

**Abridged**

# **Gandhi - Ganga**

**(Inspiring Stories)**

**Compiled by : Mahendra Meghani**

**Translated by : Mrs. Jyoti M. Verma**

**Published by:**

**Mumbai Sarvodaya Mandal - Gandhi Book Centre  
299 Nana Chowk - Tardeo Road,  
Mumbai 400 007**

**Printed by :**

**Jitendra T Desai  
Navajivan Mudranalaya  
Ahmedabad 380 014 (INDIA)**

## M.K. Gandhi

### 01. Hatred?

It was rather impossible for me to hate anyone in this world. My firm belief in God has helped me lead a pious life. For the last forty years, it has been utterly impossible for me to despise anyone. I know I am being boastful, yet I politely insist on it. Wherever a misdeed is committed, I shall be there and condemn it firmly. I really do as I say. I don't only disapprove the Britishers' tyranny in India, but I despise it too. I strongly hate their inhuman policy of exploiting the Indians. Likewise, I also despise the shameful practice of untouchability observed by millions of Hindus. But I do not hate the tyrant Britishers themselves or the Hindus because I still believe that their attitude can be altered either by love or by other means.

## Vinoba

### 02. The Gandhi I know

Countrywide Gandhi was called Bapu . Yet I feel that he was more a 'mother' than a 'father'. Whenever he is remembered, his affection for all comes to the fore, rather than his other virtues. We witness an affectionate motherly nobleman within Bapu, which is the outcome of age-old traditions and the seedling of new ones. I have observed Bapu practicing 'Karmayoga' from Gita. So indifferent a human being, can rarely be found. But I have seen the embodiment of such saintly virtues in this great man. I had the privilege of staying with him. Every person who could live in his company has experienced that his vices have vanished; the pettiness has been replaced by open-heartedness. He helped a lot of people gain self- importance.

People dislike some of Gandhi's thoughts. Some of them would say, "You would better go to the *Himalaya*." Smiling, Bapu would reply, "If you would go to *Himalaya* I would definitely follow you. But if you stay here, then this humble man would stay here to serve you. The servant follows the master!" Continuing he would say, "Whenever poverty and exploitation are to be eliminated and help to be offered, there exists my *Himalaya*."

Presently, there seems to be no institution or a person who can morally command the countrymen to follow him. Leaders from different parties disgrace each other. This does not generate creativity among public. A kind of passivity, emptiness and disorientation has encompassed the country. The people are confused and unable to find a way out.

### 03. The Day Is Going To Break

No sooner than we got freedom, God deprived us of Gandhiji. Humans can hardly comprehend what God proposes, yet we can guess it by thinking deeply. If it wasn't God's will to give us absolute freedom, He might have let Gandhiji be amongst us. But He wished us to be free of all kinds of enslavements. The Britishers' quitting our country had freed us of external pressures. God has disoriented us by taking Gandhiji away. It seems that Gandhiji is saying, "You are absolutely free. Apply your reasoning power and be free in the real sense of the term. However great a man may be, can he free the whole country? I will have to put myself to sleep."

Similarly, I have to get freedom for myself. If God would always send a messiah for us it won't ensure our progress. God doesn't incarnate very often. People say that darkness has spread out after Gandhiji's demise, but I feel that the day is about to break. Open your eyes and you would know. Gandhiji used to say time and again, think discreetly over whatever I say; accept it only if it appeals to your reason. But we didn't even care to think and kept following him. That is why God must have decided to make us think.

### 04. An Ode to Malaygiri

It is said that shrubs don't grow under a banyan tree because it takes all the nutrition, which is meant for both of them. This explains the fact that common people don't progress much under the auspices of great people.

But sages are different from great people. Sages are neither ambitious nor selfish. They are eminent. They don't devour others' nutrition. On the contrary they nourish others. They can be compared to an affectionate cow. A cow nourishes her calf on her milk. The calf grows day by day. Eminent people let others grow. They are courteous and polite to others. Bapu's life is the embodiment of the cow's nurturance. Those who came under his patronage could grow. The fowl minded turned good. The stern ones became soft. Each person, who had the privilege of living with him, would relate the same experience. A poet writes, "We don't honour a golden or silver mountain that doesn't let the trees grow on it. We honour *Malaygiri* that lets the common trees transform into sandalwood."

## Lallubhai Patel

### 05. Erase Those Two Words

The Hindu-Muslim riots had broken out in Calcutta (now Kolkata). A mob attacked the house Gandhiji was staying in. They shattered the doors, the windows and the furniture too. They threw bricks at Gandhiji, but by God's grace no one was hurt. The incident made him brood over it. He decided to go on a fast. He said that he would keep fast to bring awareness to the agitated people of Calcutta. He said, "My conscience prods me to go door to door and ask the people to do away with their differences of opinion and unite again. Since it is not possible for me at this age, I have resorted to go on fast." He had already declared that during the fast he would take only water, soda and lemon squash. Rajaji was the Governor of Bengal at that time. Since Gandhiji had decided to have lemon squash, Rajaji thought that there was a chance to dissuade him from fasting. Rajaji met him and explained the reason for not doing so. He said, "If you are going on fast, why take lemon squash even?" Gandhiji looked at Nirmal Babu and asked, "Why didn't you realise it when you checked my declaration? Rajaji knows me since long and hence he has caught me perfectly. I hope that I would be able to sustain the fast and that's why I mentioned lemon squash." Saying this he took the pencil and erased the words 'lemon squash'!

### 06. A Ghee-Lamp

On that day at Sevagram, Bapu was going to give a discourse after the evening prayers. It was Gandhiji's birthday. Hence a lot of people had gathered for the evening prayer. A dais had been set for Gandhiji. There were no decorations. The settee was covered with white Khadi. A ghee lamp in a pooja thali was lit at some distance. Gandhiji arrived and saw the lamp. Closing his eyes, he started praying. After the prayer, before starting to discourse, he asked, "Who brought the pooja thali?" Ba answered, "I brought it." "From where did you get it?" Ba said, "From the village." Bapu stared at Ba for an instant. Thinking that it was customary for every Hindu woman who wished her husband a long-healthy life, she had the pooja thali and the lamp brought here.

Ba could not gather why Bapu asked this question. Gandhiji exclaimed, "Ba's lighting this ghee lamp in pooja thali was the worst deed of the day. Today is my birthday. Was it the reason this lamp was lit? I know how people around me lead their everyday life. They don't even get a few drops of oil for their roti. On the contrary a ghee lamp is burning in my ashram! What if today is my birthday? Good deeds should be committed today, not sin. Who authorised us to misuse a thing which is unavailable to the poor villagers?"

## 07. The Work Preceding the Lecture

Once Gandhiji went to London from South Africa. He had become popular there as a great leader from Africa. In those days a lot of Indian people stayed there. Many of them were students and some were revolutionaries. All of them wished freedom for India. Taking advantage of Gandhiji's presence there, they organised a programme. It was decided that food would be served first and then the lectures would be delivered.

The youngsters requested Gandhiji to be the chairperson. He accepted it on some conditions. The terms were that the food would be strictly vegetarian and liquor won't be served. The youngsters agreed to it. The boys were happy that they had Gandhiji, the winner of the African revolution, as their chairperson. The boys enthusiastically took up cleaning the vessels and vegetables etc. Gandhiji reached there six hours prior to the programme and started working with the boys. Nobody knew that their chief guest was washing dishes with them.

The programme was about to commence. The conveners stood at the door waiting for Gandhiji. But Gandhiji had not come yet. Someone said that he would be late, so they would better have a look at the arrangements for food. A leader went inside. A lean and thin person was working in the kitchen with the boys. The leader was shocked to see him as if a man from CID had come there. Someone inquired, 'who is he?' Ashamed, the leader said, "He is Mr. Gandhi, the chairperson of our programme!" The word spread out. People sitting in the hall came to know that the chairperson was working in the kitchen.

Some people said, "Should the guest be asked to do such chores? This is shameful!". The revolutionaries were amazed with Gandhiji's behaviour. Quickly they went to him and asked to stop working. Gandhiji replied, "Wait, let me first finish the job." Then the food was served. Gandhiji helped in serving the food and then delivered a soulful address.

## 08. Such a Washerman

The Indian community in South Africa had started agitating under Gandhiji's leadership. People were sent to jail in large numbers. Many of them had left behind their families unattended. Such people were looked after at Gandhiji's Tolstoy farm. After being released from jail, Gandhiji had a lot of work to do. Still he would make it a point to visit the women from those families and assure them. Many a times he would help them in their domestic chores. Once he went to the river to wash his clothes. He saw the mothers of children toiling there and went to them. He told those mothers, "Today I will wash all your cloths. The river is far

away and you have to look after the children too. Give me their soiled cloths also.” Overcome with affection and hesitation, the women said, “How can we ask Gandhibhai to wash our clothes? We will wash them ourselves.” But Gandhiji was not going to listen to them. He insisted on washing their clothes. The women felt very uneasy.

But Gandhiji’s affection and insistence won. He stowed the clothes into a stack and heaving it on his back went to the river. He washed the clothes carefully and dried them on the river bank. Folding them neatly, he came to the farm and distributed them. Those gentle ladies might have considered themselves blessed wearing the clothes washed by such a great washerman.

### **09. Poverty Makes You Shiver**

It was freezing cold in Delhi. At that time Gandhiji was staying in Birla Bhavan. Before the morning prayers, he would wash his face with freezing cold water. Anybody watching him would think that he would better use warm water. He would decline it if someone suggested so. He would say, “Why burden someone to warm the water?”

In that winter, finishing the morning prayers, he saw a big heap of used postal envelopes. He took the scissors and started cutting them neatly. He made a writing pad from those papers. He couldn’t tolerate the wastage of paper in a poor country like ours. While cutting the envelopes, his hands started shivering with cold. To dissuade him from doing it in that cold weather someone said, “Bapuji, you are shivering with cold.” Bapuji replied, “No, I am not shivering with cold. This natural cold is beneficial for the body. But the thought of our countrymen and their poverty does make me shiver,” and he continued cutting the envelopes.

### **Mili Graham Pollack**

### **10. Johannesburg Meeting and a Young Man with Knife**

Once in Johannesburg, the Indian people and their supporters arranged a meeting. The hall was over-crowded. Not a single inch was left empty. People were standing in the lobby, in the door and outside. Gandhiji was the chief orator. Wherever he went, people came in large numbers to listen to him.

The meeting came to an end. Gandhiji stepped down the dais. He talked to some people and then both of us went out. When we were going out I saw a man standing in the dark. Gandhiji might have also seen him, for he directly went to

him. He talked to him. He was disturbed for a while, and then he started walking along with him. I was also keeping pace with them. We crossed a lane. I could not hear what they were talking about because they were whispering.

At the end of the lane the man handed over something to Gandhiji and went away. It made him uneasy. When the man left, I asked, "What did he want? Did he want anything special?"

Gandhiji replied calmly, "Yes, he wanted to kill me!" "Kill you?" I was shocked. "It's horrible! Was he out of his mind?" "No, he thinks that I am deceiving people. Teaming with the government I am going to harm Indians and yet I call myself their leader." "But it's cruel to think so," I said rather loudly. "You should have handed him over to the police. Why did you let him go? He must be mad." Gandhiji said, "No, he is not mad, but he has misunderstandings. You saw that after I talked to him, he gave me this knife and went away. He had brought it to attack me." "What if he had attacked you?" Intervening me Gandhiji said, "Don't worry. He wished to kill me but he dared not do so. If I were not good enough as he thinks, I would better die. But there's nothing to worry about now. The incident is over. If I had handed him over to the police, he would have become my enemy, but he is my friend now."

## 11. Status of a Woman

We usually used to debate about something or the other. Once we were discussing about the status of women. Gandhiji said, "Women's status in the East is higher and more respectable than that in the West." I said, "I don't agree with you. East had made her dependent on men. It seems that she has no personal life." "You are mistaken," Gandhiji said, "In the East a woman is worshipped." I said, "I don't feel so. On the contrary, it seems to me that she struggles to satisfy men's desires."

"In many a walks of life, she goes along with them and sometime she even surpasses them. Though she might be doing them some petty favours occasionally." I asked him, "How can you say that men regard women as their equals even though it's customary here that men rest in a chair and the women stand behind them in attendance."

Smiling a bit, Gandhiji said, "It's true that men have not yet reached that standard, but almost all men are aware of that."

## Umashankar Joshi

### 12. An Attitude for Saving.

Shankarlalbai used to wash Gandhiji's clothes in Yerwada Jail. Once Gandhiji told him, "Don't wash my clothes. I will wash them myself." Shankarlalbai thought that he might not have washed them properly, so he asked him about it. Gandhiji said, "You wash them properly. But I feel that soap is being used extravagantly. I would use this much soap for many more days."

Shankarlalbai assured him, "Now I would use it thriftily." He used to think that although more soap was used but the clothes were washed quite clean. Now he had come to know how to be thrifty. One morning, Gandhiji said to him, "Shankarlal, don't light the stove. Don't heat the water." "Why?" Shankarlal asked. Gandhiji told him, "The petromax is lit all night long. I think that we can put a pot of water on it so that it will be warmed till morning." The experiment was successful. Gandhiji got warm water to drink. Shankarlal felt sorry. He thought Gandhiji was doing this to save him the trouble of lighting the stove. He said, "Perhaps you are not satisfied with me." Gandhiji replied, "No, you were doing your job perfectly, but this is an experiment. We tried to heat water on petromax and were successful. We were able to save some coal. No need to be sorry about it!"

### 13. The King's Hospitality

Bapuji had been to London for the round table conference in 1931. King George V had arranged a banquet for about hundred citizens. The Secretary of State for Indian (Minister) Sir Samuel Hoare was confused about sending an invitation to Gandhiji. He thought, would the King prefer to meet such a revolutionary? Secondly, even if he did so, would Gandhiji be dressed properly for the function? Samuel thought it proper to consult the King. At first, the King gave way to his ill feelings and said, "Do you think that I should invite that *fakir* to my place even after his attacks on my officers?" A few minutes later he again expressed disgust about 'that' *naked, improperly dressed ordinary fellow*. Finally it was decided that he would be invited without warning him about the dress code.

The Secretary of State for India took it upon himself to present Gandhiji to the King at an opportune time during the function. He helped them meet. It was impossible for the King to forget Gandhiji's rebellion. For the past one year, he had been leading the revolution. But they started conversing. It went on smoothly. The King was kind hearted and Gandhiji knew the etiquettes. In the midst of the conversation, the King eyed Gandhiji's short dhoti (pancha). The minister's heartbeats grew faster.

