matched his very soul against the mere body of the tyrant, the odds are that the soul in the latter will be awakened, and the girl will stand an infinitely greater chance of her honour being protected than in any other conceivable circumstance- barring, of course, that of her own personal courage.

If we are unmanly today, we are so, not because we do not know how to strike, but because we fear to die. He is no follower of Mahavira the apostle of Jainism or of Buddha or of the Vedas, who, being afraid to die, takes to flight before any danger, real or imaginary, all the while wishing that somebody else would remove the danger by destroying the person causing it. He is no follower of non-violence, I concede, who does not care a straw if he kills a man by inches by deceiving him in trade, or who will protect by force of arms a few cows and finish off the butcher, or who, in order to do a supposed good to his country, does not mind



the killing of a few officials. All these are actuated by hatred, cowardice, and fear. Here love of the cow or the country is a vague thing intended to satisfy one's vanity or soothing a stinging conscience.

Non-violence, truly understood, is in my opinion a panacea for all evils, mundane and extra-mundane. We can never overdo it. Just at present we are not doing it at all. Non-violence does not displace the practice of other virtues, but renders their practice imperatively necessary before it can be practiced even in its rudiments. Let no one therefore harbour the notion that non-violence has made the Indian unmanly. Mahavira and Buddha were soldiers, and so was Tolstoy. Only they were deeper and truer in their profession and practice and found the secret of a true, happy, honourable and godly life. Let me tell you that true non-violence is not possible in the presence of desire, anger, hatred, attachment and selfishness. And only when these are controlled and conquered can we be joint sharers with these great teachers.

The Scribe: In this age of brute force, is it not almost impossible that most people would reject the law of the final supremacy of brute force?

Bapu: Such being the hold of the doctrine of the sword on the majority of mankind—and as success of non-co-operation depended principally on the absence of violence, my views in this matter affected the conduct of a large number of people, I was, anxious to state them as clearly as possible.

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908 in South Africa—whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and have defended me—I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so-called Zulu rebellion, and World War I. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would have India resort to violence and arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.



But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, and forgiveness is more manly than punishment. True "forgiveness adorns a soldier". But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I, therefore, appreciate the sentiment of those who cried out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his ilk. They would have torn him to pieces if they could. But I did not believe India to be helpless. I did not believe myself to be a helpless creature. I wanted to use India's and my own strength for a better purpose.

Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. Definite forgiveness would therefore mean a definite recognition of our strength.

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—the strength of the spirit.

I therefore placed before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice and its offshoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance. These are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The Rishis who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence were greater geniuses than Newton and greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence.

Non-violence, in its dynamic condition, means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer; it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under the law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to



save his honour, his religion, and his soul, and lay the foundation for that empire's fall and its eventual regeneration.

I wanted to emphasize that India had a soul that could not perish and that it could rise triumphant above every physical combination of the whole world. However, being a practical man, I could not wait till India recognized the practicability of the spiritual life in the political world. India considered herself to be powerless and paralyzed before the machine guns, the tanks and the aeroplanes of the English. So she took up non-co-operation out of her weakness. It would, I thought, serve the same purpose and bring her deliverance from the crushing weight of British injustice, if a sufficient number of people practiced it. I invited even the 'school' of violence to give this method a trial.

The Scribe: What is the difference between the force of physical power and the force of non-violence or love?

Bapu: The power of the sword is brute force. Killing people required no intelligence. We may, by misdirecting our intelligence, employ it in the service of brute force. Yet brute force remains brute force and the law of the sword remains the law of the beast. In the latter, the self is in a state of nescience and can have no knowledge of itself. That is why we know that the animal world is enveloped in darkness. The activities of eating, drinking, sleeping, feeling afraid, are common to man and beast. But man has the power of distinguishing between good and evil and can also know the self. One animal subdues another simply by its physical might. Its world is ruled by that law, but it is not so in the human world. The law which is most in harmony with human nature is that of winning over others by the power of love—by soul force. When, therefore, a man wins over an enemy through love, he simply follows the law of his nature. Man is at times seen acting like an animal. He is endowed with brute force as well, and so long as he has not developed awareness of his spiritual nature, he remains an intelligent animal. Though human in body, he follows the law of the animal. This, however, should not be regarded his true nature. I believe, therefore, that if we



wish to live up to the consciousness of our true nature, we should this very moment renounce the law of the jungle.

The Scribe: Are there any circumstances in which brute force by human beings can be justified?

Bapu: Yes, there are. Our sages saw that the passions of the heart had not died out in most persons, though they possessed human bodies. They recognized, therefore, that there was scope for the use of brute force even by human beings and showed under what circumstances it might be employed.

When a man submits to another through fear, he does not follow his nature but yields to brute force. He who has no desire to dominate others by brute force will not himself submit to such force either. Recognizing, therefore, that the man who fears has not attained self-knowledge at all, our *Shastras* allowed him the use of brute force while he remained in this state.

A Pathan made a murderous attack on me in 1908, as I told you earlier. My eldest son was not present then. He possessed fairly good physical strength. I did not have the Pathan prosecuted, since I held the same view then as I do now. I was educating my sons in the idea of forgiveness and love, and so at the very first meeting after the assault, my son said to me: "I want to know what my duty would have been if I would have been with you at the time. You have taught us that we may not strike back nor tamely submit to the other man. I understand this principle but I have not the strength to act upon it. I could not remain a silent spectator while you were being beaten to death. I would consider it my duty to protect you if you should be assaulted, but I could not do this by laying down my own life, instead of striking back. I must, therefore, either protect you by attacking the man who would strike you, or be a passive witness to the attack on you, or run away." I told him: "It would be a sign of cowardice if you ran away or did nothing to protect me. If you could not protect me by taking the danger upon yourself, you should undoubtedly do so by striking the other man. It is any day better to use brute force than to betray cowardice." I hold this view even now. It would have been better for India to arm itself and take the risk rather



than refuse to take up arms out of fear. It was for this reason that I had joined the Boer War and did my bit in helping the Government during the Zulu rebellion. It was for this reason that during the 1914-1918 War, I gave my help (to the British Government) both in England and India.

The Scribe: Why did you not have the Pathan (who assaulted you) prosecuted?

Bapu: Forgiveness is the virtue of the brave. He alone who is strong to avenge a wrong knows how to love and forgive. He alone who is capable of enjoying pleasures can qualify to be a *brahmachari* by restraining his desires. There is no question of the mouse forgiving the cat. It will be evidence of India's soul force only if it refuses to fight when it has the strength to do so.

The Scribe: Please explain clearly what you mean by the phrase 'strength to fight'.

Bapu: The strength to fight does not mean only physical strength. Everyone who has courage in him can have the strength to fight, and everyone, who has given up the fear of death, has such strength. I have seen sturdy Negroes cowering before 'white' boys, because they were afraid of the 'white' man's revolver. I have seen also weaklings holding out against robust persons. Thus the day India gives up fear, we shall be able to say that she has the strength to fight. It is not at all true to say that, to be able to fight, it is essential to acquire the ability to use arms. The moment, therefore, man wakes up to the power of the soul, that very moment he comes to know the strength he has for fighting. That is why I believe that he is the true warrior who does not die killing, but who has mastered the *mantra* of living by dying.

The sages who discovered the never-failing law of non-violence were themselves great warriors. When they discovered the ignoble nature of armed strength and realized the true nature of man, they discerned the necessity of the law of non-violence for this world, all full of violence. They then taught us that the *atman* can conquer the whole world, that the greatest danger to *atman* comes from itself, and that the conquest over it brings us the strength to conquer the entire world.



The Scribe: Do you consider that the law of non-violence is only for those who have discovered it or those who have faith in it?

Bapu: It is not necessary to have the higher knowledge to be able to recognize the importance of the law of non-violence before one begins practising it. The law is the same even for a child and it can act upon it. It is the same for those who do not have faith in it. The greatest obstacle to the launching of all-out non-co-operation is the fear of violence breaking out. I have, therefore, emphasized that non-co-operation and violence could not go together.

The Scribe: Is that why, when even sporadic violence broke out in some places, you called off the non-co-operation movement?

Bapu: Precisely. In 1919, when the Rowlatt Act agitation was started, people erred. They did so in Amritsar and Kasur, and in Ahmedabad, Viramgam, and Kheda. I retraced my steps, humbled myself before man and God, called the mistake my Himalayan blunder and called off not merely the mass civil disobedience but even my own which I knew was intended to be civil and non-violent. The next time, it was through the events in Bombay that God gave me the warning. He made me an eye-witness to the deeds of the Bombay mob. The humiliation was greater than in 1919. But the bitterest humiliation came after Chauri Chaura. The Bardoli agitation and civil disobedience had to be suspended. To become a fitter instrument, able to register the slightest variation in the moral atmosphere about me, I decided to undergo personal cleansing and imposed on myself a five-day continuous fast. In the Quit India agitation, after my arrest, people indulged in large-scale violence. All these outbursts only delayed the achievement of independence.

The Scribe: Please tell me briefly what you consider to be the essence of non-violence.

Bapu: I will enumerate the essentials:

1. Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.



2. In the last resort, it does not avail for those who do not possess faith in the God of love.
3. Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence, in the very nature of things, is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.
4. Individuals and nations that would practise non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all, except their honour. It is, therefore, inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e., imperialism which is frankly based on force.
5. Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all—children, young men, and women or grown-up people—provided they have a living faith in the God of love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.
6. It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals, it is not so for the masses of mankind.

The Scribe: Can *Himsa* or violence be totally avoided?

Bapu: No. There is a measure of unavoidable violence in eating, drinking, etc. and also in the protection of one's ward when threatened by an assailant.

The Scribe: Are there circumstances under which violence can be justified?

Bapu: Violence is involved in the destruction of mosquitoes, bugs, and other insects harmful to man and is therefore justified. It is also justified in the destruction of rats and other pests or animals which cause damage to crops or in the destruction of wild animals like tigers when they turn man-eaters. The idea here is that human life—and its legitimate needs and activities—have priority over sub-human life.



The Scribe: Is then perfect non-violence not possible for embodied humans?

Bapu: No, it is not. But one must keep on endeavouring to achieve the maximum.

The Scribe: Is hatred compatible with non-violence?

Bapu: It is not. I ceased to hate, and found myself to be incapable of hating any being on earth. This I achieved through a long course of prayerful discipline during my earthly life. But though I hated no one, I did hate evil wherever it existed. I hated the ruthless exploitation and the foreign rule in India and elsewhere. I hated untouchability and many other evils. My non-co-operation (with the British in India) had its roots not in hatred but in love.

We can only win over the opponent by love, never by hate. Hate is the subtlest form of violence. We cannot be really non-violent and yet have hatred for the adversary.

The Scribe: Is non-killing always *ahimsa* (non-violence) or killing always *himsa* (violence)?

Bapu: No. I will illustrate my answer by some examples. Taking life may be a duty. We do destroy as much life as we think necessary for sustaining our body. Thus for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like and we do not think we are guilty of irreligion. For the benefit of the species, we kill carnivorous beasts. Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about, sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes in his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone, who dispatches this lunatic, will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man.

I see that there is an instinctive horror of killing living beings under any circumstances whatsoever. For instance, an alternative has been suggested in the shape of confining even rabid dogs in a certain place and allowing them to die a slow death. Now any idea of compassion makes this thing impossible for me. I cannot for a moment bear to see a dog or, for that matter, any other living being helplessly suffering the torture of a slow death. I do not kill a human being



thus circumstanced because I have more hopeful remedies. I should kill a dog similarly situated, because in its case I am without a remedy. Should my child be attacked with rabies and there was no helpful remedy to relieve his agony, I should consider it my duty to take his life. Fatalism has its limits. We leave things to fate after exhausting all the remedies. One of the remedies, and the final one to relieve the agony of a tortured child is to take his life.

The Scribe: Should those who oppress mankind be killed?

Bapu: No human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption; no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil. No one should ever forget the distinction between the evil and the evil-doer. No ill-will or bitterness should be harboured against the latter, and even offensive language should be eschewed. For those who have the well-being of mankind at heart, it should be an article of faith that there is no one so fallen in this world who cannot be converted by love. One should always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth and *himsa* by *ahimsa*. There is no other way of purging the world of evil.

The Scribe: Is speaking out or writing a distasteful word violence, especially when the speaker or writer believes it to be true?

Bapu: No, it is not. The essence of violence is that there must be a violent intention behind a thought, word or act, i.e., an intention to do harm to the so-called opponent.

False notions of propriety or fear of wounding susceptibilities often deter people from saying what they mean and ultimately land them on the shores of hypocrisy. But if non-violence of thought is to be evolved in individuals, societies or nations, the truth has to be told, however harsh or unpopular it may appear to be for the moment.

The Scribe: Many countries achieved their political independence through armed, violent revolutions. Why did you decide against it?



Bapu: The method of violence suffers from numerous limitations. In the first place, it does not always succeed. There are on record as many failures from its use as the successes. Revolutionary violence is intended to exert pressure. But it is the irrational pressure of anger and ill-will. I contend that non-violent non-co-operation exerts pressure far more effectively than violent acts, for the pressure comes from goodwill and gentleness. Secondly, I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil that it does is permanent. Even if one succeeds in disposing of the opponents, the millions will be just as badly off as they were before. The opponents will be powerless to do evil, if we will but be good. Hence my persistent emphasis on reform from within. Thirdly, good brought through force destroys individuality. Only when the change is effected through the persuasive power of non-violent non-co-operation. i.e., love, is the foundation of individuality preserved, and real and abiding process assured for the world. Fourthly, history teaches us that those who have, no doubt with honest motives, ousted the greedy by using brute force against them, have in their turn become a prey to the disease of the conquered. Fifthly, the method of violence is a weary and long-drawn process. The method of non-violence is the surest and the swiftest the world has seen. Sixthly, it causes brutalization of the human nature and thus people become brutalized in their desperate efforts to get victory over their opponents or to exploit weaker nations or weaker sections of men. They not only drag down themselves but mankind too. And it cannot be a matter of pleasure to me or anyone else to see human nature dragged into the mire. The non-violent method, on the other hand, results in the long run in the least loss of life. What is more, it immortalizes those who lose their lives and morally enriches the world for their sacrifice. Seventhly, and lastly, let me tell you that true democracy or Swaraj of the masses is never achieved by violence. With the growing lawlessness and violence, democracy in this country and elsewhere exists only in name.

The Scribe: How should people conduct themselves when there are criminal assaults on women?



Bapu: The main thing is for women to learn and know how to be fearless. It is my firm conviction that a fearless woman, who knows that the purity is her best shield, can never be dishonoured. However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity. There are examples, even in modern times, of women who have thus defended themselves. I can, as I speak, recall two such instances. I therefore recommend that women should cultivate this courage. They will become wholly fearless if they can and cease to tremble, as they do today, at the mere thought of assault. Parents and husbands should, therefore, instruct women in the art of becoming fearless. It can best be learnt from a living faith in God. Though He is invisible, He is one's unfailing protector. He, who has this faith, is the most fearless of all.

But such faith cannot be acquired in a day. Meanwhile, we must try to explore other means. When a woman is assaulted, she cannot afford to worry about the propriety of using violence or non-violence. Her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ any method or means that comes to her mind in order to defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and, if need be, die in the effort. The man or woman who has shed all fear of death will be able not only to protect himself or herself but others also through laying down his or her life. In fact, we fear death most, and hence we ultimately submit to superior physical force. Some will bend the knee to the invader, some will resort to bribery, some will crawl on their bellies or submit to other forms of humiliation, and some women will even give their bodies rather than die. I am not saying this in a carping spirit. I am only illustrating human nature. Whether we crawl on our bellies or whether a woman yields to the lust of man, it is symbolic of that same love of life which makes us stoop to anything. Therefore he who loses his life shall save it. There is an Upanishad *mantra: tena tyaktena bhunjithaah*. Everybody should commit this matchless *mantra* to memory. But mere lip loyalty to it will be of no avail. It must penetrate deep down to the innermost recesses of our hearts. To enjoy life one should give up the lure of life. That should be part of our nature.



The Scribe: So much for what a woman should do. But what about a man who is a witness to such a crime?

Bapu: The answer is implied in what I have already said. He must not be a passive onlooker. He must protect the woman. He must not run for police help. He must not rest satisfied by pulling the alarm chain in the train. If he is able to practise non-violence, he will die in protecting the woman. If he does not believe in non-violence or cannot practise it, he must try to save her by using all the force he may have. Either way, there must be readiness on his part to lay down his life.

The Scribe: What is a woman to do when attacked by miscreants? To run away or resist with violence? To have boats in readiness to fly or prepare to defend with weapons?

Bapu: My answer to this is simple. For me, there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be for non-violence if courage of the highest type is to be developed. Violence can only be treated as being preferable to cowardice. Therefore, I would have no boats ready for flight in an emergency. For a non-violent person there is no emergency, but quiet and dignified preparation for death. Hence whether it is a man or a woman, he or she will defy death even when he or she is unassisted; for, the real assistance is from God. I can preach no other thing, and I am here to practise what I preach. If there are women who, when assailed by miscreants, cannot resist themselves without arms they, do not need to be advised to carry arms. They will do so. There is something wrong in this persistent enquiry as to whether to bear arms or not. People have to learn to be naturally independent. If they will remember the central teaching, namely that the real, effective resistance lies in non-violence, they will model their conduct accordingly. And that is what the world has been doing, though unthinkingly. However, those who do not see the futility of violence will naturally arm themselves to the best of their ability.

The Scribe: Can a woman take her own life rather than surrender⁷



Bapu: The question requires a definite answer. I gave it in Delhi just before leaving for Noakhali. A woman would most certainly take her own life rather than surrender. In other words, surrender has no room in my plan of life. But I was asked in what way to take one's life. I promptly said it was not for me to prescribe the means, and behind the approval of suicide under such circumstances was, and is, the belief that one, whose mind is prepared for even suicide, will have the requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant will be disarmed. I could not carry the argument any further, because it does not admit of further development. It requires positive proof which, I confess, is lacking.

The Scribe: If the choice is between taking one's own life and that of the assailant, which one would you prefer?

Bapu: When it is the question of killing oneself or the assailant, I have no doubt in my mind that the former should be the choice.

The Scribe: What is one's duty during riots?

Bapu: Riots must be quelled non-violently. For this there must be true *ahimsa* in one's heart, an *ahimsa* that takes the erring communalist, casteist and even the hooligan in the warm embrace. Such an attitude cannot be cultivated. It can come only as a result of prolonged and patient effort which can be made during peace times. Every 'mohalla' (locality) in a city and every village must have a peace brigade. The member of the peace brigade should come into close touch and cultivate acquaintance with the various elements in the vicinity. He should know all and be known to all and win their hearts by his living and selfless service. No section should be regarded as too contemptible or mean to mix with. 'Goondas' (bad characters) do not drop from the skies, nor do they spring from the earth like evil spirits. They are the product of social disorganization, and society is therefore responsible for their existence. In other words, they should be looked upon as symptoms of corruption in our body politic. To remove the disease, we must first discover the underlying cause. To find the remedy will then be a comparatively easy task.



The Scribe: What kind of physical training should a non-violent member of the peace brigade receive?

Bapu: Physical fitness and ability to kill by use of arms is the only qualification for a recruit for a violent army. But the standard for selecting candidates for a non-violent army is quite different. The ability to kill requires training in the use of lethal weapons. The ability to die is in him who has the will to die. A non-violent body will have no use for such weapons and will therefore beat his swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, and will shrink from the thought of using them as lethal weapons. The violent soldier will be trained in the use of violence by being taught to shoot. The non-violent soldier will have no time for this pastime. He will get all his training from nursing the sick, saving those in danger at the risk of his own life, patrolling places which may be in fear of thieves and dacoits, and in laying down his life, if necessary, in dissuading them from their designs. Even the uniforms of the two will differ. The uniform of the non-violent 'soldier' will be simple, in conformity with the dress of the poor, and betokening humility. The purpose will be just to protect him from heat and cold and rain. A violent soldier's protection is in the skilful use of arms. For his non-violent counterpart the first and last shield and buckler is his unswerving faith in God. The minds of the two will be poles asunder. The violent man will always be casting about for plans to work the destruction of his enemy and will pray to God to fulfil his purpose. The national anthems of countries, which soldiers sing in time of war, simply kindle their hate and anger to white heat. A non-violent soldier has, on the other hand, nothing but compassion in his heart for the supposed enemy. He will, therefore, pray to God that He may give the supposed enemy a sense of right, and bless him.

Thus since the minds of both will differ widely, their physical training will differ in the same degree. The various exercises of *hatha yoga* practised in this country from time immemorial impart, among other things, physical health, strength, ability and the capacities to bear heat and cold. There is room in these exercises



for improvement. The object of these exercises is to strengthen and purify the body in order to secure the control of the mind and the senses.

But as the mass non-violence we are thinking of applies to the people of all religions, the exercises and the rules that may be framed must be such as can be accepted by all believers in non-violence, irrespective of their religious faiths. If the non-violent person we have in mind is not healthy in body and mind, he may perhaps fail in mustering complete fearlessness. He should have the capacity to stand guard at a single spot, day and night; he should not fall ill even if he has to bear heat and cold and rain; he must have the strength to go to places of peril, to rush to the scenes of fire, and the courage to wander about alone in desolate jungles and haunts of death; he will bear without a grumble severe beating, starvation and worse, and will keep to his post of duty without flinching; he will have the resourcefulness and the capacity to plunge into a seemingly impenetrable scene of rioting; he will have the longing and capacity to run with the name of God on his lips to the rescue of men living on the top floors of buildings enveloped in flames; and he will have the fearlessness to plunge into a flood in order to rescue people being carried off by it or to jump into a well to save a drowning person. He would not hanker after wealth or fame. He should be a *brahmachari*, free from lustful thoughts or designs.

The Scribe: What rules would you prescribe for members of a non-violent volunteer corps?

Bapu: The rules culled from my own experience are:

1. A volunteer should not carry any weapons.
2. He must be easily recognizable.
3. Every volunteer must carry bandages, scissors, needles and thread, surgical knife etc. for rendering first aid.
4. He should know how to carry and remove the wounded.
5. He should know how to put out fires, to enter a fire without getting burnt, how to climb heights for rescue work and descend safely with or without his charge.



6. He should be well-acquainted with the residents of his locality.
7. He should recite God's name ceaselessly and persuade others, who believe, to do likewise.

The Scribe: For many years, during your earthly sojourn, you were an admirer of the British Empire; and, as its citizen, you considered it your duty to participate in the Boer War, in the Zulu rebellion and in World War I. But after the imposition of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre and other atrocities committed in India by the British rulers, you came to the conclusion that India, and the other countries in the British Empire, would ever remain hewers of wood and drawers of water. You then resolved to resist and remove the Empire and you succeeded in doing so. For the first time in recorded history, you employed civil disobedience on a mass scale as a method (which Thoreau had used in distant Concorde in the United States) for alleviating the sufferings of the Indian community in South Africa. After your return to India, you made use of satyagraha—non-violent direct action based on Truth and non-violence—to wrest political freedom from the British. You achieved your goal within a period of three decades. Your boundless devotion to the cause of non-violence, together with the acceptance of non-violence as a policy by the Congress leaders and others, met with success and Britain retired from India in apparent goodwill and friendship.

Bapu: What you say is right.

The Scribe: How come, then, that even after thirty years of training and practice of non-violence for ending the British rule, large-scale violence erupted in the subcontinent at the time of independence?

Bapu: In answering this question, I must repeat what I said at that time. It showed my bankruptcy and not that of the doctrine of non-violence. For most people, including leaders of the Congress and other parties, and even for the Cabinet Ministers of the new Government, non-violence, as you have said, was only a policy. It was non-violence of the weak. India has never had the experience of the non-violence of the strong. For me, however, non-violence has been a creed,



and I cannot but continue to repeat that the non-violence of the strong is the strongest force in the world.

The Scribe: The contradiction between your advice of non-violence to Churchill, Roosevelt, Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese during World War II and your failure to similarly advise your friends in the Congress Government, when they rushed military aid to Kashmir, was construed by many people abroad as abandonment of the policy of non-violence by you. People are still not clear on this issue. Could you please throw some light on this?

Bapu: I repeatedly said at that time, and I say it again, that I had no influence in the matter over my friends. All the same, I hold on to my views on non-violence. They were (then and now) as firm as ever; but I could not impose my views on my best friends in the Cabinet. I could not expect them to act against their convictions, and everybody should be satisfied with my confession that I had lost my earlier hold upon my friends.

