

Moved by Love

(The Memoirs of Vinoba Bhave)

Translated by Marjorie Sykes
from a Hindi text prepared by Kalindi



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MOVED BY LOVE

KALINDI joined Vinoba in 1960, soon after taking her Master of Social Work degree. As his companion, she took notes of his speeches and conversations, and acted as his representative in dealings with the Press. When Vinoba started the Hindi monthly magazine Maitri in 1964, she became its editor, a position she held for about 40 years. She is a member of the Brahmavidya Mandir, the ashram founded by Vinoba at Paunar. The material translated into English for this book was originally published as a special edition of Maitri in 1985. MARJORIE SYKES spent the greater part of her life in India, and became an Indian citizen in 1950 when this became constitutionally possible. Having graduated with First Class Honours from Cambridge University, she first went to India at the end of 1928 to teach at a girls' school in Madras. Ten years later she moved to Bengal to work with Rabindranath Tagore at his innovative university at Shantiniketan. Already fluent in Tamil, she learned Bengali, and at Tagore's request translated some of his works into English.

After Indian Independence was achieved she was free to accept Gandhi's invitation, given two years earlier, to help with his Basic Education programme at Sevagram. In 1957 Vinoba invited her to convene the first all-India Shanti Sena (Peace Army) Committee, which he wished to be led by women. She later went to the U.S. and Canada as a consultant to the non-violent Civil Rights movement, and from 1964-67 was a member of the Peacekeeping team monitoring the ceasefire between the Indian Government and the Nagaland Independence fighters. She died at the age of 90 in 1995.

Her published work includes biographies of Rabindranath Tagore and C.F. Andrews, translations of Vinoba's Thoughts on Education and other works, and (in collaboration with Jehangir Patel) a book of personal reminiscences of Gandhi, Gandhi: his gift of the fight. A biography, Marjorie Sykes: Quaker Gandhian by Martha Dart, was published in 1993.

PREFACE

By Kalindi

This book is not Vinobaji's autobiography. He himself used to say that if he were to sit down and write, the result would not be 'the story of the self'¹, but a story of the 'not-self', because he was 'Vinoba the forgetful'. But he neither wrote nor dictated any such story of the not-self. But during the course of his thousands of talks he used to illustrate his topics by examples from experience, and these naturally included some incidents from his own life. This book is simply an attempt to pick out such incidents from various places and string them together.

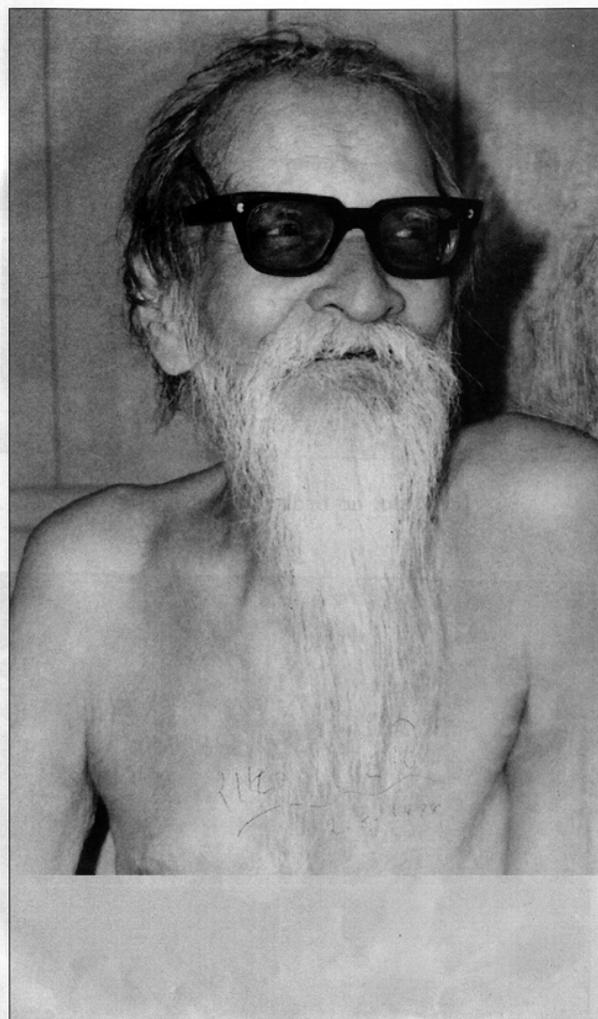
It follows that there are limits to what can be done. This is not a complete life story, only a glimpse of it. There is no attempt to give a full picture of every event, every thought, every step of the way. It brings together only those incidents and stories which are to be had in Vinoba's own words. Some important events may therefore not be found in it, and in some places it will seem incomplete, because the principle followed is to use only Vinoba's own account. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations the glimpses will be found to be complete in themselves.

Children are fond of playing with a 'jigsaw puzzle', where a complete picture, painted on a wooden plank, has been cut up into small pieces of many shapes and sizes; the aim is to fit them together in their proper places and so re-build the picture. Sometimes the players make mistakes and insert a piece into the wrong place, so that the picture is spoiled. The trouble is with the child's lack of skill, not with the original painter of the picture. It is possible that in putting together these fragmentary 'glimpses' of Vinoba's life similar mistakes may have crept in.

But then, as Jnanadev asks, how can one number the Infinite, or add lustre to the Supreme Radiance? How can the mosquito grasp in its fist the illimitable sky? As he goes on to say, there is one basis on which it can be done. The work

has been undertaken in a spirit of utmost devotion on the basis of the 'gift of fearlessness' received from Vinoba. Vinoba has both given and received gifts of many kinds, but this gift of fearlessness which we have received from him is the quintessence of his own quest for non-violence, and shows that the quest was successful. There can be no doubt that these glimpses of his life will inspire and strengthen us to carry on that quest with enthusiasm. They are offered here in the name of the Lord.

1. The Hindi word for 'autobiography' is *atma-katha*, literally 'story of the self'.



VINOBA BHAVE
(11-9-1895 – 15-11-1982)

FOREWORD

By Hallam Tennyson (9-6-1993)

In April 1951 Vinoba Bhave sprang into sudden prominence. He started his *Bhoodan Yagna*. This movement—which we translated into English as ‘Land Gift Mission’—was a brilliantly simple conception. Vinoba went on foot from village to village appealing to landlords to hand over at least one-sixth of their land to the landless cultivators of their village. ‘Air and water belong to all,’ Vinoba said. ‘Land should be shared in common as well.’

The tone of voice in which this was said was all-important. It was never condemnatory, never harsh. Gentleness—true *Ahimsa*—was Vinoba’s trademark. A gentleness backed up by a life of such dedication and simplicity that few could listen to his pleading unmoved.

In the first six years of his mission Vinoba walked over five thousand miles and received land for distribution which amounted to an area equal to the size of Scotland. No doubt some of this land was as uncultivable as the Scottish highlands too. And here lay the main problem of *Bhoodan Yagna* from the practical point of view. After Vinoba had walked on to the next village—and he very rarely stayed more than one night in any single place—many villages developed factions and disagreements leading to disillusion and the rapid flickering out of the *Bhoodan* spirit which Vinoba had inspired.

When I walked with Vinoba I found this aspect distressing, even heart-breaking. But today, reading the extracts translated by Marjorie Sykes, I see the situation in a different light. Vinoba was a true embodiment of the spirit of the Gita: ‘In every age I come back, to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish righteousness,’ Krishna said. He did not promise permanent solutions; he redirected our gaze to the universal good and rekindled faith in human capacities.

This is what Vinoba did. He did not worry about the fruits of his actions. If his actions were sound enough then their influence would work on the soggy dough

of human consciousness and help it to rise up to achieve something nearer to its full potential. He was astonishingly—at least to the eye of a Westerner—detached from the results.

This attitude of detachment coloured every aspect of Vinoba's life and thought, as is shown in Marjorie Sykes' deft translation of extracts from his recorded speeches. Vinoba did not care what the world thought; he followed his own glimpse of the truth to its stark and logical conclusion. He had little of Mahatma Gandhi's wonderful sense of drama and little of his playfulness and sense of fun. But this apparent lack of 'personality' was not a defect. It was the inevitable price he had to pay for the great gift he brought us. 'Let only that little be left of me by which I may name Thee my all.' Vinoba, with his usual mathematical precision, had calculated this sum exactly. There could be no one better qualified to translate Vinoba's thoughts for Western readers than Marjorie Sykes, who has been interpreting India to the West for well over fifty years ! She brings to the task great skill, precision and understanding. Thus a dozen years after his death Vinoba once again confronts the western reader with his simplicity and subtlety, his courage and his supreme gentleness.

The radiance goes on.

INTRODUCTION

By Satish Kumar

Vinoba Bhave was a man of great purity. I worked with him from 1955 to 1962, during his twenty-year campaign to give land to the poor. He was a man who was able to move the hearts of landlords and touch them so deeply that, in all, they voluntarily donated four million acres of land. This extraordinary happening, unprecedented anywhere in the history of the world, cannot be explained in any other way than by recognizing that his demand for land came from the heart of a saint untainted by any self-interest, desire for personal glory, or pursuit of material gain.