The conversation was about to end. George V knew his responsibility. But he warned Gandhiji while leaving, “Remember Mr. Gandhi, I won’t tolerate an onslaught on my empire.” The Minister held his breath! He thought that a debate would flare up but Gandhiji was discreet enough to save the scene. He said, “After enjoying His Highness’s hospitality, I don’t see it fit to ensue a political discussion.” Then they bid a friendly good-bye to each other. The Secretary of State heaved a sigh of relief.

#### **14. Do I Dare Drink It?**

In the summer of 1947, Bihar was facing severe communal riots. To calm it down, Bapu had come to Delhi. His appetite had slowed down in those days. One morning Manu brought a glass of mango juice for him. Bapu asked her, “Just inquire about the price of these mangoes.”

Manu thought that Bapu was simply joking. She got busy copying the papers. After a while she saw that Bapu did not drink the juice. She again asked him to take it. Bapu said, “I thought you would ask the price and come back immediately. Even though they were sent as a gift, you should have asked the price before giving the juice to me. You didn’t do that. You didn’t even give me a reply. I have heard that a mango costs ten annas approximately. I can survive without eating them. It won’t improve my blood count. Instead it would lower it. In these days of inflation and sorrow, you offered me the juice of four mangoes. It means that it cost two and a half rupees. Should I dare drink that juice? At the same time two destitute women came to greet Bapu, along with their children. Bapuji instantly divided the juice into two portions and gave them to those children. He felt relieved. He told Manu, “This instance proves that God helps! God sent those children to me. Those children were as I had expected them to be. God is great!”

#### **15. The Mother of the Poor**

Bapu was at Sevagram and Kasturba was supposed to come there shortly. People inquired about her arrival, time and again. When would Ba come? By which train would she come? Ba had gone to Surat. She would have to go to Bombay and then come to Wardha. But it was rather a longer route and costly too. Catching Tapti-valley train from Surat and coming via Bhusawal would cost less.

A lady had especially come to see Ba and was awaiting her eagerly. It was time for a train from Bombay. She asked, “Will Ba come by this train?” Bapu replied, “If she is rich people’s Ba, she will come by this train, But if she is poor people’s Ba then she will catch ‘Tapti-valley’ and will reach till morning.” The poor people’s

Ba indeed reached there next morning. Horace Gundry Alexander wrote about this unique couple, “Whether Ba and Bapu were together at one place or in adjacent rooms, they conversed very little. But it always gave you the feeling that they knew each other to the core of their hearts.”

## 16. Half Anna Worth Lakhs of Rupees

Bapuji was raising funds in Orrisa for the Khadi project. He was in a meeting when a very old woman came to see him. All her hair was grey and she had a hump back. She had to struggle with the volunteers before she could reach Gandhiji. “I wanted to see you,” she said and taking a half anna coin from her waist-band kept it at Gandhiji’s feet and left patiently. Gandhiji quickly picked up the coin and kept it with himself. Jamnalal Bajaj, who aptly looked after the accounts, was sitting nearby.

He said, “Give me the coin, Bapu.” Gandhiji said, “No, I can’t give it to you.” “I handle Charkha Sangh’s all the cheques worth thousands of rupees and yet you won’t trust me with this petty coin?” retorted Jamnalalji. Gandhiji replied, “This half anna coin is worth lakhs of rupees. If a person having lakhs of rupees gives a thousand rupees to someone there’s nothing extraordinary about it. But this coin from the poor old lady is worth millions of rupees. Just imagine how generous she might be!”

## 17. Hit Me on the Head, First

The All India Conference was going on at Nagpur. Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai, along with others, were discussing in his cottage. Outside the cottage, a Marwari couple was having a brawl with the volunteers for a chance to meet Gandhiji. At last Vallabhbhai asked the volunteers to send in whosoever it was. At the same time a volunteer came running and informed about some mishap at the Bengal camp. Gandhiji, who had just finished shaving, got up immediately. The sun was shining brightly. Bapu took a sheet of cloth lying nearby and set off.

The couple, which had struggled so hard to see Bapuji, kept staring at him. The woman held at the corner of his sheet and said, “Just wait, I want to talk to you.” Gandhiji, who was in a hurry to leave, dropped the sheet and left. Seeing this Vallabhbhai humoured, “On such occasions he would even throw his valet away and go there.” In that freezing cold Gandhiji went to the Bengal camp and witnessed an unexpected scene. At his own cost, Das Babu had brought 250 representatives from Calcutta to oppose Gandhiji’s proposal for non-cooperation. Banerji was supporting the proposal. Both their representatives were having a dispute. On reaching there Gandhiji stood upon a stool and asked the people other

than Bengalis to leave the place. Then he said to the Bengalis, “I am the cause of all this dispute. So, if at all you want to hit anyone, hit me on the head, first of all.” Within no time the brawl was calmed down. Gandhiji discussed things with Das Babu, then and there. As a result, Das Babu, who had initially opposed the proposal, himself put forth the proposal in the meeting!

### **18. Both of Us Kept Mum**

Ba came to meet Bapu in Yerawada jail. The meeting was arranged in the presence of the jailor. Ba and Bapu were inquiring about each other when the jailor thought that the two pious souls be left alone so that they could talk freely. So he moved away from them and kept walking to and fro. After a while he came back smiling.

He asked Bapuji, “Have you finished talking?” Gandhiji exclaimed, “Talking? We inquired about each other in your presence, but we didn’t utter a word after you left. The jailor asked, “Why?” Gandhiji told him, “You know the rules of the jail; the inmates cannot talk to the visitors in the absence of an officer. We inquired about each-other’s well-being while you were here, but kept mum after you left.”

### **19. Don’t Say Mahatma!**

A meeting was arranged at the Excelsior Theatre of Bombay. The meeting was called to find out a solution to the Malabar problems. Gandhiji attended the meeting. After Barrister Jaikar’s speech Gandhiji came to know that the meeting was called to solve the Malabar problem as well as to honour him. People belonging to various national parties came one by one and delivered speeches in his honour. Then it was Jamnadas Dwarkadas’ turn to speak.

It was obvious from his speech that it was an effort to prove him better than others in felicitating Gandhiji. Suddenly, someone from the crowd cried, “Not Gandhiji, say Mahatmaji!” Jamnadasji tried to appease him by saying, “Gandhiji himself doesn’t like to be called ‘Mahatma’, he told me so himself. I don’t want to hurt him.” He continued his speech. Again someone shouted from the crowd. Jamnadasji again explained politely. There were other speeches too. At last it was Gandhiji’s turn to address. Expressing his hurt he said, “A few of our friends have insulted Bhai Jamnadas and this assembly too. I had instructed Jamnadas not to say ‘Mahatma’. Many a useless things have been done in the name ‘Mahatma’. For me the word stinks. If someone insists on calling me ‘Mahatma’, it writhes me with pain. No matter how desperately I try to avoid it, it keeps sticking to me. Saying only ‘no’ to it doesn’t work. This is a forbidden word in the *Ashram*. Bhai Jamnadas said many nice things about me. Had he said, ‘There was no other

miserable man like Gandhi', no one among us would have the right to stop him." While Gandhiji was speaking, someone in the front balcony got up and greeted the assembly politely by putting his hands together for *Namaskar*. Gandhiji said, "That is enough, but there are two more persons! They too should be asked to be pardoned." Those two persons also got up and asked to be pardoned. Gandhiji was satisfied. He said, "I was hurt when you insulted Jamnadasji, but your polite request for forgiveness has transformed the sorrow into happiness. God will bless not only those who asked to be forgiven but those too who have witnessed this incident."

## Kaka Kalelkar

### 20. Memorising 'Gita'

Gandhiji had decided to memorise complete 'Bhagwad Gita' while he was in South Africa. There he used to write two or three *Shlokas* (couplets) from Gita on the wall and would memorise them while brushing his teeth. In Yerwada jail he had enough time on hand. So he decided to improve his pronunciation and learn the *shlokas* by heart. He said to me, "Kaka, I want to learn correct pronunciations of Gita. I have watched you teaching Gita to the children in the *Ashram*. Please stop me whenever I pronounce incorrectly. I would repeat it to improve the pronunciation. Don't think that I am 'great' or 'mahatma'. If such a thought would prevent you from correcting my pronunciation, it would be sinful on your part. Treat me like a pupil and keep correcting me unless I don't memorise it flawlessly." Whenever I pointed to an error, Gandhiji would mark it with a pencil and read it repeatedly. It is the natural way of learning a line or a word. Pupils learn the pronunciations and a way of reciting by this method only.

### 21. Returned Forty Thousand Rupees

The *Ashram* had just started in those days. An astrologer named Girija Shankar Joshi used to visit Gandhiji very often. Once Bapuji said to him, "Since you come here regularly, why don't you teach Sanskrit to the children here?" He agreed to do so.

He was an astrologer. A lot of rich people in Ahmedabad trusted his knowledge of astrology. A person named Somalal wished to offer charity to Gandhiji. He sent forty thousand rupees with Joshi for building a school there.

Building a house was being planned when influenza broke out there. Nearly sixteen hundred people would die every day. It caused havoc. Bapuji told Joshi, "We won't be able to build the house this year, neither the school building. So we

would better send back the money Somalalbai has donated.” Joshi said, “But he hasn’t asked it back.” Bapu said, “So what? The purpose for which he has given the money is not going to be served in near future. Then why keep the money with ourselves?” Joshi replied, “If not now, we would be building it some time later! This money would be useful then.” Gandhiji said, “Yes, but there would be some donor when it would be built. We should send the money back.” Joshi explained the matter to Somalalbai. He said, “I have donated the money for good. I won’t take it back!”

## 22. For Saving Untouchability

In 1921, Gujrat University was found in Ahmedabad. A meeting was called for the members of the management board. Mr. Andrews was one of the board members. During the meeting he asked, “Are the *harijans* being admitted to the university or not?” I replied instantly, “Of course they are!” But some of the board members had a different opinion. They were not in favour of abolishing untouchability.

Even others also started giving excuses. This issue could not be resolved that day. At last, the matter was taken to Gandhiji. He too gave the same answer as I had. The issue set a debate all over Gujarat. Many a rich Vaishnav men from Bombay came to see Gandhiji. They said to him, “Educating the nation is a religious deed. We will donate whatever amount of money you need but you would better leave aside the issue of untouchables. We cannot accept it.” Those people were going to donate five to seven lakh rupees.

Bapuji told them firmly, “Let us forget about the donations for a while. If someone would offer me freedom for India at the cost of observing untouchability, I won’t accept it. The issue of university funds is negligible compared to it!”

## 23. Rules of Religious War

All his life Bapu had to overcome a lot of hurdles. Perhaps he was born for it. Still he didn’t have grudges for anyone. In South Africa, a delegation of his opponent Indian people went to see General Schmutz. But none of them had neither knowledge nor linguistic proficiency to impress him. At last they requested Gandhiji himself to represent them.

Gandhiji accepted the responsibility and did the job satisfactorily! This incident not only proved his friendliness but it caused to grow his respect for those Indian people, who acknowledged their opponent’s calibre and trusted him totally. Owing to his openheartedness, Gandhiji had turned foes into friends. He taught

gentleness to so many. Whenever he saw deceit and conspiracy, he preached the need to learn the rules of religious war.

## 24. Stern Discipline

Once I got into a fix. Whatever Bapuji did, whether it was eating or anything else, everything had to be done properly. One 'ser' (equivalent of 1 kg.) raisins were bought from the market. Bapuji said, "This should last for eight days. Count it divide it into eight equal portions so as to know how much be used everyday." I do remember that it came to twenty raisins a day. I thought that it would be insufficient, but I also knew that it was no use talking to him about it. So I started picking up twenty bigger ones and gave him every day. But they were over in a few days. Now Bapuji's permission had to sought before increasing the number of raisins. I told him, "The bigger raisins have been consumed and the smaller ones would not provide enough nutrition. We would better increase their number." I knew that he would be angry and upset too. I expected so but the things turned rather serious. Gandhiji demanded an explanation as to why I did so and said, "Now I will have to assign this chore to someone else." But it was a jail, not the Ashram to delegate the job to anyone else. If I was not allowed to do it, he would do it himself. Although I am not soft hearted yet I wept a lot on that day. Bapuji too was sorry about it and the job was left to me again. Then for the rest of the days I would give him twenty raisins only however small they might be.

## 25. A Representative of Sin

Gandhiji's satyagrah (non-violent resistance) was governed by specific regulations. Excercising it without established rules was considered foul, a forced act. In the last twenty years (after 1950) nobody has presented an ideal for real 'satyagrah'. As a result it turned into 'Hatyagrah' (massacre). It will either enervate the government legally or there will be mayhem. Gandhiji had labeled the Chourichoura massacre as a 'national sin' and had started fasting for its atonement. Many a people came to Gandhiji at that time to assure him that people knew that he worshipped non-violence. Nobody would dare hold him responsible for it. Then why consider him responsible for their sins? Gandhiji answered, "I consider myself a representative of India by heart. I am a servant representative of India. There are righteous as well as sinful people here. I represent all of them. The violence committed by anyone in the country is my responsibility. If I don't regret on their behalf it will be shameful for me." This is why the nation called him '*Rashtrapita*' (The Father of the Nation).

## 26. Spare Time and Breakfast

Bapu returned from South Africa to India via Europe. I was at Shantiniketan then. Some of the residents of Bapu's Phoenix *Ashram* were also staying there as guests. I used to read the newspaper hence I knew the latest news about our people in South Africa.

I knew about Gandhiji's Phoenix Ashram too and perhaps its inmates had also heard about me. I got friendly with those people. We attended the morning and evening prayers together, and the dinner too. The Ashram inmates would toil there for an hour each morning. The Shantiniketan people had entrusted a job to them.

There was a pond and a hill nearby. The job was to dig the hill and to fill up the pond with the soil. We were more than ten people who did the work quite enthusiastically, everyday. When Bapuji arrived at Shantiniketan both of us kept talking about things till late in the night. In the morning we set out to work after the prayer. On return we found that our breakfast and fruits were laid meticulously in the dishes!! All of us had been out to work. Then who took the efforts to do all that? I asked Bapu, "Who did this?" He said, "I did it, why?" Embarrassed by his answer I said, "Why did you do it? It makes me uneasy that you would do all this and we would eat it like a sponger." He simply asked, "Why, what's wrong with it?"

I said, "Shouldn't we deserve to be served by you like this?"

I was not prepared for Bapu's answer to this; it was utterly unexpected. (In those days I used to talk to him in English). I said, "We must deserve it." He simply exclaimed, "Which is a fact!" Amazed, I kept looking at him. He said smiling at me, "You all went to the work and would return there again after the breakfast. I had some time to spare, that is why I did it to save your time. Haven't you earned the ability to get readymade breakfast after toiling for an hour?"