But my non-violence forbade me from denying credit where it was due, even though the creditor was believer in violence. Thus though I did not accept Subhas Bose's belief in violence and his consequent action, I had not refrained from giving unstinted praise to his patriotism, resourcefulness, and bravery. Similarly, though I did not approve of the use of arms by the Union Government for aiding the Kashmiris and though I could not approve of Sheikh Abdullah's resort to arms, I could not probably withhold admiration for either for their resourcefulness and praiseworthy conduct, especially if both the relieving troops and the Kashmiri defenders died heroically to a man. I knew that if they could do so, they would perhaps change the face of India. But if the defence was purely non-violent in intention and action, I would not use the word 'perhaps', for I would then be sure of change of the face of India.

The non-violent technique of my conception would have required no armed assistance to the defenders. Non-violent assistance could have been sent from the Union without stint. But the defenders, whether they got much assistance or not, would have defied the might of the raiders or even a disciplined army in



overwhelming numbers. And defenders dying at their post of duty, without malice and without anger in their hearts against the assailants and without the use of any arms including even their fists, would have exhibited a degree of heroism as yet unknown to history. Kashmir would then have become a holy land shedding its fragrance not only throughout India but the whole world.

The non-violent action, that I desired so much, did not come about and I had to confess my own impotence, in that my word lacked the strength which perfect mastery over the self (as described in the concluding verses of the second chapter of the Gita) brings.

I lacked the *tapascharya* required for the purpose. I could only pray to God that if it pleased Him, He might arm me with the qualities of a perfect man—a *sthitaprajna*.

The Scribe: It was reported in the *Peace News* that, during your last days on earth, you were overcome by a feeling of dark despair which you had never experienced before in your life.

Bapu: Whatever I might have felt or said at the time does not refer to the failure of non-violence; it only reflected my failure to recognize (until it was too late) that what I had mistaken for non-violence was only passive resistance of the weak, which can never be called non-violence or *ahimsa* even in the remotest sense.

The Scribe: Thirty-seven years have elapsed since you left your physical frame. During this period, India has done nothing to cultivate even the non-violence of the weak, leave alone the non-violence of the strong which was so near to your heart. Its rulers have glibly talked about Mahavira, Buddha, and Gandhi's country, in season and out of season, but have in practice openly indulged in violence of all kinds. It has helped build an industrial society after the Western model with all its attendant evils—exploitation of the poor by the rich, consumerism, extravagance on the one hand and degrading deprivation on the other, overpopulation, militarism and crimes of violence and war. Are you not dismayed by the spectacle that the country presents today—dacoities, encounters (real and



farce), bus and train hold-ups, bank robberies, gang rapes, daylight murders, crimes against Harijans, communal riots, suppression of civil rights, police atrocities, and repression by the State?

Bapu: Frankly I am. But my dismay soon gives place to hope. I believe in man's innate goodness. I am an inflexible optimist.

As for those whom you have been pleased to call my followers, they never believed in non-violence. For them, it was only a policy. They practised it as long as it suited them, but gave it up the moment they climbed onto the seats of power.

I had wished that with the achievement of political independence, the Congress Party would disband itself but it never did; and Congressmen who tasted power wanted to retain it for all time. For the achievement of this end, they have considered any and all means fair. I do not need to list all the foul means they have employed, they are well-known. But I must draw your attention to one which in my opinion has never been used elsewhere. India is perhaps the only instance of a federal government where the Union (Congress) Government at the Centre encourages violent agitations by its partymen in the States where opposition parties are in power.

The Scribe: This state of things is insufferable. But tell us how can violence and war be abolished.

Bapu: It can be abolished if there is a will behind it and a concerted effort by individuals and nations. It can be abolished if the causes underlying it are identified and removed. So long as there is exploitation of the poor by the rich within countries and exploitation of poor countries by rich countries, violence and war will go on.



PART TWO



1. Education

THE SCRIBE: How can you end exploitation?

Bapu: Propagate and implement my Constructive Programme.

The Scribe: Why do you give so much importance to the Constructive Programme?

Bapu: I do so because it is the only truthful and non-violent way of winning Poorna Swaraj or total independence. Its total fulfilment should lead to complete independence. Imagine all Indians busying themselves with the whole of the constructive programme which is designed to build up the nation from the bottom upward. Can anybody dispute the proposition that it could achieve complete independence in every sense of the expression?

The Scribe: But have we not already won independence through the civil disobedience campaigns that you launched?

Bapu: You have won independence; but is it the Poorna Swaraj or complete independence? You have gained only political power for the ruling party. The masses of the people have no independence whatever, not even political independence. Social and economic independence is completely wanting. Poorna Swaraj or complete independence is to be found nowhere today—not even in the West. There too you find high and low, the privileged rich and the wholly deprived. It cannot be achieved through military revolts or even non-violent civil disobedience. The only way to achieve it is through the full implementation of the constructive programme.

The Scribe: Do you think there is any possibility of all our people participating in the fulfilment of the constructive programme? They never did so during the fight for political independence, though you always emphasized its great importance. Many outside the Congress laughed at your constructive programme and even Congressmen themselves never took it as seriously as your programme of civil disobedience and even ignored its working.



Bapu: I know. That is why the independence that came is not worth the name. As I have said, it is independence only for the ruling elite. As for those who never co-operated in the fulfilment of the programme and even scoffed at it, there is much truth in their ridicule. To them, my answer is that it is still worth the attempt. Given an indomitable will on the part of a band of earnest workers, the programme is as workable as any other, perhaps more so than most. Anyway, I have no substitute for it, if it is to be based on non-violence. Let me reiterate this. Thus, the constructive programme may, otherwise and more fittingly, be called the construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means.

The consequences of efforts for independence through violent and, therefore, untruthful means, we know only too painfully. Look at the enormous destruction of property, life and truth that took place in World War II and all other wars that have taken place since then.

Complete independence through truth and non-violence means the independence of every unit, be it the humblest in the nation, without distinction of race or creed. This independence is never exclusive. It is therefore wholly compatible with interdependence within or without. Practice will always fall short of the theory, even as the drawn line falls short of the theoretical line of Euclid. Therefore, complete independence will be complete only to the extent of our approach to truth and non-violence.

The Scribe: I now understand that perfect or near-perfect independence can be achieved only through full implementation of the constructive programme and not through violent means, for the latter presupposes the ascendancy of that party of the nation which makes the most effective use of violence. Without proper fulfilment of a constructive programme, perfect equality—economic or of any other kind—is inconceivable. Do you think, Bapu, that the disaster that has overtaken the country is the outcome of our failure to implement the constructive programme? If this is so, how can it be remedied?



Bapu: I frankly believe that the country's ills are the result of the failure to adopt and fulfil the constructive programme. The only remedy, therefore, that occurs to my mind is to create a countrywide awareness about it.

The Scribe: How can this be effectively brought about?

Bapu: By a continued, comprehensive programme of education.

The Scribe: If this is your opinion, would it not be better for us to have your detailed views on the subject of education before a consideration of the constructive programme?

Bapu: I think it is a good suggestion.

The Scribe: What is the goal of education? What are its objectives?

Bapu: The goal is character building—an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and the man. The virtues that need to be inculcated among children and all others at all times are simple living, austerity, fearlessness, hard work, honesty, co-operation, social justice, selflessness and service of others, truth, non-violence, love, courage, strength, and the ability to forget oneself in working towards great aims. These must be emphasized right from the start and throughout the school years. Indolence, lying, dishonesty, selfishness, waste, greed, stealing, arrogance and quarrelsomeness are vices that children and students should be taught to eschew both by precept and by example.

The Scribe: How would you summarize the aims and objectives of progressive education?

Bapu: I have done so before on numerous occasions. But for your benefit and that of others I would restate them. They are:

1. To take everyone out of his class and into one common humanity.
2. To promote democratic, cultural, and human values such as truth and non-violence, equality and social justice, brotherhood of man, and international peace.



3. To encourage learning rather than teaching, encourage curiosity, independent thinking and initiative, encourage scientific approach, honesty and hard work, encourage practical learning by doing, offer help and co-operation to the weak, the backward and the handicapped.
4. To relate teaching to training for work in the house, the farm, the work place, the office or elsewhere.
5. To eradicate illiteracy and to ensure teaching through a craft that would secure the basic needs of every individual for food, clothes, shelter, and medical and health measures.
6. To reject, 'bank deposit' education and replace it by 'problem posing' education, to reject cramming, to reject competition, to reject grading and examinations, to reject failure and wastage, and to reject compulsory attendance.

The Scribe: Do you think the goal and the objectives that you wish to achieve can be met by the system that is in operation?

Bapu: No. *This is not* possible. The existing system of education has numerous drawbacks:

First, it is based upon foreign culture to the virtual exclusion of indigenous culture. Almost from the commencement, the textbooks deal, not with the things the boys and the girls have to deal with in their homes, but with things to which they are utter strangers. It is not through the textbooks that a child learns what is right and what is wrong in home life. He is never taught to have any pride in his surroundings. The higher he goes, the farther he is removed from his home, so that at the end of his education he becomes totally alienated from his surroundings. He feels no poetry about home life. The village scenes are all a sealed book to him. His own civilization is presented to him as imbecile, barbarous, superstitious and useless for all practical purposes. His education is calculated to wean him away from his own traditional culture. And if the mass of educated youths are not entirely denationalized, it is because the ancient



culture is too deeply embedded in them to be altogether uprooted even by an education adverse to its growth. If I had my way, I would certainly destroy the majority of the present textbooks and cause to be written textbooks which have a bearing on and correspondence with the home life, so that boys or girls as they learn may react towards their immediate surroundings.

Secondly, whatever may be true of other countries, in India at any rate about 80 per cent of the population is agricultural and another 10 per cent industrial, who are mainly involved in manual work. Hence, here, it is a crime to make education merely literary and to unfit the boys and girls for manual work in later life. Indeed, I should reiterate that as the larger part of our time is devoted to labour for earning our bread, our children must from their infancy be taught the dignity of manual labour. Our children should not be so taught as to despise labour. There is no reason why a peasant's son, after having gone to a school, should become useless as regards his family vocation. It is a sad thing that our schoolboys look upon manual labour with disfavour, if not contempt. Moreover, in India we expect, as we must, every boy and girl of school going age to attend public schools. However, we have not the means to finance education in accordance with the existing style, nor are millions of parents able to pay the fees that are at present imposed. Education to be universal must be entirely free. I fancy, however, that even under an ideal system of government—and the existing one is far from it—we may not be able to find enough money to make education free. It follows, therefore, that our children must be made to pay in labour, partly or wholly, for all the education they receive. Such universal labour to be profitable can only be (to my thinking) hand-spinning and hand-weaving. But for the purposes of my proposition, it is immaterial whether we have spinning or weaving or any other form of labour, so long as it can be turned to account. Only, it will be found upon examination, that on a practical, profitable and extensive scale, there is no occupation other than the processes connected with cloth production which can be introduced in our schools throughout India.



The introduction of manual training will serve a double purpose in a poor country like India. It will help pay for the education of our children and teach them an occupation on which they can fall back in later life. Such a system must make our children self-reliant. Nothing will demoralize the nation so much as that we should learn to despise labour.

Thirdly, the present education system not only ignores the culture of the hand, it also ignores the culture of the heart. I do not believe that this can be imparted through books. It can only be done through the living touch of the teacher. And, who are the teachers, in primary and secondary schools or even places of higher learning? Are they men and women of faith and character? Have they themselves received spiritual training or training of the heart? Is not the method of engaging teachers for lower schools or, for that matter, any educational institution, an effective bar in the way of character building? Do the teachers get even a living wage?

We know that no teachers are selected for their ability or their devotion to teaching. Often they are from among those who cannot find any other employment.

Finally, I cannot reconcile myself to English as the medium of teaching. The foreign medium has caused brain-fag, put on an undue strain upon the nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and thought, and disabled them from filtering their learning to the family or the masses. The foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land. It is the greatest tragedy of the existing system. The foreign medium has prevented the growth of our vernaculars. If I had the powers of a despot, I would today stop the tuition of our boys and girls through a foreign medium, and require all the teachers and professors on pain of dismissal to introduce a change forthwith. I would not wait for the preparation of the textbooks. They will follow the change. It is an evil that needs a summary remedy.

My uncompromising position on the foreign language has resulted in an unwarranted charge being levelled against me of being hostile to foreign culture



or learning of the English language. No reader of *Young India* or *Harijan* could have missed the statements often made by me that I regard English as the language of international commerce and diplomacy, and therefore consider its knowledge on the part of some Indians as essential. As it contains some of the richest treasures of thought and literature, I would certainly encourage its careful study among those who have linguistic talents and expect them to translate those treasures for the nation in its vernaculars.

Nothing can be farther from my thought than that we should become exclusive, or erect barriers. But I do respectfully contend that an appreciation of other cultures should follow, never precede, an appreciation and assimilation of our own. It is my firm opinion that no culture has treasures so rich as ours. We have not known it, we have been made even to deprecate its study and deprecate its value. We have almost ceased to live it. An academic grasp without practice behind it is like an embalmed corpse, perhaps lovely to look at but nothing to inspire or ennoble. My religion forbids me to belittle or disregard other cultures, as it insists under pain of civil suicide upon imbibing and living my own.

It is clear to me that unless we advance our vernaculars and our own culture, we shall not be able to remove the intellectual and cultural gulf between our men and women, and between the classes and the masses. It is also equally certain that the vernacular medium alone can stimulate originality in thought in the largest number of persons.

The Scribe: What is the place of literacy in education?

Bapu: I am not sure that it is not better for the children to have much preliminary instruction imparted to them orally. To impose on children of tender age a knowledge of the alphabet is to deprive them, whilst they are fresh, of the power of assimilating instruction by word of mouth.

So far as the adults are concerned, although much useful work can be done without a knowledge of the three 'R's, it is my firm conviction that we cannot always do without such knowledge. It develops and sharpens one's intellect, and



it increases the capacity for doing good. I have never placed an unnecessary high value on the knowledge of the three 'R's. I am only attempting to assign its proper place to it. I have pointed out, from time to time, that there is no justification for men to deprive women of or to deny to them equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy. But education is essential for women to assert these natural rights to exercise them wisely, and to work for their expansion; again the true knowledge of the self is unattainable by millions who lack such education. Many a book is full of innocent pleasure and enlightenment and this will be denied to us without education. It is no exaggeration to say that a human being without education is not far removed from an animal. Education, therefore, is necessary for women as it is for men.

The Scribe: Should religious instruction form part of the school curriculum as approved by the State? Do you favour separate schools for children belonging to different denominations for facility of religious instruction? Or should religious instruction be left in the hands of private bodies? If so, do you think it is right for the State to authorize such bodies?

Bapu: I do not believe in a State religion. The State interference would always be unwelcome. Religion is a purely personal matter. There are in reality as many religions as there are minds or individuals. Each mind has a different conception of God from that of the others.

I am also opposed to State aid, partly or wholly, to religious bodies. For, I know that an institution or group, which cannot manage to finance its own religious teaching, is a stranger to true religion. This does not mean that the State schools would not give ethical teaching. The fundamental ethics are common to all religions.

I do not believe that the State can concern itself or cope with religious instruction. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. I believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the State. I have in mind fundamental ethics and not



that which goes by the name of denominationalism. We have suffered much from State-aided religion and State Church. A society or a group, which depends partly or wholly on State aid for the existence of its religion, does not deserve or rather it does not have any religion worth the name. I do not need to give any illustration in support of this obvious truth.

The Scribe: Thirty-seven years after your 'gift' of independence to the nation, one finds the state of education in a worse predicament. The number of illiterates in 1947 was 295 million. Today the number has mounted to over 450 million. This is 111 million more than the total population of the country (339 million) in 1947.

The education imparted in schools and colleges has little relevance to the life and work of the people. The number of unemployed youth, educated or otherwise, is increasing by leaps and bounds. There is a brain drain of educated young people from the villages to the cities. Those who leave the villages never go back again. The unemployed educated urbanites—doctors, engineers, scientists trained at a very heavy cost to the country— find it profitable to leave the country as they are not able to find suitable jobs for themselves and their families. Was there no way open to India's rulers and educationists to prevent this unfortunate position? Is there none now?

Bapu: There were ways before even as there are ways now to deal with the problem. But in their 'wisdom', the country's rulers chose to continue, with minor differences, the same old system of education which prevailed in the country during the period of the British rule.

The Scribe: What are the differences, Bapu?

Bapu: These are in respect of the expansion of education of science and technology. During the period of the British rule, it was almost completely ignored as they did not wish India to develop any industry worth the name. The Congress Government is overdoing it and our scientists and technocrats, trained



at a great expense to the country, fail to find suitable employment in the country itself.

The Scribe: You have given deep thought to the problems of education over a period of several decades. In fact, you gave your ideas a practical shape in the Phoenix and Tolstoy farms in South Africa and later in India. You have also discussed the subject threadbare in your speeches and writings. Could you please give us a gist of your present views on education?

Bapu: Shall we begin with the education of the child?

The Scribe: Please do.

Bapu: Then listen. A child's education begins even before his birth. His life and thoughts are influenced by the life and thoughts of the parents—before gestation, at the time of conception and during the period of gestation. The *samskaras* of the parents influence the embryo in the mother's womb. It is, therefore, well to bear in mind that cultivation and inculcation during this period and even earlier of ethical, moral, and spiritual values and a life of service by the parents, has no small place in the development, the apotheosis of the future child.

The pre-school education of the infant and the child, at home or in the nursery, should receive the utmost attention. In the case of working mothers, there should be suitable childcare centres where properly trained women can look after the child's education. Such childcare centres should be established in every street or 'mohalla' in the urban areas as also in each one of the 5,00,000 villages. The task of this education, whether in the home or in the childcare centres, should be the concern of mothers or specially trained women. The All-India Women's Conference should be entrusted with the task of organizing this five-year pre-school education of the child.

The purpose of building childcare centres is twofold: First, to free working women from the home and enable them to become happier, healthier, more productive and more complete human beings and, secondly, over and above the initial purpose of enabling them to leave their children in safe and suitable



environment, to provide conditions for the development of the 'New Child' who would ultimately become the New Man with a developed sense of solidarity and collective identity with the people around him. Such a man will be unselfish and would identify himself with the group, even though he would retain his own individual character. He would work with his compeers and produce things which he will share with them. He would respect all kinds of work if that work helps the community, and regard the work of a scavenger or a barber as important as that of a physician, a lawyer, or an engineer. Such a man will usher in a society in which there is *not* a ceaseless competition to go ahead—so that the one in front puts out his foot to trip the one behind—but there is desire on the part of everyone to help others: a society where the pain of one is the pain of everyone and where an injustice to one hurts all.

The enrolment to the childcare centre should be restricted to infants and children between the ages of forty-five days and five years. Infants and children should be assigned different rooms depending on age at the time of enrolment. Those who are enrolled when they are barely forty-five days or a little older should be cared for in a separate room, each in its own crib. They should be fed and looked after by assistants or nurses wearing masks and sterilized gowns. When they are a little older and able to sit or crawl, they may be transferred to another room and put in play-pens with other children of their own age. The process of socialization begins in the cribs where they see and hear other children cared for, as they themselves are cared for but would be intensified in play-pens where they play with one another using common toys. When they are able to stand or begin to walk, they should be transferred to a different room with a large play-pen or a corral— the size of a small room and raised on wooden legs— so that they are looking at the world, not up at it. It is in these play-pens that they would develop their visual, auditory, manual, motor and verbal abilities. They should play with the ball and other toys in the corrals and by the time they are able to walk, they should be encouraged to go up and down a ramp leading into the pen. At this stage, all their activities are collective—bathing, changing, napping and eating. As soon as they are able to walk, they should begin playing



games with other children in playing areas inside the building of the centre and learn to put away the toys in their proper place. When they are a little older, they should play games, both inside the centres and the play areas outside attached to the centre. By the age of three, they should be able to dress and undress themselves.

Cleanliness and attention to hygiene should receive the highest emphasis at all levels. The toys used must be washable and every time a child places a toy in the mouth, it should be cleaned before another child handles it. All articles that can be boiled must be sterilized regularly.

From an early age, emphasis should be placed on learning through games and development of verbal skills such as storytelling, puzzles, poems, songs, dance, puppetry and play-acting. As soon as possible, they should be encouraged to engage in the use of clay and draw and work in the garden where they begin by watering and pulling weeds. In most childcare centres, the children have a small garden plot and children relate themselves to the food they eat as the producers of the food. They plant, weed, and harvest the vegetables and fruits which they will later eat.

The pre-school years are formative years in the child's life, and habits and traits, acquired during this period, often last a lifetime. Proper pre-school education, therefore, whether in the home and the nursery schools or in the childcare centres, is of the utmost importance and should receive the attention that it deserves.

The Scribe: Yes. What you say is true. Now let us have your views on the school education of the child.

Bapu: I have said and written so much on Nai Talim or Basic Education. I shall, therefore, give you only its salient points.

The Scribe: I am all ears. Please proceed.

Bapu: I attach the highest importance to the primary education of the child. This is to be not only completely free but also compulsory. To make it compulsory, an



Education Act should be passed and parents who do not send children to school between the ages of six and fourteen years should be penalized and, if necessary, even sent to prison. This will ensure 100 per cent enrolment at the age of six years.

The Scribe: But even if 100 per cent enrolment is initially achieved, how about the drop-outs? Many parents justify it on the ground that they need their children to help them at the time of sowing and harvesting.

Bapu: This is true. But it has been suggested by many observers that if school vacations coincide with the sowing or harvesting times, this objection can be met.

Primary education of eight years duration should be equal to the present high school education minus English. It should be built round a craft. I hold that proper education of the child can only come through a proper exercise and training of bodily organs— hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and the quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor, lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole.

I would, therefore, begin the child's education by teaching him a useful handicraft and enabling him to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus schools can be made partially or wholly self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over what the schools produce.

I hold that the higher development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically; but, indeed, the child should know the why and wherefore of every step and process. I am not saying this without some confidence. It has the



backing, as you know, of my personal experience. This method is being adopted more or less completely where spinning is being taught to workers. I have myself taught sandal-making and even spinning on these lines with good results. This method does not exclude a knowledge of history and geography. But I find this is best taught by transmitting such general information by word of mouth. One imparts ten times as much in this manner as by reading and writing. The signs of the alphabet may be taught later when the pupil has learnt to distinguish wheat from chaff and when he or she has developed his or her tastes. This is a revolutionary proposal, but it saves immense labour and enables a student to acquire in one year what he may take much longer to learn. This means all-round economy. Of course, the pupil learns his mathematics whilst he is learning his handicraft.

We have up to now concentrated on stuffing the children's minds with all kinds of information, without ever thinking of stimulating and developing them. Let us now cry a halt and concentrate on educating the child properly through manual work, not as a side activity but as the prime means of intellectual training. You have to train the boys in one occupation or another. Round this special occupation, you will train up his mind, his body, his artistic sense and so on. He will be the master of the craft he learns.

The Scribe: What kinds of vocations are fittest for being taught to children?

Bapu: These should be directly related to the work and the needs of the villagers. Among the five basic needs of the villagers— food, clothes, clean and sanitary houses, education, and medical and health care—the first three are food, clothes, and a house. In my opinion, a villager's education should be related to the task of better and improved methods of production of goods which satisfy these needs. A school education which does not fit the boys and girls in producing cheaper, better and more food per acre; which does not teach them better skills for producing cheaper, better and more clothes; and which does not enable them to build better, sanitary and more comfortable houses for themselves—such an education is, in my opinion, no education.



In respect of food, they should be taught, in order to increase yields, to build improved agricultural tools, produce plentiful organic manures, learn the techniques of terracing, bonding, building irrigation channels, better sowing and harvesting methods. They should also learn the techniques of processing foods and packaging, bottling and canning them for their own use and for the use of town and city dwellers. In respect of clothing, they should be taught how to grow natural fibres—cotton and silk—learn spinning, carding, weaving, dyeing and turn them into cloth and tailor them into garments. All the processes from the growing of fibres to the manufacture of finished goods can be carried out in the village homes. Enough cloth should be produced to make the villages self-sufficient. As for village housing, there is need for complete overhaul and reconstruction. For this purpose, the schools must train a sufficient number of brick-layers, carpenters, smiths, village planners, architects, plumbers and electricians. They will help in building our villages anew. Besides these most essential vocations, there are scores of others which the village schools will have to teach—dairy farming, animal husbandry, bee-keeping, forestry, tree-farming; tailoring, shoemaking, leather goods, simple and cheap household furniture for the village homes; repairs of bicycles, pump sets and electrical motors; manufacture of pottery, china and glassware, utensils; durries, carpets, shawls; handmade paper, soaps, oils, dentifrices, mirrors, combs, brooms, brushes, toys and other articles of day-to-day use.

The scheme that I am placing before you today is not the teaching of some handicrafts side by side with so-called liberal education. I want that the whole education should be imparted through some handicraft or industry. It might be objected that in the middle ages only handicrafts were taught to the students, but the occupational training, then, was far from serving an educational purpose. The crafts were taught only for the sake of crafts, without any attempt to develop the intellect as well. In this age, those born to certain professions had forgotten them, taken to clerical careers and were lost to countryside. The remedy in my opinion lies in imparting the whole art and science of a craft through practical training and these through imparting whole education.