Vinoba was doubtful of the value of formal education: he used to remark to his friends that the existing schools and colleges were only large factories for training 'your most obedient servants'. After leaving school without taking his final examinations he prepared for his future life by going to Benares to study, contemplate and discuss with *sadhus* and scholars. Finally he felt that these holy men were cut off from the real world. In the dualism of God and the world, the meaning of wholeness was lost. God can only be realized through the world. It was then that Vinoba discovered Mahatma Gandhi: Gandhi who was campaigning to liberate the untouchables from the shackles of class domination, who was working to revitalize rural life, and who was living in a community which worked through prayer and meditation. Vinoba went to stay at Gandhi's *ashram*, and both felt a deep attraction for each other. From then on Vinoba devoted his life to seeking God and serving the people, particularly dedicating himself to the poor of India.

Gandhi chose the little-known Vinoba Bhave, as one whose purity of motive was unquestionable, to be the first to raise the flag of independent India in the individual satyagraha campaign of 1940. Those who did not know Vinoba were surprised by the choice, but those who did know him approved wholeheartedly because here was a man who had no political axe to grind.

Vinoba's non-violent but illegal actions as part of the freedom movement involved him in years of imprisonment. In spite of this he kept himself in the background after independence. He spent seven years, partly in studying and translating the Gita, the Upanishads and other Sanskrit texts, and partly in constructive work for the upliftment of the poor in a small village in central India.

As is described in the following pages, Vinoba's great Land Gift Movement (*Bhoodan*) was brought about as a result of the riots between landless peasants and the mighty landlords near Hyderabad in south India. Vinoba was deeply disturbed by these riots, and travelled to the area in order to see if he could help to find a just solution to the grievances of the poor. The forty landless families of one village said they needed eighty acres for subsistence; and one landowner, Ramachandra Reddy, was so moved by Vinoba's presence that he made the unprecedented offer of a gift of one hundred acres of his land. Vinoba could not believe his ears: this was too good to be true. The landless families accepted only their original request for eighty acres. They assured the landlord that they would serve Mother Earth with all their heart. Wiping away his tears, Vinoba said, 'Both the donor and the recipients are present here in our midst. Let them exchange the land in our presence. The donor should also help these labourers with some seeds and implements for cultivating the land in a co-operative way.' Then he added, 'I came with empty hands and I go with empty hands, but my heart is full.'

Land belongs to God—it belongs to all or none. Nobody created the land, so why should anyone claim to possess it? Air, water, sunshine, forests, hills, rivers and the earth are part of our planetary heritage. No one group or individual has a right to own it, possess it, spoil it, pollute or destroy it. We can receive the earth's fruits as God's gift and return what we do not need to God. And so Vinoba knocked at every door, persuading landlords, capitalists and Communists to establish a new relationship with the earth and its people. If you are rich, give; if you are poor, give. No one is a 'have not'. Some possess land, others property and yet others intellect and physical strength.

Furthermore love and affection permeate the hearts of all human beings. We all have something to give, so give and give.

Through his campaign of giving gifts (*dan*), Vinoba inspired people to make a gift of land, gift of labour, gift of money, gift of tools, gift of knowledge. This was economics of the imagination. Hardly anybody refused this divine beggar.

Vinoba's practice was never to antagonize the landlords, but to assist them to act rightly. The spirit of giving cannot be developed in an atmosphere of opposition and confrontation. Opposition reduces the chances of a change of heart and is itself a form of violence.

Vinoba's understanding of this was perceptive and profound: 'Take the example of a house. You want to enter the house, but it has high walls around it. You go to the wall and fight to get past it. You cannot. What happens? Your head is broken. But if you find a small door, you can get into the house and go wherever you want. But you have to find the door. Like that, when I meet a landlord he has many faults and shortcomings, and his egotism is like a wall. But he has a little door, a little goodness in his heart. When you are prepared to find the door, you rise above your own egotism and you enter his life. Don't worry about his faults, find the door. If sometimes I cannot find the door it is my fault: my fault that I am banging my head against his shortcomings.' Living like the poor and seeing God in the poor, Vinoba became a fearless defender of the poor. He said: 'If you have five sons consider me the sixth son, the representative of the poor, and give me one sixth of your land to share with the landless.'

Vinoba became such a force in India that Prime Ministers and Presidents came to see him in the thatched huts and bamboo cottages where he camped during his long walks through the countryside. Where untouchables or people of different religions were not welcome, Vinoba would not go, whether it was a palace or a temple.

When he had reached the age of seventy-five, Vinoba decided to relinquish social and political action. He stopped his travels, and spent his time in prayer, meditation and contemplation. In spite of the fact that he was reluctant to talk

about his life and refused to write an autobiography, Kalindi, a close associate and disciple, has from his own words woven together the story of his life, reflections and memories. Both she and the translator Marjorie Sykes have performed a great service by bringing Vinoba's insights and experience to us.

At the age of eighty-seven, Vinoba felt weak and unwell. He saw death approaching. Doctors wanted to prolong his life but Vinoba had no fear of death. He renounced all food, drink and medicine. When his fast unto death became known, his friends and followers gathered in their thousands to bid him farewell. After eight days of fasting Vinoba left his body in total peace.



Towards Hyderabad on foot (1951)

TO BEGIN WITH

By Vinoba Bhave

I am a man who belongs to another world than this, one that may seem very strange. For I claim that I am moved by love, that I feel it all the time. I do not deal in opinions, but only in thought, in which there can be give and take.

Thought is not walled in or tied down, it can be shared with people of goodwill; we can take their ideas and offer them ours, and in this way thought grows and spreads. This has always been my experience, and therefore I do not accept any kind of label for myself. It is open to anyone whatever to explain his ideas to me and convince me, and anyone is free to make my ideas his own in the same way.

There is nothing so powerful as love and thought—no institution, no government, no 'ism', no scripture, no weapon. I hold that these, love and thought, are the only sources of power. You should not expect me therefore to have any fixed opinions, only ideas. I am a man who changes every moment. Anyone can make me his slave by putting his ideas vigorously before me and convincing me that they are right. But no one, however hard he tries, can get me to accept his authority without first convincing me of the soundness of his thought.

I am just one individual; I wear no label, I am not a member of any institution, I have nothing to do with political parties. I do however keep in affectionate contact with the organizations for constructive work.¹ I was born a Brahmin, but I cut myself off from my caste when I cut off my shikha.² Some people call me a Hindu, but I have made such a repeated study of the Koran and the Bible that my Hinduism has been washed off ! People like what I say because my work is rooted in compassion, love and thought. I have ideas, but no permanently settled views. In fact I am so unreliable that I do not hesitate to express one view today and another tomorrow. I am not the same today as I

was yesterday. I think differently every moment and go on changing all the time.

I should make one thing clear. I am often seen as a representative of Gandhian ideology. Nothing could be farther from truth. It is true that my life has been spent in carrying out those of the Gandhiji's programmes which appealed to me—but, let it be emphasised, only those which appealed to me. I have indeed gained a lot from his thoughts and from my association with him. But so have I gained from other thinkers as well. I have accepted those thoughts which I was convinced were right and rejected the rest. So I am a man with my own ideas. Gandhiji knew this, and still he regarded me as one of his colleagues as he was a lover of liberty. Hence, I am not competent to represent Gandhian ideology even if I am inclined to do so; and I am surely not so inclined.

Many currents of thoughts are working in the country, and as I am in direct touch with the people I get an opportunity to observe them minutely. I can therefore take an impartial stand and never lose my focus on harmony. I never indulge in polemics. For me, to oppose anybody needlessly goes against the grain. In fact, my condition is like Saint Tukaram who said, 'I just cannot stand a single word expressing opposition !'

I regard myself as the 'Supreme cementing factor' as I do not belong to any political party. But this is to put things in a negative manner. I, in fact, love the good men in all the parties. That is what makes me the the 'Supreme cementing factor'. Anyone who works for revolutionary transformation through change of heart is bound to be a cementing factor, not only for any one country but for the whole world.

All are my kinsfolk and I theirs. It is not in my heart to love some more and others less. In the Life of the Prophet Muhammed it is related how once, speaking about Abu Bakr, he said: 'I could love him more than anyone, if it were not forbidden to love one more than another.' That is to say, God forbids us to love one more than another. The same is true for me. I cannot make any differences between individuals.

I once saw a portrait of Louis Pasteur, and below it these words: 'I do not want to know your religion or your views, but only what your troubles are. I want to help you to get rid of them.' Those who do that are discharging their duty as human beings, and that is what I am trying to do.

Once a visitor asked me, 'Who would carry forward your work?' My reply was: the one who motivated me would take care of it. In fact, I do not regard myself as a doer. I am not inclined to order others, to impose discipline on others. I cannot therefore have any disciple. The power that moved me would therefore take the work forward.

It is my firm conviction that a spark of true knowledge can burn down all the problems in the world. With this conviction I have spent all my life in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. It will serve my purpose even if that could inform just a couple of lives.

I don't take any step without going deeply into the matter and getting at the root of it. I have spent thirty years of my life in solitary thought, while at the same time giving what service I could. I wished to make my life one of service, but it has also been one of reflection—reflection about the changes which must come in society, and how the roots of those changes must be purified. I am quite clear now about my basic thought, and I am not afraid of any problem. No matter what it is, no matter how big, it seems small to me, for I am bigger than the problem. However big it may be it is after all a human problem, and it can be solved by human intelligence.