## 27. A Political Prisoner

Gandhiji set about the *Salt Satyagrah* and got into jail in 1930. The government detained him at Yerawada jail as a political prisoner. The government chose me to accompany him and I was transferred there from Sabarmati jail. I stayed there with Gandhiji for about five months. He was in Yerawada jail nearly for eight months. Owing to a dispute with the government he stopped allowing visitors. Each week he would send a lot of letters to people. He wrote hundreds of letters in those days. All the while he would be busy spinning the cotton and thinking

about possibilities of improvement in it. He would be immersed in spinning cotton on his spinning wheel. The rhythmic sound of his spinning wheel would give the feeling of listening to the *Shlokas* (verses) of *Mahabharata*, written in 'Anushtubh' metre. It seemed very sweet and elegant. During those days in the jail he made various kinds of spindles from earthen roof-tiles, pieces of broken earthen pots and bamboo. He had received so many types of spinning wheels too, like 'Jeev Chakra', 'Gandiv', 'Bardoli Chakra' and the 'Villager's Chakra' etc.

He studied all those spinning wheels to assess their positive and negative aspects and then developed a beautiful spinning wheel called the 'Yerawada Chakra'. He had asked the carding instrument to be brought to his room even before he reached the prison. He used to card the cotton on it and make fine cotton wads for spinning. He used to make the spindles or spinning wheels, card the cotton, make fine cotton wads, spin the yarn, make spools, sew the caps, etc with absolute concentration. In spite of being in jail himself, he thought and cared about his countrymen and their families. He showed deep interest in the personal and domestic life of those who sent him letters. He would offer them proper counsel with a holistic view of their physical, emotional and spiritual health.

## 28. A Versatile Player

Bapuji's colleagues came from different walks of life but never did he complain about it. A real player is one who makes the best use of the cards in his hand. He never complains about the lower cards he gets. Instead, he says, "Whatever be my cards, I will play with them. I won't quit!" In his entire life he never complained to God for giving him those colleagues or said, "Why was I born in such a country?"

He made the best use of whatever came his way. He had a wonderful knack for it. There were various types of people around him. He handled them properly. He had various jobs done by deputing them to these people. But while doing all this he used to be vigilant about being truthful, always. This was no little achievement.

## 29. Service of the Nation

The era we are living in will be known as 'the Gandhian Era' for at least a thousand years. All his life Gandhiji followed the tradition of humanitarianism propounded by the *Saints and Paigambers*. The inspiration, the conviction and the teachings offered by him to the humanity will require at least a thousand years of prowess to imbibe it into our lives and spread it in the world.

In the beginning of 1915 Gandhiji returned from South Africa to be settled in India for good. In 1920, he assumed the reins of the freedom struggle and initiated a powerful movement in the country. Then after ten years, he accepted the goal of absolute freedom in Lahore Congress and started the *Salt Satyagrah* movement to achieve it. Then exactly after twelve years he asked the British government to quit India. It took five years of struggle to free India. Gandhiji's amazing and heroic service of the nation thus went on for thirty-six long years and finally paid off. The history of these years has reflected in the lives, the words and the attitude of many national leaders like Gandhiji. But those, small and great alike, who had been a part of it for more than three decades, who had studied the attitude and the inspiration behind it, should take upon themselves to recollect and write down the reminiscences of those days.

A variety of literature is required to know Gandhiji in depth. Mahadevbhai's diaries and weekly letters would be very important means to portray Gandhiji's life. All the details of the minor or big incidents should be brought to people's notice.

### 30. Worshipping Truthfulness

Those were the days when the *Ashram* was being founded. We were residing at the Kochrab bungalow. Teacher Dhondo Keshav Karve had come to Ahmedabad to collect funds for his institution. He came to the Ashram to see Bapu. Bapu asked the inmates of the Ashram to gather and to offer salutation by prostrating in front of him (Sashtang Pranipat). He said, "When Gokhaleji had come to South Africa, I asked him, who are the honest people in your region? He said, "I can't include my name in the list. I try very hard to be truthful but in politics you have to lie on some occasions. But I know three persons who are genuinely honest. One is the teacher Karve, second Shankarrao Lawate (who worked for prohibition all his life.) and the third..." and he stopped. Then said, "These staunch followers of truth are to be respected by us." The motive behind the foundation of this *Ashram* is the worship of truth. Having such a follower of truth in the *Ashram* makes it a very auspicious day for us." Karve almost choked with vehement emotions; he couldn't say anything. He simply said to Gandhiji, "Bapu, you have been extremely gentle with me. Do I stand comparison with you?"

### 31. Orthodox Yet Reformer

When Bapuji returned from South Africa, he had neither the lock of hair on the top of his head (kept after tonsure) nor did he wear the sacred thread. At the time of 'Kumbhmela' (an assemblage of religious minded people at the pilgrimage, after every twelve years) a *Sadhu* (a holy man) persistently asked

Bapu to have both of them. Bapu agreed to keep the lock of hair but declined to wear the sacred thread. Telling me about this incident, he said, “Although I am a staunch Hindu myself I want to introduce so many reforms in Hindu society. If required I would even set about a hunger strike against this society. That would be the only way to reform it. So I would better abide by their traditions and keep them happy until then. Nothing can be achieved by refusing a trivial thing like keeping a lock of hair. But regarding the sacred thread, he said, “We have unnecessarily made a number of compartments in Hindu society. We divided it into pieces. Some of the people have the right to wear the sacred thread and some don’t have it. This divide is unaccounted for.” Gandhiji was a great reformer but basically he was a ‘baniya’(a tradesman by caste). That is why he called himself orthodox, but accepted the profession of a reformer.

### **32. From Sabarmati to Yerawada**

Gandhiji never thought of my transfer from Sabarmati to Yerawada, and if someone had asked me, I too would have said ‘no’! Although I was at the Ashram right from the beginning, I was never among those who looked after him closely. I did not know the minute details of his requirements. Secondly, I have never done anything meticulously in my life. Hence, I never felt that I could look after him properly. Although, it was a rare opportunity to be with him in the jail, yet fearing that Bapu would not be satisfied with my service, I would have said ‘no’. Bapuji thought, “Kaka has settled well in Sabarmati jail. He teaches a lot of political prisoners there. He is rather running a college there with the help of a number of scholars. It would be improper to disturb him.”

Inspector General of Prisons Colonel Durdle knew me well. He was just transferred from Armed Forces as Jail Superintendent when I was sent to Sabarmati jail. We had known each other for over six months and had cordial relations. So he chose me. I was brought to Yerawada jail in spite of Gandhiji’s unwillingness. I was sent to the European ward where Bapuji was kept. I was happy to see him. In fact, I was close to tears but I recovered myself and touched his feet.

### **33. Reading in Jail**

In 1921-22 Bapuji was sent to Indian jail at Yerawada, for the first time. During his stay there he had asked for a lot of books from the jail library and read them. He liked two of them especially, ‘The Seekers After God’ and Sir Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Jungle book’. He asked me to read them this time. Fortunately, this jail library had both of them. ‘Seekers After God’ contains three elaborate essays about the life of three Romans, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. During those initial days of the sentence I had sent him the book ‘Decline And Fall Of The Roman

Empire’, and Bapuji remembered it. He told me, ‘Seekers After God’ contains the essence of Gibbon. A person like you must read it.’ During those few months Gandhiji got a lot of books. I still remember him reading two of them.

One of them was Upton Sinclair’s ‘Goose steps’. In that book he had described, with instances, the decaying education system in contemporary America. Another was an inspirational book ‘Midstream’, which was the biography of blind Helen Keller. Bapuji had formerly read the story of her early life, ‘The Story of My Life’ and had praised it too. So, while in the jail, I read ‘Midstream’ first and after my release I read ‘The Story Of My Life’. Shri Bhagwanbhai Desai has translated it into Gujarati as ‘Apangani Pratibha’. My favourite pastime in the jail was doing errands for Bapuji and discussion with him various topics. Doing errands also consumed a lot of time. The ones I enjoyed most were washing the dishes, keeping them in place, making his bed, arranging his things properly, giving him whatever he needed, cooking food for him, making preparations for carding and spinning the yarn, reading letters to him etc. The day would be over doing all these things. The remaining time would be utilised for reading.

### **34. Limping Dattoba**

I entered Yerawada jail and noticed that an ordinary prisoner named Dattoba was assigned the duty of cooking food for Bapu. The poor fellow was suffering from arthritis. He used to limp while walking. He was an introvert but performed his duty perfectly well. He was assigned the jobs like heating water for Bapuji, folding his clothes, warming milk for him and likewise.

Bapuji saw him limping and asked me to enquire about it. The next morning he asked the Jail Superintendent, Major Martin, “If you would permit me, I wish to offer him naturopathic treatment. The doctor in the jail has treated him for six months to no avail.” Major Martin said, “I won’t object, you may treat him.” Bapuji told him, “I will let him keep fast for a few days. Then I will put him on a strict regimen.” Dattoba never had anyone taking so much interest in his well being. He agreed to the treatment. Nevertheless all this surprised him. Bapuji would ask him to come everyday. He would change his diet according to the changes in his condition. He was completely cured in a few days. A limping Dattoba could run now. No wonder Dattoba started serving Bapuji with more reverence. I was the first to be released from the jail, then Bapuji and Dattaji in the last, after completion of his sentence. After a considerable lapse of time Bapuji came to Bombay at Mani Bhavan. I went there to see him. Unexpectedly Dattaji too came to see Bapu. I took him to Bapu. Bapu asked him affectionately, “What is your occupation these days?” He told Bapu that he had set a very small restaurant near Fort. Bapu was quite busy that day. He said, “Dattoba, I am busy

today. Do come tomorrow, we will meet then.” He said ‘yes’ and went away but he never came back. Bapuji regretted a lot. He said, “I wished to give him some money for his business. The poor man has to toil hard to earn his livelihood. How could he come twice to see me? I should have offered him money then only.” I thought a lot about it but it was very difficult to find Dattoba in a crowded city like Bombay!

### **35. King Alfred**

Gandhiji always insisted that everyone should learn the language spoken in the neighbouring region. When I was appointed in the Ashram School, Gandhiji included Marathi in the school syllabus along with Gujarati, Hindi and Sanskrit. Once he told me, “I learned Tamil in South Africa so that I could serve the ‘Girmits’. How can we do without knowing Marathi, here in Bombay region?” He got the opportunity to learn Marathi in Yerawada jail. He asked me to help him. We got a few textbooks from the library for the general prisoners. We started with them. Bapu used to read and I would explain the meaning. Whenever he fumbled, he would immediately ask the meaning. He would allot a few minutes for Marathi, everyday. Once in a lesson, a poem by Ramdas from ‘Dasbodh’ had a few lines about handwriting. Bapuji loved them. He wrote them and read them many a times. He asked the meaning whenever he couldn’t grasp; yet it did not satisfy him. At last he wrote down the complete lesson and sent it to the weekly of his Ashram. He instructed that all the inmates of the Ashram should read it seriously. His own handwriting was not at all good. That is why he cared for good handwriting. While learning Marathi he came across a lesson named ‘Alfred the Great’. After loosing a battle, this King of England was leading the life of a recluse, with an old woman. Once, the old woman asked him to bake bread. While doing it he became so engrossed in his thoughts that the bread was burned. The old woman reproached him for that. We read the lesson together. After that whenever I committed a mistake or forgot something, Bapuji would call me ‘King Alfred’.

### **36. The Departure**

However enthusiastic a person might be about going to jail, he exhales a sigh of relief as the day for his release closes in. But I felt contradictory to it this time. Being prisoners we didn’t have a free will to go out of the prison whenever we wished. But I didn’t wish to be released since here I had the opportunity to stay with Bapu. Although the rules and regulations of this prison were very strict, they did not matter to me due to Bapu’s company. For more than five months, I felt as if I was staying at home and that someone was dragging me out of it now. I spent the remaining days in a depressed condition. At last, the moment of release

came. I packed my things off and sent them to the jailor's office. I finished the morning chores and got ready to go.

Bapuji affectionately gave me some instructions. He said, "You are going out in the hustle and bustle of the outside world after the seclusion of so many days. You might get excited. On your first day outside, eat a little. Meet everybody but don't keep awake till late." I bent down to touch his feet. He patted me on the back; it had both his love and blessings. On that day I experienced the agony of separation! I was fortunate to have the opportunity of living with Bapuji for so many days. But I wasn't fortunate enough to get such a chance either before or after that. It was an exceptionally rare companionship!!!

**Jugatram Dave**

### **37. The Life at Ashram**

There was a hostel in the Ashram. Pupils from many countries came to study there. Some of them would try to learn spinning, some would learn weaving, or carding or some of them would learn to make 'charkha' in the workshop or some would come merely to study. The Ashram had a kindergarten too but there was no special teacher for it. The female inmates there used to run it. The ashram had a beautiful 'Goshala'(a cow pen). It had cows of various breeds. A small tannery was also there. The jobs like skinning the dead animals, tanning the skin, making chappals' (leather slippers) and shoes from it,were carried out there. Using the butchered animal's skin in anyway was strictly prohibited there. The Ashram inmates used the footwear made from the skin acquired in a non-violent way.

The Ashram had its farms too. All kinds of fruit bearing trees were there. Vegetables were also grown there. The farms yielded the grains and cotton. No labourers were engaged to work there. The chores were distributed among the inmates. They would work in the kitchen, on the farm, store water, clean the utensils, clean cowdung in the cowpens, clean the toilets, etc. The life at the Ashram was exactly like a beehive, busy at every moment. That is why Gandhiji called it 'Udyog Mandir' - a temple of work, and it was quite appropriate too!

### **38. Navjeevan - A New Life**

Gandhiji had then settled well in the Ashram. He thought of publishing a weekly named 'Navjeevan'. Its first issue was published on 7/9/1919. He had purchased a small printing press at Ahmedabad. Its workload started growing day by day. The people employed to work there were not sufficient for the amount of work they had. Gandhiji remembered Swami Anand and sent for him. He could do all kinds

of printing jobs. Gandhiji knew for sure that he could do this job. Gandhiji handed over 'Navjeevan' to him. Swami Anand took the reins of 'Navjeevan' at the end of 1919 and then during the next few months he sent for me.

It was 1919-1920. Gandhiji had already informed the government about the proposed peaceful protest against law, and about the strike and hunger strike. Now 'Navjeevan' press started publishing his writeups and articles. The eight pages of the weekly were stretched to 12-16 pages.