Primary education should be imparted through the medium of the regional language and, where Hindi is not the regional language, elementary Hindi should be taught from the age of nine or ten. It should include the elementary principles of sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, doing one's own work and helping parents at home, etc. The present generation of boys knows no cleanliness and no self-help and is physically weak. I would, therefore, give compulsory physical training through musical drill.

Let me reiterate that I am a firm believer in the principle of free and compulsory primary education for India. I also hold that we shall realize this only by teaching the children a useful vocation and utilizing it as a means for cultivating their mental, physical, and spiritual faculties.

The Scribe: I share your views on the immediacy and the urgency of free and compulsory education of the type you recommend. But the very fact that it has not been achieved during the past thirty-seven years is a proof of the fact that it involves a gigantic effort and expense that the Government is not willing to afford.

Bapu: I grant that it is a gigantic task, but I do not agree that there is not enough money in the country to seriously attempt or undertake it.

The Scribe: Then why has it so far not been attempted or achieved?

Bapu: It has not been done because your Government's priorities are all wrong. It has a very low priority for education and women's welfare or health. And within the field of education itself, free and compulsory primary education of the nation, which is highly economical, gets a very low priority compared to higher education which is relatively expensive. Moreover, no economic consideration should come in the way of free and compulsory education of all the children. True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as true ethics, to be worth its name, must, at the same time, be also good economics.

The Scribe: There are at present two types of schools in the urban areas. These are a legacy of the British period. But they have multiplied considerably during



the Congress rule—some elitist schools for the children of white rulers, a few schools in the plains for the children of the ruling chiefs and very well-to-do people, and some convent schools. During the past thirty-seven years, their number has grown manifold. We have today Central Schools and Sainik Schools which are run by the Central Government for the children of highly placed government officers and any number of nursery and elementary schools run by private organizations and individuals for the children of the rich. What is the *raison d'etre* for the existence of two types of urban schools—one type for the children of the rich and the other for the education of the poor which produces only slaves?

Bapu: I do not see any reason at all. The two types should be abolished forthwith and replaced by one type of neighbourhood schools for all—for the children of the rich as well as the poor.

As for the vocations for the urban children, they may vary somewhat from those in the rural areas. But one thing should be clear. I want to resuscitate the villages of India. Today our villages have become a mere appendage to the big cities. They exist, as it were, to be exploited by the latter and depend on the latter's sufferance. This is unnatural. It is only when the cities realize the duty of making an adequate return to the village for the strength and sustenance which they derive from them, instead of selfishly exploiting them that a healthy and normal relationship between the two will spring up. And if the city children are to play their part in this great and noble work of social reconstruction, the vocations through which they are to receive their education ought to be directly related to the requirements of the village.

So far as I can see, the various processes of cotton manufacture, from ginning and cleaning of cotton to the spinning of yarn, answer this test as nothing else does. Even today the cotton is grown in the villages and is spun and converted in the cities. But the chain of processes which cotton undergoes in the mills from the beginning to the end constitutes a huge tragedy of waste in men, materials and mechanical power. My plan to impart primary education through the medium



of village crafts, like spinning and carding, etc., is thus conceived as the spearhead of a silent, social revolution fraught with the most far-reaching consequences. It will provide a healthy and moral basis of relationship between the city and the village and thus go a long way towards eradicating some of the worst evils of the present social insecurity and poisoned relationship between the classes. It will check the progressive decay of our villages which has, if anything, gathered more speed during the past nearly four decades. Thus it would lay the foundation of a more just social order in which there is no unnatural division of the haves and the have-nots and everybody is assured of a living wage and the right to freedom. And all this would be accomplished without the horrors of a bloody civil war or a colossal capital expenditure which the country cannot find from its own resources, and which it cannot easily repay and which are a serious threat to its independence. Nor would it entail a helpless dependence on foreign imported machinery or technical skill. Lastly, by obviating the necessity for highly specialized talent, it will place the destiny of the masses in their own hands.

The Scribe: Before I seek your views on the subject of high school and higher education, please let us have a clear exposition of your opinion on the medium of instruction.

Bapu: Yes, that is most important. In my view, the medium of instruction should be the regional language throughout. If this is so, even the most highly educated people can communicate with those who are less educated and have all the benefit of the knowledge gained by the more talented people. For the first five years of the primary education, no other language should be taught to boys and girls. In the last three years of the primary course, elementary Hindi should be taught in schools throughout India. Hindi—or spoken Hindustani—can then be the language for inter-state communication. This will also help people from one State to find jobs in any other State of the country. Knowledge of English or even other foreign languages should be imparted from the high school level onwards to only those scholars who are in the first instance talented and meritorious and can



pursue the knowledge of science and technology for the benefit of the nation. Instruction even in these subjects should be imparted in the regional or national language. But students should acquire the knowledge of English or other languages for perusal of the treasures of knowledge that English and other languages offer. Knowledge of English and other languages will also be necessary for international communication.

The Scribe: There has been an enormous protest from several States over the teaching of Hindi in all schools.

Bapu: Yes, I am aware of it and I would have myself protested on this issue or even led an agitation against it, if it were introduced in the country without the necessary preparation.

The Scribe: I do not understand what you mean.

Bapu: I will try to explain it to you. Before introducing Hindi into non-Hindi speaking areas, all objections by the residents of those areas should have been met. In the first place, it could have been made absolutely clear to them that no advantage will accrue to residents of Hindi-speaking States, nor any disadvantage to residents of non-Hindi speaking States, if Hindi became the National Language.

The Scribe: Their principal objection concerns the weightage that Hindi will confer on Hindi-speaking people if Hindi as the National Language became the medium of competitive examinations for Central services.

Bapu: This is easily taken care of by holding competitive examinations for Central services in the particular States in their own regional languages.

The Scribe: The Hindi enthusiasts have during the past decades tried to make Hindi difficult even for the residents of the Northern States.

Bapu: This is a mistake. I had proposed that spoken Hindi or Urdu, i.e., Hindustani should be accepted as the national language. All attempts to render it more difficult should cease.



The Scribe: A psychological climate against the adoption of Hindi as a national language has been created amongst non-Hindi speaking people, by agitations by Hindi enthusiasts for use of Hindi number plates on vehicles and Hindi name plates and signboards on houses and business establishments. It generated a counter-movement against Hindi in the non-Hindi speaking areas.

Bapu: This, you will admit, has been a grave mistake. It has seriously damaged the cause which the so-called Hindi enthusiasts wished to advance.

The Scribe: The Indian Government, in its endeavour to find a solution for the language problem, evolved a three-language formula; but this has not been favourably received anywhere.

Bapu: People are quite right in rejecting it. Why should all children be compelled to study three languages? Most children, and especially those studying in village schools need to learn only one language—the regional language. These and others, who do not wish to study Hindi, would understand, however, that they are voluntarily surrendering the advantage that a study of the national language offers. Similarly those who are not desirous of learning a foreign language, including English, will forgo the advantages that a study of English or another foreign language confers.

The Scribe: Please enlighten me now on your views on high school and university or higher education.

Bapu: I hold very strong views on higher education. I would like to revolutionize high school and college education, and relate it to the Indian needs. Teaching will consist not only in the theory but also in training in the job. In my opinion, as in the case of primary education, about half the time must be spent on training in the job. I would give the highest priority to teachers' training colleges. Our teachers should not only be the most talented of all people but they should also be people who bear excellent moral character themselves, if they have to transmit it to their pupils. They should also be paid on par with those trained for



any other calling. There should be colleges for engineering, medicine, law, commerce, administration, and agriculture.

Let me now relate to you some important views which I held over the years and even enforced wherever I had the opportunity to do so: (i) I am not opposed to education even of the highest type attainable in the world. (ii) The State must pay for it only when it has definite use for it. (iii) I am opposed to all higher education being paid for from the general revenue, (iv) It is my firm conviction that a large part of the so-called education in arts given in our colleges is a sheer waste and has resulted in unemployment among the educated classes. What is more, it has destroyed the health, both mental and physical, of the boys and girls who have the misfortune to go through the grind in our colleges, (v) The foreign medium through which higher education has been imparted in India has caused incalculable intellectual and moral injury to the nation. We are too near our times to judge the enormity of the damage done. And we, who have received such education, have both to be victims and judges—an almost impossible task.



2. Constructive Programme

THE SCRIBE: In view of the high position accorded to education, we have discussed it in some detail. Let us now proceed to consider the other items of the Constructive Programme.

Bapu: Let us first draw a list of the items of the Constructive Programme. We will then discuss each item individually. The items are:

Communal unity, Removal of untouchability, Prohibition, Khadi, Village industries, Swadeshi, Village sanitation, Population control, New or basic education, Adult education, Education in hygiene and health, Language problem, Economic equality, Uplift of women, Uplift of kisans, Uplift of mill-workers, Uplift of Adivasis, Care and treatment of lepers, Go-seva and improvement of cattle, Resource exhaustion, Pollution, Afforestation, Restoration of ecology, Prevention of profiteering, Prevention of hoarding, Prevention of black-markets, Prevention of smuggling, Prevention of corruption, Electoral reform, and Role of students.

The items have not been named in the order of their importance. Moreover, the list is not complete and new items can be added as and when necessary.

The Scribe: Let us now take up the problems individually.

Bapu: The first item on our list happens to be communal unity. No genuine effort has been made to promote it during the past thirty-seven years. If anything, the situation is worse today. There used to be Hindu-Muslim riots when I was in body. Today there are riots between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, Nirankari and other Sikhs, Shias and Sunnis, Bengalis and Assamese, Tribals and non-Tribals, and Hillmen and Plainsmen. Many times the riots are promoted by political parties, including the Congress party, to gain their ulterior ends.

The Scribe: Is not this regrettable that Congressmen and Congress Governments should foment communal disturbances to gain the votes of the minorities—of the Muslims all over the country, of the Hindus in the Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, and of the Bengalis in Assam? Don't you think that the Congressmen and



the police did something heinous by instigating violence against the Sikhs in the wake of the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi?

Bapu: It is not only regrettable but also most reprehensible. But both the ruling party and the opposition parties are to blame. Communal and caste differences have been enhanced and augmented since independence by the Congress Party to keep itself in the seat of power. Ruling parties raise internal and external bogeys and foment trouble to divert people's attention from their own economic, social, and political failures. Opposition parties often resort to fomenting communal riots and trouble to replace the party in power. All sensible men know that there is only one God and he is neither Hindu, nor Muslim, nor Sikh, Christian, or Parsee. All human beings, to be good followers of their own religions, have to be good human beings. And good human beings of all religions have to be good, and not get mad and kill each other because wicked politicians and their paid minions incite people to arson, incendiarism, murder and rape, to serve their own ends. Let religious leaders of all communities and other influential persons of goodwill get together and explain to their followers that arson, rape, and killing are heinous sins. What you say about the violence in the aftermath of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination is also correct.

The Scribe: Let us consider now the problem of untouchability. You have called it a crime against God and man. You once almost lost your life for it. What have the traditional or Sanatani Hindus as a whole, the 'Congress Hindus' or even the Congress Government done to ameliorate the lot of the untouchables?

Bapu: Precious little. The Hindus and the Congressmen have completely forgotten what I stood for. As long as the curse of untouchability pollutes the minds of the Hindu, so long will he himself be an untouchable in the eyes of the world, and we cannot win Poorna Swaraj. Harijan women are gang-raped, Harijan bastis are burnt, and the Congress police looks askance. The governments, including the Congress Governments, take no action.

The removal of untouchability means treating the so-called untouchables as one's own kith and kin. He who does treat them so must be free from the sense of high



and low, in fact from all wrong class-sense. It is my considered opinion that if untouchability stays, Hinduism goes.

The Scribe: I do not know if that day will ever dawn when all men will consider one another as their kith and kin, and no one will be high or low.

Bapu: It may take long in coming but, rest assured, ultimately it will come.

The Scribe: Let us proceed. Take the next item—i.e., prohibition.

Bapu: Although, like communal unity and removal of untouchability, prohibition has been on the Congress programme since 1920, little has been achieved in carrying out this very vital, social and moral reform. Due to peaceful picketing of liquor shops by Congress volunteers during the early phase of the independence struggle, a small gain was initially made, but this could not be sustained as the Congressmen never took up the programme seriously. During the War years, the evil actually increased.

The Scribe: But we are more concerned with what happened after the War—after the achievement of independence. Do you not think that Congressmen and Congress Governments, while paying lip service to prohibition, have in reality been promoting the drink evil?

Bapu: Yes, I have no doubt they have been doing so. I sometimes think that the Congressmen and the Congress Governments have run berserk and to augment State revenues and to enrich themselves and their kith and kin—who have links with liquor kings, the liquor venders and the underworld—they have embarked on an all-out programme, not for the eradication of the drink evil but for its propagation. They talk glibly about prohibition but do everything to increase the production and spread of the fire-water. First, more and more licenses have been issued by the Government to establish new drink factories. It is said that we have enemy countries on our east, west and north and a very long sea coast to defend; so we need more and more armed forces for our defence, and armed men would not fight or risk their lives unless they are drugged and drunk. Sane and sober men may think, but who wants the armed personnel to think? Secondly, they



import foreign liquors for officers of the army and for foreigners and embassies in the country who in their turn bring in large quantities, over and above their own needs, to sell it to a large section of affluent farmers, civilian officers and businessmen, who have plenty of black money to burn.

Now about other addicting drugs. I am told that tobacco and cigarettes bring in more revenue than any other single item of excise to the Indian exchequer. Think what this means. Millions of acres of good land are lost to food crops which the country badly needs. If these lands were used for growing more food, nor food imports would become unnecessary and cease. Tobacco is a deadly weed and smoking causes lung cancer, heart and stomach diseases, and many other disorders. Tobacco chewing, which is widespread in the country, leads to mouth cancer and gastro-intestinal diseases. See what we are doing. We are undermining the health of our people. We are increasing our food deficiencies. We are throwing away precious foreign exchange for buying American wheat which could have been grown on the lands on which tobacco is grown. And this is not all. We are allowing foreign giant tobacco companies like the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC) to export tobacco and to manufacture cigarettes in the country and thus expatriate valuable capital to other lands. Further, we have allowed the ITC to build a chain of five-star hotels in the country which are used only by affluent people, who have made black money by dubious means, to make more money in the country and to take it out.

What is true of tobacco is also true of other intoxicating drugs—Ganja and opium. More opium is grown in the country than is needed for medical purposes, and is smuggled out by Indians and foreigners in raw or processed forms.

The result of not enforcing prohibition is the widespread use of these harmful agents by all and sundry—the army, the civilian officers, well-to-do persons who use these as status symbols and wish to 'belong', students, workers and peasants, and even women. The upper and the lowest sections of the society have almost completely succumbed to intoxication, but there is yet a middle segment which is relatively free. Many of these not only do not themselves indulge in drinking



nor are addicted to other intoxicants but regard the use of these agents as evils. I wonder why they have not offered any organised resistance to the use of these drugs.

The Scribe: There can be many reasons for this, but three reasons that particularly strike me are:

1. Some of these people have favours to seek from the Government and would do nothing to displease the Establishment.
2. Many are afraid and, after the terrors that were unleashed on all opponents and even innocent people during the Emergency, have lost the courage to resist.
3. People have lost all faith in the 'little men' who lead them, and no new leader of a sizable stature has emerged among them.

Bapu: I think you are right. I thought I had driven fear out of the minds of our people, but I guess I was wrong. People are today more afraid of their own rulers than they were of foreign rulers during the British period.

The Scribe: Let us move on, Bapu. There are so many items of the Constructive Programme which we have to consider.

Bapu: Yes, the next two—Khadi and other village industries— are the most important from the point of view of economic development. My views on Khadi and village industries have been before the country for decades. But I will tell you once more, briefly and succinctly, what Khadi means to me. It means a thoroughgoing Swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in India, and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers. That means a reversal of the existing state. That is to say that instead of a few cities of India and some foreign countries living on the exploitation and the ruin of Indian villages, the latter will be largely self-contained, and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both the parties. Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessities of life. Therefore, in effect, it means that every



village should produce all its necessities and a certain percentage in addition for the requirement of the cities.

Khadi to me is the symbol of the unity of Indian humanity and all its economic freedom and quality. Khadi means the complete eradication of unemployment, including partial unemployment, or hidden unemployment. For all those who have free time will know how to use it. Each family with a plot of land can grow cotton for at least family use. Today cotton crop is centralized and has to be sent to distant parts of India. It was, and still is, a money crop and subject to fluctuations of the market. Under the Khadi scheme, cotton growing becomes free from this uncertainty and gamble. The grower grows what he needs and some more for those who do not have their plots of land.

Spinning will give employment to all those who are unemployed or underemployed. You will recall that I had proposed nation-wide spinning as a sacrifice for all; an average man or woman, otherwise occupied, was to give not more than one hour daily to this work. Imagine the unifying and educative effect of the whole nation simultaneously taking part in the process—cotton growing, picking, ginning, cleaning, carding, slivering, up to spinning or spinning on the 'takli' or the wheel. Consider the levelling effect of the bond of common labour and intelligence. In our country, there has been a divorce between these two. If there is an indissoluble marriage between the two, and that in the manner suggested by me, the resultant good will be inestimable.

The Scribe: It has been argued by the detractors of Khadi that the production of Khadi brings small return for the amount of labour that goes into spinning, etc., and that if bought from Khadi shops, it is more expensive than mill-made cloth.

Bapu: The argument is fallacious. First, as regards the labour that goes into spinning, etc., eighty percent of the population that lives in the villages is without work—enforced unemployment— during six months in a year. Whatever they produce, and whatever it fetches, will add to the country's wealth. It will give them employment during their idle time and make an addition to their buying power. Secondly, the use of the 'takli' and the spinning-wheel needs no



extraordinary outlay of money or intelligence. Thirdly, I hold that the costliest Khadi is cheaper than the cheapest mill-made cloth as the mills displace human labour. The spinning-wheel can be turned by millions of the villagers of India who have been reduced to pauperism by enforced idleness. Enforced unemployment and idleness are killing the very soul of the nation. To those who say that Khadi brings poor return, I say 'burn the wheel if you can find a better substitute for it'. The spinning-wheel has a triple message for us: an economic message which says, 'spin me and you can find a crust of bread for your hungry stomachs'; a cultural message which says, 'spin me for the sake of the hungry millions'; and a metaphysical message which stands for simple living and high thinking. The spinning-wheel is the auspicious symbol of *sharir yajna* or body labour. He, who eats his food without offering this sacrifice, steals it.

The Scribe: Many people in this country and some knowledgeable people in other countries today concede that decentralized production, which you proposed long ago, would have, if faithfully followed, not only transformed the face of India but also become a model to emulate by both the developing and the developed countries. But, as you are well aware, your counsels were grudgingly accepted and half-heartedly implemented by only a few of your followers in the Congress during the independence struggle and completely disregarded and discarded after the assumption of political power by the Congress. Today the country's economy is in a shambles and people are both helpless and hopeless.

Bapu: The economy is in a bad way, but why should people feel helpless and lose hope? You know I am a great optimist and always full of hope. I feel a day will arrive when people will realize the truth of what I have been saying for a long time. More than seventy years ago, when I wrote my *Hind Swaraj*, I said that I was most unhappy with the industrial civilization and the materialistic path on which the Western society had embarked. I said that this civilization was based on untruth and violence; it was exploitative and that it was the cause of wars. After 1909, I reiterated it in many of my speeches and writings. I warned my countrymen against its evils, but even the tallest of them perhaps thought that I



was talking balderdash; and they persisted with industrialization of the country after I left the scene. You now see where it has led us.

The Scribe: Yes, Bapu, we see the result. It is very much before us. But we do not know how and where we went wrong. Before we go on to a consideration of the next item, i.e., village industries, please enlighten us on how it all happened.

Bapu: Listen. I will tell you what happened. There were many including Jawaharlal who considered my village programme a throwback and a regression to the past. They were impressed with the achievement of industrialism. On assumption of power, therefore, they brushed aside my advice and decided to adopt a model on which the Western countries had developed during the preceding two hundred years. They forgot, however, that when these countries developed and became affluent, there were for them plenty of lands to conquer, loot, and exploit. These were no longer available to India when she gained her political independence and, in the absence of the conditions under which the Western nations grew rich, development on these lines was not possible. Secondly, Jawaharlal, like many contemporary economists, believed in a growth-oriented economy and thought that if growth was adequate, it would take care of unemployment too. But, as you know, this did not happen. Thirdly, in a country like India, where three-fourths of the population live in the villages and more than half of the national income is derived from agriculture, the scarce resources of the country were not apportioned properly and agriculture and the villages were literally starved. Fourthly, in a country short of capital, where a large section of the people are unemployed or underemployed, it was wrong to use a capital-intensive technology. This aggravated the problem of unemployment. What greater blunder could have been committed in a country where millions were already unemployed? The enormity of the folly is that it is still being pursued. Fifthly, as a result of our unwise policies, our craze for imported goods and sophisticated machines, we threw a policy of self-reliance overboard and went in for large-scale foreign investments and external loans. This has involved our people—even the unborn generations—in a colossal debt which is threatening



to crush us. This aid, or loan, we never needed; and we do not need it now. It has only lined the pockets of the ruling party, the rich industrialist, the rich trader, the big farmer—less than one per cent of our total population of 700 million. It has made us vulnerable to the pressures of foreign governments, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the multinationals. We are no longer free to pursue our own policies and, whether we own it or not, our sovereignty is already abridged and our freedom is in peril.

I could go on interminably but we are digressing. Let us go ahead and take up the next item, viz., the village industries which come in as a handmaid to Khadi. Village economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, oil-pressing, 'gur' or jaggery-making, paper-making, pottery, shoe-making, canning, making of soaps, hair oils and dentifrices, mirrors and combs, utensils, simple furniture and all other articles which villagers are likely to require. All should make it a point of honour to use only village articles whenever and wherever available. When we have become village-minded, we shall not want imitation of the Western or machine-made articles. But we will develop a true national taste, in keeping with the new India in which pauperism, starvation, and idleness will be things of the past.

The Scribe: Millions of people were unemployed or only partially employed when the British left. Idleness has increased enormously since then due to industrialization of the country. Many people are now realizing that it was a wrong step in a country where millions of hands were already idle.

Bapu: Industrialization has not solved the problem of idleness even in the West. Even in boom, periods, when Western economies are in a state of good health, a significant percentage of the working population is idle. Their numbers mount rapidly when there are slumps. The only way of eradicating unemployment is to scrap mass production—with its economies of scale—and replace it with decentralised production in every hamlet and home.

The Scribe: I am sure you are aware of the growing opinion in favour of small-scale and decentralized production in the Western countries today. Eminent



economists and thinkers abroad are thinking in terms of appropriate technology and producer societies in which the consumers are the producers themselves.

Bapu: There are many people today, both Congressmen and others, who don Khadi clothes but outdo others in the use of other imported articles. They treat Khadi as a passport for the use of everything else from non-Indian sources. This is a travesty of Swadeshi and a denial of the message of Khadi. Whilst Khadi is an obligation for all time in India, surely it is equally an obligation to use India-made things wherever we can get them, even though they may be inferior to foreign articles. There are several Swadeshi things in the market which are in danger of disappearance for want of market. They may not be up to the mark. It is for us to use them and require the makers to improve them wherever improvement is possible. Numerous Indians today go abroad and bring back all kinds of imported articles—apparel, watches, calculators, electronic gadgets and durables of all kinds. This should not be permitted at all. Also, there are numerous articles made by the 'multinationals' either by themselves or in collaboration with Indian firms. All patriotic Indians should eschew their use and use only similar articles made by purely Indian firms with hundred per cent Indian equity. Lists of pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, soaps and detergents and other consumer articles made by Indian firms should be drawn up, printed, and circulated in all towns and cities and Indians should make it a practice to buy only these articles. Just as we do not give up our country for one with a better climate but endeavour to improve our own, so also we should not discard Swadeshi for better or cheaper foreign things. Even as a husband, who being dissatisfied with his simple-looking wife goes in search of a better-looking woman, is disloyal to his partner, so is a man who prefers foreign-made things, disloyal to his country though the latter may be better than country-made things. The law of each country's progress demands, on the part of its inhabitants, a preference for their own products and manufactures.

The Scribe: The major part of our population—nearly three-fourths—lives in the villages. And most of our villagers have no idea of sanitation or what healthful



living means. Would you like to tell us what one should do to improve the village sanitation?