During the course of my work, both in Ashrams and outside them, I have aimed at finding out how difficulties of every kind in the life of society, and in the life of the individual, may be overcome by non-violence. That is my chief task; that is why I went to Telangana.³ If I had avoided that work I would have broken my pledge to strive for non-violence and Shanti-sena.⁴ The things that happened in this country immediately after we got independence had dimmed the hope of non-violence. Forces of violence showed themselves in India in great strength. After Gandhiji passed away I was therefore trying to discover how a non-violent social order might be built.

By nature I am inclined to use the methods of Lord Mahavira,⁵ but what I actually did was more on the lines of Lord Buddha. The two are not opposed. It was not Mahavira's way to take up a practical problem or propagate an idea. Wherever he went he would talk to individuals, understand the outlook of whoever was before him, and show each one how to find satisfaction in life. If someone believed in a particular scripture he would use that as the basis of his teaching; if another had no faith in any book, he would make suggestions without reference to a book. In this way he shared his thought from a middle ground. The Lord Buddha on the other hand took up social problems to spread actively the idea of non-violence.

Whether one should have recourse to such practical problems in order to propagate an idea is a moot point. There is always a danger that the problem may usurp the foremost place, and the basic thought, the idea for whose sake the problem is used, may be overshadowed and become secondary. On the other hand, without the aid of such problems thought is not focused. Goodwill spreads invisibly, but ideas need to take concrete shape, otherwise ordinary people are not attracted. So there is a risk both in using a practical problem and in not using it; there is also good to be had in both ways.

I certainly used the problem of land as my framework, but my basic aim is to teach and commend the idea of Samyayoga—of unity and equality—and compassion. In choosing this framework I used my intelligence, but my thinking always went beyond the framework, and I longed many times to keep to my own real nature. Still, I did not give up the problem, so I have been working on a synthesis of the way of Lord Mahavira and that of Lord Buddha. I have one quality, which may seem a negative attribute. I cannot press anyone to do something. This often results in delays; but the work does get done invariably and successfully. I see to it that people do not get pressurised by my words, that my beliefs do not become aggressive. I would be sad if anyone accepts my ideas without getting convinced. And if anyone is convinced about any idea and still does not accept it, I cherish the hope that sooner or later he would come to accept it.

It is God's grace that allegations made by people through misunderstanding never affect me. I have placed myself in His hands. It is His work; not mine. It is He who is moving me, who is making me walk. I do not care for propaganda. Ideas, like light, get propagated through space. In fact, space may restrict the movement of light, but it can never restrict the spread of ideas. With this conviction, I continue to work without any fears or worries.

I do not seek any merit; I seek nothing but service. And I wish that I should not get any credit for that service, as that service has come to me as a matter of course and is the need of the age. Time has made me an instrument for that service. So I would get no credit for it. A twig may travel miles through the current of a river; it is not its achievement. Had it flowed a few feet against the current, it would have been a matter of credit. Likewise, had my service been against the current, it would have given me credit. I have thus ensured that I get no credit for my service; it is the service and service alone which I seek.

I do have an objective in mind, but I do not think that the responsibility of its fulfilment rests on my shoulders alone. It rests on the shoulders of all. It is the Lord's work, and is therefore bound to reach fruition. Nobody can oppose truth; it may take time to be grasped, but it cannot be ignored. I therefore place my thoughts before the people and then go to sleep in the lap of the Lord. Every day is a day of rebirth for me, and as it dawns I immerse myself in the work that I have taken up.

I often say in a lighter vein that I rarely get an opportunity to look myself in the mirror. Nor is it necessary. I see myself in all the faces around me. This was my constant experience during my walking pilgrimage. In the provinces where the people could not understand my language they had to do with the indifferent translation of my lectures. But there too I had the same experience. And the people there too had the same experience about me. Nowhere did the people consider me an outsider; I received the same love and affection everywhere.

I do not look upon the people in front of me as men; for me they are images of the Lord. I feel that the Lord that resides in my heart has taken a variety of forms for me to behold.

In many respects I am weak, but I have one strength. Nobody knows the source of that strength but everyone realises its efficacy even though people do not care to have it. Without that, I would be a lump of clay. I find nothing in me that could have sustained me in my walking pilgrimage. I have no power of my own that could make me ask for land-gifts and impel the people to part with their land. I command no authority and have no organisation. It is the Lord who is moving me. It is His grace. Wherever I see, I have His vision.

I have therefore nothing but love, not only for every man but also for every being—not only absence of hatred but positive love. I see the Lord in every face and love swells up in my heart bringing tears to my eyes. I have to make efforts to restrain them.

It has been my lot to go speaking. Earlier it was before the friends and the students; now it is before the public. As a young man I would rarely censor my tongue. But my friends knew that I had malice for none, and so they would not get hurt by my comments. In the company of Gandhiji I realised that one must keep one's tongue in leash, at least in critical times. Gradually it became a habit. At times people would complain to Gandhiji against indiscrete use of words on my part; but Gandhiji would invariably shield me. That he had to shield me would be embarrassing and that would make me more vigilant. My walking pilgrimage was, for me, in the words of Pandit Nehru, 'discovery of India'. Not that I did not know India. I did have a fair acquaintance with its past and present; although full knowledge of its past is almost impossible. It has been my endeavour to know as much of it as I can; and I did get opportunities therefor. Acquaintance with the literature of almost all of its languages gave me a feel of the pulse of India. But the pilgrimage unfolded a new vision and broadened my understanding.

In Yogvasishtha the sage Vasishtha tells Ram, 'Oh Raghava ! Have detachment from within and attachment from without.' There is no contradiction here. We

should know where we have to reach, so that we can be on the right path. If our eyes are fixed on this polestar our approach is bound to be indirect—it would be the approach of non-violence. That exactly was my approach. My co-workers say that my method appears somewhat mysterious, even though scientific, unlike that of Gandhiji whose method appears more simple and transparent. It is so, because our perceptions differ, and also because times too have changed. Gandhiji used to mix freely with the people and I remain somewhat aloof from them; still I could understand the condition of the masses with less difficulty as I grew up amongst them unlike Gandhiji who was born in an aristocratic family and had more friends among the higher classes in the society; and therefore he looked to the masses from that standpoint. I grew up in a village. My thinking has been in tune with the masses. I studied the religious literature in different provinces—the literature the masses were steeped in. My study of the secular subjects is limited. Gandhiji was a barrister—an expert in law, of which I know the least. All this naturally results in the difference in approach.

My approach is also different from that of Shankara- charya who tried to convince the learned and believed that once they were convinced they would take care of the rest. It is rather akin to that of Kabir who made direct appeal to the masses.

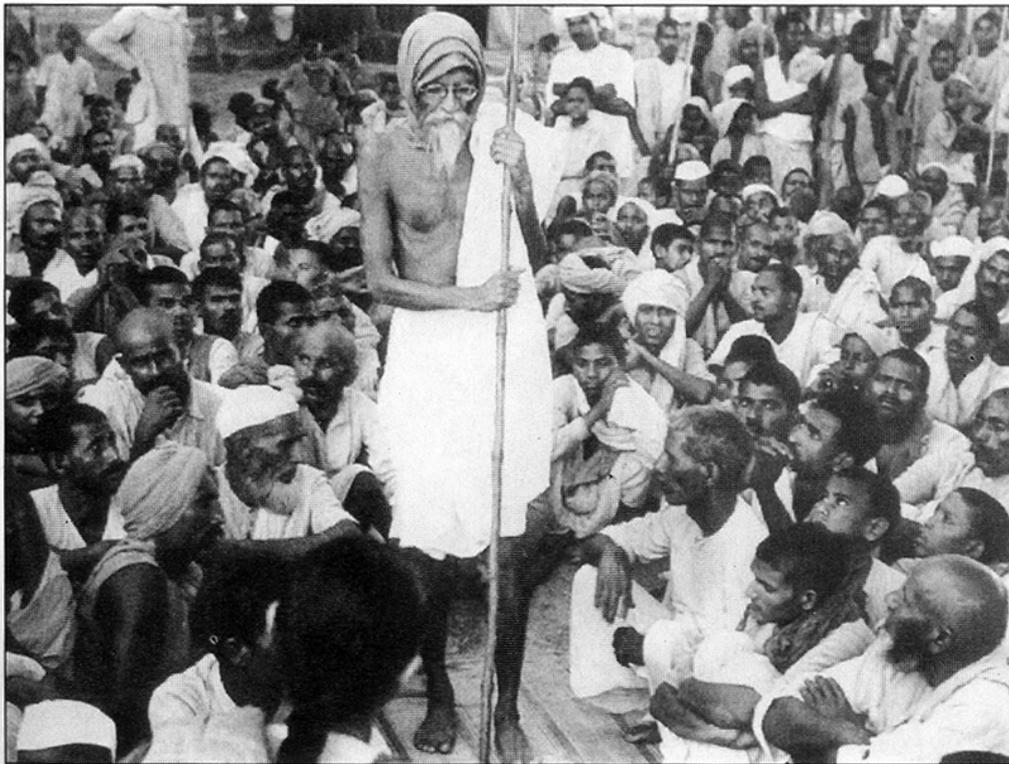
I cannot deny that there is an element of mysticism in me. So, while I am walking on the earth my mind is on a different plane. Had I not come to Gandhiji, I would perhaps have followed the way of the mystics, the way of meditation. But fascination for the Gita was there since childhood; and the Gita has said that the way of the meditation and that of the action are one and the same. I therefore realised the need for balance in life; and the contradictions within me were finally resolved in the company of Gandhiji. Since then, I have been following his way with exclusive concentration. But still there is something different within.