The press was run in a very small place in the narrow Chudi Lane. There always used to be hustle and bustle in that place. There would be on order to print new pages even before the typeset was drawn out. Many a times Gandhiji would write with a pencil and it used to be very challenging to read it. The machine operator, the compositors, the proofreaders, all would work day and night. There would be a competition of keeping awake, but Swami Anand would always supersede all of them. He would not sleep for three consecutive nights and yet would be ready to read the proofs the next morning! Gandhiji continued the stream of his brilliantly resplendent articles in 'Navjeevan' and 'Young India'. The Chudi-lane printing press was too small for it. Swamiji sought out a big house near Sarangpur. Maulana Mohmed Ali donated his printing machinery to Gandhiji. It was set-up in the new house.

## Shahnawaz Khan

### 39. The Words Will Resound Forever

The war for the independence of the country was being fought from outside, under the command of Netaji Subhashchandra Bose. I was an ordinary soldier in his army. We faced the British force with weapons but could not succeed in the battlefield.

After I was released from the Red Fort, I got an opportunity to stay with Gandhiji for more than a year... I watched him very closely. I experienced that he staunchly practiced his principles of truth and nonviolence, all his life. He firmly believed that to gain something noble, the efforts made for achieving it should also be noble and honest. He would dare risk anything for his principles. He would fearlessly raise his voice against violence and tyranny, anywhere. In Noakhali, he went to every place which was outraged.

He visited to village after village. He witnessed the signs of monstrous acts wherever he went. He saw villages engulfed by fire and the frightened people who had lost everything. Looking at them one could discern their doubts about the security of their future, but a glance at Gandhiji's countenance would revive a smile on their aggrieved faces. They would say unhesitantly that Bapu will put

everything right. Nobody can harm us now. Fearlessness would surround them. I had watched the same thing happening in Bihar too. I feel that they would not have felt so secure even if the biggest of the forces was sent to defend them. Gandhiji's arrival assured them totally.

I always wondered where did his strength come from? How did he encourage those devastated and suppressed people to be brave? How could he face the tyrant army alone and overcome it too? No doubt it was the power of truth and non-violence, which the tyranny, injustice and violence could not stand. Wherever he went, he would ask people to be brave.

The bravery helped the people get rid of the fear of death forever. I have seen the soldiers being brave in the battlefield, but this was a different kind of bravery Mahatmaji was teaching them. He asked the people not to be afraid of death while facing the tyranny and injustice and to refrain from killing anyone. This was the supreme kind of bravery, I suppose.

I vividly remember that day in January 1948. He had set about an indefinite fast to put an end to the brutality and violence going on at Delhi. One day, I called on him with some of my friends. He seemed in a joyous mood. Smiling at us, he said, "I am very happy today, because even now I am struggling against injustice and tyranny. I haven't given up yet." His condition became critical on the fourth day of the fast. The doctors Warned that if he didn't give up the fast within twelve hours, it would be fatal for him. This panicked the people around him and they started convincing him to give up the fast. He sent for me in the evening and said, "Shahnawaz, you are Netaji's soldier. You have been associated with me for more than a year now. Don't cheat, tell me sincerely has the injustice and cruelty going on in Delhi stopped? I said, "No. The people outside are shouting slogans, 'let Gandhi die'." There came a smile on his face as soon as I said this. The words he uttered then were simply great. He said, "If Gandhi's principles die, consider him dead although alive, but if his principles remain alive after his death, be sure that Gandhi will live forever!!!

**Ravishankar Maharaj**

#### **40. Avail Whatever You Have**

Once a few youngsters came to me. During the conversation they said, "Maharaj, we want to eat eggs. What do you say?" What was I going to say? I said instantly, "Friends, why do you ask me? You should rather ask the one who lays them. He said, "But Dada, what if we eat lifeless eggs?" "Tell me one thing, is there any need to eat them?" I asked them. One of them exclaimed, " Why? Eggs are full of vitamins and proteins!" "Why don't you first avail the vitamins you have? Tell me

if they are not sufficient!” I remembered an incident about Gandhiji and I told them about it. Gandhiji was an avid researcher. He would do a lot of experiments. His life itself was an experiment. Once it came to his mind that if man would get used to eating raw food, it would save him a lot of time and he can gain energy from minimum amount of food. Decided! He started experimenting on himself. It was his specialty. I too liked the idea and joined him. All went on smoothly until Bapu had diarrhea!

Once I went to his room to fetch something. He called me and asked, “Are you still experimenting? Have you lost some weight?” I said, “Yes, I must have lost about a quarter ‘ser’.” “And what about energy?” “I feel it has lessened too.” He asked me, “What do you do these days?” I told him about the jobs entrusted to me. He asked, “Do you handle all these things?” I said, “Yes, I have no problem in handling them.” He again said, “And still you say that you feel less energetic?” I didn’t know what to say to this ‘Baniya’(a grocer). But Bapuji’s comments thereafter left an everlasting impression on me.

He said, “Do you know that if you have more energy in your body than it requires, it leads to a number of disorders. This has to be understood. That is why you should have only that much energy as you require to do your jobs. Surplus energy is not beneficial. Rather, it leads your mind and senses to perversion.

## Ramnarayan Pathak

### 41. Coordination of Contradicting Forces

Gandhiji had a wonderful coordination of a number of contradictory forces within his personality. In spite of being a revolutionary he defers antiquity. He is soft yet stubborn. He is insistent yet liberal also. He is loving as well as dreadful. That is why his words would be extremely penetrating many a times. Once he said, “Instead of having this country in such a pitiful condition, I would rather have it vanished from this earth!”

On some other occasion he said, “If woman is going to be men’s slave for ever, I would prefer the human race to have no lineage.” If a countrywide ‘Satyagrah’ is called upon and thousands of youngsters have to suffer and die, I am sure he wouldn’t shed a single tear for it. To me he seems to possess a mysterious natural power, rather than being an ordinary human being. The nature, which nurtures extremely microorganisms, creates typhoons also for unknown reasons, creates crevices in the mountains and also devastates the countries altogether. Just like nature Gandhiji can also serve the lowly people as well as can accept the destruction of thousands of people. The nature kills a lot of people to set an example. Gandhiji can give up anything to prove the truth. Although he is very

simple and straightforward because of the energies springing from the depth of his soul, he appears to me mysterious, incomprehensible, obscure and irresistible, just like nature.

## **Shankarlal Banker**

### **42. A Versatile Diplomat**

Mohmed Ali Jinnah was the chief of Home Rule League's Bombay branch and I was the secretary. He used to be very friendly with me. I had been in jail with Gandhiji for about a year. Hence it was but natural that he would enquire about Gandhiji. His monk like life style had impressed me deeply and I had so much to talk about him. But Jinnah fancied him differently. He said to me, "You don't know him. He is a great revolutionary but he is a greater diplomat too. See how cleverly he is leading the struggle with this government. First he establishes a fellowship with the people and then tries to eliminate their sorrow.

He gathers strength by setting about the movement and then keeps the struggle going. While the struggle is on its prime, something goes amiss; then he steps in to appease the people as well as the government and establishes peace. After a lapse of time, he again finds something to start the agitation. He sets about the struggle, stops it, and again flares it up. He teaches people how to continue the struggle. The government has the power and the people don't have enough strength. That is why Gandhiji continually sets about the movement, holds it back and then lets it flare up again, so as to train the people for the struggle. He is not a monk like you think him to be. He is, in fact, a versatile diplomat.

### **43. Should I Ask You To Makea Film?**

In 1922, Gandhiji was sentenced for six years. I was also sent to jail with him, for one year. I was with him all the time. During those days carding cotton and spinning it held the first place in his routine. He used to card the cotton for two hours and then spin for four hours till it tired him. In the meantime, a leader who was about to be released came to see him. He said, "Bapu, tell me what to do after I am released. I need your advice." Gandhiji said, "Try to propagate Khadi with all your might." The leader was a believer in Khadi and used to spin cotton regularly. But he had doubts about its acceptance by the people. He said, "You are right, Bapu, but how is it going to be sold? What if people don't like it?" The gentleman's queries irritated Gandhiji. Troubled, he said, Alright, then you suggest what should I ask you to do. Should I ask you to make a film so that people would like to see it? Hundreds of people would watch and pay for it too.

“But how would it help us? We must not do what people would like. We should rather lead them to the path of their welfare and ‘Charkha’ is that path.” He saw that the poor don’t get clothes even to cover themselves, he decided to clothe himself scantily. He felt very sorry about the poverty in the country but more than that he was unhappy about people’s inactivity and lack of concern regarding it. Why did the country reach this state? Inactivity is the root cause of poverty. If the people are concerned about it, they should try to eradicate it. But the laziness has gone to such an extent that it almost competes with the extent of poverty and unhappiness. If laziness is done away with, poverty can be removed. The only solution for getting rid of the inactivity is to make the villagers do something, which they can easily do. It will benefit both - their mind as well as their body.

#### 44. Why Did Vishwamitra Behave Like That?

Gandhiji had made up his mind to fully utilise whatever spare time he would get in the jail. He always had a heap of public interest things to do, when he was out of jail; so he wouldn’t get time to do anything else. In jail he used to get ample time to do certain things, but he would have to plan for them meticulously. Gandhiji always held ‘Charkha’ as the most important thing yet reading and writing were equally favourite ones. He would allot four hours for it everyday. He had already decided what books he would like to read; accordingly he started reading regularly. He read Gujarati translations of Ramayan, Mahabharat, Tilak’s Gita, Dnyaneshwari etc. he kept reading as well as writing. He wrote ‘The History of South African Satyagrah’ and ‘Balpothi’ in jail only.

Gandhiji read the Gujarati translation of Dnyaneshwari and loved it. He said, “I would ask you to read this book ...” but I wasn’t prepared for the philosophical readings at the time. I said, “If you insist I would read it. But it’s not my cup of tea.” He knew me well. He never forced me to do so again. But after a considerable lapse of time I had the opportunity to read it and I repented not reading it earlier in the jail. You are inspired to read such books by God’s grace only.

While reading Lokmanya’s ‘Gita’, Gandhiji said to me once, “I am very much upset since last three days.” I asked him the reason. He said, “I am reading Lokmanya Tilak’s ‘Gita’. There appears a citation regarding a person’s behaviour during a catastrophe (Apaddharma) with an example of Vishwamitra. Once there was a severe drought in his times and nothing was available to eat. Vishwamitra was very hungry. Finding no alternative he went to a ‘Chandal’ and started eating a dead dog’s meat. The Chandal said, “You are a Brahmin and I am a Chandal, and this is a dead dog’s meat. Why are you eating it? Vishwamitra replied, “Don’t say anything now. These are the implications of the catastrophe. I have no other

alternative if I want to survive. So keep quiet.” Telling this Gandhiji said hesitantly, “How can Hinduism be like that? Vishwamitra should have sacrificed his life! But why would he do so? I am unable to comprehend it and so it hurts.” He kept brooding over it for a few days. I didn’t know what did he think, but I feel that we should let the bygones be bygones. Why should we cry over the spilt milk?

## **Narhari Parekh**

### **45. Mahadev Bhai’s Diary**

In 1917, Mahadevbhai came to stay with Gandhiji. He regularly kept diary until his death in 1942. He would often make notes about Gandhiji’s letters, his speeches, his conversations with people, his thoughts about a lot of things, in his diary. Gandhiji’s life is like an open book. People don’t know as much about any other leader as they know about personal and private life of Gandhiji. Still a lot of things remain to be known about him.

These diaries contain anecdotes about Gandhiji’s life, his peculiarities and his philosophy of life. One can also find the comments about the books he had read and a lot of intriguing citations from some books, in those diaries. Mahadevbhai’s diaries might be having very raw details but they are the most important ingredients of Gandhiji’s life. They would ever be an inspirational literature for the mankind. Mahadevbhai’s Diaries hold the foremost place among this kind of literature because of the grandeur of the subject matter and its style of presentation.

## **Ghanshyamdas Birla**

### **46. On The Deathbed of A Patient**

This is an old incident. In Delhi, a woman emaciated by the disease was about to die. Her respiration was the only sign of life. She had lost all hopes for life. Thinking that she was about to embark upon her last journey, she kept murmuring ‘Ramnam’, but she earnestly wished to meet Gandhiji. She hoped that her last wish be granted by the God. Gandhiji was nowhere near Delhi at the time, so it seemed rather impossible. But to me it seemed unfortunate that a dying person’s wish could not be met. I said to her, “Let’s see. If God provides, your wish might be granted.”

After two days, I came to know that Gandhiji was coming from Kanpur and going to Ahmedabad via Delhi. His train would arrive at Delhi at 4 O’clock, early in the morning and the train to Ahmedabad would depart at 5 O’clock. There was just an

hour in-between. The sick woman lived ten miles from Delhi. Going to see her and coming back in an hour's time was rather impossible.

It was a windy day of the winter season. To ask Bapu to travel twenty miles back and forth seemed improper to me. Secondly that distressed woman didn't at all now about Gandhiji's arrival there. Gandhiji alighted the train. I whispered to him hesitantly, "Could you stay here for a day?" Gandhiji said, "Its very difficult." I was depressed to hear that. I knew how disappointed the sick woman would be!

Gandhiji asked me, "Why do you ask me to stay?" I told him the reason. Gandhiji said, "Come, we shall go there at once." I said, "How dare I take you out in an open car in this chilling weather?"

He asked me not to worry about it and to get him in the car immediately. I did so. It was extremely cold and windy. The day was about to break. The early morning silence pervaded the atmosphere. The sick woman was saying 'Ramnam' on her deathbed. Gandhiji went to her bed. I told her, "See, Gandhiji has come." She could hardly believe it. Stunned, she tried to get up but had no strength left. Tears rolled down her eyes. The sick woman's eyes expressed the peace she felt. Gandhiji's train had already departed but we were able to catch it at the next station.

## **Balwant Singh**

### **47. Crying Over Spilt Milk**

Once Bapuji made a plan. He said that two or three people together should clean all the utensils, turn by turn. He thought that it would help grow togetherness among people; the dislike for cleaning someone else's dishes would lessen and it would save people's time also. I didn't like the plan. I told him, "Washing everybody's utensils will generate disorder." Bapu said, "Establishing order within disorder is our job. Come, let me and Ba do it first, and he took Ba with him to the washing place. He asked everybody to pile up their used dishes there, wash the hands and proceed to work. At first, people were confused, but then casting a look at Bapu's face they kept the dishes and went away. Ba and Bapu started cleaning the utensils. I was in charge of the kitchen. He couldn't ask me to go, so I started helping them.

When Ba and Bapu were cleaning the dishes, I was torn between joy and shame. It dawned on me that if Ba and Bapu could do it, I must not label any work high or low.