Bapu: Instead of having graceful hamlets dotting the land, our villages are today so many dung-heaps with clusters of hovels. The approach to many of them is not a refreshing experience. Often one would like to shut one's eyes and stuff one's nose; such is the surrounding dirt and offending smell. If a majority of our political workers—Congressmen and others—were drawn from the villages as it should have been, they should have been able to make our villages the models of cleanliness in every sense of the word. But they have never considered it their duty to identify themselves with the villagers in their daily lives.

A sense of national or social sanitation is not a virtue among us. We may take a kind of bath, but we do not mind dirtying the well, the tank or the river by the side of which or in which we perform the ablutions. I regard this failing as a great vice. It is responsible for the disgraceful state of our villages and the banks of our sacred rivers and for the diseases that spring from insanitation. Sanitation and hygiene will thus engage a good part of the village worker's attention. His home and his surrounding will not only be a model of cleanliness, but he will also help to promote sanitation by taking the broom and the basket round. If the worker becomes a voluntary 'bhangi', he would begin by collecting night-soil, and turning it into manure, and sweeping village streets. He will tell people how and where they should perform their daily functions and speak to them on the value of sanitation and the great injury caused by its neglect. The worker will continue to do the work whether the villagers listen to him or not.

The Scribe: What is your image of a model village?

Bapu: My idea of a model village is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet interdependent. It will have an attractive approach. The streets and lanes will be free of dust and dirt, and well-lighted with electric lights from dusk to dawn. The houses will be preferably brick-built, and there will be a brick kiln for every group of five or more villages. Other material used in construction will be available within a radius of five miles.



The kitchen, the bathroom and the ever-clean, sanitary lavatory will have a supply of piped water through controlled wells or tanks. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use, and to house their cattle. Every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops, including vegetables and fruits and cotton for its cloth. All things that a village requires, it must produce itself. This has been done before and can be done now. If more land is available, it will grow money crops excluding Ganja, opium, tobacco, and the like.

Every village will have houses of worship, a village common for the grazing of cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary Nai Talim schools for compulsory education—in which industrial education will be the central fact—, a meeting hall, and a theatre. There will be no castes, as we have today, with their graded untouchability. Everybody will be fully employed, and hunger and poverty will be things of the past. The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayats of five persons annually elected by the villagers, male and female, and possessing the minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. The Panchayats will perform the triple functions of the legislative, the judiciary, and the executive for its year of office. The Panchayats will also take steps to promote cattle welfare, increase milk supply and the quantity of foodstuffs grown in the village. They will promote tree-farming; and if the villages have their own tree-farms on one-third of the inferior land by rotation, there will be no shortage of fuel and timber, and our forests will be saved.

There is nothing inherently impossible in the picture of the village that I have drawn. To model such villages may be the lifetime effort of the village worker and the villagers themselves; but it is worth the trouble. Any lover of true democracy and village development can take it up, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results.

The Scribe: What are the qualifications and duties of a village worker?



Bapu: These have been admirably summed up by Vinoba in two couplets in Sanskrit:

अहिंसा सत्य अस्तेय ब्रह्मचर्य असंग्रह |
शरीरश्रम अस्वाद सर्वत्र भयवर्जन ||
सर्वधर्मसमानत्वं स्वदेशी स्पर्शभावना |
हो एकादश सेवावीं नम्रत्वे व्रत निश्चर्ये ||

[Non-violence, Truth, non-stealing, brahmacharya, non-possession, body labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal respect for all religions, swadeshi (restricting oneself to the use and service of one's nearest surroundings in preference to those more remote), spirit of unexclusive brotherhood—these eleven vows should be observed in a spirit of humility.]

The Scribe: How is a village worker to earn his livelihood? Is he to draw an allowance from an institution, or earn it by labouring for it, or to depend upon the village for it?

Bapu: The ideal way is to depend upon the village. There is no shame in it but humility. There is no scope for self-indulgence either, for I cannot think of a village which would encourage or tolerate self-indulgence. All that the worker need do is to work for the village all his working hours, and to collect whatever grain and vegetables he needs from the village. He may collect a little money too (for postage and other monetary expenditure), if he should need it, though I do not think he cannot do without it. The village will willingly support him, if he has gone there at the invitation of the village. I can conceive an occasion when the villagers may not be able to tolerate his views and withdraw their support as, for instance, they did when I admitted untouchables in the Satyagraha Ashram in 1915. Then, he should work for his living. It is no use depending on an institution.

The Scribe: Should the worker do body labour?



Bapu: The village worker is in the village to do as much body labour as possible, and to teach the villagers to outgrow idleness. He may do any kind of labour, but he should give preference to scavenging. Scavenging is certainly productive labour. I like some of the workers' insistence on devoting at least half an hour on work entirely on service of a productive kind.

The Scribe: Should he maintain a diary?

Bapu: I have no doubt that the village worker must be prepared to account for every minute of his waking hours, and must fill them with work and mention it distinctly in his diary. A real diary is a mirror of the diarist's mind and soul, but many find it difficult to make a truthful record of their mind's activities. In that case, they may confine themselves to a record of their physical activities. But it should not be done in a haphazard way. Simply saying, 'worked in the kitchen', would not do. One may have whiled away his time in the kitchen. Specific items of work should be mentioned. The village worker will leave politics alone. He may become a member of a political party, but he may not take part in an election campaign. He has his work cut out for himself.

Workers without character, living far above the ordinary life of villagers, and devoid of the knowledge required of them for their work, can produce no impression on the villagers, whether Harijan or others. Village workers drawn from cities have to develop village mentality and learn the art of living after the manner of the villagers.

We want ideal labourers in the country's cause. They will not bother about what food they get, or what comforts they are assured by the villagers whom they serve. They will trust in God for whatever they need, and will exult in the trials and tribulations they might have to undergo. This is inevitable in our country where we have over 5,00,000 villages to think of.

You will be tempted to ask if this is also the standard for the villagers. Not by any means. These prescriptions are for those who serve and not for the village folk—their masters. We have sat on their backs all these years, and we want to



accept voluntary and increasing poverty in order that our masters' lot may be much better than it is. We have to enable them to earn much more.

The Scribe: What is the meaning of all-round village service?

Bapu: An all-round worker must know all those living in the village and render them such service as he can. That does not mean that the worker will be able to do everything single-handed. He will show them such help and materials as they require. He will train up his own helpers. He will so win over the villagers that they will seek and follow his advice. Supposing I go and settle down in a village with a 'ghani', I won't be an ordinary 'ghanchi', making an ordinary living. I will be a Mahatma 'ghanchi'. I have used the word 'Mahatma' in fun, but what I mean to say is that as a 'ghanchi' I will become a model for the villagers to follow. I will be a 'ghanchi' who knows the Gita and the Koran. I will be learned enough to teach their children. I may not be able to do so for lack of time. The villagers will come to me and ask me, 'please make arrangements for our children's education'. I will tell them, 'I can find you a teacher, but you will have to bear the expenses'. And they will be prepared to do so most willingly. I will teach them spinning and when they come and ask me for the services of a weaver, I will find them a weaver on the same terms as I found them a teacher. And the weaver will teach them how to weave their own cloth. I will inculcate in them the importance of hygiene and sanitation, and when they come and ask me for a sweeper, I will tell them, 'I will be your sweeper and I will train you all in the job'. This is my conception of all-round village service.

The Scribe: In 1940, you said that the best method of population control was *brahmacharya* or sex restraint, and that if the resources of the country were properly utilized, it could support double the existing population, and that the use of artificial contraceptive measures was sinful and would promote promiscuity and immorality. Now the population of the divided India has increased from 337 million in 1947 to 710 million in 1984, i.e., it has more than doubled during the past 37 years and the annual rate of population growth of 2.5



per cent has almost completely annulled the economic gains made during the same period. After all this, do you still hold the same views on population control?

Bapu: I must say that with the change in the situation, I cannot hold on to the same views. There has been a population explosion following the rapid industrialization of the country. This is precisely what happened in the West in the wake of the industrial revolution. If you have adopted the industrial model, you cannot escape its attendant evils. Did I not repeatedly warn the country against these? The population explosion that has taken place calls for immediate and urgent measures—any measures—that will call a speedy halt to a further rise of population.

The Scribe: What measures would you suggest?

Bapu: These are no different from those that have been successfully used elsewhere:

1. I would suggest a reversal of the policy of large-scale industrialization and would advocate rapid economic development on a decentralized pattern and a totally rural bias. This will raise the standard of living of the masses in the villages and, with higher standards of living, the size of the family declines.
2. Free and compulsory primary education up to the age of fourteen years, as suggested in the section on education, must be commenced forthwith. Adult education programmes should be vigorously pursued and social, political, and economic education should stress that large families and economic welfare do not go together. Education and Factory Acts should be legislated and implemented strictly.
3. The minimum age of marriage should be legally raised for men to twenty-four years and for women to twenty-two. The ideal before the people should be one-child families and, in no case, more than two-children families.
4. Compulsory registration of all births and marriages should be enforced.
5. Measures for emancipation of women should be undertaken. Liberating women from the chores of domestic work by providing childcare centres to



take care of infants and children in every street in the urban areas and every village in the countryside, and by providing them with productive employment, would have a significant impact on population control, as employed women would wish to have fewer children.

6. Provision should be made for adequate old-age pensions. In India, male children are desired for social security during old age. This desire would be eliminated or weakened by provision of social security during old age.
7. To these general observances must be added sexual restraint or *brahmacharya*, contraceptive measures such as the use of safe periods, IUDs, pills, voluntary sterilizations—vasectomies or laparoscopic tubectomies, etc.

The Scribe: Out of the original items of your Constructive Programme as many as three—basic education, adult education and education on health and hygiene—are devoted to a consideration of education which we have already considered in great detail. Would you like to say anything more on these whilst we are considering the items of the Constructive Programme as such?

Bapu: There is no need for me to restate what I have already said in a previous dialogue. But I would like to say that both basic education and adult education constitute a big field of work meant to transform village children and adults into model villagers.

Primary education today is a big farce designed without regard to the wants of India of the villages and, for that matter, even of the cities. Basic education links the children, whether of the cities or villages, to all that is best and lasting in India. It develops both the body and the mind, and keeps the child rooted to the soil with a glorious vision of the future in the realization of which he or she begins to take his or her share from the very commencement of his or her career in school.

Basic education will need teachers, buildings, and teaching materials. Till such time as suitable teachers are available, the constructive village workers will have to take up this work themselves. They will also inculcate the spirit of service and



co-operation in the villagers so as to help with money, materials, and free labour to provide necessary and suitable school buildings and teaching materials. It is a gigantic task needing the help of the government and the support of the entire nation.

As for adult education, this has been woefully neglected. Where it has not been neglected, illiterates have been taught how to read and write. If I had the charge of adult education, I would begin with the general and political education of the villager by word of mouth. I would bring home to him the greatness and the vastness of India to which he is hitherto a complete stranger. I would wean him away from the evil customs and superstitions to which he has been a prey for generations. I would open his mind and make him aware of the wrongs done to him by the outside world and the city-dwellers. I would inform him how there has been a drain both of wealth and of talent to the city and the world outside. I would tell him who his exploiters have been in the past and who are exploiting him at the present time. Last, but not least, I would explain to him how this process of exploitation can be checked and even reversed.

Side by side with this education by mouth, there would be the literary education of the adult. This, I think, will follow in the wake of the basic education of the children who will themselves become their parent's teachers. Be that as it may, the village worker has to undertake adult education also.

Now let me say a word on education in health and hygiene, before we take up the consideration of the language problem.

The Scribe: But have we not already considered village sanitation, Bapu?

Bapu: Yes we have, but we have not considered education in health and hygiene. Mere mention of sanitation is not enough to include health and hygiene. The art of keeping one's health and hygiene is by itself a separate subject of study and corresponding practice. In a well-organized society, the citizens observe the laws of health and hygiene. It is established beyond doubt that ignorance and neglect of these laws is responsible for a majority of diseases to which mankind is heir.



The very high rate of morbidity and mortality among Indians is no doubt largely due to our gnawing poverty, but it could be mitigated to some extent if the people were educated in health and hygiene.

Mens sana in corpore sano is perhaps the first law for humanity. A healthy mind in a healthy body is a self-evident truth. There is an inevitable connection between the mind and the body. If we are in possession of health, we shall shed all violence and, naturally obeying the laws of health, we should have healthy bodies without any effort. I hope, therefore, that no worker will disregard this item of the Constructive Programme. The fundamental laws of hygiene and health are simple and easily learnt. Here are some:

1. Think the purest thoughts and banish the impure ones.
2. Breathe the purest air day and night.
3. Establish a balance between bodily and mental work.
4. Stand erect, sit erect and be clean in each one of your acts, and let these be an expression of your inner condition.
5. Eat to live for the service of fellow-men. Do not live for indulging yourselves. Hence your food must be just enough to keep your mind and body in good order. Man becomes what he eats.

Your water, food and air must be clean, and you will not be satisfied with mere personal cleanliness, but you will infect your surroundings with the same threefold cleanliness that you will desire for yourselves.

The Scribe: It is a very important and a very comprehensive item.

Bapu: Yes, it is both important and comprehensive and also difficult of observance.

The Scribe: You have already given us your views on the language problem while discussing education. Would you like to say something more on it, now that we are considering the items of the Constructive Programme?



Bapu: Love of the English language—the English have gone but it still remains the language of the new rulers—was there among the educated classes. But due to certain false notions and the mishandling of the problems of education, there has come about the establishment of numerous public schools, central schools, sainik schools, convent schools, and privately-owned children's schools employing convent-educated teachers, where English is the medium of instruction. What was, during the period of the British rule, a preferential love for the English language at the cost of one's mother tongue, has now become an infatuation. The children, both boys and girls, of our brown masters and of the city elites do not talk in their mother tongue in the school, home, street, theatre, and restaurant. They chatter about in English as if they were trained in Eton, Harrow, Oxford, or Cambridge. This has created a deep chasm between the educated or the upper classes—the new 'sahibs' and 'mem-sahibs'—and the masses. Further, it has led to a disastrous impoverishment of the provincial languages. We flounder when we make vain attempts to express abstruse thought in our mother tongue. We are at a loss when we fail to find equivalents for scientific terms. The masses thus remain cut off from the modern mind. It is easy to understand that, unless we undo this mischief, the mass mind must remain imprisoned and the masses cannot participate in the development of the country. This is impossible unless every step is explained in their own language.

And then for all-India intercourse we need, from among the Indian stock, a language which the largest number of people already know and understand and which the others can easily pick up. This language is indisputably Hindustani—Hindi when written in the Devanagari script and Urdu when written in the Persian script. It is written and spoken in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, and understood in Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra, and Karnataka. There are people also in Tamil Nadu and Kerala who understand it. Had any economic advantages which accrue to the people of Hindi-speaking States been effectively neutralized and no efforts made to impose Hindi on the people of Tamil Nadu, Andhra,



Kerala, and Karnataka, Hindustani would have joyfully been accepted by them, and it would by now have become the medium of inter-state communication.

The Scribe: When the British left this country, the English language had already acquired a position of great eminence among the educated classes. It was the medium of instruction, the language in which all official work was conducted both at the central and provincial levels, and the language in which people from different parts of India conferred and conversed with one another. It was also studied avidly for its rich treasures by students of literature, art, and science. It still very largely occupies that position among the Anglophiles. What place would you assign to it in the India of today?

Bapu: My love for the English people and the English language is second to none. I only love my own country and my own language more. I would recommend the study of English by the more talented people for their enjoyment of its rich treasures and for their ability to translate into their provincial languages and Hindustani the wealth of learning it contains for the use of the Indian masses. Its other use is as a link-language with the rest of the English-speaking world. Talented and desirous scholars should also study other languages for similar purposes.

The Scribe: What are your views on economic equality?

Bapu: I regard economic equality as the hub of the Constructive Programme. My writings and utterances over several decades are brimful of the importance and necessity of economic equality. How often have I said that economic inequality or flagrant disparities in income and wealth, in the same country or between countries, are causes of strife, violence, civil wars and wars between country and country! History is replete with such examples. You can never hope to establish a peaceful or non-violent society in a country where a few members of the elite exploit large masses of men. Similarly you cannot prevent wars between countries if the strong and developed countries continue to exploit the weak and the underdeveloped countries.



My views on economic equality find full expression in what I have said and written on a variety of subjects—non-stealing, non-possession, selflessness, self-denial and self-sacrifice, Sarvodaya, bread labour, body-labour, Swadeshi, economics of Khadi, decentralization, non-violent occupations, just wage, the Swaraj of my dreams, industrialism, machinery, unemployment and underemployment, capital and labour relations, landlord and tenant relations, human relations, academic economics, Marxism and the trusteeship doctrine.

The Scribe: It is a long list of topics. Please go slow and take up those, one by one, which bring out your meaning best.

Bapu: Non-stealing and non-possession—*asteya* and *aparigraha*—are two of the *yamas* of the *Rajayoga* of Patanjali. Let us take non-stealing (*asteya*) first. It is impossible that a person should steal and simultaneously claim truthfulness or cherish love. Yet everyone of us is unconsciously or consciously guilty of theft. It is theft to take something in the belief that it is nobody's property. It is theft to take something from another for which we have no need. We should not receive a single thing that we do not need. We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen from the breaches of the principle of non-stealing.

One who observes the principle of non-stealing will refuse to bother himself about things to be acquired in the future. This anxiety for the future will be found at the root of many a theft. Today we only desire possession of a thing; tomorrow we shall begin to adopt measures, straight if possible and crooked if necessary, to acquire its possession.

Ideas may be stolen no less than material things. One who egotistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him, is guilty of a theft of ideas.



One who takes up the observance of non-stealing has therefore to be humble, thoughtful, vigilant, and simple in his habits.

The Scribe: Now let us consider non-possession.

Bapu: Non-possession is allied to non-stealing. A thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if we possess it without needing it. Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after truth and a follower of the Law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow; he never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If, therefore, we repose faith in Him and His providence, we should rest assured that He will give us everyday our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who lived in such faith, always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man his daily bread, and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the attendant miseries. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted, while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich.

Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world and no man would die of starvation. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving.

In India, we have millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day, and that too consisting of insufficient 'chapatis' or rice and a little salt. No one has really any right to anything in excess until these millions are clothed and fed better.



The Scribe: Let us now move on to a consideration of selflessness, self-denial, and self-sacrifice.

Bapu: This does not mean renunciation in the sense of abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one, if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the Law, use his abilities for service. He will, therefore, not cheat, or speculate, lead a simple life, not injure a living soul, and lose millions rather than harm anybody.

A life of service is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. One, who would serve, should not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to by his Master on high. He will not therefore encumber himself with everything that comes his way. He will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unaffected in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and will take precedence over service of the self. In fact, the pure devotee concentrates himself on the service of humanity without any reservation whatever. If he does this, there would be no inequalities as prevail in the society today.

The Scribe: You have said so much on Sarvodaya. Let us now go on to its consideration.

Bapu: Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which I read during a train journey in South Africa, brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life. I translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it Sarvodaya (the welfare of all).

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure.



The teachings of *Unto This Last* may be summarized as follows:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it clear as daylight to me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles into practice.

The Scribe: What is the difference between the teachings contained in Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and Mill's doctrine of 'the greatest good of the greatest number'?

Bapu: A votary of *ahimsa* (non-violence) cannot subscribe to this utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the idea. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge at many points in their career. But there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The devotee of Sarvodaya will even sacrifice himself.

The Scribe: How would you describe Sarvodaya?

Bapu: The entire Constructive Programme that we have been talking about is Sarvodaya. For me decentralized production, Ram Rajya, village reconstruction, and rural uplift are synonymous. The following is a brief outline:

If we would see our dream of Sarvodaya, i.e., true democracy realized, we would regard the humblest and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land. This presupposes that all are pure or will become pure, if they are not. And purity must go hand in hand with wisdom. No one would then



harbour any distinction between community and community, caste and outcaste. Everybody would regard all as equal with oneself and hold them together in the silken net of love. No one should regard another as untouchable. We should hold as equal the toiling labourer and the rich capitalist. Everybody would know how to earn an honest living by the sweat of one's brow and make no distinction between intellectual and physical labour. If the person is a medical man, there is disease enough in India to need all his medical skill. If he is a lawyer, there are disputes and quarrels enough in the country to patch up and prevent litigation. He should not defend the guilty and, through his practice of Law, help the criminal. Today, alas!, even the highest in the land have gone crazy and even tried to change the Law to protect a Chief Minister against whom there is *prima facie* evidence of having indulged in corrupt practices. Legal skill should be used in the service of the innocent and not to make more money than the village carpenter. If all are employed and distribution is fair, all men will have the wherewithal to supply all their natural wants and no more. To hasten this consummation, we would voluntarily turn ourselves into scavengers. No one, who has wisdom, will ever touch opium, Ganja, tobacco, liquor or other intoxicants. Everybody would observe Swadeshi as the rule of life and regard every woman, not being his wife, as his mother, sister or daughter, according to her age, and never lust after her in his heart. He would be ready to lay down his life when occasion demands it, and never want to take another's life.

The Scribe: Was anything like Sarvodaya ever operative in India's past?

Bapu: In a way, yes. To observe morality is to attain mastery over the mind and passions. We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets, the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge in our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, and the poor quite happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and



pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in ancient times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation, decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to their sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the *rishis* and *fakirs*. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover the 'vakils' and 'vaid's' did not rob the people as they do today. They were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid the courts. There were no touts to lure people. The common people lived independently and followed their agriculture-based occupations. They enjoyed true home rule.

The Scribe: While we are discussing economic equality, please state briefly and succinctly your views on bread labour.

Bapu: The Law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on bread labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian peasant-writer T.M. Bondaref. Tolstoy gave it much wider publicity. In my view, the same



principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Bhagavadgita, where we are told that he, who eats without offering sacrifice, eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can mean only bread labour.

Reason too leads us to this conclusion. How can a man, who does not do body labour, have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread', says the Bible. A millionaire cannot carry on for long and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He, therefore, induces hunger by taking exercise, and helps himself to the food he eats. If everyone, whether rich or poor, has thus to take exercise in some shape or form, why should it not assume the form of protective bread labour? No one asks the cultivator to take breathing exercises or to work his muscles. And more than three-fourths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining people followed the example of the overwhelming majority, at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food? And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be certainly redressed, if such people take a hand in it. Again, invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, when everyone, without exception, acknowledged the obligation of bread labour. It is common to all the *varnas*. There is a worldwide conflict between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only the trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship truth, and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present, at any rate, everybody is not in a position to take to it. A person can, therefore, spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithy, etc., instead of tilling the soil—always regarding agriculture, however, to be the ideal. Everyone must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for everyone to dispose of his own waste. If this is impossible, each family should



see to its own scavenging. I have felt for years that there must be something radically wrong, when scavenging has been made the concern of a separate class in society. We have no historical record of the man, who first assigned the lowest status to this essential sanitary service. Whoever he was, he by no means did us good. We should, from our very childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is for everyone, who has realized this, to commence bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

I have so often emphasized that sacrifice may be of many kinds. One of them is bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, there would be enough food and enough leisure for all.

The Scribe: May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour?

Bapu: No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's', perhaps applies here well.

The Scribe: Why should we insist on a Rabindranath or a Raman eating his bread by manual labour? Why should not brain workers be considered on a par with manual workers, for both of them perform useful social work?

Bapu: Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation. It will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output.

If I pay due wages to my man, I shall not be able to amass unnecessary riches, to waste money on luxuries and to add to the mass of poverty on earth. The man who receives due wages from me will act justly towards his subordinates. Thus the stream of justice will never dry up, but gather strength as it flows onward. And the nation with such a sense of justice will be happy and prosperous.

We thus find that the economists are wrong in thinking that competition is good for a nation. Competition which exaggerates disparities is an evil. It only enables



the purchaser to obtain labour and material unjustly cheap, with the result that the rich grow richer and the poor poorer. In any society, where wages are just, the highest income should not be more than double the lowest wage. The President, the Prime Minister, the graphic and performing artistes, should not get more than double the wage of the lawyer, the doctor, the engineer, the barber or the scavenger who should get a near equal wage. If the disparities in income are small, competition for jobs will cease and corruption minimized, if not entirely eradicated. More near wages or incomes will stop thefts, dacoities, and violence which have become the order of the day.

True economics is the economics of justice. People will be happy in so far as they learn to do justice and be righteous. All else is not only vain but leads straight to destruction. To teach the people to get rich by hook or by crook is to do them an immense disservice.

An economics that inculcates Mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice. It promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.

The Scribe: Now that we have discussed Sarvodaya which you say is synonymous with decentralization, would you like to say something on the latter?

Bapu: Bureaucratic centralization, as you know to your own cost, is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society. As a votary of non-violence, it is my ardent wish that India should evolve on non-violent lines. If it decides to do so, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoits, and so must be the huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India well-equipped with army, air, and naval forces.