It is not that Gandhiji lacked this element. Those in close touch with him did realise that, although he appeared exclusively concerned with service in his

outward activities, he was striving for something else. It is a question of attitude. Gandhiji was basically an activist, but there was mysticism in the background. Vivekanand, on the other hand, was apparently a mystic, but had activism in the background. Ramkrishna Paramhans was a pure mystic. Attitudes thus differ. I think, I stand somewhere in the middle. In whatever that seemed to me to be worth doing in life, I have received the greatest help (apart from the scriptures) from three people—Shankara, Jnanadev and Gandhiji. As for Gandhiji, I not only studied his ideas and writings, I lived in his company, and spent my whole time, in my youth, in the various forms of service which he started. His presence, his ideas, and the opportunity to put them into practice—I had the benefit of all three. In other words I lived under the wing of a great man, and he gave me a very great gift for which I am grateful. So did the first Shankaracharya.⁶ He helped me chiefly in overcoming the philosophical doubts which naturally arise in any reasoning mind, and I shall always remain in his debt in the world of thought. As for the gift I have received from Saint Jnanadev,⁷ I have no words to describe it. He has shaped my thought, entered my heart, guided my action; besides all this, as I believe, he has touched my body also. His influence has been great and many-sided. I am by nature very harsh, a lump of rough shapeless rock. Shankaracharya made the rock strong, Gandhiji chiselled it and gave it a form, but the mighty task of piercing the rock and releasing the springs of water below, and so endowing my life and heart with sweetness—that was the work of Saint Jnanadev.

When I think of myself, of who I am, and of the good fortune that has come my way, I recall a lot of favourable outward circumstances. I certainly had very special parents, as people recognize. My brothers too have a quality of their own. I have had a guide on my way who by universal acclaim is a Mahatma. I have had dear friends, and all of them without exception have won the affection of the people. I have had students of whom I myself have become enamoured. What a great heap of good fortune ! In addition, because I know a number of languages, I have had and still have opportunity to taste the nectar of thought of many saints and men of religion. That too, so one may reflect, is

a piece of great good fortune. Yet all this pales into insignificance beside the greatest good fortune of all, which is mine and yours and everyone's—that we are all members, portions, limbs of God; waves in that Ocean. Our greatest good fortune is that we abide within God; once we feel that, we are free.



Message of hope for the people

PART ONE :
A Youth Unyoked
1895-1916

01. MY VILLAGE HOME

My childhood was spent in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Gagode was a small village of about eighty houses, in Colaba district. It had no school and most of its inhabitants were illiterate.

The women of every household used to get up with the first light to begin their work. The first job was to grind grain into flour for the day's needs, in the circular stone hand-mill. Then followed the sweeping of the courtyards, which were sprinkled with a mixture of cow dung and water to lay the dust and keep them fresh and clean. While their hands were occupied with these and other chores, the women's lips would be singing hymns in the name of the Lord. The sweet sounds filled the morning air with purity.

My grandfather was an Inamdar, a kind of landlord. We lived in quite a big house, with a spacious courtyard where there were a great many frogs of various kinds, which all night long kept up a regular Mandukya-Upanishad.¹ I was quite scared of these innumerable frogs; later I read the description given by the sage Vasishtha in the Veda: 'One frog looks rather like a bullock, another like a goat, another is spotted, and they all croak in chorus like Brahmins chanting the Vedas. In the hot weather they grow dry and withered like Brahmins performing austerities, but in the rains they grow fresh and vigorous and shout with joy.' What an imaginative way of looking at frogs ! But people tell me that nowadays the number of frogs in our courtyard is not even a quarter of what it was then. Frogs' legs are regarded as a delicacy in America,² so frogs are caught for export. Sometimes when I am asked when I plan to go back to Gagode I answer: 'When the courtyard is as full of frogs as it used to be !'

Gagode had a lake—a very large lake! There was a very tall tree beside it, and a spacious temple. Many years later, when I was forty years of age, I went back there and found that lake, tree and temple had all shrunk! One could easily throw a stone right across the lake, easily climb the tree. It was only in a child's eye that they had seemed so big.

I used to wander about the village watching labourers at their work. One day I was standing watching some men splitting a big rock. One of them noticed me. 'Would you like to try your hand, Vinya?' he asked. 'Oh yes please !' So when after a few more blows the rock had reached breaking point they put the hammer into my hand. I struck with all my little might, and sure enough the rock fell apart ! To please me the good-natured labourers stood and cheered: 'Well done Vinya ! The Inamdar's boy split the rock!'

Sometimes on special occasions a Brahmin would come to our home at Gagode and give recital from the Vedas. I would sit and listen, and soon had made up my own Veda in Marathi, which I chanted with all the sonorous intonation of the Brahmin's Sanskrit mantras. All it said was that 'horses are grazing on the bank of the river', but delivered in that style it sounded magnificent ! A blind uncle lived with us in the Gagode house. He was very hard-working and gentle, and everyone loved him and cared for him. Later on when we went to Baroda with father he remained in Gagode, and one day a letter brought the news of his death. Usually when any such news came mother would give us all a bath and bathe herself, but this time there were no such rituals and I asked her why not. 'You see, Sonnie,' she said, 'blind uncle did not really belong to our family. He was in great need and had no one to care for him, so he lived with us.' So it was only after his death that I learned that the uncle we had known for so many years was not a blood relation.

The first nine years of my life were spent in that village home. Then in 1905 we joined our father at Baroda, where he was employed. During our holidays we used to go and stay with our grandparents at Gagode, but I had no more close contact with my native village, and a few years later I cut loose from my family also. As I have said I went back to Gagode in 1935 at the age of forty, just for two or three days. While I was there I had something to write for Bapu³ about the spinning wheel. By the time I had finished it was midnight, and I was about to go to bed when I heard the sound of singing from the temple nearby. The villagers had assembled there, and I went and sat quietly among them. Hymns

of devotion went on for about an hour. My feeling for language would normally have been outraged by their crude pronunciation, but before the depth of their devotion nothing else mattered. I was completely carried away, sunk in bliss. One of their hymns struck me as specially sweet, and I remember it to this day:

*Nowhere in this world is happiness,
crave it not in vain:
The whole world is a snare of sorrow,
where happiness is not to be found.*

Here, I thought, are these villagers in this tiny village, miserably poor, like walking skeletons, with practically nothing to cover their nakedness, and yet they can lose themselves in such devotional music ! I was delighted. Where had these people, in this village without a school, where no one could read or write, obtained this knowledge? It must surely be because they sing with such devotion so many of the hymns of Tukaram and other saints, that they keep to this day their understanding and intelligence. It is here that our strength lies. Saint Tukaram himself fell into such great poverty that his wife died of hunger. Yet he turned to the Lord and said: 'Oh my God, if there were no sorrow, there would be no remembrance of Thee !' and in the midst of his grief he found joy:

*Joys piled on joys have filled
my heart to the brim;
Love is an everflowing stream
resounding with Thy Name.*

It is because our country possesses this spirit of devotion that even the very poorest show the world a smiling face. The people of poverty-stricken Gagode, outwardly so dried-up and withered-looking, were filled with the nectar of devotion.

Once before, in 1920, I had spent a day in Gagode. Some had died, others still survived—some of the grain, as it were, was being cooked on the stove, some was waiting its turn in the basket, that was all the difference ! The same stars that I had seen in Wardha shone over Gagode also; I was the same too, except that in Gagode the sight of the hills haunted me. Perhaps I had once been a

wild creature of those hills, a deer or a tiger maybe, the companion of some hermit? Perhaps by mistake I was born as a man? I am not wholly tamed even now—I am still the same Vinoba, even though I have been 'fried in Gandhiji and rolled in Jamnalalji.'⁴

During my 1935 visit I wrote, in a letter, that the mountains and the mother, between them, are the symbols of all creation and all relationships. In the course of those three or four days I must have recalled my mother about forty times. Gita, Mother, Takli:⁵ that is my 'Trinity', and for me those three include every one of the thousand Names of the Lord.



Jeevan-dan (dedication of life at Bodhgaya Conference (1954). President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Jayaprakash Narayan look on.

02. MY GRANDFATHER

My grandfather Shambhuroo Bhave was very devout. Every morning he would spend hours in the ritual of worship, offering puja¹ to Lord Shiva. We children would get up early and bring flowers and leaves from the courtyard for his offerings. Grandfather would get me to prepare sandalwood paste for the worship, and then to sit by his side while he recited the sacred mantras. Sometimes while the recitation was going on people such as the village Patel would come to see him. Grandfather would break off his chanting and talk with them, and take up the recital again after they had left. Sometimes he would forget what point he had reached, and he would turn to me: 'Now then Vinya, how far had I got?' If I remembered I would tell him, but if I had also forgotten the mantras had to be recited again from the beginning. Sometimes it might be a couple of hours before the recitation was finished.