Ba and Bapu were chitchatting merrily while cleaning the vessels. They seemed to be contesting with each other. Bapuji asked me, “Balwantsinghji, are the utensils clean enough? Why are you confused? When a person makes up his mind nothing is impossible for him. See, what happens in our homes; women have to serve all in the family. Ours is a big family here. At least we should not discriminate between men and women. That is why I entrusted the kitchen to you rather than to a woman. In Sabarmati Vinoba used to look after the kitchen. I have experimented a lot in my life. I have come to the conclusion that a common kitchen breeds a feeling of being the members of one family. Also keeping everything clean and meticulous while feeding the people with dedication and love helps us ascend spiritually. If you get through this test I would consider you capable of serving people.” During the conversation I wished that Bapu would better leave the vessels and go away, but on the other hand I also thought that he would better be there as long as he could. If I were a painter I would have painted that scene for the people to see. Many a times I wish that Bapu should incarnate so that we could learn how to live...but its no use crying over the spilt milk.

### **Bapu’s Blessings**

#### **48. Only Selfless Service Can Touch the Heart**

At Sawali village, goats were offered in sacrifice to a deity, on a specific day people would individually bring a goat, offer it in sacrifice and then cook it for the meal. I wrote its description in detail and sent it to Bapu. It was a horrendous sight. The big, fat goats were hung there. Bapu sent a reply to my letter.

Dear Balwantsingh,

Vardha, 17/9/1935

The description of sacrificing the goats for the deity was very painful. The age-old superstitions cannot be eradicated easily. People would not listen to us unless we serve the people and win their hearts. Appealing to one’s discretion is even more difficult. A selfless service easily appeals to the heart. Presently, we will have to serve these people who offer such sacrifices to the deity. We will eradicate the superstitions when we get the chance. But mind well, the scene you have witnessed among the illiterate villagers can also be seen happening among Calcutta’s literate people, on a very large scale.

Clare Sheridan

#### 49. Extreme Simplicity

I had the privilege of closely observing that tiny but great Mahatma. I got the opportunity of making his sculpture due to sister Sarojini Naiydu. It was not at all an easy job. It was utterly impossible that he would sit motionless for making a sculpture. Some of its reasons could either be his modesty or it could be the workload or apathy to art. This reminded me of the people's leader Lenin. In 1920, I was granted permission to enter his Kremlin office in Moscow. He too had made me accept such conditions. There is an amazing similarity in these two leaders. There might have been differences of opinion between them about violence and nonviolence, but both of them were staunch idealists.

On my first meeting with Mahatmaji, he told me (just like Lenin did) that he wouldn't be able to sit still in front of me continuously and that he would keep working; I would have to do whatever I could in that condition. He sat down on the floor and started spinning his wheel; Lenin had started reading a book sitting in his office chair.

Both these incidents had ultimately led to a friendship between us. One day, Gandhiji ironically said to me, just like Lenin would have said, "So, you are Winston Churchill's sister?" It's an old joke! Winston's real sister was trying to be friendly with his staunch enemy! Gandhiji then added, "Do you remember that your brother had asked you not to see me? But, would you tell him how happy I am to see you?"

Lenin too had said almost the same thing... "Tell you brother..." etc. The immortal message these two eminent leaders spread in the world has kindled hope within the lowly, downtrodden and unhappy people. This message promises them a better position; they feel that they belong in this world. Those who sacrificed their lives for Lenin were brave but those who sacrificed their lives for Gandhi were brave as well as martyrs.

American sculptor Joe David had sculpted a replica of Gandhiji's head. I had an opportunity to talk to him. Joe David had made sculptures of almost all the famous men and women of this era. Both of us had the same opinion about one thing; both of us were disappointed to meet these people. Their bodyguards always surrounded all of them as if they were sentenced to house arrest. None of them had impressed us much, but Gandhiji was different from all of them. This man with a lean and thin stature, who walked barefoot and used Khadi to drape himself, had made deep impression on us by his extreme simplicity.

## Dhirubhai Thakar

### 50. Immortal Celebrity of A Resplendent Life

Mahadevbhai Desai's son, Narayan Desai had imbibed Gandhi's philosophy and demeanour since his childhood. Along with his mother tongue Gujarati he is equally proficient with Bengali, Hindi and English. He has written more than a dozen books. But the essence of his creativity is truly exhibited in Mahadev Desai and Gandhiji's biographies he has written. 'A Rose In A Fire Pit'(Agnikundma Ugelu Gulab - pub.1992) is the name of Mahadevbhai's biography. As fascinating as a novel, it's not only Mahadevbhai's biography but Gandhiji's too.

Narayanbhai's supreme gift is Gandhiji's biography in four volumes for which he had to labour for years together. The Book is named, 'Maru Jeevan Ej Mari Vani' (My Life Is My Voice). The biography is spread over 2000 pages. Its publication is a milestone in Gujarati literature as well as an important incident of the righteous life-style of Gujarat. Hundreds of books have been written about Gandhiji's life and work. But a comprehensive biography was not available in Gujarati. Mahadevbhai had wished to write such a biography which would offer a minute-to-minute commentary on Gandhiji's life and which would rank among world's best literature. So he wrote diaries to keep track of happenings but his untimely demise curbed the efforts. Now Narayanbhai has fulfilled his father's wish by writing this biography. The writer has included a lot of hard to obtain subject matter in it, to make this epic-like biography attain eminence and honour. A number of interesting anecdotes have been included in this 'Mahakatha'.

There are a number of minute details only Narayanbhai could have provided and which have bedecked this piece of literature like tiny jewels. Narayan Desai is a potential thinker who has established Gandhian philosophy at the universal level. Nonetheless, he is an eminent painter who has portrayed in letters the resplendent life of this world leader and has lent it immortality. This literary service of Narayanbhai will be as immortal as Gandhi himself.

## Indulal Yagnik

### 51. A Historical Meeting

The movement for eradication of untouchability had begun in Bombay and Poona, prior to Gandhi's return to India. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad was trying to emancipate the downtrodden since 19<sup>th</sup> century. As soon as he landed in the country, Gandhiji took up the emancipation of untouchables as the goal of his life. It lent the history a new dimension.

The Gujarat Political Conference (Gujarat Rajkiya Parishad) was convened at Godhara in Nov.1917. On the concluding day, with Gandhiji's support, Thakkar Bappa and Mama Phadke worked hard to arrange a meeting at the settlement for the untouchables. It was to be attended by the volunteers from Gujarat, the higher caste city dwellers as well as the untouchables.

The settlement was situated on the road to crematory. The sweeper brothers and sisters had decked the entrance with paper flags and the road was also decorated with colourful cotton flags, tied on the poles, to welcome Gandhiji and the higher caste invitees. Within no time thousands of people gathered there. It was an unusual sight in Gujarat that the wealthy people, the advocates, the businessmen, gentlemen from other walks of life and the untouchables were mixing up. The untouchables started feeling uneasy as the time of the invitees' arrival neared. They thought, let them be the guests but how to touch them? All of them decided to hop on the roofs of their huts when the guests arrived and listen to Gandhiji from there. Thakkar Bappa came first. He was delighted to see the big crowd of the higher caste people there. But he felt amiss not to notice the chiefs of the untouchables anywhere around. Incidentally, he glanced above and found all the untouchables sitting on the top of the houses. He was shocked to see it but was not going to be dissuaded by it. With a laden heart he earnestly requested them again and again to climb down. At last he was able to persuade many of them to come down.

**Tansukh Bhatt**

## **52. A Different Kind of Violence**

The monkeys who came to the fields and destroyed the crops were driven away by the villagers with the help of slings. The stones hurled with the slings were sure to strike hard. So the monkeys turned to the fields of Gandhiji's non-violent Ashram thinking that at least there would be no risk of being hit. The radish, tomato, papaya, oranges etc were grown in the Ashram-farm. The monkeys savoured on them resulting in a loss for the Ashram. A complaint was lodged with Gandhiji. He was a practical man. He knew that the crops are produced by hard work only. He too considered it unwise to grow the vegetables and allow the monkeys to feast on them. This man, who propounded non-violence, sent for the archers from Panchmahal and asked them to guard the fields. He even allowed them to aim at the monkeys if needed. This non-violence of Gandhi was quite different from his 'love for all organisms' (jeevdaya) approach.

## Mukulbhai Kalarthi

### 53. Bapu, The Cobbler.

Once during a conversation, Vallabhbai said to Bapu, “There used to be a good cobbler over here. But they are hard to find these days, so I sent away my shoes”. Bapu replied, “I would have fetched some leather and tried if I can still use the skill I learnt. You know that I used to make very good shoes. A sample of my feat has been kept in Sodpur’s Khadi Pratishthan (institute). Sorabji Adajania had been here. Satyanand loved him deeply. So Adajania wrote me, “I would like you to make a pair of shoes for Satyanand.” I did send him one, but the extremely modest Bengali person as he was, he said, ‘these shoes are not be worn; they are to be worshipped.’ He never used them. He preserved them and then sent them to Khadi Pratishthan’s museum.” Mahadevbhai had just finished writing new chapters of autobiography for Oxford University, the same day. Bapu checked all of them.

On remembering this incident Bapu said, “Mahadev, why is there no mention of my shoe making anywhere in this brief edition? It ought to be there. It was a good occupation at the Tolstoy farm. I made shoes for so many children there. Kalenbech had learnt it at the Trapist Monastery and then taught me.”

### 54. Pardon Me!

Bapu used to observe silence every Sunday after 3 p.m. On Sundays and Mondays some time would be reserved for visitors or anyone who wanted to communicate with him. Once, only a few minutes before 3 O’clock, Vallabhbai said, “Come, now get done with whatever you have to ask or say.” “You sound as if a ‘will’ is being prepared,” retorted Mahadevbhai. Intervening them Bapu said, “If that is the case, let me also register; pardon me for my misdeeds!” and there was a childlike smile on his face. Fondly reminiscing an incident, he continued, “Ba would always say, pardon me for my follies! Poor thing!” Vallabhbai intervened, “Yes, but when did she say that?” Bapu said, “Oh! She said so when police came to arrest me. Tears would trickle down here face and she would mutter, ‘pardon me if I erred!’ Poor thing! She must have thought that it was for the last time that we were together; who knows if death would occur before being forgiven.”

### 55. Sing Only If You Are Melodious

Mahadevbhai once sang the bhajan ‘*Uth jaag musafir*’ in the morning prayer. But he missed the tune as well as its notes, resulting in an amalgamation. After the morning prayer Bapu told Mahadevbhai, “If one cannot sing in a perfect tune, I consider it useless however good that may be.” It was almost intolerable this

morning. Remembering Jhaverchand Meghani, he said, “Meghani used to say that he could enjoy and cherish the meaning of his songs while he sang them. I feel it’s quite true.”

## **56. Why Are You So Scared?**

Ba and Bapu once went on a walk as usual. Unknowingly, Bapu stumbled upon a stone hurting his toe. It started bleeding profusely. Bapu panicked and asked Ba to bring a bandage and dress the wound. Ba said, “You always boast that you are not scared even of death, then why are you so upset with a small wound?”

Bapu said, “Listen this body belongs to our people. My recklessness may make it sore, leaving me unable to work for a week or so. The people will be at a great loss due to it. It will be a breach of peoples’ trust for us.’ Ba agreed to what Bapu said.

## **57. Obedience**

Bapu founded Bharat Gramodyog Sangh and stayed in Maganwadi to establish it properly. In those days it was customary that the native people would do everything.

Once, Bapu and C.Kumarappa had to take up the job of cleaning utensils. Both of them gladly started doing so. Somehow Ba got the news. She came to kitchen and started scolding Gandhiji. She said, “Don’t you have better work to do? There are so many important things to be done. You would better go and do them.” Bapu kept cleaning while listening to Ba’s scoldings, which added fuel to Ba’s anger. She snatched the utensils from his hands and started cleaning herself.

Only the coconut scrubber remained in Bapu’s soiled hands. Laughing, he said to Kumarappa, “You really are a happy man, because you don’t have a wife to dictate you. But I have to obey Ba to keep peace at home. I hope you will forgive me for appointing Ba to assist you in this job.” Bapu then washed himself and went to his cottage. Ba and Kumarappa then continued their work.

## **58. My Being There Makes A Difference!**

In 1932, taking up the issue of untouchability, Bapu set upon an indefinite hunger strike in Yerawada jail. Ba, at that time, was in Sabarmati jail. She felt miserable because she was not with Bapu in that situation. Bapu’s life being put at stake made her uneasy. Once, talking to her jail inmates, she gave way to her feelings

saying, “We do read Bhagwat and Ramayan, but never came across the mention of this kind of fast. But Bapu is one of his own kind. He would always do something out of this world. The situation is unpredictable!” Those inmates tried to appease her saying, “Ba, why do you worry? Government will offer many facilities to Bapu.” Kasturba replied, “Government would offer many things but would he accept them? He would never cooperate. Really, I have never seen a person like him! I know so many stories from Puranas but there never was a monk like him.” After a while she would say, “It hardly matters in fact. Mahadev is there, even Vallabhbai and Sarojinidevi too. But my presence there would certainly make a difference.”

### **59. Are You Scared Of Me?**

The kitchen of Sabarmati Ashram was solely at Kasturba’s disposal. Bapu had a lot of visitors everyday. Enthusiast, as she was, Kasturba would welcome them all.

A lad from Travancore used to help her. One afternoon, Ba finished her work, tidied the kitchen and went to take a nap. Bapu was waiting for her to leave the kitchen. Now Bapu beckoned the boy and whispered, “Listen carefully, so many guests are coming for lunch. Ba has been working hard since morning. She must be tired. Let her rest for a while. Don’t wake her up. Ask Kusum to help you. Both of you manage everything. Get the stove ready. Also keep the dough ready and then call Ba, if needed. Manage everything. Don’t irritate Ba. Keep everything in its place after lunch is prepared. I would be happy if she wouldn’t have a row with me.”

The boy tiptoed to call Kusumben and started making arrangements. Both of them were taking precautions not to wake up Ba. Vegetables were cleaned and dough was prepared. Suddenly a plate slipped down Kusum’s hands. The rattling sound woke up Ba who thought that a cat had broken into kitchen. She went there to see what it was all about. They had to tell her everything. She asked, “But why didn’t you wake me up? Wasn’t I able to do it?”

When the guests left in the evening, Ba came to Bapu to seek explanation as to why did he ask those children to cook? She said, “Do you think that I am a lazy bone?”

Bapu realised that there was no escape. Laughing, he said, “You know, I am so much afraid of you on such occasions ..... you may not know .....” Unable to resist laughing Ba explained, “You? Scared of me? Let it be!”