You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages. Rural economy, as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be non-violent; and to be rural-minded, you have to have faith in the spinning-wheel and village industries.

The Scribe: Industrialism has contributed in a big way to the material comforts of man—airplanes, automobiles, air-conditioners, refrigerators, radios, transistors, television, video, household electric appliances, better fabrics, and other consumer goods. Why then do you call industrialism a curse and industrial civilization an evil?

Bapu: I concede that industrialism has provided material comforts for a small percentage of mankind. But this is the outcome of exploitation of the poor by the rich in the developed countries, and of the poor countries by the rich countries of the world. What is worse, industrialism has turned countries into warring camps, busy fabricating and piling up destructive weapons, both conventional and nuclear, which pose a grave threat to the very existence of mankind. Industrialism has given rise to the pollution of the air, soil, and the seas. It has led to a serious threat to the eco-systems and a rapid exhaustion of the non-renewable and scarce resources of the planet which it took millions of years to form and accumulate. It has seriously eroded moral, ethical, and spiritual values. It has goaded the greedy and rapacious individuals and groups to grab and acquire what is not theirs by dint of honest labour. Do you still doubt that industrialism is a curse and industrial civilization anything but an evil?

The Scribe: Industrialism is based on machinery. Are you, then, against the use of machinery?

Bapu: Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour. I would welcome every improvement in the cottage machine, but I know that it is criminal to displace hand labour by power-driven spindles unless one is, at the same time, able to provide millions of



farmers some other occupation in their homes. That use of machinery is lawful, which subserves the interests of all.

I would favour the use of most elaborate machinery, if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness are avoided. I have suggested hand-spinning as the only ready means of driving away penury. The spinning-wheel itself is a piece of valuable machinery, and in my humble way I have tried to secure improvements in it in keeping with the special conditions of India.

The Scribe: You are not against all machinery.

Bapu: My answer is an emphatic 'no'. But I am against the indiscriminate multiplication of machinery. I refuse to be dazzled by its seeming triumph. I am uncompromisingly against all destructive machinery. But simple tools and instruments, and such machinery as saves individual labour and lightens the burden of millions of cottages, I should welcome. What I object to is the craze for machinery, and not the machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I too want to save time and labour—not for a fraction of mankind but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery helps a few to ride on the back of the millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour but greed. It is against all this constitution of things that I fought with all my might.

The Scribe: Then your fight is not against machinery as such, but against its abuses which are so much in evidence today.

Bapu: I would unhesitatingly say 'yes'. I myself told you this. But I should add that scientific truths and discoveries should first of all cease to be mere instruments of greed. Then labourers will not be overworked, and machinery—instead of becoming a hindrance— will be a help. I am not aiming at the total eradication of machinery, but its limitation.



The Scribe: When logically argued out, that would seem to imply that all complicated power-driven machinery should go.

Bapu: It might have to go, but I must make one thing clear. The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not be the cause of atrophy of man's limbs. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of Singer sewing machine. It is one of the few useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself. Singer saw his wife labouring over the tedious process of sewing and seaming with her own hands and, simply out of this love for her, he devised the sewing machine in order to save her from unnecessary labour. He, however, saved not only her labour but the labour of everyone who could purchase a sewing machine.

Th4 Scribe: But, in that case, there would have to be a factory for making the Singer Sewing machines, and it would have to contain, power-driven machinery of ordinary type.

Bapu: But I am socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalized or State-controlled. They ought to be working under the most attractive and ideal conditions, not for profit, but for the benefit of humanity, love taking the place of greed as the motive. It is an alteration in the conditions of labour that I want. This mad rush for wealth, which is increasing from day to day, must cease, and labour must be assured not only a living wage but a task that is not mere drudgery.

The Scribe: You would not industrialize India any more?

Bapu: No. Do you not see the damage industrialization has already done? I would call a halt even at this late stage. The Indian village communities would be revived. Instead of mass production, there would be production by the masses. The production would be decentralized and the producer would also be the consumer.

There was a time when Indian villages produced all they needed and also looked after the needs of the cities and the towns. India became impoverished when our



cities became foreign markets and began to drain the Indian villages by dumping machine-made goods from foreign lands. I would wish the process to be reversed—the villages not only producing all they themselves consume but also producing a surplus to sell in the cities and towns.

The Scribe: How do we begin?

Bapu: I have answered this question many times. I do not mind answering it once again. My economics is not growth-oriented. It is employment-oriented. I would wish, therefore, that everybody is fully employed. In my scheme, there is no room for unemployment, partial employment or, hidden unemployment. Every working-age person—man or woman—shall engage himself or herself in body work activities related to one of the four essential categories:

1. Production and processing of food.
2. Production of fabrics and cloth.
3. Building industry which includes construction of cheap, comfortable and sanitary houses, school buildings, dispensaries, meeting halls, irrigation works, roads, etc.
4. Production of other essential articles not covered in the other three categories.

Children of school-going age (between seven and fourteen years) shall also do productive work in schools, in addition to learning. What they produce would be bought by the community. People of older age (say over sixty years) may also do light work.

This scheme is good not only for this country but for the world at large. It will prevent the exploitation of the villages by the cities and of poor countries by the rich and powerful countries. It would bring about economic equality. And when a few people do not have what others would like to steal—thefts, dacoities, and other crimes of violence will cease. The establishment of equality following the cessation of exploitation will also bring about amity among nations and put an end to the manufacture of destructive weapons and devastating wars.



The Scribe: From non-stealing (*asteya*) and non-possession to voluntary poverty and renunciation is but a short way. Would you care to say something about it?

Bapu: We would divide it into two parts and consider voluntary poverty first and then go on to a consideration of renunciation.

When I found myself drawn into the political struggle, I asked myself what was necessary for me in order to remain absolutely untouched by immorality, by untruth, and by what is known as political gain. I do not propose to take you through all the details of the actor performance, but I can tell you that it was a difficult struggle in the beginning; and it was a wrestle with my wife and— as I can vividly recall—with my children also. Be that as it may, I came definitely to the conclusion that if I had to serve the people in whose midst my life was cast and of whose difficulties I was a witness from day to day, I must discard all wealth, all possession.

I cannot tell you that when this belief came to me, I discarded everything immediately. In fact, I must confess that progress at first was slow. And now, as I recall those days of struggle, I remember that it was also painful in the beginning. But as days went by, I was able to throw overboard many things which I used to consider as mine; and it was a matter of positive joy to give up those things. And, then, one after another, by almost geometric progression, the things slipped away from me; and as I am describing my experiences, I can say a great burden fell off my shoulders. And I felt that I could walk with ease and do my work also in the service of my fellow-men with great comfort and still greater joy. The possession of anything then became a troublesome thing and a burden.

Exploring the cause of that joy, I found that if I kept anything as my own, I had to defend it against the whole world. I found also that there are many people who did not have the thing, although they wanted it; and I would have to seek police assistance also if hungry, famine-stricken people, finding me in a lonely place, wanted not merely to divide the thing with me but to dispossess me of it. And I said to myself, if they wanted it and would take it, they do so not from any malicious motive, but because theirs was a greater need than mine.



And then I said to myself: Possession seems to me to be a crime. I can only possess certain things when I know that others, who also want to possess similar things, are able to do so. But we know—everyone of us can speak from experience—that such a thing is an impossibility. Therefore, the only thing that can be possessed by all is non-possession, not to have anything whatsoever. In other words, a willing surrender.

You might then well say to me that I am keeping many things on my body even as I am speaking about voluntary poverty. And your taunt would be right, if you only superficially understood the meaning of the thing that I am speaking about just now. It is really the underlying spirit that matters. Whilst you have the body, you will have to have something to clothe the body with. But then you will not have to take for the body all that you can get, but the least possible, the least with which you can do. You will take for your house not a mansion, but the least cover that you can do with. And similarly with reference to your food and so on.

Abubakar and Hazrat Umar, who collected revenue running into crores, accepted voluntary poverty, lived simple and austere lives and spent their crores in the service of the people.

Now let me explain to you the meaning of renunciation. It does not mean inaction or a withdrawal from a life of activity. It does not mean retreat into a Himalayan cave and a life of solitude and contemplation. It means only giving up or renouncing certain activities and certain things—things not needed by man, or even injurious for his evolution.

I believe, like many Hindus, you have heard about and even know the Ishopanishad. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it did during the subsequent years, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live forever. It reads:



ईशा वास्यम् इदं सर्वमयतकिंचित जगत्यां जगत्
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्यस्वित् धनम्

Isavasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat;

Tena tyaktena bhunjithah, ma gradhah, kasya svid dhanam

The verse divides itself into four parts. The first part is *Isa vasyam idam... Jagat* which means, as I would translate, that all that we see in this great universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and the third parts which read together—as I read them —*tena tyaktena bhunjithah*. I divided these into two and translate them thus: Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means: Enjoy what He gives you. Then follows the final and the most important part, *ma gradhah kasya svid dhanam*, which means: Do not covet anybody's wealth or possessions.

All the other *mantras* of the ancient Upanishads are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*. As I read it in the light of the Gita or the Gita in the light of this *mantra*, I find that Gita is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the socialist and the communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings too. And if it is true—and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God, the Creator and Master of all that lives, pervades the universe? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that he has created, you must believe that you cannot covet anybody's possessions. The moment you carry out these precepts, you become a wise citizen of the world living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter.

Let me repeat once again that the fourth or the concluding part of the verse—though a plain statement—involves a number of ethical and spiritual values.



Whatever you have gained by your labour, it says, that alone belongs to you; enjoy life with that, and do not covet what belongs to others.

The Scribe: The women in India are oppressed and discriminated against in a variety of ways. What are your comments?

Bapu: As women constitute about half the population, work among women, both in the cities and the villages, is a most important plank of the Constructive Programme. It is true that the freedom struggle automatically brought India's women out from their darkness, as nothing else could have, in an incredibly short period of time. Congressmen and others have never felt the call to see that women became equal partners with men in their day-to-day life. They have not realized that woman must be the true helpmate of man in all spheres of life including the mission of service. Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man has been responsible and in the shaping of which she has had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his. But as every right in a non-violent society proceeds from the previous performance of a duty, it follows that rules of social conduct must be framed by mutual co-operation and consultation. They can never be imposed from outside. Men have not realized this truth in its fullness in their behaviour towards women. They have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends, equals, and co-workers. Women are in the position somewhat of the slaves of old who did not know that they could or ever had to be free. And when freedom came, for a moment they felt helpless. Women have been taught to regard themselves as the slaves of men. Wives should not be treated as slaves nor should they be used as dolls and objects of indulgence but should be treated as comrades in common service. To this end, those who have not received a liberal education should receive such instruction as is possible from their husbands. The same applies, with the necessary changes, to mothers, sisters, and daughters.

Man today considers that he belongs to a species different from and superior to women. He thinks, therefore, that he is entitled to certain privileges and things



to which a woman is not. He can drink, and get drunk, can smoke, can have promiscuous sex, and can beat his wife and gloat over all this. But if a woman drinks or smokes or has a single sexual lapse, her future becomes seriously jeopardized. The birth of a female child is an occasion for mourning in many homes in this country, and the female child is discriminated against in matters of food, education, property, games and freedom. Young girls are kidnapped and forced into prostitution.

The condition of women has deteriorated further in free India. The number of dowry deaths by bride-burning and of rape cases— even gang-rapes by police constables and officers which were rare or almost unheard of during the period of the British rule—are increasing by leaps and bounds. Cases of eve-teasing and chain-snatching—most frequent in Delhi—are now being reported from all state capitals and large cities.

Resistance by individual women and women's organizations, against oppression by men, has been there from time immemorial. But from my wandering in space, I oversee that it has gathered great momentum during the past two decades. The day of 8 March every year has now come to be recognized and celebrated as the Women's Day by women in many countries throughout the world.

The Scribe: As you are aware, there are the beginnings of a strong women's movement in this country too. Strong rural organizations like the Shramik Sangathan in Dhulia in Maharashtra, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Bihar, and the Mahila Mukti Morcha in Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh have sprung up to set right the various wrongs done against women. Nationwide demonstrations— not only by angry women but also by male-dominated groups and parties which hitherto took no notice of the problems of wife-beating, bride-burning, rape, etc.—are quite frequent.

Bapu: I know all this; but is it sufficient? The majority of women workers in India— about 45 to 50 per cent—are agricultural labourers. According to the 1981 census, cultivators comprise another 33 per cent. It is this large sector which we must bring in to the forefront of the women's struggle. Their access to health-care and



education is among the lowest for the whole population. It is a pitiable fact that work in the home, which is performed by women, is not even reckoned as productive work by economists the world over. The women rear children, sweep, clean, cook and slave in the home from morn till night. And, in spite of the double burden of fieldwork and house chores, they invariably get less to eat than their menfolk and have significantly lower body weight and life spans. It is these women who need to strive most for dignity and freedom.

The Scribe: The bulk of our population of 720 million people is constituted of Kisans. They are illiterate, ignorant and steeped in poverty and superstition. They are exploited by the absentee landlords and money-lenders, and oppressed by village 'goondas' and the police. They wallow in filth in their ill-ventilated, mud hovels with dung plastered floors, and are dehumanized and degraded to the level of their own beasts with whom they often share the same room. They believe in the inexorable law of *karma* and are resigned to their fate. Tell me, Bapu, how can this vast ocean of humanity, living at a subhuman level, be organized and uplifted?

Bapu: This could have been achieved by now, if the Congressmen had listened to my advice in 1947. They should have converted the Congress into an organization for constructive work but they refused to do so. Instead, like thieves who are united when they burgle a house and soon break up and fight among themselves for the share of the booty, power-hungry and selfish Congressmen have been fighting among themselves for power and pelf. The task of re-constructing the country, which really boils down to an assiduous endeavour for rebuilding our plundered villages, has received little or no attention from them, their governments or from the opposition parties. But it is never too late. Let all those who mean well for the country, whether they are in the seats of power or in the opposition parties, apply themselves to the business of making the Kisan aware or conscious of the wrongs done to him. This is a herculean task and can only be accomplished by a comprehensive programme of compulsory education of the child and by political, economic, and sociological education of the Kisan.



In my opinion, the Kisan must not be used for power politics. I consider it contrary to the non-violent method. Kisans must be properly organized. To this end, special organizing bodies or committees should be formed where there are none, and those already in existence should be reformed and strengthened. Those who would know my method of organizing Kisans may profitably study the movement in Champaran where Satyagraha was tried for the first time in India with the result everyone knows. It became a mass movement which remained wholly non-violent from start to finish. It affected over twenty lakhs of Kisans. The struggle centred round one specific grievance which was century-old. There had been several violent revolts to get rid of the grievance. The Kisans were suppressed. The non-violent remedy made them politically conscious, and they succeeded in achieving their end in barely six months. The workers may profitably study the Kisan movements in Kheda, Bardoli, and Borsad. The secret of the success lies in a refusal to exploit the Kisans for political ends outside their own personal and felt grievances. Poor wages for landless labourers, wages that cannot provide sufficient food, clothing or shelter, lack of cheap credit for the marginal farmer, lack of power and other inputs, remission of land revenue during periods of droughts, etc., and absentee landlordism—all these are the wrongs suffered which they understand.

The Scribe: I can figure out your concern for the peasants who constitute the bulk of our population. Will you now throw some light on the problem of the mill workers who have greatly increased in numbers during the past thirty-seven years?

Bapu: It is unfortunate that there has been a phenomenal increase in their numbers. This has occurred due to: (i) a rapid rise in the growth rate of the population which should not have taken place if appropriate steps were taken at the proper time, and (ii) due to urbanization in the wake of the multiplication of mills and rural unemployment following industrialization of the country. You will recall that I often said that the establishment of each new mill will throw a thousand or more persons out of employment. Attention to this obvious result



was not paid by the ruling party, and the greedy industrialists, including those who helped in the freedom struggle, and who often acted as my hosts and were ostensibly my admirers and followers.

The Scribe: Do you mean the Birlas and the Bajajs, Bapu?

Bapu: Why do you want me to say things which hurt? The country has been industrialized against my wishes. Indian capitalists and the ruling elite have collaborated with foreign governments and foreign capitalists to exploit this woebegone land in a manner that was not possible even during the British rule. The peasant has been impoverished and starved and, only next to him, the hardest hit is the manual worker.

The Scribe: How can his plight be improved?

Bapu: The primary aim of the Constructive Programme should be to secure for the worker his due share in production. This can happen only when labour is intelligent enough to co-operate with itself and then offer co-operation to capital on terms of honourable equality. Today capital controls labour because it knows and exercises the art of combination. It combines with other capitalists, with labour officials of the government, with chambers of commerce and industry, with trade union leaders and with police and the 'goondas'. It divides the workers. A true and non-violent combination of labour would put an end to it. Drops in separation can only fade away; drops in combination make oceans which carry on their bosoms the ocean greyhounds.

Labour should be united, and morally and intellectually trained. It should have its own Union—one Union for each industry. It should have its own self-reliant, self-sufficient organization and, by proper education of the labourer, evolve its own leadership. Clever, maneuvering and voluble non-labour leaders often exploit labour for their own ends. Labour, in my opinion, should not become a pawn in the hands of the politician on the political chess-board. It must, by its unity and sheer strength, look after its own interests. Its direct aim is not in the least degree political.



Constructive workers should ensure that education, both general and scientific for both men and women, is regularly undertaken through high schools, that children of labourers are educated in neighbourhood schools after the basic education pattern which is available for others, that the labourers or their families have suitable sanitary accommodation and that there is a hospital, a creche and a maternity home to cater to their needs.

The Scribe: There are four principal categories of people—the peasants, the labourers, the untouchables and the Adivasis or tribals who are among the down-and-out, ignored, wronged and discriminated against in a variety of ways. We have already considered the first three. Will you now say what needs to be done in respect of the fourth—the Adivasis?

Bapu: The Adivasis or the tribals are not an inconsiderable group as you say. There are over two crores or 23 million of them spread all over India—from Assam in the North-East, through Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra in the West, and from North to South. Little work was done among them during the period of the British rule except by Christian missionaries who, with few exceptions like Elwyn Verrier, actually alienated them from the stream of Indian nationalism, and were mainly interested in their conversion to Christianity. Of the Congressmen, Thakkar Bapa did some work among Bhils in Gajarat and Balasahib Kher threw himself with his usual zeal into this much-needed service in Thana in the 1940s of this century. But, by and large, this difficult work was completely ignored.

It should have received a fillip after political independence was gained, but this did not happen. Congressmen, as the other parties, never took to constructive work, and the Constructive Programme was given a complete go-by. Congressmen, and the Congress Governments became wholly engrossed in the exercise of power and the fruits power brings. They failed to realize that it was difficult to make good their claim to be one nation, unless every group acquired a living consciousness of being one with all others. They forgot that service of



the tribals was not only humanitarian but solidly national and designed to bring them close to true independence.

If a sizable section of our people has to be brought into the national stream, both the ruling and the other parties should stop using the Adivasis for their own ulterior ends, as they have been recently doing in Assam and elsewhere, and begin in all earnestness constructive work among them.

The Scribe: And how about lepers, Bapu? No work has been done, amongst them except, once again, by the Christian missionaries.

Bapu: Leper is a word of odour. When I introduced the leper as a link in the chain of constructive effort, leprosy, though its cause was then known, was still reckoned by many as a curse of God on those guilty of some heinous sin. It was not easily amenable to treatment. The lot of the lepers was a studied neglect. It was, in fact, heartless. It was largely the missionary who, be it said to his credit, came to his help and bestowed care on him. With advances in modern medicine, leprosy is now among curable diseases and lepers should be treated like persons suffering from any other communicable disease, such as tuberculosis or syphilis. Ever since the discovery of this new knowledge, a number of leprosy hospitals and settlements have been established and are doing good work. But there are plenty of uncared for lepers who need looking after, and constructive workers should interest themselves in their care, rehabilitation and welfare.

The Scribe: In a letter which you wrote in 1946, you agreed to add a new item—cow service (Go-seva)—to the original eighteen items of your Constructive Programme. You wrote: "... Cow service may be included as one more item in the Constructive Programme. I would phrase it as improvement of cattle. I think it should not have been left out." Will you please comment on this?

Bapu: We have discussed this topic already when we were talking about Sanatan Dharma; but even at the cost of repetition, I shall do so again.

Cow protection, as I have said earlier, is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me



means the entire subhuman world. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower orders of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless.

A Hindu who protects the cow should protect every animal. But taking all things into consideration, we may not cavil at his protecting the cow because he fails to protect the other animals. The only question, therefore, to consider is whether he is right in protecting the cow. And he cannot be wrong in so doing if non-killing of animals generally may be regarded as a duty for one who believes in ahimsa. And every Hindu and, for that matter, every man of religion, does so. The duty of non-killing animals generally and therefore of protecting them must be accepted as an indisputable fact. It is then so much to the credit of Hinduism that it has taken up cow protection as a duty. And he is a poor specimen of Hinduism who stops merely at cow protection, when he can extend the arm of protection to other animals. The cow merely stands as a symbol, and the protection of the cow is the least he is expected to undertake.

The Scribe: During the past twenty years or so, a number of new problems have come up and have assumed serious proportions. They call for inclusion in the Constructive Programme.

Bapu: Pray, name them and we shall consider them too.

The Scribe: Population control, which you did not think was a serious problem when you were in flesh and blood with us, assumed serious proportions later. But we have already discussed it.

Bapu: What are the others?



The Scribe: I think we may divide them into two groups. In the first group come corruption and black money and, in the second group, pollution, resource exhaustion and the threat to ecology.

Bapu: Let us first consider the all-pervasive corruption. An insignificant factor before World War II, it gained strength during the war years. After the achievement of independence, due to rationing and other controls and the issue of permits and quotas, the level increased somewhat more. In 1962 the war with China gave it a further push. After 1966, it began to grow by leaps and bounds and it has now grown into a mighty colossus that stalks the land. In December 1981, the then Assam Governor B.K. Nehru—by all means a knowledgeable person on the goings-on in the Government—publicly stated that "an uncomfortably large number of politicians and Ministers are corrupt.... In one particular State no less than 30 per cent of the legislators are involved in criminal cases of one type or the other". Just about that time, an Orissa Minister was convicted in a case of theft or stealing. Also, just around that time, a judicial inquiry in Maharashtra had revealed that (in Dhule district) about one crore rupees were misappropriated by senior officials administering the much-publicized Employment Guarantee Scheme. A little earlier (March 1981), the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, confessed to a feeling that corruption was "pervasive" all over the country. In a discussion in Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Members—cutting across party lines—alleged that there was a "rate (or price) for everything" and for every public functionary, "people (i.e., politicians and officials) now accepted cheques, not cash". A few years ago, a senior Union Minister had, for years, "forgotton"—with impunity—to file his income tax returns. Most recently—during the parliamentary election campaign in December 1984—a national newspaper published from the Capital carried a report (which has not been contradicted) that the ruling Congress Party had supplied (to each one of its over 500 candidates) cash worth seven lakh rupees, several lakhs worth of flags, buntings and posters, and a couple of jeeps or motor vehicles. Where on earth could such vast resources be found save through corrupt collection of funds from the vested interests? A Prime Minister was held guilty of corrupt practices by a High Court



Judge and her sons figured in Maruti, fertiliser and Kuo oil scandals, a second Premier's son, and a third one's relations were alleged to have indulged in corrupt practices. Charges of corruption were levelled against a number of Chief Ministers who had to relinquish their posts. One Chief Minister, who favoured his son in forest leases, was indicted by a High Court and removed from office; but he was later appointed a Governor in a Southern State by the Congress Government at the Centre. From the higher echelons, corruption has percolated down to lower politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists, big farmers, merchants, traders, teachers, big doctors, engineers, policemen, and others. There is not an individual in the country today who can put his hand on his heart and claim or say that he has escaped the virus of corruption. People in power today give concessions to Big Business and industrial tycoons who amass large fortunes and, in their turn, allow those in power to line their pockets. Corruption has now become a way of life and, as recently as March 1984, a bill was sought to be introduced in a House of Legislature in a Western State to amend the Constitution to legalize corruption to protect a Chief Minister against whom there was a *prima facie* case of corruption. It was being said, in the Central Hall of Parliament in New Delhi that the intention of the legislators who had ganged up for this purpose was that the amendment be added to the Ninth Schedule so that it cannot be called into question in any court in the land.

The Scribe: Corruption and generation of black or 'Number Two' money go hand in hand. Would you care to say something about its growth?

Bapu: Before 1966, the amount of black money in circulation was not so large. But after this date it has been rapidly increasing. Today it has become a parallel economy. In 1967-68 it was 3,034.4 crore of rupees. As percentage of black money to official GNP, it was 9.5. By 1972-73, the corresponding figures were 15,195.5 crore and 31.8. By 1976-77, the figures were 34,33.502 crore and 39.4, and by 1978-79, 46,866.8 and 48.8. By 1981-82, the estimated figures were 54,000 crore.