One morning when I was seven or eight years old, Grandfather had seated himself as usual to begin his worship, when we noticed that a scorpion had settled upon the sacred image. Everyone began to shout, 'Scorpion ! Scorpion ! Kill it !' Grandfather checked them, and then said solemnly: 'The scorpion has taken refuge with the Lord. He is in sanctuary, let no one touch him.' The words sounded like a verse from the Upanishads ! Then Grandfather went on with his puja, offering the flowers, sandalwood and water, and completing the whole ritual, while the scorpion remained motionless throughout. Only when it was all over did he climb down and walk away. The incident made a deep impression on me: one who takes sanctuary with the Lord is to be treated with respect, no matter who he may be.

I remember another thing. A boy who was living with us had helped himself to some gur.² Granny caught him and complained to Grandpa about him, calling him a thief. 'No,' said Grandpa, 'he is not a thief. What if he did take the gur without asking us? This is his home no less than ours, and the gur is also his gur. If he had asked us he would have got it. Now he has got it without asking, but that should not be called a theft.' Then Grandpa sent for the boy and said to

him: 'Look here, laddie, when you want a bit of gur just ask, and you will certainly get it. But there is another thing; when you took that gur, did you wash your hands?' 'No, I didn't,' said the boy. 'Then in future,' said Grandpa, 'first wash your hands, then ask, then take what gur you want.' From that time the boy was able little by little to overcome his habit of petty thieving. In later years we had to deal with a lad in our Ashram who used to smoke beedies³ on the sly. He had acquired the habit in a students' hostel where he had lived previously, though he did his work in the Ashram very well. One day one of the Ashram inmates caught him smoking and brought him to me. I could see that the poor lad was in a terrible fright. 'Come,' I said, 'don't be afraid. After all, many great men smoke; there is nothing wrong in that. What is wrong is to try to hide it. So I am going to give you a little room where you can smoke openly, and every week I'll give you a bundle of beedies.'

Some of the Ashram inmates didn't like this at all, and I had to explain myself to them. 'Smoking is a bad habit, no doubt of it,' I said. 'We don't smoke here and the boy knows it. But he has fallen into the habit, and he has also got into the habit of trying to hide it, which is worse. So it is our duty to give him the chance to break himself of those habits by his own efforts. That is ahimsa, non-violence. Ahimsa is very patient and long-suffering. We should not make an issue of every little thing.'

One day as Grandfather was seated for puja he began to shiver and feel cold; he was in fact feverish. He was not prepared to allow this discomfort to interfere with his worship during the next two hours or more, so when the shivering fit started he went straight to the well and jumped in. Granny was startled; the sudden movement took her by surprise. Grandfather, who was a good swimmer, swam around in the well for about five minutes; then he climbed out, dried himself and went on with his puja. I saw this with my own eyes, and later I too found, during my walking pilgrimages, that no harm comes of getting wet through. Water is a complete medicine in itself, which is why the Vedas have entitled it 'the universal medicine'.

For the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi we installed an image of Ganapati⁴ in our home. Grandfather used to make it himself with the help of us children. We would prepare sandalwood paste and he would use it to make the image. After it was installed there was puja and arati (the offering of lights), and for the next few days the house had a festive air. But then on the tenth day the image was taken away and immersed in water. When I was a child this used to make me very sad; we had worked so hard to make it, we had worshipped and honoured it for so many days, and then we not only got rid of it, we even celebrated its immersion as a festival, with songs and music ! It was only later that I came to understand the significance of this custom. Hindu teaching links together the worship of the image and the ultimate unimportance of the image. It is not to be smashed violently, but to be relinquished reverently. The practice of invocation-immersion is a symbol of great beauty. We must seek the detachment which will enable us to relinquish, when the time comes, our own best creations.

Grandfather observed regular vows and fasts, one of which was Chandrayana, in honour of the moon. On the first day of the moon only one mouthful of food is taken, on the second day two mouthfuls, and so on, the amount increasing as the moon waxes, until on full moon day fifteen mouthfuls are taken. Then as the moon wanes the number of mouthfuls decreases one by one until on the day of no moon a complete fast is observed. When Grandfather kept Chandrayana he would offer puja to the moon each day after moonrise, and after completing the rites he would eat whatever amount of food was prescribed for that day. But moonrise varies from day to day; it may happen in the evening, or at midnight, or in the small hours of the morning when I was fast asleep. Grandfather would ask Mother to waken me, and she would get me out of bed to sit with Grandfather at his puja. I would be half asleep, but all the same as soon as Grandfather's puja was finished my hand would be held out for prasada.⁵ And Grandfather would put into the outstretched hand a little portion of his own quota for that day.

It is my Grandfather I have to thank for whatever purity of spirit I may possess; that was his greatest bequest to me. He must certainly have shown me all the ordinary kindnesses, given me sweets and so on, but what I can never forget is the inward prasad I received, the impression made on my mind as he wakened me even at midnight for a darshan⁶ of the Lord. That was his greatest gift to me.



Giving document of title to land to a landless tribal

03. MY MOTHER

The Ideal Devotee

There is nothing to equal the part my mother played in shaping my mind. I have spent time in the company of many good men; I have read the books of many of the great, filled with the wisdom of experience. But if I were to put all that in one pan of the scales, and in the other what I learned from my mother of practical devotion, that second pan would carry the greater weight of value.

Mother was a really great devotee. She would serve everyone in the house with their food, and finish all her other household work, and then before eating her own meal she would seat herself before the Lord and carry out the ritual of worship, offering the lights and flowers in the customary way, just like everyone else. But the devotion in her heart was revealed when she made her obeisance to the Lord at the end of the puja. Bowing before him she would grasp both her ears¹ and pray aloud: 'O Lord of this boundless universe, forgive me my faults,' while tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks.

Such tears are not produced at will; they can come only from a heart overflowing with devotion. Of course it is common enough for us ordinary folk to shed tears on special occasions such as Ramanavami or Krishnashtami,² as we contemplate the divine image we have installed for the festival. But I have watched the tears flowing every day, at the ordinary daily puja, in a way impossible without a heart-devotion. Of all my treasured memories of Mother this is the most precious.

Mother was an ordinary housewife, busy all day long with her work, but her mind dwelt continually on the Lord. She was in the world, but the world was not in her mind or on her lips, and we never heard her utter a harsh word. From the moment she rose in the morning she would be repeating the Name; as she sat grinding the grain she would sing hymns to the Lord. All her songs were songs of worship, and she sang them with wonderful love and devotion. She had a very sweet voice, and she would become completely absorbed in her singing.

I said to her once: 'Mother, you must sing a new song every day—it won't do to have yesterday's song today or today's song tomorrow !' So for six months she sang a new song for me every day, so many did she know. She was from Karnataka where her family still lived, and she knew Kannada songs also, besides Marathi.

Whatever Mother was doing, whether bathing or cooking, she would be inwardly absorbed in some devo- tional chorus or other, so much so that one of the dishes occasionally got salted twice over. She herself would never eat until everyone else had finished and she had completed her puja. I was usually the first to sit down to the meal, but I paid very little attention to the food: I simply ate whatever was set before me and then went off. Then my father would come and say that there was too much salt in the vegetables. In the evening Mother would tackle me: 'Why didn't you tell me that the vegetables were over-salted?' 'Why didn't you taste them and find out for yourself?' I would reply. But that would never have seemed right to her. How could she possibly taste food until she had finished her worship and made her offerings? Mother had great respect for my father, but she also took a lot of notice of what I said. For example, she had resolved at one time to offer to the Lord one hundred thousand grains of rice. Every day as she made an offering, she took a handful of rice and offered one grain at a time, counting as she did so. Father saw what she was doing, and said: 'Why do you do it in that way? Why not weigh up one tola³ of rice and count the number of grains in that? Then you can easily reckon up how many tolas will make one hundred thousand grains, and you can add an extra half-tola to be sure you have the full number.' Mother did not know what to say to this, so when I came home that evening she asked me about it: 'Vinya, this is what your father suggests. What do you think about it?' I said: 'Well, this offering of yours, this hundred thousand grains of rice, isn't just a matter of accounts or arithmetic. It's matter of devotion, done in the name of God and the saints. With every grain you count your mind is fixed on the Name, so you should go on counting one by one, I think.' Mother was very pleased and told my father about it.

When the Nagapanchami⁴ festival came round Mother used to offer puja to the Nag (the snake), and she would ask me to make a drawing of the Snake-god for her. 'You can get a beautiful drawing in the bazaar, Mother,' I would say. 'Maybe,' she would reply, 'but I don't want their beautiful drawings, I want your drawing.' Such was her affection for her son. So I would take a small wooden plank and draw the Nag on it with red kumkum powder. Every evening Mother would set the milk for curd, invoking the Lord as she did so. Where was the need, I once asked her, to bring God into the business? 'Look Sonnie,' she answered, 'of course we on our part do everything we can, but all the same it will only set well by God's grace.' She knew that there is a place for both human effort and divine grace.