## 60. I Would Eat If Ba Wouldn't!

Kasturba was an expert cook. Her culinary skills were of no use when Bapu started refraining from choice in eating. In spite of that, she would sometimes make his favorite dishes. She was fond of making and offering choicest dishes to others and enjoy them herself. During her last sickness, she was in Agha Khan palace. She used to suggest Manu to make something special for Dr. Gilder's breakfast. Once she asked Manu to make Puranpoli (sweet stuffed roti). She said, "I will also relish it today. Ask Bapu if he would have it too!"

Kasturba was not keeping well and a heavy food like Puranpoli would aggravate her cardiac condition. When Manu asked Gandhiji about this, he did remember it. He said, "Yes, I would have it only if Ba would keep away from it." Kasturba didn't at all hesitate in deciding, she said, "Accepted! I won't eat it." Later, she served the puranpoli to Bapu and others but refrained from eating it as promised.

## Raojibhai Patel

### 61. The Mystical Revelation of Gita

I went to the Ashram as Bapu had instructed. There the houses for the teachers of the National School were under construction. 'Hriday Kunj' was also being built. Bapuji also arrived there in a few days. I used to supervise the building work during the day and at night I would keep account of everything. There was a hutment of 'Paradhi' community near the Ashram. The atmosphere used to be fearsome. Quite often thefts also took place in the Ashram. So it was decided to patrol during the nights. Mahadevbhai and myself were assigned the responsibility of patrolling every night from 12 to 3 o'clock.

Once a person came from Bharuch. He had literary inclinations and used to compose poems. He wished to stay at the Ashram. He had a talk with Bapu. Bapu said to him, "Tell me, what you can do?" He said, "Anything." Bapu asked me to let him help in the building work. He accompanied me to the site. I asked him to count the bricks, which were unloaded there, arrange them and give me the account in the evening. He did it for a few days but soon lost interest. He thought, 'Why am I asked to do such things? What's the use? I can write books, compose poems too. But for the last few days I have had no time for it. If this continues for a few more days I will become sluggish.' He told me all this. I said, "Tell Bapuji about this. He will give you a satisfactory solution to it. He went to see Bapu. He said, "I am stuck with the bricks and the lime since I came here. I can't spare time to do anything else." Bapuji said, "Very good, I like it." He said,

“Bapuji I get no time to read or think.” Bapu said, “Is there any need for it? You will get enough time when you will need it. Keep busy with the job assigned to you and don’t be tempted to read. If you can learn this much even, it will be sufficient.”

This literary connoisseur, who had come to stay at the Ashram, said to Bapu, “I have purposely come here to learn the mystical revelations of Gita from you, so that I will be able to write something special about Gita.” He had been assigned to look after the building work that was in progress there. His statement made Bapu laugh. Bapu then said to him, “You want to comprehend the mystical revelations of Gita! If you would concentrate on the job you are doing, you will easily comprehend it. Gita’s mystical revelation is in ‘Karmayoga’. Being indifferent to the result of the work you are doing, concentrating on the work you have accepted, is the mystical revelation of Gita. You too are doing the same.

“You won’t get any profit out of the job you are doing here. Don’t expect anything out of it. Just meditate on the job, do it spiritually and you will know the real meaning of Gita. What else do you need? If we apply the teachings of Gita in our day to day life, we won’t need to read anything else or write anything different about it!”

The gentleman was stunned listening to this sermon. He said after some time, “I am going to be sluggish here. I came here with an intention to read, think and be inspired. But if I stay here like this, month after months, I won’t gain anything.”

Admonishing him, Gandhiji said, “Friend, this is the way of life here. You should be able to derive inspiration from whatever job you have accepted. I too could comprehend the mystical revelation of Gita in this way only and I urge others also to go along it.”

The gentleman stayed there for a few more days and then left.

## **62. Bapu, For All**

On the night this incident happened, it was pitch dark outside. A ‘Ramayan Path’ (recitation of the Ramayan) was going on after the prayer and then we lingered around talking about various things. Having finished the programme, Devdas went out. As soon as he stepped out, he heard the hissing of a snake. He turned back and told me, “Something is lurking outside. Please bring the lamp.” I went there with Maganlal Gandhi. Maneuvering cautiously in the dark we saw the trail of a snake. Tracking down the trail we found a big snake hiding behind the water tank near the house. We used to keep a stick with a silken noose for catching the

snakes. We caught the snake with that noose and dragged it out. It would spring up erecting its hood, again and again. We were trying to suppress it with sticks. We were feeling the jerks. At that instant Bapu came there and saw the snake. He exclaimed, "Oh! It's such a beautiful creature! Don't pull the noose very hard. It will hurt the creature." Then he asked us to put it down. We thought, why was he asking us to put it down instead of releasing it in the jungle. But we put it down. Bapu said, "Loosen the noose a bit and be careful not to strangle it."

We loosened the noose so much so that it could easily escape if it wished to. Could anyone imagine what Bapu would do next? He bent down and caressed that eight feet long snake and exclaimed what a beautiful creature it was! What emotions did he have about that venomous reptile? He was caressing the snake affectionately as if he was caressing a child. He caressed it not once but thrice! The reckless creature calmed down with his affectionate touch. The snake seemed to forget its stinging instinct. He lay there motionless. After a while Bapu got up. He said, "Both of you lift it up carefully and leave it far enough." It seemed as if the violent reptile did not want to be free from that amazing touch. We carried it up and left it near the spring. It crawled away calmly.

## Hariprasad Desai

### 63. New Bank Is to Be Opened

The Satyagraha Ashram was founded on a very small scale in Shri. Jeevanbhai's bungalow at Kochrab. I used to go for a walk in the evenings. Now Satyagraha Ashram became my favourite place to visit everyday. I used to discuss a lot of things with Gandhiji. The discussions would be prolonged. He would be willing to talk about health, food, religion, literature, medical science, social reform, farming, service to others etc. He wasn't yet called 'Mahatma'. He wanted to assess truly where he stood in this country! Gokhale had advised him to observe the country for a year. He had also asked him to abstain from delivering a public speech till then. On the day the time limit was crossed, I was with him. I asked him, "Please tell me what did you observe in the country?"

Nervously he said, "It's just a drama going on here. Nobody really wants to scarify his life for the country." I was shocked to hear this. I exclaimed, "What are you saying? Lokmanya, Malviyaji, and the Bengali leaders... you have met them all. Still you say so?"

Gandhiji said, "I am extremely sorry. I am sorry to say such things about these great people, but I now what I am saying!"

I asked, "What about the revolutionaries who throw bombs? Aren't they prepared to die?"

Gandhiji said, “They are the exceptions. It’s true that they don’t fear death, but I don’t agree with their way of doing things.” Then he discussed non-violence, which is devoid of bloodshed, killings and is a peaceful way of doing things. He said, “If the country will accept my path, I am sure to get freedom. The things that happened in South Africa can happen here too. But I don’t want to cash in on that account. I will have to save money anew and establish a new bank!”

## **Gunwant Shah**

### **64. Jatayu Has Revived**

Jatayu’s character in Ramayan is my favourite one, more than that of Rama’s. Jatayu only is the solution to our contemporary problems; who was this Jatayu?

When Sita was abducted, Jatayu braced himself to save her at the cost of his life. On that occasion the practical minded and the wiser of his lot might have said to him, “Jatayu, this is Rama’s and Ravana’s battle. Why do you interfere? Both of them are mighty. There would be no trace of you left. Can you stand against Ravana? Just think over it!”

Jatayu answered those elderly ones, “Ravana cannot abduct Sita as long as I am alive. No, not all till I am alive!” After Gandhiji’s demise this society has totally lost its ‘Jatayu attitude’. We often hear people say, “What can we do about it?”

Gandhiji went to Champaran. There he could have said, “What can we do about it?” When he went to Bardoli, there also he could have said so. About the problem of the farmers’ tax, he could have said, “what can we do?” He could have spent his life saying only this. During the British regime also there were a lot of people who said, “We won’t stand comparison with them.” But Babu grew efficient people from this soil itself. The people had lost their potency, but Babu instilled Jatayu’s soul within them and revived him again.

## **Mahendra Meghani**

### **65. The Moth in A Scattered Musical Concert**

Mahavir Tyagi’s two booklets were translated into Gujarat and were just published. ‘Those Days of the Freedom Struggle’ - 4<sup>th</sup> edition, and ‘The Sound of Trumpet Against Kettledrum’ - 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, were those books. These books were originally published in Hindi in 1993. Both these books contain reminiscences of the writer. One of them has 132 pages and the other has 152 pages. I took hold of the little book first and started reading its fourteen chapters from the rear. Many

a times the book made me touchy and at others it made me split my sides with laughter. Here I present an excerpt from the book 'Those Days Of Freedom Struggle', for the benefit of those readers who don't know Mahavir Tyagi. "We are the carefree youngsters who danced spellbound to some celestial tune. For thirty years we have been ceaselessly performing in that great ballet, matching its beats with those of our hearts. We defied everything in the world and enjoyed that music wholeheartedly. But neither that carefree attitude nor the tune exists now. Our gathering has messed up just like a gathering of moths is dispersed after the candles in the chandelier have burnt out. The Congress without Bapu is just like the notes without a tune. I don't even remember what we did during the last forty years. We used to do everything with the carefree attitude of an intoxicated person. We faced a lot of obstacles but we enjoyed the work assigned to us.

Since Independence, most of our Congressmen have become jobless and homeless too. Because, the Master who trained us is no more now. We had sharpened our senses to listen to his claps and would jump and run when he whistled. We lost our hearts to his smile. Now, there is no leash around our necks. We go here and there wagging our tails. No one is there to clap or whistle now. I had something or the other to do when Britishers were here. If we had nothing at all to do, we would organise a rally in the morning. If we saw a few people gathering together, we would tell them the news from the papers. They would call us and ask, "What is Mahatmaji doing these days? He must be acquainted with you." I would enthusiastically tell them stories about Bapu. But those are the old tales now. When Britishers quit this country, their cooks and many others lost their jobs. Now, Congressmen also don't have any job! I called on each and every leader to get something to do with their help. They had power, money, permits, licenses, scholarships and lot more but no work!

## 66. Three Icons of Gandhi

Gandhiji was a strict observer of pledged rituals. He wrote, "One can't lead life simply by observing rituals. The rituals are useful only if one keeps praising God incessantly. One can also gain strength by reading about the lives of noble people." If someone tries to find out about the idols this nobleman worshipped himself, it will certainly benefit the readers. Yet, we would better try to now about some of his Icons from his 'Autobiography'.

An infant gets to know this world through his mother. Gandhiji has sketched his mother Putlibai's profile in a few words only. "My mother was a saintly, religious minded woman. She would staunchly observe the hardest of religious rituals and won't give them up even if she was not keeping well. About Karamchand Gandhi, he writes, "My father was a family oriented man, truth loving, brave, generous

but indignant. Still he was passionate about certain things. His achievements were based on his experiences. He was extremely practical in his dealings. He would delve deep to find out the cause of even the minutest things. He also had a knack of dealing with thousands of people.”

The third person who influenced Gandhi as a child was Rambhabai, his nanny. Young Mohan was afraid of ghosts. Rambha suggested that the surest way to evade them was to say ‘Ramnam’. Mohan revered Rambha more than ‘Ramnam’. This seed of Ramnam sown in the childhood spread its roots deep enough. Gandhiji effectively used the strength it generated till the end of his life, because it was a sapling planted by Rambhabai.

## **Keshubhai Bhavsar**

### **67. Gandhi, the Coordinator**

In 1941, the Congress Working Committee called a meeting. I was then a student at the Khadi Vidyalaya of Sevagram. So I had an opportunity to closely observe the working of the committee. A prominent leader of the Congress, Abdul Kalam Azad, was reclining on the dais smoking a cigarette. Near by, Gandhiji was engrossed in spinning on his wheel. I was shocked to see it. I thought that smoking like this during a meeting was like insulting the common people. At the same time Gandhiji was preaching people to lead a simple, restrained, truthful life, in a non-violent way. Many like me were proud of being Gandhiji’s soldiers. That incident hurt me badly but I kept quiet.

During the agitation in 1942, I was sent to jail. There I had an opportunity to read Maulana Azad’s book about ‘Kuran’. I was deeply impressed by his scholarly deliberations in that book. But I also thought that wouldn’t it be better if such an eminent, scholarly person could live a simple life, devoid of addictions.

On the other hand, when I observe hard working people leading a simple life, I wonder how many of them possess Maulana Azad’s fearlessness, feeling of equality and dedication to the nation. Would people who are intolerant and lack foresight help realise Gandhiji’s dream even though they are simple and forbearing?

Today, I realise that while dealing with these kinds of people, Gandhiji tried hard to coordinate between them. He overlooked Azad’s smoking habit, as well as he adapted with forbearing yet conceited people like us who did not tolerate each other. We are still not able to co-ordinate between these two kinds of people. Simple, self-sufficient and chaste life style is always welcome. If the sentiments of fearlessness, openheartedness and willingness to dedicate one’s life for crores

of unhappy and illiterate people could be imbibed into life at some point of time, then only we will be able to gain independence in the real sense of the term!

## Manu Gandhi

### 68. Better Done Than Said

Bapuji used to be very particular about cleanliness. He preferred cleaning a thing himself and cite an example to others rather than asking someone to do that.

The roads in Noakhali were narrower than a footpath. Some of them were so narrow that Bapu had to walk ahead of me. When I walked behind him he had to lean on his stick for support.

The dirt scattered here and there would make him uneasy. He would have to tread upon that dirt barefoot. There used to be faeces, spitting and filth all over those roads. I was stunned to see him cleaning it all with tree leaves.

Annoyed, I said to him, “Bapu, why are you making me ashamed of myself? Why are you cleaning it yourself, when I am here? Smiling at me Bapu said, “You won’t imagine how much I enjoy doing such things! Doing things rather than talking about them tires me less.

I said, “Yes, but the villagers are watching! What about it?” Bapu said, “Just watch, I won’t need to clean these filthy roads from tomorrow because people will know today that this is not a substandard work.”

I said, “Suppose that tomorrow it would be cleaned but what if it would appear the same again the next day?” He immediately said, “Then I would send you to inspect it and if it is filthy again, I would come and clean it.”

It happened exactly as he had said. When I went to see it, I found the filth all over it. But I didn’t inform Bapu about it. Instead I cleaned it myself with a broom. I told him later, “I cleaned the road. The villagers were with me and they have promised to keep it clean. They said that I don’t need to go there tomorrow.”