The Scribe: What are the avenues in which black money in the country gets channellized?

Bapu: Black money is channellized in diverse and devious ways which are as ingenious as the ways in which it is acquired—for indulging in unauthorised business transactions, for smuggling of gold, diamonds and luxury goods, purchasing scarce commodities for the purpose of hoarding, black-marketing, profiteering and speculation, in illegally purchasing quotas and licenses at a premium, financing elections, acquisition of movable and immovable assets, buying tax-free government securities, for depositing in Indian and foreign banks in ghost names, for anonymous charitable contributions, for throwing lavish parties in five-star hotels, for vulgar and ostentatious living and, finally, spending extravagantly on marriages and other ceremonies.

The Scribe: Isn't there a way of curtailing or putting an end to corruption or black money?

Bapu: There is, but who is interested in it? The ruling party wants enormous funds for fighting elections and staying in power. All this comes from unaccounted funds.

The Scribe: This want could be diminished or eliminated, if suitable electoral reforms were carried out as many people have suggested.

Bapu: The present system of elections is highly unsatisfactory. It puts parties into power which secure as few as thirty per cent of the total votes polled. It encourages large-scale defections and floor-crossing with all its attendant evils. It has no provision for recall of legislators by the people who elected them. And, finally, it is so frightfully expensive that it makes individuals and parties dependent on industrial tycoons, big farmers, and other monied people for their success. Parties and party leaders, who come to power on contributions from such questionable sources, compensate the donors with tax exemptions, subsidies, cheap credit, support prices and other reliefs. The result, as I have



already pointed out, is corruption, hoarding, profiteering, black-markets and subversion of the entire economy.

The Scribe: What measures, other than electoral reform, would you recommend for the elimination of the twin evils of corruption and black money?

Bapu: It will need a heroic and sustained effort on the part of dedicated workers, if such can be found. They would work incessantly, day and night, in villages and cities for the implementation of the Constructive Programme in all its bearings. They would arouse social awareness among the people and develop among them the faculty of exercising social disapproval of corrupt conduct and disapprobation and opprobrium against those found corrupt. No one with a reputation for corruption would be held in public esteem as he is today or elected to a house of legislature. Persons with known reputation for honesty could be elected by the people and appointed as Ombudsmen or Lok Ayuktas to investigate and indict those guilty of corruption. They should have at their command suitable machinery to punish those found guilty. If these measures are zealously carried out, I think corruption can be minimized, if not entirely eradicated.

The Scribe: Let us now briefly discuss the pressing problem of resource exhaustion.

Bapu: Non-renewable fossil fuels and minerals and metals should not be allowed to be lightly frittered away. They should be treated as sacred patrimony which has taken billions of years to form and accumulate. They are valuable capital assets, and not expendable or renewable raw materials. They should be properly valued and priced considerably upwards taking into careful consideration; (i) their scarcity and limited availability; (ii) their usefulness; (iii) their internal and external demand; (iv) their cost of mining and extraction; (v) their long-term interest and rehabilitation of the mining regions; and (vi) the conservation for posterity.

For many years, India has allowed the mining and export of her scarce and limited supplies of solid fossil fuels, metals (iron ore bauxite, cadmium etc.) and



minerals at ridiculously low, dirt-cheap and throw-away prices, to the permanent detriment of the country's economy. Recent and flagrant instances of her exploitation are Bailadila and Kudremukh. It is important that these hurtful and ruinous practices cease. If, however, India has at all to mine and export these scarce materials, she should do so only sparingly and slowly. She should also fix their prices herself as the Arab and other oil-producing countries have done in respect of oil. If the rich and the developed or, even other countries, do not wish to pay the price that is fixed, let the country mine only so much as she needs herself. This will make the fossil fuels, the metals and the minerals available for the economic development of the country itself for a much longer period of time.

The Scribe: Pollution of tanks, wells, springs, streams and rivers has been there for centuries, but pollution of the environment, generally, was comparatively unknown before 1947. Would you like to say something about it?

Bapu: With the doubling of the population, lack of education in health and hygiene and the non-existence of sanitary facilities, people shit about indiscriminately in the vicinity of ponds, wells and springs and near the banks of streams and rivers, rendering the water unfit for drinking and other purposes. The result is a manifold increase in water pollution and spread of avoidable bowel diseases—worm infestations, indigestion, diarrhoea, dysentery, and cholera. With the industrialization of the country, thousands of tons of noxious chemicals, much more harmful than human or animal excreta, are being daily pumped into lakes, streams, rivers and the sea, as industrial wastes, making the water harmful for river and sea-life and totally unfit for human consumption. Add to it the effluents from thermal and nuclear power plants and the water pollution picture is complete.

The air pollution in 1947 was infinitesimal compared to what it is today. With increase in population there are more domestic fires for cooking and heating, and more smoke. With increased industrialization, more factories belch volumes of smoke into the atmosphere. With an enormous increase in the number of automobiles, there are noxious exhaust fumes to poison the atmosphere of cities



and even the countryside. Our large cities are enveloped in smog and the fog does not lift for hours together after sunrise during the winter months. Both in the mornings and the evenings, the visibility is reduced and the presence of smoke hurts the eyes. There is increased incidence of diseases of the lungs, including cancer.

The soil is polluted with the increasing use of pesticides like DDT and Benzene Chlorhexane to protect the crops from the damage to the crops. The very cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, eggs, fish, meat, milk and milk products which we consume are poisoned by these toxic substances which are said to be present in them above safe levels.

The noise pollution in large cities from traffic and other causes is proving very detrimental to the auditory functions and the mental and nervous health of the people.

The pollution in all spheres has reached dangerous proportions and poses serious threats for human life, health, and well-being. One of the ghastliest cases of the horrors of industrial pollution has recently (December 1984) occurred in Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. The massive leakage of Methyl Isocyanate Gas (MIG) from a foreign-owned pesticide plant located on the very outskirts of the town is reported to have killed over two thousand persons and (according to doctors) another two or three thousand may die or be permanently incapacitated by the delayed effect of the killer gas. The Government and its 'expert' spokesmen have tended to shift the blame for the horrible tragedy on inefficiency or carelessness on the part of the company functionaries. However, the newspapers have reported that—on a somewhat smaller scale—a similar leakage occurred in a pesticide plant in Virginia (United States), where very rigorous enforcement and supervision of control requirements are usually in operation. Moreover, large-scale storage and use of 'killer' gases is a normal requirement of the 'modern' pesticide and fertilizer industry—which is fast expanding in India. With the proliferation of these industries in the country—storing and using highly toxic gases and manned at the lowest operational level by ill-paid and semi-trained



workers—who could rule out the possibility of such lapses (and their disastrous consequences) in the future? Thus it is part of the game in our present industrial outfit. And we should not be fooling ourselves or the gullible public by shifting the blame- in a given instance—on to one or more persons. If I may say so, Bhopal-like disasters are inherent in 'modern' industrialism. And even more disasters may arise—even if we assume full sanity on the part of great power leaders—from possible leakages in fissile nuclear materials or the erroneous use of nuclear weapons due to mechanical radar-system miscalculation or their being stolen or used by the so-called terrorist groups.

The Scribe: What are your suggestions for fighting this menace?

Bapu: There are quite a few. Pollution of water can be prevented by: (i) proper disposal of excreta and preventing its ingress into streams, rivers and other sources of water supply; (ii) proper treatment of effluents before they are discharged into the water courses; and (iii) calling a halt on industrialization. Pollution of air and soil can be prevented by: (i) reducing the number of large industrial units by becoming village-minded and using articles made in village homes and cottages—if only goods made locally are used, motor vehicles, using gasoline, for transport of machine-made goods from distant places would be prevented and air pollution by exhaust fumes reduced; (ii) by decentralized production which will cut down the number of large units with chimneys belching harmful fumes into the air; and (iii) by extensive afforestation and tree-farming which will not only turn atmospheric carbon dioxide into food and oxygen, rendering air purer for man and animal, but also provide shelter for animal life and birds which prey on insects which harm plant life and thus reduce the use of insecticides and pesticides, which are poisoning all food consumed by men, animals and birds, and have also caused such gory tragedies as we witnessed at Bhopal. Also, we must dismantle all nuclear weapons, radioactive materials, and wastes.

The Scribe: We have considered environmental pollution at some length. During the past fifty years, what is now being talked about as 'spiritual pollution' is



receiving some attention in a section of the press. Would you like to say something about it?

Bapu: Spiritual pollution is more pervasive in this country today than environmental pollution. It is propagated by the media—the press, the movies, the radio, the television and the video. Thousands of obscene and pornographic weekly and monthly magazines and novels in English and the regional languages are on display on stalls all over the country and have sales which many times exceed the sales of periodicals and books of scientific or artistic merit. Whereas it is difficult to sell even a few hundred or a thousand copies of a book written by an author of repute, story books and novels, depicting amorous, erotic, bestial, brutish and carnal scenes, sell by tens of thousands and lakhs. They are read avidly by boys and girls in their teens, and older men and women everywhere. Lewd display of women's body on magazine covers, cinema screen or the television, immoral and irrelevant exhibition of women's body for advertisement of commodities from A to Z, including toothpastes, cigarettes, alcoholic drinks —modelling shows by textile industry, fashion parades, beauty contests, blue films, disco music and everything else which is sexy, smutty and salacious are witnessed, read, heard and enjoyed both by young people and those who are not so young and continue to corrupt all. Its two important causes are avarice and loss of character. And what are the results? Eve-teasing, chain-snatching, assaults, pick-pocketing, thieving, robberies, dacoities, bus and train hold-ups, murders, bride-burning, sexual promiscuity, rapes, encounters, hoarding, profiteering, smuggling, bank frauds and bank robberies, graft, defections and corruption at all levels, including the highest. These evils were infrequent and almost unheard of even during the period of foreign rule. See to what depths of degradation mankind in India has sunk during the past thirty-seven years.

The Scribe: This is unfortunately too true. But what is the remedy?

Bapu: The remedy consists in the creation of a New Child, a New Man, and in building a New Society based on truth and non-violence. It lies in a new



transformation through the implementation of the Constructive Programme—universalization of basic and adult education, including moral, ethical and spiritual education, full employment, voluntary poverty, global thinking, and local action.

The Scribe: Imbalance of ecology has emerged as a serious threat within the past three and a half decades. What have been its evil effects, how can these be countered, and the balance restored?

Bapu: The causes that have contributed to this imbalance are industrialism and deforestation. The remedy lies in undoing these evils by reversing the trends.

There has been a thoughtless and wanton destruction of the country's forests without a corresponding effort to remedy it by planting new trees in places of those felled within the last three decades due to corruption, cozenage, and chicanery of her leaders and forest and other officials, in collusion with greedy and rapacious contractors, fuel and timber merchants, paper-mill owners, and others. This has led to a denudation of hillsides, valleys and plains causing, (i) acute shortage and spiralling prices of fuel, timber and other materials, (ii) dangerous landslides in the hill areas, (iii) serious soil erosion, (iv) silting of dam reservoirs and river and canal beds, (v) devastating floods and destruction of property year after year, (vi) scanty rainfalls and consequent droughts and famines, (vii) change of weather and rise in average atmospheric temperature, (viii) desertification, (ix) frequency of dust storms and cyclones, (x) extinction of wild life and bird life, and (xi) severe ecological imbalances.

These baneful changes can be reversed and the balance restored only by a decentralized production, village revival and a planned afforestation movement quite different from a haphazard planting of trees and so-called ritual 'Mahotsavas'. A proper implementation of a well-considered programme of tree-farming is therefore imperative.

The Scribe: Please spell out your programme of tree-farming.



Bapu: In a proper programme of tree-farming not an inch of land anywhere should be without crops or tree farms. No land should be allowed to remain fallow anywhere. All river and canal banks, sea coasts, arid, semi-arid and desert areas should be planted with Casuarina or other suitable fast-growing trees. For rocky areas, the choice is Prosopis. In all village lands, tree-farming should be done by rotation with agriculture in the proportion of one part tree-farming of inferior land to two parts of crops on the better land. The inferior land will, in a few years, improve and can be used for crops and trees farmed on land exhausted by several years of multiple cropping. The improvement in the quality of land and utilization of all lands, previously allowed to remain fallow, will increase the total agricultural produce.

The Scribe: Your plan of afforestation and tree-farming is admirable. Would you kindly enumerate the purposes it would achieve?

Bapu: They are numerous:

1. It would produce cheap and readily available firewood charcoal for use (a) directly as fuel for cooking and heating etc. or wood charcoal as a non-smoking fuel for domestic or industrial application, as gas and hydrogen produced from wood charcoal rather than more pollutive fuels like petrol or diesel, or again as alcohol and/or gas (Gobar gas) after anaerobic fermentation of wood and biomass; and (b) indirectly by conversion of wood, charcoal and biomass into heat, mechanical and electrical energy for diverse uses in the home, agriculture and industry. These are effected in total energy systems installed for every industrial undertaking or a group of undertakings and every rural or urban community to meet its entire requirements of power and heat or refrigeration. The systems use non-condensing steam or gas turbines.
2. It would provide timber for buildings and furniture, and pulp for paper.
3. It would purify the atmosphere. When wood and wood charcoal are burnt, unlike coal and petroleum fuels, no poisonous gases like carbon monoxide or oxides of sulphur and nitrogen are formed and thrown into the air. The only gas



formed is carbon dioxide which is avidly absorbed by trees to form sugars and starches. The air is thus rendered purer and healthier for man and animals. Trees further purify the air in the process of transpiration when oxygen is added to the atmosphere. They also make the ground dust free by absorbing particulate matter. The effectivity of trees in abating noise pollution is well known.

4. It would improve the quality of the soil by enriching it with humus from falling leaves, twigs, branches and blooms, by improving the physical structure of the soil by better aeration and drainage, by increasing its water-holding capacity, by additional gain of nitrogen from nitrogen-fixing trees and by translocation of minerals and water from the depths to the surface, making these substances available to the agricultural crops.

5. It would prevent soil erosion and ensure maximum possible water conservation by allowing absorption of large quantities of water which will then flow in numerous underground rivulets diminishing flooding in seasons of heavy rainfall and providing underground water during period of scanty rainfall.

6. Widespread tree-farming has a moderating effect on the climate. It would mellow the heat, induce rainfall in areas of scanty rains and make it more even in areas of heavy precipitation. Multiple, heavy and compact belts of quick and high-growing trees along the coast act as wind breakers and form the best and most inexpensive barriers to break and reduce the high speed of tempests, hurricanes and cyclones which inflict heavy damage to houses, property, crops, and human and animal life near vulnerable coasts as of Andhra.

7. It would help mitigate the evil effects of chemical fertilizers, allow reduction or elimination in the use of poisonous pesticides and also help restoration of ecological balance.

The Scribe: We have still not considered the item which you deliberately kept last in your original list of eighteen items in the Constructive Programme.

Bapu: Your reference is evidently to the role of students. It is last in my published list but it is also one of the most important.



Children and young people are the nation's most valuable assets and it is from their ranks that future leaders emerge. It is, therefore, imperative that they imbibe the right kind of social justice, brotherhood of men and universal peace—that will help build their character. After imbibing these values, their most important role would be to help others acquire the same.

It does not rebound to the credit of our leadership or our teaching community that they have not so far been able to evolve a system of training and education which answers to the needs of the community. Our teachers themselves lack character and are adepts in the art of miseducation. Our universities have, during the past three decades, ceased to be seats of learning. They suffer indiscipline, strikes, suspension of studies and closures. They are dens of smoking, drinking, gambling, and crimes of violence and sex. They are warring camps of the young followers of political parties.

For entrance into the circle of higher jobs, degrees are required and the students acquire them somehow—the underprivileged and the conscientious ones by dint of study and hard work, and those with money, muscle or connections by copying, cheating, bribery, intimidation, violence, pressure and purchase. Even divisions and positions are for sale in some universities.

I have not drawn a very happy picture of higher education and the country's youth. But as I told you a little while ago, such as the students are, it is from them that the future leaders of the nation are to rise. Let all those, therefore, who have the good of the country at heart, go all out to mould them in the proper way to enable them to take up and pursue constructive work.

You know I have been a student all my life and I always cultivated close contacts with the students. They knew me and I knew them. They gave me service. In the heyday of non-co-operation, they responded to the country's call and gave up schools and colleges. Many of them became my esteemed co-workers and gained much for themselves and the country. For various reasons, the call was not repeated. I think it is time for the young educated people, both boys and girls, to spread out into the countryside as the Russian students did during the Czarist



regime, to educate the people as also to help implement the Constructive Programme.

The colleges and the universities are at present producing hundreds of thousands of unemployable graduates of arts, commerce, law and social sciences who yearly add to the numbers of the educated unemployed, and thousands of graduates of medicine, science and technology, who for want of suitable employment in the country, migrate to serve abroad. One wonders whether it would not be worthwhile to close the colleges and universities for a period of two to four years and send all the teachers and the taught into the countryside, first, to educate the people and, secondly, to carry out the Constructive Programme. Any patriotic, national government would, in my opinion, think on these lines. And even if it is not considered feasible or possible to temporarily close down the colleges and the universities, half the staff and the students may be sent out for periods of four and a half months each, during the course of the year, making an allowance for three months of vacations which should coincide with the harvesting seasons during which even village schools should be closed to enable children to help the parents on their farms or to take care of young infants and children at home when the parents are out in the fields.

Before I close this topic, may I say a few more words on what the students should do and what they should not do.

1. Students must not take part in party politics. They are students and researchers, not politicians.
2. They should not resort to political strikes. All differences with teaching staff and management should be settled peacefully and amicably.
3. They must all do either sacrificial spinning in a scientific manner or perform other bread or body labour in addition to their studies.
4. They will be Khadi wearers all through and use village products to the exclusion of all analogous things, foreign or machine-made.



5. They should honour the National Flag and harbour neither communalism nor untouchability in their hearts.
6. They will make it a point to give first-aid to their injured neighbours and do scavenging and cleaning in the neighbouring villages and instruct village children and adults.
7. They will learn and teach the National Language, in one or both scripts—Devanagari or Persian.
8. They will translate into Hindustani or the mother tongue everything new they may learn, and transmit it to the villagers.
9. They will do nothing in secret, will be above board in all their dealings, will lead a life of self-restraint, shed all fear, be always ready to protect all their weak fellow students, and be ready to quell riots by non-violent conduct at the risk of their lives.
10. They will be scrupulously correct and chivalrous in their behaviour towards their girl fellow students.

For working out the programme I have sketched for them, the students must find time. I know that they waste a great deal of time in idleness. By strict economy of time, they can save many hours. I would, therefore, advise patriotic students to lose some period, not at a stretch but spread over their period of study. They will find that a year or more, so given, will not be a waste of time. The effort will add to their equipment—mental, moral, and physical—and they will have made, even during their studies, a substantial contribution to the social and economic freedom movement.

The Scribe: Now that we have considered the Constructive Programme in all its bearings, will you give us an outline of the set-up which you propose for the fulfilment of this programme?

Bapu: It is a very important question, and I am glad you have asked it. Its answer was furnished in my last communication to the Secretary of the Indian National Congress on the forenoon of 30 January 1948. Let me repeat it for you:



Though split into two, India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, i.e., as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral, and economic independence in terms of its villages as distinguished from its cities and towns.

The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies. For these and other similar reasons, the AICC should resolve to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand.

Every Panchayat of five adult men and women, being villagers or village-minded, shall form a unit. Two such contiguous Panchayats shall form a Working Party under a Leader elected from among themselves.

When there are 100 such Panchayats, the 50 First Grade Leaders shall elect from among themselves a Second Grade Leader and so on—the First Grade Leaders working meanwhile under the Second Grade Leader. Parallel groups of 200 Panchayats shall continue to be formed till they cover the whole of India, each succeeding group of Panchayats electing Second Grade Leaders after the manner of the First. All Second Grade Leaders shall serve jointly for the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The Second Grade Leaders may elect, whenever they deem necessary, from among themselves, a Chief who will, during pleasure, recommend and command all the groups.

As the final formation of Provinces or Districts is still in a flux, no attempt has been made to divide this group of servants into Provincial or District Councils and jurisdiction over the whole of India has been established in the Group or Groups that may have been formed at any given time. It should be noted that this body of servants derives its authority or power from service ungrudgingly done to their master, the whole of India.



1. Every worker shall be a habitual wearer of Khadi made from self-spun yarn or certified by the AISA and must be a teetotaler. If a Hindu, he must have abjured untouchability in any shape or form in his own person or his family. He must be a believer in the ideal of inter-communal unity with equal respect and regard for all religions and equality of opportunity and status for all, irrespective of race, creed, or sex.
2. He shall come in personal contact with every villager within his jurisdiction.
3. He shall control and train workers from among the villagers and keep a register of all these.
4. He shall keep record of his work from day to day.
5. He shall organize the villages so as to make them self-contained and self-supporting through their agriculture and their handicrafts.
6. He shall educate the village folk in sanitation and hygiene and take all measures for prevention of ill-health and disease among them.
7. He shall organize the education of the village folk from birth to death along the lines of Nai Talim, in accordance with the policy laid down by the Hindustani Talimi Sangh.
8. He shall see that those, whose names are missing on the Statutory Voters' Rolls, are duly entered therein.
9. He shall encourage those who have not yet acquired the legal qualification to acquire it for getting the right of franchise.
10. For the above purposes and others to be added from time to time, he shall train and fit himself in accordance with the rules laid down by the Sangh for the due performance of duty.

The Sangh shall affiliate the following autonomous bodies:

- (i) AISA, (ii) AIVIA, (iii) Hindustan Talimi Sangh, (iv) Harijan Sevak Sangh, and (v) Go-Seva Sangh.



The Sangh shall raise finances for the fulfilment of its mission from among the villagers and others, special stress being laid on collection of the poorman's pice.

The Scribe: One last question before we consider the need for Satyagraha in its different forms.

Bapu: What is it?

The Scribe: What qualifications would you wish to lay down for the members and the workers of the Sangh?

Bapu: They do not differ from those of the constructive worker or the Satyagrahi.



Part Three



Satyagraha or the Non-violent Direct Action

THE SCRIBE: We have already discussed two parts of your teaching and programme, viz., the fundamentals or what we called the Spiritual Part; and the training for political action or what has been called the Constructive Programme. Now let us discuss the third part—the Political Action itself.

Bapu: It is the unarmed, non-violent revolt and is to be used only when the occasion demands.

The Scribe: When and where did you put non-violent direct action into use?

Bapu: In the history of Satyagraha, the mass meeting of the Indians at Johannesburg on 11 September 1906 was a memorable event. It was convened to oppose the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance of the Government. The resolutions of this meeting were chiefly notable for initiating the method of non-violent direct action to the unjust laws, with all its consequences. The fourth resolution said: "In the event of the Legislative Council, the local Government and the Imperial Authorities rejecting the humble prayers of the British Indian Community of the Transvaal in connection with the Draft Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance, this mass meeting of the British Indians here assembled solemnly and regretfully resolves that, rather than submit to the galling, tyrannous and non-British requirements laid down in the above Draft Ordinance, every British Indian in the Transvaal shall submit himself to imprisonment and shall continue so to do until it shall please His Most Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor to grant relief."

In introducing the resolution, I told those present that I had not come to the meeting to get the resolution passed in the manner it was being done. The credit for doing so belonged to Sheth Haji Habib; and while congratulating him for the suggestion, I explained that it laid a great responsibility on him and on all those who adopted it. I told them that they should understand what that responsibility was, and as an adviser and servant of the community, it was my duty to explain it to them. I made it clear to them that wisdom lay in taking serious steps with great caution and hesitation, and to pledge themselves or to take an oath in the



name of God or with Him as witness, was not something to be trifled with. If having taken such an oath, they violated it, they would be guilty before God and man.

I told them that there was no doubt in my mind that the occasion was opportune for taking pledges, but everyone of them had to think for himself if he had the will and ability to pledge himself. Only those who took a pledge could be bound by it. Everyone was, therefore, to search his own heart, and if the inner voice assured him that he had the requisite strength to carry him through, then only should he pledge himself, and then only would his pledge bear fruit. It was quite possible that they might not be called upon to suffer at all. But if, on the one hand, one who took a pledge must be a robust optimist; on the other, he must be prepared for the worst. Again, it was quite possible that in spite of the warning given, some or many of those who pledged themselves might weaken when the trial came. They might have to go hungry and suffer extreme heat or cold. Hard labour might be imposed upon them. They might be flogged by rude warders. They might be fined heavily and their property might be attached and held up to auction, if there were only a few resisters left. Opulent the previous day, they might be reduced to abject poverty the next day. They might be repatriated and suffer starvation and similar hardships in goal. Some of them might fall ill and even die. In short, therefore, it was not all impossible that they might have to endure every hardship that they could imagine, and wisdom lay in pledging themselves on the understanding that they should have to suffer all that and worse.