The Teacher of Good Conduct

Mother insisted, when I was a child, that I must water the tulsi⁵ plant every day. One day after my bath I came straight to the kitchen and sat down for my meal. 'Have you watered the tulsi?' asked Mother. 'No,' I said. 'Then go and do it now. I will only give you your food when it's done.' That was her lasting gift to me. She gave me so much else, milk to drink, food to eat, and stayed up night after night to care for me when I was sick; but this training in right human conduct was the greatest gift of all.

There was a jack-tree in our courtyard at Gagode. I was only a small child then, and as soon as I saw a fruit beginning to grow I would start asking when I could eat it. When at last it was ripe Mother would cut it down and fill a lot of leaf-cups with segments of the fruit. Then she told me to take these as gifts to every house in the neighbourhood. When they had all been distributed she would seat me at her side and give me some of the sweet segments to eat. 'Vinya,' she would say, 'we must first give, and afterwards eat.' She was teaching me some of the deepest truths of philosophy, but she made it into a little rhyme:

Giving is God-like,
Hoarding is Hell⁶

This teaching of hers made such an impression on me that without it, I must admit, I might never have had the inspiration to start the land-gift movement. If any of our women neighbours fell ill Mother would go to the house and cook for the family. At such times she would first finish the cooking for our own household and then go to the other house.

‘That’s selfish, Mother,’ I said one day. ‘You take care of your own children and your own home first, and the other family comes second !’ Mother began to laugh. ‘What happens?’ she said. ‘Our food is cooked too soon, so it gets cold. I want those people to have their food fresh and hot, so I go there and cook it at the proper time. That’s not selfish, it’s unselfish !’

When I was little I was afraid of ghosts. Mother explained to me that ghosts would never harass the devotees of God. ‘But if you feel frightened just take a lantern with you while going out in the dark and go on repeating the Name of God. Whatever ghosts happen to be there will soon run away.’

One night during that time I saw a big shadow on the wall. It was my own shadow, but I was too little to know it. It seemed terribly tall, the tallest man I had ever seen. Off I ran to my Mother. ‘There’s no need to worry,’ she said. ‘That fellow is your slave. Whatever you do, he will do. If you stand up, he will stand up too. If you sit down, so will he.’ I thought I would try this out and see what happened. I sat down, he sat; I stood up, and he stood; I walked along, so did he; I lay down and he lay down too. He was my slave, I discovered—why be afraid of him? That was how Mother rid me of fear of ghosts by faith, and fear of shadows by commonsense.

God in Human Form

If a beggar came to our door Mother would never allow him to go away empty-handed. One day a very sturdy-looking beggar came, and Mother gave him alms. I protested. ‘Mother,’ I said, ‘that man looks perfectly fit; to give to such people is to encourage laziness. Those who give to the undeserving are the

worse for it themselves. Does not the Gita tell us to consider that gift pure which is given at a fit place and time to a worthy person?' Mother listened, and then said very quietly: 'Vinya, who are we to judge who is worthy and who is unworthy? All we can do is to regard everyone who comes to the door as God, and offer what is in our powers. Who am I to judge him?' To this argument of my mother's I have not to this day been able to find a convincing reply.

My father often had a needy student living with us in the house. When some food was left over from a previous meal Mother would eat it herself, and if there was too much for her she would serve some to me. For the student however she always served fresh hot food. This went on day after day, and finally I spoke to her about it. 'Mother,' I said, 'you tell us that we ought to regard everyone as equal, but you are still making distinctions yourself. You never give that boy left-over food, you always give it to me. You are not treating us as equals, are you?'

Mother answered at once: 'Yes, you are right. I do treat you differently from other people. I am attached to you, I am partial to you, because I still look upon you as my son, whereas I look upon that other boy as God in human form. When I can see you too in that way, these distinctions will disappear.' There is a custom among the Brahmins to set aside five small portions of rice at every meal as an offering to God. One day I omitted to do this, and Mother asked if I had forgotten. 'No, I've not forgotten, but I've been thinking. Five of these portions make about a quarter tola of rice, so that in a month of thirty days it adds up to about seven tolas. There are about thirty million Brahmins in India, and that means that in the course of a year about thirty million seers⁷ of rice go to waste. It's not right to throw away all that rice when there are so many poor people in the country.' 'All right,' Mother replied. 'You are a learned fellow and I've no doubt your calculations are correct. But my way of reckoning is different. If you put that scrap of rice by the side of your plate, the flies sit on that and not on the food that you are eating. The flies get something to eat, it's a service to other living creatures.' I often reflected on the meaning of what she said.

One day I was idly swinging a stick, striking the wooden columns of the veranda. Mother stopped me. 'Why are you doing that?' she asked. 'They are an image of God, why do you hurt them?' I stopped at once. In India, the feeling that even a wooden pillar should not be needlessly hurt is in the very air we breathe. This reverence for all the creatures of God is something Mother taught me from earliest childhood.

As a child I was often sick and under medical treatment. When Mother gave me the medicine she used to make me recite a Sanskrit verse, and one day I asked her what it meant. She said: 'It means, Look upon the doctor as God, and upon his medicine as Ganga water.' 'Might it not equally well mean that God is the true healer and Ganga water the true medicine?' I asked. 'Yes,' she said, 'that is also a correct interpretation, but one has to be fit for it; for the present, you had better look upon the doctor as God.' Two alternative lines of thought, and truth in both of them.

Mother was not well-read but she was familiar with the stories of the saints in such books as Bhakti-vijay. One day I commented that saints like these were to be found only in ancient times; there were none such today. Mother replied that there are saints alive in our times, but we do not know about them. 'If there were no saintly spirits to give the world the strength of their austerities, how could it survive?' That was her faith, and on the basis of that faith she taught me things which have been of value to me throughout my life. I myself became my Mother's teacher in reading. One day she was spelling out the words in a book of hymns, letter by letter, so that it took her at least fifteen minutes to read one hymn. I was sitting in the upstairs room, and I could hear her struggling with the letters. In the end I came down and helped her to finish the hymn. After that we read together a little each day, and she was able to finish the whole book.

Mother and the Gita

One early morning I was sitting in the upper room reciting one of the poems of Wordsworth. Mother heard me. 'Why that lingo, Vinya, at this time of day?' she

asked. I told her the meaning of the poem. 'It is a good book I am reading,' I said. 'I know you would never read anything bad,' she replied, 'and even in English some good things must have been written. You should read English too, there's nothing wrong with that. But in the early morning you should read Sanskrit.' She meant that while other things might be read at other times, only Sanskrit was fitting for the sacred early hours.

It was Mother who gave me my enthusiasm for Sanskrit. When I was about to enter High School there was a discussion at home about which 'second language' I should choose. Father suggested French, and I agreed. Mother took no part in the discussion but she listened to it all, and when I came home from school in the evening and sat down to eat she asked me which language I had chosen. 'French,' I replied. 'Shouldn't a Brahmin boy learn Sanskrit?' she asked. 'Of course he would,' I said, 'but that doesn't mean he has to learn it at school.' Nevertheless Mother's words made an indescribably deep impression on me, and after that I began to study Sanskrit.

About 1915, I think, a man was giving commentaries on the Gita in Baroda, and Mother would go every night to listen to his discourse. After a day or two she came and said: 'Vinya, I can't follow what he says; can you please get me a copy of the Gita in Marathi?' I did so, but when she opened it and saw that it was in prose, she asked for a verse translation instead; probably she found the verse easier to read. I found that Vaman Pandit's Samashloki Gita (translation of the Gita verse by verse) was available and got it for her. But in a few days she said that it was too difficult, she couldn't understand it. 'What's to be done?' I asked. 'There is no simpler translation.' Her answer came like a shot: 'Why shouldn't you make a simple translation for me? You could do it !' It was Mother's faith in me which made me write my (Marathi) Gitai.

The Giver of the Ascetic Ideal

As a child I was full of day-dreams. I used to dream of brahmacharya,⁸ so I gave up sleeping on a mattress, wearing shoes and so on. One day Mother remarked: 'Vinya, you do a lot of playing at asceticism; if only I were a man I

would show you what real asceticism is.’ The fact is that she felt the slavery of womanhood, even though in our home Father gave everyone their full freedom.

I feel quite sure that she was capable of doing what she said. Her three sons all became brahmancharis. ‘Vinya,’ she would say, ‘a virtuous life as a householder brings salvation to one generation, but the life of brahmacharya at its highest brings salvation to forty-two generations.’ When she was thirty-six years old, at her earnest desire, she and my father took a vow of celibacy, as Father told me himself after she had died.

Mother died at the age of forty-two on 24 October 1918, at the same age as Tukaram, whose devotional hymns she so often read. I was with her when she died, as it seemed to me, in great peace. I had asked, did she feel at peace? ‘Completely at peace,’ she had replied. ‘For one thing, you are grown up, and I have no anxiety either about you or about your brothers, for you will look after them. For another thing, two months ago I had that darshan of the Lord.’ She was referring to a visit to the shrine at Dakor two months earlier. Dakor is only four hours’ journey from Baroda, but because of her household work she had never previously been able to go during all her twelve years in Baroda. When the time came for Mother’s last rites to be performed I said that I would carry out all the ceremonies myself without bringing in any Brahmin from outside. The others, however, were against it. ‘Do you think your mother would have liked it?’ my father asked. ‘I feel sure that she would,’ I replied. ‘She would prefer me to anyone else.’ But they didn’t agree; so I absented myself, bathed, and sat down to study the Vedas. From that day on the Vedas took my mother’s place.