Bapuji said, “You have stripped me of the merit of that good deed. I should have cleaned the road. Now two things have been accomplished. One is that, cleanliness will be maintained; and the other is, if the people keep their promise they would learn to abide by truth and the road will always be clean.”

## 69. Seizing Two Compartments

After getting involved in the agitation at Noakhali and Bihar, Bapu had to call on Lord Mountbatten on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1947. The Viceroy had asked him to travel by air but Bapu declined it saying that he could not use the vehicle which could not be availed by the millions of poor countrymen. He said that he would be quite comfortable in the train. It was blazing hot in those days and it was a twenty-four hour journey. He asked me to carry minimum luggage and to reserve the smallest third class bogie. I did pack minimum things to carry along but I knew that people will horde in to see Bapu. Hence, I reserved two ordinary third class compartments. I used one of them to keep our luggage and the other was prepared for him to rest and meet people.

The train departing from Patna for Delhi used to start at 9 O'clock in the morning. During the summer Bapu used to take lunch at 10 O'clock. I went to the other compartment to arrange for his lunch. I came back to his compartment after some time. He was busy writing something. He asked me where had I been. I told him, "I was in the next compartment to look after the arrangements for your lunch." He asked me to peep through the window. I was shocked to see the people hanging on to the compartment on both the sides! He asked me in a scolding tone, "Did you ask for the second compartment?"

I said, "Yes. I will have to do all the chores here, like warm the milk on the stove, clean utensils etc. I thought that it would disturb you, so I asked the Railways for another compartment." He said, "Fine, what a lame excuse? This is called loving someone blindly. They had offered to arrange for a special train or a plane to save me any kind of botheration. But I know that a special train costs thousands of rupees and also obstructs the passage of so many trains. How could I bear it? I know that you did all this just out of love, but I want to take far ahead. I don't want to push you downwards! Try to understand and there's no need to shed tears like that. Now for its atonement, you may pick up our belongings and keep them in the adjacent compartment. Secondly, ask the Station Master to see me." I was trembling while listening to all this. I did shift the luggage but worried about Bapu, thinking how would he manage? He did everything in the train like, writing, reading, spinning, smearing the mudpack, teaching me etc. He did everything during the journey as he did at home!

We arrived at the next station. The Station Master was sent for. Bapuji told him about my feat. He said, "She is my niece. She is very innocent, poor thing! She doesn't know me properly yet. That is why she reserved two compartments. But she is not be blamed; it's my fault altogether. I have not trained her properly. But both of us have to atone for it. Hence this compartment has been emptied. You may use it for the passengers hanging outside. It may help reduce my guilt." The

Station Master tried a lot to change his mind but Bapu didn't give in. At last, he offered to arrange one more compartment for those people so that Bapu could have one for himself. Bapu declined the offer and said, "You may arrange for one more compartment but use this one too. Availing extra facilities simply because they are available is also a kind of violence. Do you want this girl to misuse the facilities and get her habits spoiled?"

The poor Station Master couldn't utter a single word! At last he had to accept Bapu's suggestion.

## **Adam Ghodawala**

### **70. Are We Incidental?**

'Is Gandhi incidental in contemporary times?' is a frequently asked question. 'Whether Gandhi is incidental or not' is not the basic issue; it is rather 'are we incidental or not?' In the contemporary race of becoming a super power, the policy of globalisation and open trade has pushed our poor countrymen in to a quagmire. Even after realising this fact, does anyone of us possess the moral courage to oppose it like Mahatma Gandhi would have done? Can we ask them not to dump their Pizzas, Burgers and Coca Cola at our doorstep? For a courageous person, Gandhi is incidental even today; but for a coward, he was incidental neither then nor today!

## **Jagdish Chawda**

### **71. Aaftab**

Parikshitbhai never used to be free from work. Whether it was a festival or a Sunday didn't make any difference to him. He would often joke, "Don't we take food on Sundays or on festivals?" He would be continuously busy since 5 o'clock in the morning till 10 or sometimes 11 o'clock in the night. The labourers from the village would always flock around him. Whether he was in the office or in a car or traveling, he would always have an infinite number of visitors. He would heartily meet every visitor saying, "welcome brother, how are you?"

Whenever he was at the Ashram, he would be at the office of the Harijan Seva Sangh from 7 in the morning till 5 O'clock in the evening. Once during a conversation one thing led to another. He asked me, "Do you have a holiday on Holi?" I went through the list of holidays and told him, "We have a holiday on Holi and its next day too." "Oh! Two days leave?" He was surprised to hear it. Then in a voice loud enough for all in the office to hear, he said, "Bapuji never takes a leave on any festival or on Sundays. In Yerawada jail too, he would get up early as

usual and then engage himself in prayer, spinning, reading or writing etc. One of his guards was a Somali from Eden. He knew neither English nor Hindi. He would come to Bapu whenever he was free and join him for prayer. He would watch Bapu spinning the yarn.

Although Bapu was suffering from severe cold in those days, he would follow his routine since dawn. The Somali observed this and started saying something in his language. Bapu couldn't understand what he said. At last with the help of signs he asked Bapu to rest. Bapu got it then. He pointed to the blazing Sun and said, "Aaftab! Aaftab!" The Somali was clever enough and got the cue that people should always keep working just like the Sun who never tires." The story was over and the smiling Parikshitbhai got busy in his work.

## **Jugatram Dave**

### **72. Ashram**

Gandhiji's Ashram is situated on the bank of Sabarmati at Ahmedabad. Gandhiji and Kasturba lived there with a lot of other people, girls and boys too. Along with Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Madrasi and Nepali, foreigners from Britain and China also stayed there. They wore Khadi and used to spin yarn regularly. All of them used to get up at dawn and would gather together for morning and evening prayers. They would recite 'Shlokas', sing "Bhajans" and "Ramdhun". There would also be repeated recitals of Gita. Gandhiji would deliver a 'Pravachan'(sermon) after the prayer. There was a common, big kitchen in the Ashram, which was run by the Ashramite sisters. They would cook food turn by turn. They would clean the grain in the storeroom. All inmates of the Ashram used to dine in the same kitchen. There would not be any spices, chilies, asafetida or any seasoning in the food cooked there. It used to be quite simple and clean. Gandhiji himself used to serve the food. Harijans would also dwell there with all others. They used to work with all and would take food with them. It used to be spotlessly clean in the Ashram. All the Ashram dwellers used to clean the toilets by themselves.

### **73. Compartment Is The Home!**

#### **Compartment Is The Ashram!**

There used to be an inscription on the flag of Maharaja Gaikwad of Baroda—'Jin Ghar, Jin Takhat' (The saddle is our home, the saddle is our throne). The Maratha Sardars (knights) felt proud that their saddles were never taken off their horses. Their horses used to be saddled day and night. Likewise Gandhiji's home and

ashram and the third class compartment were the same for him. He continuously traveled to propagate his message from one end of the country to the other. It was very difficult to guess whether he spent more time in Ashram or in the railway compartment.

He would do all his daily chores as if the railway compartment was his home. He would work on his spinning wheel, spin yarn, pray, look after the correspondence, give interviews, etc. there. He always traveled by the third class and experienced the jostling and the plight of the travelers of that class. He was not known as 'Mahatma' then. Many a times he would have to travel standing all the way and bear the jostling too.

The leaders of the country used to be a bit reserved and maintained a distance from the poor countrymen. They used to travel by the first class like higher officials. Once Gandhiji came to Calcutta and stayed at Gokhale's residence. While returning, Gokhale offered to see him off at the station. Gandhiji politely tried to dissuade him, but Gokhale did not listen to him. He said, "Were you traveling by the first class like others, I wouldn't have come to see you off. I will come because you will be going by the third class." Gandhiji got to know very well the poor countrymen through traveling by third class. No other leader knew the common people, their disposition, their shortcomings, their habits and many other things, as good as Gandhi knew. That is the reason why people revered him so much.

#### **74. A Joypus Satyagrahi**

There was a great 'satyagrahi' from Bardoli in Gujarat, Morarjibhai - a resident of Swadla. He used to live in a village. He had a great sense of humour. He could seek a proper way out through any kind of difficulty. The jail sentence for 'Satyagrah' used to be a lengthy one, but with Morarji's company it would become enjoyable for all his jail mates like us. The villagers would come to seek his advice about their complaints against each other. He used to entertain both the parties, would reconcile them and send away. For the want of a child, his father compelled him to remarry. He didn't care about our opposition to it. His first wife accepted the new one and treated her like a sister, which made his family life a happy one. Once we were having a chat with Bapu when Mahadevbhai told him about Morarji's two wives. Bapu asked him, "Do you worship Ram?" Morarji instantly retorted, "Bapuji, if we worship Ram, why not worship his father too?" It made Bapu explode with laughter. Morarji's happy-go-lucky attitude to life helped ease the difficulties in our struggle. He passed away after a few years of gaining independence. There would always be a want of such selfless people like him, on the path of 'Sarvoday'.

## Josef Doc

### 75. The Hero

I first saw Gandhiji in the last week of Dec. 1907. I made up my mind to meet this Asian leader. His office on the corner of Resil and Anderson Road was just like any other office. All of a sudden, a tiny, slender but agile figure stood in front of me. His skin was dark, his eyes were also black but there was a pure smile on his face. His straight, fearless glance captured my heart at once. He must be thirty-eight or so. The gray streaks in the hair bore witness to the vast amount of work he had to handle. He spoke perfect English. His personality exuded his values.

He offered me a seat and asked the purpose of my visit. He attentively listened to what I said. When I finished, he logically explained the condition of the Asian people residing there. I was listening to such a meticulous explanation for the first time. He explained even the smallest issues in detail. He convinced me calmly and patiently.

I was drawn to this Indian leader immediately due to his calm and stable disposition, his greatness and his transparent honesty.

We had an unbreakable bond of friendship between us when we parted our ways.

## Jeevatram Kriplani

### 76. Was Gandhi Modern?

If abiding by truth and moral values is a sign of modernity then we can call Gandhi modern.

If keeping the promises and performing the accepted jobs to completion is a sign of modernity, he was modern. If patience and discretion are considered modern, then Gandhiji should be called modern. Be behaving nicely with an opponent and with one who holds a different opinion is being modern, then Gandhiji must be considered modern. One who possesses humility and behaves equally with all, irrespective of their designation, power and possessions, is modern in the real sense. If identifying with the downtrodden is being, modern, Gandhi was one. If working incessantly for poor, famished, lowly people is being modern, Gandhiji must be called so. And above all, if sacrificing one's life for a noble cause is called modernity, then Gandhiji possessed it for sure.

## Mirza Ismael

### 77. Saint, Diplomat and Nation-builder

The assumption that the name and fame of some persons from our times will be immortal is not proper. The next generation will bestow immortality on those whom it prefers. But it's almost impossible that the immortality of Gandhi will fade away in future. He is the greatest among his contemporaries. He is the Icon of Indian people and his love for his country resonates from his speech. He conquered his countrymen by his non-violent attitude and a life style replete with noblest values. His deep impression on a large portion of the Hindi population suggests that he is the most influential person in the British regime.

There is absolutely no one in India who follows the voice of his soul, is religious and a staunch observer of principles. Also there is none who can beat his diplomatic acumen. His values render him unlimited strength. His personal life is spotless. One can find an amazing unification of mind, speech and performance within his personality. He is extremely religious and reminds you of saints and hermits. On the contrary he is also one who has generated awareness in the countrymen, has revitalised the Indian people, has rekindled their self-esteem and has always been a proud carrier of his culture. He is a great diplomat and an extraordinary seer. A new Indian Nation is rising and Gandhiji is the builder of that nation.

## Vallabhbhai Patel

### 78. Ganga Flowing In the Courtyard

You, the people of Ahmedabad, have designated me in your citation the foremost disciple of Gandhiji. I pray, may God make me worthy of it! But I know for sure that I am not worthy of it. I don't know how many lives I will have to spend before I could acquire it. But, I still want to emphasise that you have cited many things with exaggeration purely out of your love for me. I may accept all those things but not this one.

All of you know that in the Mahabharat, there was a Bhil disciple of Dronacharya He had never met him personally. He made Dronacharya's statue, which he worshipped everyday and would visualise it teaching him archery. How did it happen? Because he worshipped his teacher and had absolute faith in him. His soul was pure. The person you call my teacher is always with me. In spite of this, I am not worthy of being his favourite disciple, or perhaps not worthy of being his disciple even. I don't have any doubts about it. There may be so many disciples of him in this country who might not have seen him personally. Yet they might have worshipped not the 'person' but the 'mantra' he has given. This sacred land must

be having someone like that. People may say, “What if Gandhiji is gone?” But I have no misgivings about it. He did whatever he had to. Now it’s up to us to do whatever remains to be done.

**John Hans Holmes**

### **79. An Excellent Person**

Twenty years back, I had reported to the American people that Gandhiji was the best person in the world. At that time he was not a familiar figure in the Western world.

Gandhiji did not achieve the highest place in this world due to his mental ability or fame. He is neither the commander of an army nor a conqueror. He is not even the highest authority of the sovereignty. He doesn’t even have a dignified appearance. But he achieved it due to his undefeatable will power, by instilling within his countrymen a sense of pride for the nation and generating awareness among them. He taught them the habit of self-restraint. He empowered them to acquire independence and made them worthy of enjoying it. He offered them political independence along with liberation of their souls. Besides this he liberated the untouchables from the slavery and sorrow. In the history of mankind this was the highest feat performed for the liberation of people and will be remembered for ever. His supreme performance was the propagation of the principle of ‘non-violent resistance’ and its application as a tool for establishing liberty, peace and justice in the world.

As an eminent person, Gandhiji can be compared to the greatest people in the world’s history. Like Wilfer Force, Garrison and Lincoln, he was the great liberator of the slaves. As a proponent of ‘unfaltering love’ he can be remembered with Saint Francis, Thoro and Tolstoy. He can also be counted among the greatest Messishs of all times, along with Laotse, Buddha, Zarathustra and Christ. But besides all this, his eminence lies in his being an excellent human being and an excellent person. In one of my books I have written about him, “He is very polite, sophisticated and very affectionate. He has an unbeatable sense of humour. He possesses an alluring simplicity. He is the lord of peace. He has the heart as soft as a flower but his physique is as tough as a diamond. He possesses a transparent power of concentration and his worship of truth is unfluctuating.