I put in then a word about my personal responsibility. I told them that if I was warning them of the risks attendant upon the pledge, I was, at the same time, inviting the 3,000 present at the meeting to pledge themselves, and I was fully conscious of my responsibility in the matter. It was possible that a majority of those present there might take the pledge in a fit of enthusiasm or indignation but might weaken under the ordeal, and only a handful might be left to face the final test. Even then, there was only one course for the like of me—to die but not



to submit to the law. It was quite unlikely, but even if everyone else flinched leaving me alone to face the music, I was confident that I would never have violated my pledge. I requested them not to misunderstand me. I had not said that out of vanity, but I wished to put them, especially the leaders upon the platform, on their guard. I wished respectfully to suggest to them that if they had not had the will or the ability to stand firm even when they were perfectly isolated, they must not only not take the pledge themselves but declare their opposition before the resolution was put to the meeting and before the members began to take pledges and they must not make themselves parties to the resolution. Although they were going to take the pledge in a body, no one was to imagine that default on the part of one or many could absolve the rest from their obligation. Everyone was fully to realize his responsibility, and then only pledge himself independently of others and understand that he himself must be true to his pledge even unto death, no matter what the others did.

The Scribe: What are your reasons for defying an unjust law?

Bapu: In defying an unjust law, we obey the divine law. To submit to an unjust law will be a sin. Likewise, it will be a sin to violate the divine law.

The Scribe: What is this divine law?

Bapu: It is that one has to suffer pain before enjoying pleasure and that one's true self-interest consists in the good of all, which means that we should die—suffer for others.

Let us take a few examples. When a lump of earth is broken into dust, it mixes with water and nourishes plant life. It is by sacrificing themselves that plants sustain every kind of animal life. Animals sacrifice themselves for the good of their progeny. The mother suffers unbearable pain at the time of childbirth, but feels only happy in that suffering. Both the mother and the father undergo hardships in bringing up their children. Wherever communities and nations exist, individual members of those communities or nations have endured hardships for the common good. In the sixth century B.C., Lord Buddha, after wandering from



forest to forest braving the extremes of heat and cold and suffering many privations, attained self-realization and spread ideas of spiritual welfare among the people. Nineteen hundred and eighty four years ago, Jesus Christ, according to the Christian belief, dedicated his life to the people and suffered many insults and hardships. Prophet Muhammad suffered much. People had prepared themselves for an attack on his life. He paid no heed to it. These great and holy men obeyed the law stated above and brought happiness to mankind. They did not think of their personal interest but found their own happiness in the happiness of others.

The same thing applies in the political sphere. Hampden, Tyler, Cromwell and other Englishmen were prepared to sacrifice their all for the people and did not feel concerned at being robbed of all their possessions. Nor did they feel anxious since their lives were in danger. This is why the British people till yesterday ruled over a large empire. The rulers of Transvaal enjoyed power because they suffered great hardships. Mazzini suffered for the sake of his country. Today he is being revered. He is regarded as the father of Italian unity. He suffered endless hardships. George Washington made America what it is today.

Let us go further. It is a sin to violate one's pledge—to betray the manhood with which we are endowed. To save himself from the sin of incest, Yousof Abesalam suffered goal. Imam Hassan and Hussein refused to acknowledge the authority of Yazid, for it would have been wrong to do so. For this reason, that is, in order to preserve their honour, they became martyrs. For the sake of honour, God's devotee Prahlada, boldly embraced the red hot pillar, and the child Sudhanva threw himself into the frying pan without any hesitation. For the sake of truth, Harishchandra allowed himself to be sold to a low-caste man; he gave up his throne and suffered separation from his wife and son. For the sake of his father's word, Ramachandra went into the forest. And for the sake of the right, the Pandavas left their kingdom and wandered in the forest for fourteen years.

In the first and the second decades of the present century, it fell to the lot of the Indian community in Transvaal to submit to this great divine law. So



persuaded, we congratulated our countrymen. They had the opportunity then to see the Indian community throughout South Africa gaining its freedom. How could such happiness come to us without our going through equally great suffering? Our petition was not then addressed to man, it was addressed to God himself. Day and night He listened to our complaints. We did not have to seek an appointment with Him for the hearing of our petition. He hears the petitions of all at the same time. With the purest heart, therefore, we prayed to God to grant us strength to undergo all hardships that can befall the lot of man. We placed our trust in Him and, as you know, He stood by us. The result was there for all to see.

After my return to India, we organized passive resistance or shall I say, non-violent direct action in Champaran in North Bihar; it removed an age-long grievance. Up to the end of the First World War, I was a sincere admirer of the British Empire and, as a British Indian citizen, I thought that I owed a duty to Britain when it was in trouble. It was for this reason that, during the War, I gave Britain my help both in England and in India. In India, I engaged myself in recruiting work. At the end of the War, when Britain rather than reward India for the services it rendered Britain during this period, tried to further restrict her freedom by passing the Rowlatt Bills, my faith in British sincerity was shattered. And from 1918 onwards, I with the help of the Indian National Congress and the Indian people, led several movements against the British Government in India—some for seeking redress for specific wrongs and others for the freedom of the country from the British yoke. Examples of the former are the agitation against the Rowlatt Bills, the Bardoli Struggle and the repeal of the Salt Laws; and instances of the latter are the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1920, and the Quit India Movement of 1942. Between 1919 and 1947, numberless people were humiliated, starved, tortured, and deprived of their possessions and property. Hundreds of thousands were gaoled and thousands lost their lives—all in obedience to the divine law of suffering and sacrifice. And while the world gaped in wonder and amazement, India gained her freedom from the British yoke by non-violent means.



The Scribe: It was a great achievement.

Bapu: Yes, it was, and we demonstrated to the world what non-violent direct action could do. It has been used elsewhere, since, to successfully wrest power from colonial rulers. Martin Luther King used it, in the richest and the most powerful country of the world, to wrest civil rights for the American 'Blacks'.

The Scribe: During the period of the South African struggle, Passive Resistance attracted worldwide attention. Please throw some light on its theory and practice.

Bapu: The term Passive Resistance is not suitable for the activity of the Indian community in South Africa between the years 1906 and 1914. It is a misnomer. A more appropriate term for it is truth-force. Tolstoy called it soul-force or love-force, and so it is. Carried to its utmost limit, this force is independent of pecuniary or other material assistance. Indeed violence is the negation of this great spiritual force, which can be cultivated or wielded by those who will entirely eschew violence. It is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its performance and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women, and children. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by violence. This superstition arises from the incompleteness of the English expression. It is impossible for those who consider themselves to be weak to apply this force. Only those who realize that there is something in man which is superior to brute nature in him, and that the latter always yields to it, can be effective passive resisters. The force is to violence and, therefore, to all tyranny and injustice, what light is to darkness. In politics, its use is based upon the immutable maxim that the government of the people is possible only so long as they consent either consciously or unconsciously to be governed. We did not consent to be governed by the Asiatic Act of 1907 of Transvaal, and it had to go before this mighty force. Two courses were open to us—to use violence when we were called upon to submit to the Act, or to suffer the penalties prescribed under



the Act and thus to draw out and exhibit the force of the soul within us for a period long enough to appeal to the sympathetic chord in the governors or the law-makers. We took long to achieve what we set about striving for. That is because our Passive Resistance was not of the most complete type. All passive resisters do not understand the full value of the force, nor do we who always from conviction refrain from violence. The use of this force requires the adoption of poverty, in the sense that we must be indifferent whether we have the wherewithal to feed or clothe ourselves. During the struggle, all passive resisters were not prepared to go that length. Some, again, were Passive Resisters so-called. They came without any conviction, often with mixed motives, less often with impure motives. Some even, whilst engaged in the struggle, would gladly have resorted to violence, but for the most vigilant supervision. Thus it was that the struggle became prolonged; for, the exercise of the purest soul force, in its perfect form, brings about instantaneous relief. For this exercise, prolonged training of the individual soul is an absolute necessity, so that a perfect passive resister has to be almost, if not entirely, a perfect man. We cannot all suddenly become such men, but if my proposition is correct—as I know it to be—the greater the spirit of Passive Resistance in us, the better men we will become. Its use, therefore, is, I think, indisputable, and it is a force which, if it became universal, would revolutionize social ideals and do away with despotism and the ever-growing militarism under which the nations of the West are groaning and are being almost crushed to death, and which fairly promises to overwhelm even the nations of the East. If the past struggle had produced even a few Indians who would dedicate themselves to the task of becoming passive resisters, as nearly perfect as possible, they would not only have served themselves and India in the truest sense of the term, they would also have served humanity at large. But, alas, this has not happened. Thus viewed, Passive Resistance is the noblest and the best education. It should come, not after the ordinary education of the child in letters, but it should precede it. It will not be denied that a child, before it begins to write its alphabet and to gain worldly knowledge, should know what the soul is, what truth is, what love is, and what powers are latent in the soul.



It should be an essential part of real education for a child that, in the struggle of life, it can easily conquer hate by love, untruth by truth, violence by self-suffering. It was because I felt the force of this truth that in the later part of our struggle in South Africa, I endeavoured, as much as I could, to train the children at Tolstoy Farm and then at Phoenix along these lines, and one of the reasons for my leaving South Africa was to still further realize, as I had done in part, my own imperfection as a passive resister, and then to try to perfect myself; for, I believed, as I still do, that it is in India that the nearest approach to perfection is most possible.

The Scribe: Most knowledgeable people in India and outside are today aware how you sacrificed your life on this planet in obedience to the divine law and how you succeeded in perfecting yourself as a passive resister—a Satyagrahi after coming back home from South Africa. Please explain more fully the meaning of Satyagraha.

Bapu: The word was coined in South Africa in the first decade of the century, but the principle which it denotes is as ancient as time. The literal meaning of Satyagraha is insistence on truth, and the force derivable from such insistence. We made use of Satyagraha in its various aspects—non-co-operation, passive resistance, individual civil disobedience, mass civil disobedience—to seek justice for specific grievances and for winning the political freedom of the country.

One of the axioms of religion is that there is no religion other than truth. Another religion is love. And as there can be only one religion, it follows that truth is love and love is truth. We shall find too, on further reflection, that conduct based on truth is impossible without love. Truth force is then love force. We cannot remedy evil by harbouring ill-will against the evil-doer. This is not difficult of comprehension. It is easy enough to understand. In thousands of our acts, the propelling power is truth or love. The relations between father and son, husband and wife, indeed our family relations are largely guided by truth or love. And we therefore consciously or unconsciously apply Satyagraha in regulating these relations.



If we were to cast a retrospective glance over our past life, we would find that out of a thousand of our acts affecting our families, in nine hundred and ninety-nine we were dominated by truth; that in our deeds, it is not right to say we generally resort to untruth or ill-will. It is only where a conflict of interest arises that there arises the progeny of untruth, viz., anger, ill-will, etc.; and then we see nothing but poison in our midst. A little hard thinking will show us that the standard that we apply to the regulation of domestic relations is the standard that should be applied to regulate the relations between the rulers and the ruled and between man and man. Those men and women, who do not recognize the domestic tie, are considered to be very like brutes or barbarians, even though in form they have the human body. They have never known the law of Satyagraha. Those who recognize the domestic tie and its obligations have to a certain extent gone beyond the brute stage. But, if challenged, they would say, "what do we care though the whole universe may perish so long as we guard the family interest?" The measure of their Satyagraha, therefore, is less than that of a drop in the ocean.

When men and women have gone a stage further, they would extend the law of love, i.e., Satyagraha, from the family to the village. A still further stage away from the brute life is reached when the law of Satyagraha is applied to provincial life, and the people inhabiting a province regulate their relations by love rather than by hatred. And when, as in Hindustan, we recognize the law of Satyagraha as a binding force even between province and province and the millions of Hindustanis treat one another as brothers and sisters, we have advanced a stage further still from the brute nature.

In modern times, in no part of the earth have people gone beyond the national stage in the application of Satyagraha. In reality, however, there can be no reason for the clash of interests between nation and nation arresting the operation of the great law. If we were in the habit generally of giving no thought to our daily conduct, if we did not accept local custom and habit as matters of course, as we accept the current coin, we would immediately perceive that to



the extent that we bear ill-will towards other nations or at all show disregard for life, to that extent we disregard the law of Satyagraha or love, and to that extent we are still not free from the brute nature. But there is no religion apart from that which enables us entirely to rid ourselves of the brute nature. All religious sects and divisions, all churches and temples, are useful only so long as they serve as a means towards enabling us to recognize the universality of Satyagraha. In India, we have been trained from ages past in this teaching and hence it is that we are taught to consider the whole universe as one family. I do wish to submit, as a matter of experience, that it is not only possible to live the full national life by rendering obedience to the law of Satyagraha, but that the fullness of national life is impossible without Satyagraha, i.e., without a life of true religion. You would no doubt expostulate that the conduct of the Indian people and the Indian Government, after the achievement of independence, belies all that I have just now said. You are quite right in doing so, but that is a passing phase. I believe that before long the situation will change. That nation which goes on stockpiling weapons of war, or wars against another nation, has to that extent disregarded the great law of life. In spite of what the Indian people or the Indian Government have done or left undone during the past thirty-seven years, I shall never abandon the faith I have that India is capable of delivering this truth to the whole world. And I wish that all Indians, men and women, whether they are Hindus or Mohamedans, Parsis, Christians or Jews, will share with me this unquenchable faith.

The Scribe: There is some confusion in my mind about the use of the terms passive resistance, non-co-operation, civil disobedience, Satyagraha, etc. Would you help me in resolving this difficulty?

Bapu: Satyagraha is the comprehensive term; all others are its branches or parts. It is beyond my capacity to give accurate and terse definitions. But I will try.

Satyagraha, then, is literally holding on to truth and it means, therefore, truth force. Truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as soul force. It excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and,



therefore, is not competent to punish. The word was, as I told you earlier, coined in South Africa to distinguish the non-violent resistance of the Indians of South Africa from the contemporary "passive resistance" of the suffragettes and others. It is not conceived as a weapon of the weak.

Passive resistance is used in the orthodox English sense and covers the suffragette movement as well as the resistance of the non-conformists. Passive resistance has been conceived and is regarded as a weapon of the weak. Whilst it avoids violence, being not open to the weak, it does not exclude its use, if in the opinion of a passive resister, the occasion demands it. However, it has always been distinguished from armed resistance and its application was at one time confined to Christian martyrs.

Civil disobedience is civil breach of immoral statutory enactments. The expression was, as far as I am aware, coined by Thoreau to signify his own resistance to the laws of a slave state. He has left a masterly treatise on the duty of civil disobedience. But Thoreau was perhaps not an out-and-out champion of non-violence. Probably, also, Thoreau limited his breach of statutory laws, to the revenue law, i.e., payment of taxes, whereas the term "civil disobedience" as practised in India in 1919 covered a breach of any statutory and immoral law. It signified the resister's outlawry in a civil, i.e., non-violent manner. He invoked the sanctions of the law and cheerfully suffered imprisonment. It is a branch of Satyagraha.

Non-co-operation predominantly implies withdrawing of co-operation from the State that, in the non-co-operator's view, has become corrupt, and excludes civil disobedience of the fierce type described above. By its very nature, non-co-operation is even open to children of understanding and can be safely practised by the masses. Civil disobedience presupposes the habit of willing obedience to laws without fear of their sanctions. It can therefore be practised only as a last resort and by a select few in the first instance at any rate. Non-co-operation, too, like civil disobedience, is a branch of Satyagraha which includes all non-violent resistance for the vindication of truth.



The Scribe: Now that you have defined the various aspects of Satyagraha for me, please describe non-co-operation and civil disobedience in a little greater detail to enable me and others to grasp their meaning more fully.

Bapu: Let us begin with non-co-operation. As the term implies, it means withdrawal of co-operation from an unjust government. Following the Government's failure to penalize the culprits of the Punjab crime, who not only went unpunished but remained in service and continued to draw pensions from the Indian revenue and, in some cases, were even rewarded, and the non-redemption of the Khilafat promise, the country's hope in British justice and fair play was completely shattered, and the Congress launched the non-co-operation movement. Students in schools and colleges were asked to come out, lawyers and legislators to boycott courts and houses of legislature, government servants to leave their jobs and title-holders to renounce their titles. All Indians were asked to boycott foreign cloth. The struggle was to be completely nonviolent. As I have told you earlier, non-co-operation is even open to children and can be safely practised by the masses. It is, moreover, progressive in character and more items can be added to the programme as the movement progresses non-violently. Items like the non-payment of taxes and the call to the armed forces not to obey unjust orders of an iniquitous government, may only be made in the last resort and one prays that, in most cases, it may not be necessary at all.

The Scribe: I understand what you mean by non-co-operation. Please now explain civil disobedience in some detail.

Bapu: Civil disobedience may be practised by individuals or by masses. Again, it may be partial or it may be complete. For practice of individual civil disobedience, the climate is always congenial except when it is certain to lead to bloodshed. I found this climate during the Satyagraha days. But even so, a call may come which one dare not neglect, cost what it may. There have been times in my life when I had to refuse obedience to every single State-made law, even though I apprehended a certainty of bloodshed. When neglect of a call means a denial of God, civil disobedience becomes a peremptory duty.



Mass civil disobedience stands on a different footing. It can only be tried in a calm atmosphere. It must be the calmness of strength and not weakness, of knowledge and not ignorance. Individual civil disobedience may be, and often is, vicarious—mass civil disobedience may be, and often is, selfish in the sense that individuals expect personal gain from their disobedience. Thus in South Africa, Kallenbach and Polak offered vicarious civil disobedience. They had nothing to gain. Thousands offered it because they expected personal gain also in the shape, say, of the removal of the annual poll-tax levied upon ex-indentured men and their wives and grown-up children. It is sufficient in mass civil disobedience if the resisters understand the working of the doctrine.

It was in a practically uninhabited tract of the country that I was arrested in South Africa when I was marching into a prohibited area with two to three thousand men and some women. The company included several Pathans and others who were able-bodied men. It was the greatest testimony of merit the Government of South Africa gave to the movement. They knew that we were as harmless as we were determined. It was easy enough for that body of men to cut to pieces those who arrested me. It would have not only been a cowardly thing to do, but it would have been a treacherous breach of their own pledge; and it would have meant ruin to the struggle for freedom and the forcible deportation of every Indian from South Africa. But the men were no rabble. They were disciplined soldiers and all the better for being unarmed. Though I was torn from them, they did not disperse, nor did they turn back. They marched on to their destination till they were, everyone of them, arrested and imprisoned. So far as I am aware, this was an instance of discipline and non-violence for which there is no parallel in history.

We must dismiss the idea of overawing the government by huge demonstrations everytime someone is arrested. On the contrary, we must treat arrest as the normal condition of the life of a non-co-operator. For, we must seek arrest and imprisonment, as a soldier who goes to battle seeks death. We expect to tear down the opposition of the government by courting and not by avoiding



imprisonment, even though it be by showing our supposed readiness to be arrested and imprisoned *en masse*. Civil disobedience then emphatically means our desire to surrender to a single unarmed policeman. Our triumph consists in thousands being led to the prisons like lambs to the slaughter-house. If the lambs of the world had been willingly led, they would have long ago saved themselves from the butcher's knife. Our triumph consists again in being imprisoned for no wrong whatsoever. The greater our innocence, the greater our strength and the swifter our victory.

As it is, the governments are cowardly and we are afraid of imprisonment. The governments take advantage of our fear of gaols. If only our men and women welcome gaols as health resorts, we will cease to worry about the dear ones put in gaols which our countrymen in South Africa, and later in India, used to nickname as His Majesty's Hotels.

We have too long been mentally disobedient to the laws of the State and have too often surreptitiously evaded them to be fit, all of a sudden for civil disobedience. Disobedience to be civil has to be open and non-violent.

Complete civil disobedience is a state of peaceful rebellion—a refusal to obey every single State-made law. It is certainly more dangerous than an armed rebellion. For, it can never be put down if the civil resisters are prepared to face extreme hardships. It is based upon an implicit belief in the absolute efficiency of innocent suffering. By noiselessly going to prison a civil resister ensures a calm atmosphere. The wrong-doer wearies of doing wrong in the absence of resistance. All pleasure is lost when the victim betrays no resistance. A full grasp of the condition of successful civil resistance is necessary at least on the part of the representatives of the people before we can launch out on an enterprise of such magnitude. The quickest remedies are always fraught with the greatest danger and require the utmost skill in handling them. One should inculcate discipline in those who resort to it, and also make sure that they are habitual wearers of hand-spun, hand-woven Khadi and firm believers in communal unity and removal of untouchability.



The Scribe: If both non-co-operation and civil disobedience are branches of Satyagraha, how do you distinguish these and Satyagraha from passive resistance?

Bapu: Satyagraha which includes non-co-operation and civil disobedience is, in the first instance, not a passive state. It is an intensely active state—more active than physical resistance or violence. Passive resistance is, as I said earlier in describing the struggle in South Africa, a misnomer.

Secondly, in Satyagraha, one acts in obedience to a higher law. A Satyagrahi sometimes appears momentarily to disobey laws and the constituted authority only to prove in the end his regard for both. Disobedience to the law of the State becomes a peremptory duty when it comes in conflict with the law of God.

Thirdly, in Satyagraha there is no room for violence. While in passive resistance there is scope for the use of arms when a suitable occasion arises, in Satyagraha physical force is forbidden even in the most favourable circumstances. In passive resistance, there is always present an idea of harassment of the other party and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships called upon us by such activity, while in Satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. Satyagraha postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person. Satyagraha implies non-violence, and non-violence is never a method of coercion; it is one of conversion.

Fourthly, in Satyagraha the motive is love and not hatred. While there is no scope for love in passive resistance, hatred has no place in Satyagraha. Passive resistance is a negative thing, and has nothing to do with the active principle of love. Satyagraha proceeds on the active principle of love which says: "Love those that spitefully use you. It is easy for you to love your friends. But I say unto you, love your enemies." Passive resistance, unlike non-violence, has no power to change men's hearts.

Fifthly, Satyagraha implies respect for the adversary. Immediately we begin to think of things as our opponents think of them, we shall be able to do them full justice. I know that this requires a detached state of mind, and it is a state very



difficult to reach. Nevertheless, for a Satyagrahi, it is absolutely essential. Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings of the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint. We will then agree with our adversaries quickly or think of them charitably. A Satyagrahi bids goodbye to fear. He is therefore never afraid of trusting the opponent. Even if the opponent plays him false twenty times, the Satyagrahi is ready to trust him the twenty-first time; for, an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed.

Finally, non-co-operation is not with a part but with the whole system. I was faced with this question as the author of the non-co-operation movement. I said to myself that there was no State –not even the ones run by Nero or Mussolini– which has no good points about it; but we have to reject the whole, once we decide to non-co-operate with the system. "There are in our country grand public roads, and palatial educational institutions", said I to myself, "but they are part of a system which crushed the nation. I should not have anything to do with them. They are like the fabled snake with a brilliant jewel on its head, but which has fangs full of poison." So I came to the conclusion that the British rule in India had crushed the spirit of the nation and stunted its growth. If the State is involved in a war, it is one's duty not merely to refuse war service but to extend the scope of non-co-operation from mere refusal to serve in war to non-payment of one's taxes. Non-co-operation in military services and service in non-military matters are not compatible. You are all the while giving military service by proxy because you are supporting a State which is based on military service.

The Scribe: What is the secret of the true spirit or attitude of Satyagraha?

Bapu: The life-giving spirit underlying Satyagraha is fearlessness. A Satyagrahi enjoys a degree of freedom not possible for others, because he becomes a truly fearless person. Once his mind is rid of fear, he will never agree to be another's slave. Having achieved this state of mind, he will never submit to any arbitrary action.



Such Satyagraha can be, ought to be, practised not only against a government, but against society as well. It can often happen that a society is as wrong as a government. It becomes one's duty then to use Satyagraha against society. Thoreau, the well-known author of *Civil Disobedience* thought that his countrymen did wrong in carrying on slave-trade. He therefore ranged himself against his people. The great Luther defied his people single-handed, and it is thanks to him that Germany enjoys freedom today. And there was Galileo who opposed society. The people were resolved to kill him. Undaunted, he told them that they could kill him if they wanted to, but it was true all the same that the earth revolved. Today, we all know that the earth is round and that it rotates on its axis once every twenty-four hours. Columbus acted like a true Satyagrahi when facing his sailors. Exhausted, they declared, "we will never get to America. Let us turn back, else we will kill you". Unperturbed, Columbus answered: "I am not afraid of being killed, but I think we ought to go on for a few days more." They did discover America, and Columbus won everlasting fame.