Some of my mother’s words have had such an influence on me that I have included them in my book Vichar-pothi (Random Reflections):

Vinya, don’t ask for much. Remember, Small is Sweet, Much is Mischief. A stomachful of food and a cloth to cover the body, that is all we need. Give ear to nothing save the words about the wise, the gods and the saints. When you serve your country, that service shows your devotion to the Lord, but let there be songs of devotion also.

Mother had the fullest faith in me, her son, and that faith had moulded me. When I left home my father, thinking it would comfort her, told her that I would be sure to come back after a little while. Mother did not agree. 'When Vinya says something he will not change,' she said. 'See,' said the neighbours, 'this is how modern boys behave; they care nothing for their parents.' 'What !' Mother retorted. 'As if my Vinya would ever go off and get into bad ways ! He will never do anything wrong.' To this day Mother is with me; she is an abiding part of my life.

O Mother, you have given me what no one else has given, and yet even you did not give me in your lifetime what you are giving me now, after your death ! I need no other proof of the immortality of the soul.



At Kanyakumari (1957) – Renewal of pledge to work for *gram-swaraj* (freedom of village communities)

04. My Father the Yogi

My Father's way of life was not unlike Gandhiji's, in that while he was flexible in many things, he was very firm on points of principle. Not to cause pain to others, always to show respect to older people, to be helpful to one's neighbours—that was his code of conduct. When I was a child he gave me a little book of maxims from which I learned a good deal about these standards of conduct, and which also showed me my faults. I owe my father a great debt of gratitude, and I remember him as I remember my mother, with joy and thankfulness. I may not have recounted so many reminiscences of him as of her, but he too is part of the very fabric of my life.

Father was scientific in everything he did. He ate by rule. His evening meal was a bowl of milk, three wheaten pancakes and ten tolas of vegetables. For breakfast he took a quarter-measure of milk. These meals were fixed and never varied. The midday meal he left to mother's choice and ate whatever she prepared, though he himself decided how much.

When he began to suffer from diabetes he reviewed his diet and gave up all sugar and milk. For milk he substituted chhaina (solids separated from the milk), and instead of wheat and cereals he began to eat soya-bean, which contains a lot of protein and fat but is low in carbohydrates. He set about making the change in an interesting way. On the first day he took one soya-bean only and reduced the quantity of wheat by three grains. On the second day he took two beans and reduced the wheat by six grains. In this way in about six weeks he had gradually reduced his intake of wheat to forty per cent of what it had been, and in the end, with fifteen tolas of soya-bean and some vegetables, the disease was cured.

At another time he suffered from piles. One day he visited another house where he was served with puri (fried pancakes) and karela (bitter gourd). Next morning he had a good bowel movement with no difficulty, and began to wonder which of the two dishes had this effect. So next day he tried eating only puri, but got no benefit. Then he tried karela, found it was beneficial, and

continued to eat it regularly. That is an example of his scientific and experimental turn of mind. He outlived Mother by thirty years, and for nearly twenty of those years he lived almost entirely on milk though he sometimes took soya-bean too.

One day my brother Balkoba asked father what difference Mother's death had made to him. 'Since she died I have been rather better in health,' he replied. 'I am a man who believes in self-restraint and science, but while your mother lived I used to leave one meal a day in her hands and eat whatever she set before me, whether or not it was good for me. Now, I eat only what seems to me to be good for my health.' When Balkoba told me about this I was very much moved. What power of detachment there was in that response ! It was very close in spirit to the words of Tukaram:

My wife has died, she has attained her freedom;

And to me the Lord has granted release from illusion.

Father was a yogi, mathematician and scientist. As a chemist he carried out a lot of experiments with dyes. He would dye small pieces of cloth with various dyes and then test them to find out how fast they were, how they stood up to strong sunlight and hot water. He kept them all in an album with details of the dye and the results. 'You could have dyed a whole sari for me with what you are using on all those scraps !' said Mother once. 'As soon as I have completed these trials you shall have many saris, not just one,' said Father. 'But till then you'll have to put up with the scraps !'

When the first textile mill was started in Baroda, Father was extremely delighted. He came home full of happy excitement and told us all about it. 'Why,' said Mother, 'you seem to be even more delighted than when you heard of the birth of your first-born, Vinya !' Modern thinkers are happy with machinery. For them it means the birth of a new age, and they can't wait to discard the tools of the old one. Like nestling birds, wanting to fly high into the sky the moment they come out of the eggshell, our modern thinkers too want to fly high, now that they are no longer imprisoned within the eggshell of the old tools. 'India must be modernized,' Father would tell us day after day.

Nevertheless, when Gandhiji started the Village Industries Association Father was very pleased with the idea. Gandhiji invited him to visit Maganwadi,¹ and he inspected everything that was being done. His advice was that a machine should be used for the pulping of hand-made paper, and all other processes carried out by hand. That was in 1934-35 when Maganwadi had only just begun, and there was such emphasis on hand processing that Father's advice was not then accepted. Later, however, it was realized that he was right and a pulping machine was installed.

From Maganwadi Father wrote me a letter on which, unfortunately, I cannot now lay my hands. I ought to have kept it, but I do not usually keep the letters I receive, and I must have let that one go with the rest. He had written ten or twelve pages in a large hand on paper with a slightly bluish tinge. 'Everything about this letter,' he wrote, 'is my own handwork. I made the paper, I made the ink, I made the pen I am using, and I am writing with my own hand.' The letter was an example of complete self-reliance. Father went on: 'The paper is a bit blue. I could have bleached it, but only by getting a chemical from outside, so I decided to leave it as it was, and really there is nothing wrong about the colour.'

Father also urged that we should study what had been written in England on this subject about one hundred and fifty years ago. England too was earlier using handspun yarn. When the mills were started there was a transition period during which many experiments were tried out. Now that India is in a similar position books of that period would be of use here, he thought. He bought whatever he could find, and made a good collection.

Father was by nature very self-reliant: he never asked Mother or us children to do things for him, and after Mother died he never had any servant to help him. Someone once suggested that he should get a maid-servant to clean the cooking vessels, sweep the floors and so on. He replied: 'No matter how good she might be, she would be bound to make occasional mistakes, and then I might lose my temper and scold her. I would rather do a little work myself than run the risk of hurting someone's feelings.'

Once Jamnalalji (Bajaj) went to see him at Baroda. Receiving the notice of his arrival Father went to a Marwari (the community to which Jamnalalji belonged) gentleman and enquired about their eating habits. He then purchased all the necessary things (his own diet was altogether different) and prepared the dishes himself. The elaborate arrangements, made with care and concern so touched Jamnalalji that he later told me that he had never seen a person with such love and concern ! There were tears in his eyes when he said so.

Father was extremely punctual and self-disciplined. He had a friend in Baroda to whose home he would go every evening to play chess. They had arranged to play for half an hour a day, no longer. At the time Mother had gone to her parents' home in Karnataka, so I used to go to this friend's house for my meal, and was there when Father came for his game. It was to end at seven, and Father sat down with his watch in front of him, and got up to go on the minute.

Sometimes the game was not finished, and when he stood up his friend would say: 'Oh, just let us finish this game; it won't take more than five minutes.' Father never agreed. 'We can finish tomorrow,' he would say. 'Leave the board as it is, and we can start from where we left off.' No one could ever persuade him to change his rules.

He was also very fond of music. During his later years he studied Indian music with a Musalman musician, and would practise as much as seven or eight hours a day. He was anxious that our old classical music should not be lost, and he took a great deal of trouble to get two books published at his own expense:

Nadar Khan's Mridangabaj and Sheikh Rahat Ali's Thumari-sangraha. He had eight or ten more books in his possession which were deserving of publication.

My father gave me plenty of beatings when I was a boy, but even his beating was done scientifically so as not to injure any of the bones. Every day I would roam about the town and come home late, and after supper before going to bed I was expected to report to Father. He would be sure to discover some kind of mischief or disorderliness in my day's doings—I had not put his book in its proper place, I had not folded my clothes neatly, I had been obstinate about something: there was always some reason for a beating. I sometimes asked

Mother why she didn't beat me too. 'What?' she would say, 'Do you want me to add to what you've had?'

Then one day things were different. I had been roaming about as usual, had come in and eaten my supper, but there was no summons from Father; he just went to bed. 'Well,' I thought, 'for once I've got off without a beating !' But the same thing happened the next day, and the next, and the day after that; he never beat me again. I only found out what was behind it when I read Manusmriti.² Manu says: 'When your son reaches the age of sixteen you should treat him as a friend.' On that first day I had entered my sixteenth year, so following the law of Manu my father stopped beating me. In other words, he had beaten me only because he regarded it as a necessary part of a boy's education.