## Amritlal Begad

### 80. Introducing Ahimsa to the Battlefield

The history of any country is the history of their kings, their battles and the wars they fought. In a way history is the documentation of violence. If mankind had forever been engaged in violence, it would have become extinct. But it survived because non-violence was also there along with violence. Non-violence too has a historical background like violence. If one wants to search for its point of emergence, we would have to begin with Sri Krishna. He tried his best to avoid the war of Mahabharata. He went to the Kauravas as an envoy from Pandavas, but could not evade the war due to Duryodhana's obstinacy. He offered his army to the Kauravas while he stayed with the Pandavas on the condition of abstaining from direct involvement in the war. In this way Sri Krishna gave the message five thousand years back that violence might be necessary sometimes, yet non-violence will ever be the better choice. The Mahabharat war could not be avoided. It had to be accepted as an unavoidable calamity. But Sri Krishna warned all of them that violence would never benefit anyone and he would never opt for it. Although Pandavas gained victory in that war but ultimately the massacre dejected Udhishthira and Vyas has expressed the futility of violence through him. After a considerable lapse of ages, Krishna was followed by Buddha and Mahavir. Both the contemporaries laid the foundation of Buddhism and Jainism respectively, both of which honour non-violence. Similarly, the massacre during the Kalinga War had also dejected Ashoka resulting in his acceptance of Buddhism. Regarding Jainism, we can say that non-violence is the core of Jain religion. Besides them a lot of saints and monks have advocated non-violence.

Then came Gandhiji, who accelerated the promotion of non-violence. Prior to Gandhi, it was considered to be a means to achieve personal salvation, but he explained its utility and importance in the social-life. The truth and non-violence can be used like weapons. They are more powerful and effective than weapons of violence. Gandhi made non-violence a people's movement on a large scale. He applied it in the battlefield and used it to gain independence for this vast country.

Let us again glance back at Kurukshetra. Although Pandava's commander did not hold a weapon in his hands yet the army used them to fight. Guess what could have happened had Krishna insisted that Bhim and Arjun too should not use weapons, like him. He could have said that their army too would not use weapons and would have asked Pitamah Bhishma and Guru Drona to aim their arrows at his army! He could have said that they had come there to die, not to kill! They would face them with all their might but not with the weapons. He could have said that he and the Pandavas loved them and would conquer them with love.

Although Krishna didn't say so, Gandhiji said it. He not only emphasise it but applied it into practice. He challenged the mightiest British nation saying, "You don't have a right to enslave us. We oppose this injustice but we would do it through truth and non-violence. Do you want to shoot us? Shoot! Lathi charge! Send us to jail. We won't utter a word. We are not angry or jealous. We do love you!" It had never happened before. Gandhiji 'nationalised' non-violence. He gained freedom for the country through non-violence and has set a new example of bravery. This is a delightful and enlightening message for mankind.

## Nagindas Sanghavi

### 81. An Earring

Gandhiji used to roam around the country for collecting the Harijan Fund. When he was at Dehradun, a lot of women had come from the adjacent villages to see Bapu. On that day Bapu used a new trick. He started moving among the people gathered there, spreading his hands in front of him, for asking donations. The women were impressed by this move and they gave money, coins, ornaments and whatever they could. When his hands got full of those things, Gandhiji would empty them there only and would again spread his empty hands saying, "My hands are empty. Fill them up." This went on for nearly half an hour and then the meeting was over. He asked Mahavir Tyagi to collect everything lying here and there and went away. Mahavir Tyagi collected all the things, made an inventory, sent everything to Gandhi and then went home relaxed.

All of a sudden, at 9.30 in the night, he got an urgent message from Gandhiji to come and see him. When Tyagi reached there he saw Gandhiji vexed a bit. He said, "If you accept a job, you should do it properly. Do you feel the responsibility or not?" Mahadevbhai was astonished to hear all that. Bapu again asked, "Why didn't you carefully collect all the things lying at the meeting place?" Hesitating Mahadevbhai said, "I did collect all the things." Gandhiji said, "No." Mahavir asked, "Who says that?" Showing him a small earring Gandhiji said, "This earring tells me so. Why is there a single piece? No woman would give a single earring. Where is the other one? Because you couldn't collect it, shows that you didn't discharge your responsibility properly." Mahadevbhai writes in his remembrances, "On that night we went to the meeting place again, taking along the Kitsun lamps with us. We gathered the rugs and the tarpaulin spread there for the people to sit, and shaking them properly folded them. We were lucky to find the small earring along with a number of crumpled currency notes etc. that added up to about Rs 200. We collected everything and sent it to Bapuji. But for so many days after it I was ashamed of going to him."

**Chandrakant P Shukla**

## 82. Lassitude Beats Poverty

Laziness is an old ailment prevalent among the Hindustani people; it is widespread too. Likewise poverty is also an ailment but its root lies in the idleness. Gandhiji produced 'Charkha' and 'Khadi' as a solution to it. While traveling for the promotion of Khadi he gained varied experiences, which led him to the opinion that the idleness of these people beats their poverty. Although the body lays idle due to laziness, the mind keeps thinking and roaming. It goes wayward and spoils everything for the person himself and others too. There is a saying in Hindi, 'an idle man dreams a lot'. In English they say, 'empty mind, is a devil's workshop'. In this world, most of the riots and crimes happen due to such jobless and idle people.

The ancient Roman Empire ruled many colonies around it. Their extortion brought them a lot of grains, which used to be distributed among the countrymen, free of charge. Those who used to toil in the fields earlier and were self-dependent became lazy and idle after they started receiving free food. With the passage of time the people started fighting among themselves and riots broke out. The habit of working hard was forgotten and the people became lazy and pleasure loving. All these things led to the fall of The Roman Empire. The mighty subjects dwelling in the jungles of the Northern region attacked and captured Rome.

In our country also, there was an abundance of wealth, luxury and idleness, during the middle ages, which resulted in several defeats in the battles and wars. Receiving food without hard work is like getting cursed. If a society, a nation or even a personal life is to be reconstructed, we have to subject ourselves to incessant hard work. All the eminent persons the world over possess a common quality - incessant hard work.

## 83. The Lesson of Cleanliness

All of us can learn a lesson in hard work from the army men. A soldier is respected because he defends the country at the cost of his life. He is respected for one more reason; his life is governed by rules and discipline.

The cantonments are extremely clean. Gandhiji had taught us a lesson in cleanliness. In 1934, there was a Harijan Yatra in Coorg. We were required to get up very early in the morning and march ahead. Before leaving the place, Gandhiji came to our room. He saw the trash scattered all over the room. He said with disgust, "Were you going to leave the place like this? If an army stays at a place, it makes the place tidier than before and then leaves. It is a rule. We should also follow the rule. Whichever place you live in everyday, clean it before leaving. I will not accept any excuses about it. Mind well, I will keep a watch."

## Mahadevbhai Desai

### 84. The Sorrow of Separation

“Everyone sheds tears when bereaved of the loved one, but the day the blood is shed with the tears then only one knows the value of the departed person.”

It was the month of December in 1917. I had just joined Gandhiji then. In a meeting in Calcutta, the Muslim league elected one of the Ali brothers, who were abducted from Chindwara, as president and kept the chair unoccupied. Gandhiji was specially invited there. We went there in the afternoon. The Urdu speaking people were trying to outsmart each other. The people would appreciate them saying Amin! Amin! Tears were trickling down their eyes and some sobs could also be heard. Then Gandhiji was asked to address the people.

He didn't join the mourners. On the contrary, with a straightforwardness befitting him, he asked, “How many tears in this flood are the genuine ones? If you are mourning the separation of Shaukat Ali and Mohamed Ali, not tears, but blood should trickle down your eyes. If you will brace yourself to sacrifice your life to get them freed, then only yours tears would seem genuine.” Today we can ask these questions to ourselves! Those who came to bid farewell to Gandhi, were they sincere? Those who remained in their houses and wept at his departure, were they sincere? If those tears were genuine, what have we decided to do after his departure? The portrayal of bereavement as found in Mahabharat cannot be paralleled by that in any other literature of the world. In Ramayan too, Bharat was not fortunate enough to see Ram before he went away. We are the fortunate lot that we have Gandhiji's message before he parted with us. Bharat didn't have this privilege. He received the news of Ram's departure after he returned to Ayodhya. He had a lot of near and dear ones to console and advice him to take up the new responsibility. But Bharat did not give in to those advices; rather he considered them improper. Life without Ram seemed worthless to him. He instantly decided to request Ram to return to Ayodhya. After having described this, Tulsidas doesn't immediately describe the Bharat-Ram meeting. Prior to it comes the description of Bharat's every step towards Ram, every tear that he shed, and every place that he trod during his journey to meet Ram. Hastily Bharat leaves Ayodhya in his chariot. Before crossing river Ganga he meets Guh, a staunch devotee of Ram. Because of Guh's devotion to Ram, Bharat alights down his chariot and walks towards him, as a mark of utmost respect. He reveres Guh as much as he does Ram. He enquires about everything that Ram had done but doesn't leave the place immediately. He visits every place where Ram had stayed, sat and slept. Taking a pinch of dust from there he applies it to his forehead as a mark of respect to Ram. All this while he keeps on uttering Ram-nam and tears

trickle down on his face. Tulsidas's description of Bharat's visit to Ram along with Guh, his courteous request to Ram and at last his return to Nandigram carrying Ram's 'paduka' with a laden heart, can shake the toughest person too. The plight of Ram and Sita during the 'Vanwas' (exile) can be forgotten, but one can never forget Bharat's lamentation, his penance for fourteen years and his pledge to bear any amount of hardship and sorrow to be with his beloved deity - Ram. Should a country, which has witnessed such extremes of worship and penance, let its religion decline so much that it would plunge itself down in the luxury of life. Gandhiji sent his message before going to jail. He wrote articles like 'The Moth-dance' to point out the problems prevalent in the society. How many of those lamenting his death implemented his advices in their lives? At this time, when the country should lament over his bereavement, when the blood should be shed along with tears, at such a time depression and disappointment seem to pervade the entire scene. Can anyone claim that the country is lamenting?

## Ravindranath Tagore

### 85. A Blazing Heart and a Shower of Blessing

Mahatma Gandhi arrived at an opportune time and went to the doorstep of millions of destitute and poor people. He dressed like them and spoke their dialect. Fortunately, this incarnation of love descended upon India and opened new avenues for her. Gandhiji is a great politician. He can build up big organisations. He is a great reformer too. But, besides this, his greatness lies in his being human. Although he is a staunch believer of principles, he holds human beings more important than principles. He is neither mighty nor wealthy. His impact made the enslaved subjects strongly oppose the tyrant sovereignty. The people have faith in him and are inclined to sacrifice their lives due to that faith. They can bear any sorrow too. The people who were suppressed for centuries are raising their voice against the tyranny, is no little miracle. They are winning in spite of the torture and without doing harm to anyone. The secret of Gandhi's success lies in his undeterred self-confidence and inestimable sacrifice. His life is the story of incessant sacrifice. He is neither fascinated by power, nor by wealth, fame, position or success. His power of sacrifice is invincible because it dwells with infinite fearlessness. The mighty kings, the Shahenshahs, the guns or bayonets, the prison or torture or even death cannot render him unsteady. Perhaps he might be unsuccessful like Buddha and Christ, and he may not be able to drive mankind away from its torturous attitude. But people will remember forever that there was a human being whose life was an illustration of faith, courage and love, for the ages to come.

**Louis Fischer**

### **86. Gandhiji and Ravindranath Tagore**

Gandhiji and Tagore were contemporary, and both were determined for the rejuvenation of India. Gandhiji was like a field full of grains, while Tagore was like a rose garden. Gandhiji was like hands busy in work, while Tagore was like a beautiful story. Gandhi was a commander, while Tagore was an envoy. Gandhiji was a skinny hermit, while Tagore was a handsome knight. But the infinite love they felt for India and the humankind had absolutely no difference.

**Pyarelal Nayyar**

### **87. Tiny Things Comprise The Life**

Once Gandhiji said that ‘non-violence’ means ‘absolute purity’- the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ purity. He said that our villages have become penniless. The cities are a bit better. But the people living in the villages are pushed in the marsh of illiteracy and are left there to rot. They don’t even get drinking water there. The education of the villagers was neglected and they were pushed into darkness. The villages are infested with diseases, which can be prevented. Every village has a number of quacks and ‘bhagats’ who victimise the poor villagers. We must start rescuing them by helping them change the habits, which deteriorate the condition of their mind and body. There is no dearth of people in this country. But we need effective community efforts. Only then will the environment not let the undeserving people thrive. The community efforts would eradicate illiteracy and poverty, which would lead to the development of a feeling of togetherness.

Thus Gandhiji would advice the villagers regarding their everyday experiences and would try to convince them about the power of non-violence. He never thought that any work was important or ordinary. He emphasised that whatever work a ‘satyagrahi’ performs, whether personal or of public interest, should be done honestly; and that any of his jobs, big or small, should reflect truthfulness. Gandhiji used to say that the small, ordinary things only shaped his life; and that is why he always emphasised, “Whatever I did can be done by everyone.”

### **88. The Last Day**

On that fateful Friday, the 30<sup>th</sup> January, Gandhiji thought of going to Sevagram after two days. Someone asked him if the people there should be informed about the date of his arrival there. He said, “Why waste money for the telegram? I will declare the date of departure after the evening prayer. The people at Sevagram will get the news through the newspaper even before they can get the telegram.”

He seemed to be very happy that day. Someone told him that a lady wished to go to Sevagram but did not get any transportation. On hearing this Gandhiji said, "Why didn't you walk down to the station?" he expected everyone to find a way out of any situation, in any condition. If he entrusted a job to anyone, he would not listen to any excuses. Once he was touring in South India when the vehicle stopped because the petrol was over. Gandhiji immediately got ready to heave the luggage on his back and walk down to the station, thirteen miles away. He had severe cough at the time.

Someone suggested him to take a penicillin tablet, but once again he insisted on getting well by the power of Ramnam. He said to the person who massaged he head, "If I would die due to any disease, even if due to a small boil, tell the whole world that this was a 'Hypocrite Mahatma'. This would bring me solace, wherever I would be. The people might abuse you but do it at any cost. If I die due to a disease, then also call me a hypocrite. But if someone shoots me and I would die without heaving a sigh, saying Ramnam unto the last moment, declare me the real Mahatma." It was 4 pm and he worked on his spinning wheel for about an hour. Simultaneously, he kept talking to Sarah. He also had his dinner while conversing with her. It was the time for the evening prayer. Abha could dare not intervene their conversation. Gandhiji looked into his watch and glanced at Abha. At last he said to Sardar, "Now I must leave." He got up and put his hands on the shoulders of Abha and Manu. Joking with them, he started towards the place for prayer. When he reached near the dais he said, "I hate being ten minutes late for the prayer. I feel that I should be there for the prayer at 5 o' clock, exactly." These were his last words.

\*\*\*\*\*