Such a wonderful remedy is this Satyagraha. When we ask in fear what will happen if the government does not repeal a particular Act or accede to our demands, we only betray the deficiency of our Satyagraha or talk as if we had been unarmed, having lost the weapon of Satyagraha. But our Satyagraha prompts us to become free and feel independent. We have therefore nothing to fear. "All this is idle talk. Whatever you do, you cannot start the campaign again. Once has been quite enough." There are persons who talk thus. If it is true that we cannot resume the struggle, it will have been in vain that we started it at all.

Let us justify this view of ours. It is a matter of common observation that what we have won can be retained only by the same means through which it was got. What is won by force can be retained by force alone. A tiger seizes the prey by force and retains it through force. Those who are forcibly locked up in gaol are kept there by force. The territories acquired by emperors by use of force are retained by force. In the same manner, what is gained by love can be retained only by love. The mother feels great love for the child in her womb and rears it



with the same love afterwards. A punishment given to it, while yet a child, should not be interpreted as use of force. There are also instances when a mother has lost a child altogether, because she lost loving it for some reason. Similarly what we have gained by Satyagraha can be retained only through Satyagraha. When Satyagraha is given up, we are sure that the gains will also be lost. Moreover, it is unlikely that one will succeed in retaining through physical force what one gained by Satyagraha. Suppose Indians wish to retain by force the fruits of victory won through Satyagraha. Even a child can see that, if Indians resort to force, they can be crushed in no time. Likewise, if we give up Satyagraha and go on as we did before, what we have gained may be lost.

These examples show that Satyagraha is really an attitude of mind. He who has attained to the Satyagrahic state of mind will remain ever victorious, at all times and places and under all conditions, irrespective of whether it is a government or a people that he opposes, whether they be strangers, friends, or relatives.

It is only because we do not appreciate the marvel of Satyagraha that we live in India as a poor and cowardly race, not only in our relations with the government but in our personal relations as well. Certain customs which are palpably evil are kept alive in our country mainly because we lack the spirit of Satyagraha. Though well aware that certain customs are bad, we do very little to end them either because of fear and laziness or because of undue regard for others.

The Scribe: What is the criterion of success for Satyagraha?

Bapu: This is an important question. When one gains one's rightful objective, the answer is straightforward. It is victory like the one we achieved in our struggle in South Africa or when we gained our independence from Britain. But, on reflection, we find that in this world what people take to be success is, in most cases, not real success. Sometimes that may signify failure rather than success. I do not exaggerate when I say this. Let me illustrate this by an example. If someone sets out from home with the intention of committing a robbery, and after much effort gains his end, it may be success from his point of view. On second thoughts, one realizes that it was in fact a defeat for him. If he had failed,



that would have been true success. This is an obvious example; for, it is easy to understand in this context. There are hundreds of occasions in a man's life when he is unable to distinguish easily between right and wrong. It is therefore difficult to determine whether the achievement of one's aim is truly a failure or triumph. It follows from this that success and failure do not essentially depend upon the result. Besides, the result is not in one's hand. Whenever success makes a man vain, he behaves like the fly on the wheel which imagines that it is making the wheel go round. Man's duty is to do the best he can in a given situation. What he achieves, then, will, in fact, be true success. The physician's duty is not to save the patient, for that does not lie in his hands, but to use all his skill in a sincere effort to save him. If he does that, he will have succeeded well enough. What happens to the patient— whether he lives or dies—will not detract from, or add to, the physician's success.

Let me cite one or two more examples to illustrate what I mean. A handful of Spartans once stood guarding the pass at Thermopylae and defended it against the enemy to the last man. In the end, the pass was taken by the enemy. But the world knows today that it was the brave Spartans who won. Even today, if anyone in Europe shows great courage, it is referred to as Spartan courage. The same is true of the battle of Haldighat. The Rajputs who defended the Pass died to the last man but people even today speak with pride of those who sacrificed their lives in that great battle. The steed—Chetak—that carried Maharana Pratap and saved his life but sacrificed its own, is fabled in song and story. To achieve economic and social freedom, the Indian people will have to wage a long and persistent war against their own established government. Victory may be slow in coming, it may come step by step, but it surely will, if those who fight this non-violent war, never give up till the goal is reached. The criterion of success is performance of one's duty at every turn. The will to victory, the determination to succeed, the responsibility for the result, the Creator alone must bear.

The Scribe: What in your view are the basic assumptions for successful Satyagraha?



Bapu: Briefly stated these are:

1. There must be common honesty among Satyagrahis.
2. They must render ready discipline to their commander. There should be no mental reservation.
3. They must remain completely untouched by fear, remain unarmed by material weapons, and continue resistance till the end.
4. They must be prepared to lose all, not merely their personal liberty, possessions, and cash, etc., but also the liberty and possessions of their families; and they must be ready cheerfully to face bullets, bayonets, or even slow death by torture.
5. They must not be violent in thought, word, or deed towards the 'enemy' or among themselves.
6. They must be selfless democrats willing to submit themselves to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society.

The Scribe: When is it proper to start civil disobedience?

Bapu: Since Satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a Satyagrahi exhausts all other means, before he resorts to Satyagraha. He will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody, who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues, will he resort to Satyagraha. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him, and launches out upon Satyagraha, he has burnt his boats and there is no receding.

The Scribe: What cautions would you prescribe before a mass movement is launched?

Bapu: First and foremost, as I have just now said, resort to Satyagraha should be made only when all other avenues have been exhausted. Secondly, when violence pervades the air, the expression of non-violence may not be through civil



disobedience. And if it is to be civil disobedience, it must be hedged in with adequate restrictions. In Satyagraha, it is never the numbers that count; it is always the quality, more so when the forces of violence are uppermost. Thirdly, I would not take a single step, unless I am satisfied that the country is ready for that step. Fourthly, so long as the masses are not educated to appreciate the value of non-violence, even whilst their holdings are being sold, the final step of suspension of payment of taxes will not be taken up in spite of its promise of a ready response. Fifthly, it must be borne in mind that there is no time limit for a Satyagrahi, nor is there a limit to his capacity for suffering, although suffering can be both wise and unwise, and when the limit is reached, to prolong it would not only be unwise but also the height of folly. Finally, Satyagrahis must keep exemplary patience. They must not be goaded into precipitating action. They must refuse battle where they are not ready.

The Scribe: How do you think that the masses can practise non-violence, when we know that they are all prone to anger, hate, ill-will and to fight for the most trivial things?

Bapu: They are, and yet I think they can practise non-violence for the common good. Do you think that the thousands of women that collected 'contraband' salt had ill-will against anyone? They knew that Congress or Gandhi had asked them to do certain things, and they did those things in faith and hope. To my mind, the most perfect demonstration of non-violence was in Champaran. Did the thousands of ryots who rose up in revolt against the agrarian evils harbour the least ill-will against the government or the planters? Their belief in non-violence was unintelligent, even as the belief in the earth being round with many is unintelligent. But their belief in their leaders was genuine, and that was enough. With those who lead, it is another matter. Their belief has got to be intelligent, and they have to live up to all the implications of their belief.

The Scribe: Believing that mass revolution is the only means to achieve the goal, do you believe it a practical proposition that the masses will and can remain absolutely non-violent in thought, word, and deed, in spite of all possible



provocations in the course of such revolution? It may be possible for an individual to attain the standard, but do you think that it is possible for the masses to attain the standard of non-violence in action?

Bapu: The entire course of our non-violent fight bears testimony to the fact that wherever violence had broken out, it had broken out not on the part of the masses but, if I may put it like that, on the part of the classes, that is, it was manipulated by intellectuals. Even in violent fighting, though the individual sometimes lets himself go and forgets everything, the mass of the fighting force dares not and does not. It resorts to arms only under orders and has to suspend fire in response to orders, no matter how great the individual impulse to revenge or retaliation might be. There is no *prima facie* reason why under non-violence the masses, if disciplined, should be incapable of showing the discipline which, in organized warfare, a fighting force normally does. Besides, a non-violent general has this special advantage: he does not require thousands of leaders to successfully carry on his fight. The non-violent message does not require so many for transmission. The example of a few true men or women, if they have fully imbibed the spirit of non-violence, is bound to infect the whole masses in the end.

This was just what I experienced in the beginning of the movement. I found that people actually believed that, in my heart of hearts, I favoured violence even when I preached non-violence. That was the way they had been trained to read and interpret the utterances of the leaders. But when they realized that I meant what I said, they did observe non-violence, indeed, under the most trying circumstances.

As for non-violence in thought, God alone is the judge. But this much is certain that non-violence in action cannot be sustained, unless it goes hand in hand with non-violence in thought.

The Scribe: What is the signal for the suspension of Satyagraha?



Bapu: The movement should be called off, if it is followed by an outbreak of violence in any part of the country. I called off the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill following the outbreak of violence in 1919, and the Bardoli Satyagraha, following the violence in Chauri Chaura in 1922.

The Scribe: What are the qualifications of a leader of Satyagraha?

Bapu: A Satyagraha leader admits only clean men to the fight. He refuses to be led by his men, if mob law is to be avoided and ordered progress desired for the country. I believe that mere protestation of one's opinion and surrender to the mass opinion is not only not enough, but in matters of vital importance, a leader must act contrary to the mass opinion, if it does not commend itself to his reason.

A leader is surrounded, as he must be, by people holding all kinds of views. He will drift like an anchorless ship, if he has not the inner voice to hold him firm and guide him.

An able general always gives battle in his own time, on the ground of his choice. He always retains the initiative in these respects and never allows it to pass into the hands of the enemy. In a Satyagraha campaign, the mode of fight and the choice of tactics, e.g., whether to advance or retreat, offer civil resistance or organize non-violent strength through constructive work and purely selfless humanitarian service, are determined according to the exigencies of the situation. A Satyagrahi must carry out whatever plan is laid out for him with a cool determination, giving way to neither excitement nor depression.

A wise general does not wait till he is actually routed; he withdraws in time in an orderly manner from a position which he knows he would not be able to hold on to.

The Scribe: What happens if the leader or the leaders are removed by death or by imprisonment?

Bapu: Your fitness for the goal depends on your capacity to continue the movement in spite of the withdrawal of the leaders from any cause. There should be no loss of discipline and no demoralization following the removal of the



leaders. What is needed is self-reliance. To this should be added, discipline, valour, sacrifice, determination, faith, and humility.

Strength of numbers is the delight of the timid. If a single Satyagrahi holds out to the end, victory is absolutely certain.

The Scribe: We have considered the qualifications of the leaders. Let us now consider the qualifications of the soldiers of Satyagraha.

Bapu: The following qualifications are essential for every Satyagrahi in India:

1. He must have a living faith in God, because He is his only rock.
2. He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and, therefore, have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature, which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his love and suffering.
3. He must be leading a chaste life and be ready and willing, for the sake of his cause, to give up his life and possessions.
4. He must be a habitual Khadi-wearer and spinner. This is essential for India.
5. He must be a teetotaller and be free from the use of intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.
6. He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time.
7. He should carry out the gaol rules, unless they are especially devised to hurt his self-respect.
8. He must be fearless, valorous, self-controlled, humble, and civil in his behaviour.

The Scribe: Do you think Satyagraha can help in solving the problems that have come to plague the country during the past thirty-seven years?

Bapu: I have no doubt about it. When all other solutions have been explored and found infructuous, Satyagraha is the only remedy. It is also infallible. But the game must be played according to the rules I have laid down.



Epilogue

DURING his school years in India, Gandhi came under the influence of his Vaishnava parents and Jain religion. Steeped as both these creeds, as also Buddhism, are in the tradition of *ahimsa* or non-violence, it was during this time that he imbibed his first lesson in non-violence. As a student in England, he came face to face with the evils of industrialism and the Western civilization. In South Africa he came by a copy of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. In his autobiography, he describes the decisive influence this anthology of four essays, first published in the *British Cornhill Magazine* in 1860 on the "First Principles of Political Economy", had on his life from the day when he read them on a train journey in 1903. As he puts it: "The book was impossible to lay aside. It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty-four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book, I translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it 'Sarvodaya'—the welfare of all."

In 1910, Gandhi started a settlement in the vicinity of Johannesburg and named it "Tolstoy Farm," as an humble tribute to Tolstoy, the grand old man who lived a life of voluntary poverty in Yasnaya Poliana among people who were his former serfs. Gandhi acknowledged Tolstoy's influence on himself as next only to that of Rajachandra. In the appendix of *Hind Swaraj*, written on board the ocean ship *Kildonan Castle* in 1909, Gandhi recommended twenty books for his readers' perusal to follow up the study of the book. Among the books listed are, of course, two each by Ruskin and Thoreau, but the first six titles are authored by Leo Tolstoy—with whom Gandhi exchanged several letters during 1909-1910 to inform him about the movement and the farm in South Africa. While influences of Western thinkers are not denied—and Gandhi himself accepted them—old Eurocentric interpretation of his life and message is not correct. In the preface to *Hind Swaraj*, which I regard his *magnum opus*, Gandhi writes: "That which I dimly felt received support from these books." The major factors, as we have said earlier, that influenced and moulded Gandhi's life and thought—the pious



and religious life of his parents, the philosopher-friend Rajachandra, the Hindu and the Jain religions, the Bhagavadgita, the Ishopanishad and, the Ramayana by Tulsidas—were all indigenous. Sarvodaya—the welfare of all—was for him an altruistic ethic of self-realization.

Three-quarters of a century ago, while the English-educated Indians were still obsessed with the grandeur of the materialistic Western civilization, he said that Indian civilization was the best and far superior to the civilization which in his view was the reverse of civilization. He said it was a nine days' wonder. Such ephemeral civilizations had often come and gone and would continue to do so. He advocated simple living in self-sufficient village communities, decentralized production, Swadeshi and egalitarianism. The root cause of violence and wars is exploitation. This is implicit in industrialism. He had known its evils while he was still a student in London. That is why he was dead-set against it and warned his countrymen against it. But Jawaharlal Nehru and others in the Congress, who came into seats of power, thought otherwise. They brushed aside the advice he gave to the Congress on 29 January 1948, a day before his assassination, to "disband the existing Congress organization and flower it into a Lok Sevak Sangh". They did not think much of an economy based on Khadi, home industries and village crafts, and adopted, instead, a paradigm based on economic growth, capital-intensive technology and centralized planning. The results are there for all to see. In spite of thirty-seven years of industrialism and six Five-Year Plans, India is today precariously perched on the brink of an economic disaster.

The paradigm which the Congress adopted was the one which enabled the so-called First World or European countries to develop their economies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when there were subject nations to plunder and vast empty continents to colonize. In the absence of these conditions, as expected, this paradigm never had a chance of success and it has failed. Nor is there any likelihood of the success of the socialist model, which the socialist countries adopted for growth and development. They developed themselves within the framework of the Western civilization and as a response to the social



injustices of the capitalist system. Development in these countries began from a much lower level. They have, like the developed countries (the DCs), benefited from the internal drives, but unlike the latter, the external factors have been unfavourable to them or even hostile. In spite of these handicaps, however, the growth in the socialist countries (the SCs) has been phenomenal and actually higher than in the DCs. Both these systems have developed strong military machines, and the two giant nations that represent the two systems, the USA and the USSR, are pitted against each other in a conflict that can at any time involve and destroy the whole world. Both the systems also pose the triple problems of environmental pollution, ecological imbalance, and resource exhaustion.

Long before thinkers and writers in Western countries began talking about "Limits to Growth" and, the Club of Rome and other bodies became aware of the problem, Gandhi had foreseen the danger of unlimited exploitation of resources. As early as 1928, he had warned: "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts."

Struck by the horrors to which industrialism has exposed mankind, more especially since the time the first atom bomb was exploded over Hiroshima, many thinkers from outside India have veered round to the Gandhian way—simple living, decentralized economy, reverence for life, non-violence, and peace and amity among nations. The number of such thinkers, past and present, is legion and we can name only a few: Horace Alexander, Harrison Brown, Charles Berlitz, Joan V. Bondurant, Tilehard de Chardin, David Ehrenfeld, Erich Fromm, Johan Galtung, Richard B. Gregg, Martin Heidegger, Ivan Illich, Homer A. Jack, Detlef Kantowsky, William Robert Miller, A.J. Muste, Gunnar Myrdal, E.F. Schumacher, Jan Tinbergen, George Willoughby, and many others too numerous to enumerate.

Ivan Illich, who visited India in 1978, was much distressed by the near-total eclipse of Gandhi in the land of his birth and the prevailing defeatism among the



Sarvodaya workers. According to Detlef Kantowsky, Professor of Sociology at the University of Konstanz in West Germany, Illich reportedly remarked that it would be a great tragedy if India had to re-import Gandhi from the West. Professor Kantowsky rightly deplores the fact that Indians as a nation have never learnt to properly evaluate their own civilization, their achievements and their men. We devalued and even denounced our glorious and hoary civilization in favour of a demoniac Western civilization which spells disaster for the human race. We looked with disdain on our religion and philosophy and came to realize its worth only when European and American Indologists like Schopenhauer, Max Muller, Emerson, and others opened our eyes to its merits. We looked down upon our music and dance forms and gave it recognition only when our performing troupes won applause in Europe and America. We did not honour our literateurs and scientists, until they received recognition abroad and became recipients of Nobel awards.

Professor Kantowsky, who has written a book on Sarvodaya (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980), in a recent article in *Gandhi Marg* (New Delhi, June 1983) asks: "Is Gandhi Coming Back From West To East?" From the packed houses that witnessed Attenborough's eight Oscar-award-winning movie, 'Gandhi' (in this country and all over the world) and the large number of books on Gandhian philosophy and economy that are coming out from all quarters, it is my firm conviction that he is coming back to us, much as our religion and philosophy did in the past. In his brilliant and urgent book, *To Have or To Be?* Erich Fromm, (Abacus, 1978), much in the Gandhian way, argues that in the present period of crisis, two ways of existence are struggling for the spirit of humankind. The first—dominant in modern industrial society, both capitalist and communist—there is what he calls the "having" mode, which concentrates on material possessions and power and is based on greed, envy, and aggressiveness. The second—and alternative—way is what he calls the "being" mode, which manifests itself in the pleasure of shared experience and truly productive rather than wasteful activity, and is rooted in love and the ascendancy of human over material values. Dr. Fromm sees the "having" mode as bringing the world to the brink of ecological



and psychological disaster, and envisages a new emphasis on "being" as the only course, if humanity is to avoid catastrophe.

David Ehrenfeld, Professor of Biology at Rutgers University and author of *Conservative Life on Earth*, came out in 1978 with a new and absorbing book, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (Oxford University Press). Humanism, according to Ehrenfeld, is the religion of the Western civilization. It assumes that humans can do anything with the aid of reason, science, and money. Secure in this belief—although it has provided a life of vulgar ostentation and luxury for a few—we are dismantling and discarding everything upon which human survival and happiness depend, including our knowledge of the limits of the human mind and body, our families and small communities, our best agriculture, our control over energy, our fellow species and ecological systems and even the meaning of our language. The overwhelming trend at present is towards more ruined soils, more deserts, more children with anomie, more shattered and violent societies, more weapons whose horror surpasses imagination, more techniques of autocratic suppression, and more mechanisms of isolating human beings from one another. Our personal egos are getting inflated and a wave of selfishness is sweeping over the most "humanistic" of our societies as revealed in our love of comfort without work and our dependence on more inventions, and more and more organization.

"Humanism" postulates a world that is totally redesigned and controlled by human beings. In this control, mankind has incurred heavy losses—the loss of hoary forests and wildernesses that have been wantonly gnawed and nibbled and destroyed by man with the plough and the axe, the loss of animal and vegetable species that are rapidly becoming extinct, the loss and desecration of our landscapes and scenic spots in hill regions and plains, and our architectural wonders and gorgeous monuments, the loss of human skills that have now become rare—fine stone masons, master carpenters, wood and ivory carvers, shawl and carpet weavers, etc. Human skills of this kind are either continually developed and passed on or they are lost. In India, they were systematically destroyed by the British. And though there are many other losses like that of personal liberty



and equality, there is, above all, the loss of environment and human health and human sanity.

Professor Ehrenfeld believes that from hijackings and the plastic bombs of the guerrillas to the tens of thousands of nuclear missiles crouching in their silos and poised on their launchers—not to speak of the hydrogen and the neutron bombs, and the biological and chemical weapons of destruction—there is enough power of destruction, waiting and ready so that no humanist plan or organization is safe. A trigger-happy, destructive and insane person in a position of power, could anytime press the button and blow the planet to smithereens. Ehrenfeld, however, hopes and prays that such a catastrophe will not occur and before it does, a gollum may arrive—the gentlest gollum that in its final act of self-destruction will take with it merely a finger of civilization and not its whole body. He adds: "I can only think of one": global economic depression, coming soon, without war if possible, and resulting in a collapse of the exploitative industry, the collapse of the global trade in fantastic weapons, the collapse of massive schemes to rearrange the earth, the collapse of destructive export agriculture, and the re-establishment of national and regional economies on a small scale and independent of any large system. It reminds one of Gandhi's decentralized production.

E.F. Schumacher, a noted English economist, was invited to India, in 1961, in the capacity of a consultant on rural development. He was profoundly influenced by Gandhian economic thought and the Gandhian plan of decentralization and production by masses. He thought that the economies of gigantism and automation were the leftovers of the nineteenth-century thinking and totally unrelated to the problems of the day. He said: "An entirely new system of thought is needed, a system based on attention to people and not primarily on attention to goods." He recommended the conscious utilization of man's enormous technological and scientific potential for the fight against misery and human degradation, that is, a fight in contact with actual people, with individuals, families, small groups, rather than states and other anonymous abstractions. And



this presupposes a political and organizational structure that can provide this intimacy. Seeing in decentralization a new way of life with small comprehensive groups, he added: "We must learn to think in terms of an articulated structure that can cope with a multiplicity of small-scale units. If economic thinking cannot grasp this, it is useless. If it cannot get beyond its abstractions, the national income, the rate of growth, capital, capital-output ratio, input-output analysis, labour mobility and capital accumulation have no meaning. If it cannot get beyond this and make contact with human poverty, frustration, alienation, despair, breakdown, crime, escapism, stress, congestion, ugliness and spiritual death, then let us scrap economics and start afresh." In his well-known book, *Small is Beautiful*, Schumacher lays emphasis on small units and on intermediate technology—a technology which would use local skills and raw materials and serve the needs of the local people. Such a technology—as Jan Tinbergen has also suggested—would be better than traditional technology in use, but not so modern as to throw things completely out of gear. Schumacher wrote two more books, *A Guide for the Perplexed* and *Good Work*, on the same theme. In the latter work, he addresses a question which is central to most of us and one which is all too often ignored by the economic structure of the Western world. He maintains that the purpose of man's work is threefold: to produce necessary, useful goods and services; to enable us to use and perfect our gifts and skills; and, finally, to serve and collaborate with other people in order to liberate ourselves from in-built egocentricity. A job in which one finds no personal satisfaction destroys the soul. Dr. Schumacher died in 1977 and, following his death, the Schumacher Society was established. It helps to promote the appropriate scale in technology and human organization, and to co-ordinate the efforts of individuals and groups searching for ways of living which restore initiative to the individual and contribute to harmony in industrial life. It encourages the preservation of the natural environment as a basis upon which to achieve these aims and, specifically, the use of organic and non-polluting agriculture. A well-known bi-monthly magazine, *Resurgence*, arranges annual Schumacher Lectures at the University of Bristol.



Before I conclude the book, I will consider one more Western thinker who has been profoundly influenced by Gandhian thought. He is Alvin Toffler, the author of runaway best-seller, *The Future Shock*. He has come out with another best-seller, *The Third Wave*. In it he condemns industrialism and both the capitalist and the communist systems that have failed to solve the basic problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment, rising prices, inflation, alienation, individual freedom, resource exhaustion, environmental pollution, ecological threat, and violence and war.

According to the author, both systems have brought the world to the brink of a nuclear holocaust, and if our planet is to be saved—as it must be—the only way open to mankind is to abnegate the current systems and look for a suitable, a convivial alternative. The author, who devotes a whole chapter in his book to Gandhi and the Gandhian way of life, is of the opinion that the only alternative is decentralized, small-scale production in village homes and small communities. He recommends the "do-it-yourself" approach and a mode of production in which the producer is also the consumer—the "Prosumer". He predicts that the Third Wave is fast approaching. May his prediction prove true. I for one pray to the Lord that Gandhi's countrymen, and particularly the country's "little men" who have lost credibility but still have followers, heed his counsels which they once ignored, now that he is calling out to them from the outer space and from across the seas.

*Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram,
Patita Parana Sita Ram,
Ishwar Allah Tere Nam,
Sabko Sanmati De Bhagwan,
Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram*