When Father first left Gagode for his job in Baroda we did not go with him, but stayed on with Mother in Gagode. He would sometimes visit us and bring little gifts, and when the Diwali holiday drew near Mother said he would be sure to bring sweets. I looked forward to this very eagerly and when Father arrived I ran to greet him. He put a rectangular package into my hands. I felt it and thought, it can't be round laddus or pedha, they would have been in a bundle; perhaps it is barfi. But when I tore off the wrapping paper I found two books, Children's Ramayana and Children's Mahabharata. I showed them to Mother and her eyes filled with tears. 'Your father has brought you the best sweets there could possibly be,' she said, and I have never forgotten her words. In fact I relished those sweets so much that I still relish them today.

Father had his own way of teaching us good conduct; he always tried to explain things reasonably. He and Mother both disliked seeing us leave uneaten food on our plates; it would do us no harm, they said, to take a little less. Mother would say: 'Fate has decreed that each person has a fixed amount of food to last his lifetime—so eat less and live longer.' An interesting way of thinking ! Father appealed to our commonsense. 'Where do you enjoy the taste of your food?' he would ask. 'It's on your tongue, isn't it? So keep it there as long as you can, go on chewing it, don't swallow it down straight away.' And of course

a person who chews his food slowly does eat less. So Father appealed to science and Mother to the wisdom of the Upanishads, and it's a very good thing to keep them both in mind.

During Father's last illness he sent no word to his sons. My friend Babaji Moghe happened to go to Baroda; he visited my father, saw his condition, came back to Wardha and told me. My brother Shivaji was in Dhulia. I asked him to go to Father, and with a good deal of difficulty Shivaji persuaded Father to leave Baroda and go with him to Dhulia. There he died on Sharad Purnima, the day of the autumn full moon, 29 October 1947.

It was suggested that the ashes should be immersed in the river Godavari at Nasik, which was not far away. I had arrived a few days earlier and asked why the Godavari should claim Father's ashes: 'The Godavari is water, the bones are earth—what authority has water over earth? Fire to fire, air to air, water to water, dust to dust—that is the rule.' So after the body had been cremated and the ashes collected we dug a hole in the courtyard of the house, buried the ashes, refilled the pit and planted a bush of tulsi. Many people criticized us for doing this; in their opinion ashes should always be immersed in some holy river.

I felt however that there was justification for our action in the Vedic prayer, 'O Mother Earth, give me a place for my dead body.' Western commentators discuss whether cremation or burial is the more primitive custom. That is a matter of historical conjecture, but a single verse of the Vedas combines the two: first burn the body, then bury the ashes. So on the authority of the Vedas we committed Father's ashes not to the river but to the earth. We set up a stone over the grave, and carved on it the words of Saint Ramadas: 'May all be happy, that is my heart's desire.'

05. BEGINNING THE QUEST

My Life as a Student

Father had planned not to send his son to school but to have him learn dyeing. So he taught me at home up to the level of the fifth or sixth class, and then sent me for admission to the Kala Bhavan (art school) at Baroda, where he was well known and respected. Everyone there knew me as 'Bhave's son', but they could not admit me. They asked me how far I had gone in English and I told them 'up to the third English class'; since other candidates had got as far as 'intermediate arts', I had no chance. My father then began to teach me further himself, and finding that his lad spent more time roaming about than studying, gave me a lot of mathematical problems to keep me busy. So what did I do? I would concentrate on the more difficult ones which were set out in small type at the end of the text books, work them all out and leave the rest. Father realized that I grasped the subject, so he said nothing; and what I learned with him was all I needed up to the matriculation level. I would first finish my assignment in maths and English within an hour and then be off on my wanderings for four or five hours at a stretch. So finally in disgust Father dumped me in school.

There too I carried on in the same way. I not only went on roaming, I pulled my friends out of their homes to join me and gave them no chance to study. Babaji Moghe used to hide in some temple to study and keep out of my way, but I would search for him, find him and drag him out.

As a boy my two hobbies were reading and roaming. I would be off whenever I got the chance. Another friend of mine, Raghunath Dhotre, would always tell me that I had wheels on my feet. 'Vinya,' Mother would say, 'in your last birth you must have been a tiger; for one thing, you must have your daily round, and for another you have a very keen nose, you can't bear the slightest bad odour.'

So I soon knew every street in Baroda, and I would be off at all times of day or night—any time would do for me. I liked running too; I used to run a lot, without any idea of the distance covered.

I once set out for a run at half past midnight, and took the road past the Baroda Palace grounds. The sentry shouted his customary challenge Hukum . . . Dar,¹ but I took no notice and ran on. A little later I returned by the same road. This time the sentry stopped me and asked why I was running. 'For exercise,' I replied. He retorted: 'Who runs for exercise at one o'clock in the morning? You are up to mischief, you are a thief!' 'And when did a thief ever come back by the same road he went out?' I demanded. He had no answer to that and let me go.

One Diwali² I spent hours during the three days of the festival going into every little lane and side street in Baroda to see whether there were any houses that did not display the festal lamps. I did not find a single house in the whole city where no lamps were burning. The Muslim houses too all had their lighted lamps.

I also used to visit the various temples. There was one temple close to Kamathi-bag, whose deity I named 'Lord of Exams'. Our college was nearby, and during examination days crowds of students would visit the shrine for darshan, and to pray that the Lord would grant them a 'pass'.

In school and college my only concern was how soon the class would end and I be set free. There was one occasion when the teacher began to dictate notes. I wrote nothing, I just listened, and the teacher noticed it. When he had finished the dictation he told me to stand up and read what I had written. I stood up at once with my notebook in my hand and repeated all I had heard. The teacher was taken aback. 'Just let me see your notebook,' he said. I showed him the blank pages. 'You won't be able to read what I have written, Sir,' I said.

Mathematics was my strong subject. The teacher was fond of his pupils and took great pains over his work. One day I consulted him about an exceptionally difficult problem. He thought for a while and then said: 'Come back to me

tomorrow. In all my years of teaching no one has posed such a problem before. I am so familiar with ordinary mathematics that I could teach it in my sleep, but this problem of yours is a different matter. I shall be able to give you an answer only tomorrow.’ These words made a very deep impression on me. Our French teacher was of a quiet nature. He would never raise his voice while teaching. Once he was taking roll-call while we were writing examination papers. When my name was called out I, engrossed in writing, almost shouted, ‘Yes, Sir’. After finishing the roll-call he came to me and said, ‘I see, you were engrossed in writing. Still it is not good to shout in this manner. Your tone should have been gentle.’ And then he added, ‘I am telling this because I love you.’ This touched me deeply.

But some teachers, when the children can’t work out their maths problems, have a habit of slapping their cheeks. I wonder what a slap has to do with mathematics? Is it that a slap on the cheek stimulates the flow of blood to the brain, so that it begins to work better and so solve the problem? Could that be the reason? When I was a little lad, about twelve years old, one of the teachers in our school used to cane the children a lot. He seemed to think that caning was the only basis for knowledge. He had a long cane which he kept locked up. We children didn’t like caning, but what could we do? Finally one day I managed to pick the lock and throw the cane away. When the teacher found it gone he guessed, of course, that one of us had been playing pranks, but he said nothing. Next day he brought another cane, and I got rid of that one too. He got yet a third cane, and that also I disposed of. Then he got really annoyed and began asking questions to get at the source of the mischief, but none of the boys said a word—they were all on my side.

In the end, however, the teacher did discover the truth, and having found the culprit he had to devise a punishment. He sentenced me to five hundred ‘sit-ups’³ and told another boy to stand by and count. The boy was a friend of mine and his counting went like this: ‘one-two-three-four-seven-ten’. After a while he got tired and sat down. I went on with my ‘sit-ups’, and soon he started counting again, and told the teacher that the five hundred had been

completed. But I too had been counting in my head, and I knew I had only done one hundred and twenty-three. So when the teacher told me to stop and sit down, I said: 'The five hundred isn't finished yet, Sir, only one hundred and twenty-three.' The teacher thought, 'Here's an honest lad,' and said: 'Sit down, you have already done eighteen too many.' So I did sit down, but I didn't understand what he meant. I puzzled over it and in the end got it: five hundred meant five plus a hundred, not five times a hundred—and on that reckoning, as the teacher said, I had done eighteen extra 'sit-ups'. That was how that teacher took pity on me, and I have never forgotten those figures. Our English teacher once set, as the subject for an essay, 'Description of a Marriage Ceremony'. But I had never attended any marriage ceremony. I couldn't describe it—what was I to do? So I invented a story about a young man who got married, and all the sorrow which befell him and others as a consequence. The teacher noted on my essay: 'Although you did not deal with the set theme, you used your intelligence,' and he gave me seven marks out of ten.

The Central Library at Baroda was then considered one of the best libraries in India. During my vacations, after I had had my meal, I would spend the afternoon there. Two or three hours would go by very pleasantly; the librarian had given me free access to the books in the library. During the hot weather I would take off my shirt and sit reading stripped to the waist, until one day one of the attendants objected that my dress was not 'decent'; I ought to have the sense to dress properly, he said. I told him that I dressed by the common sense God had given me, and turned back to my reading, in which I was soon absorbed.

But a complaint reached the Director that a student was sitting in the Reading Room without a shirt and refusing to listen to the staff. The Director was an Englishman; his office was on the third floor and he summoned me there. I found him 'correctly' dressed in shirt and trousers—but he had a fan over his head. He kept me standing before him (as the English usually did in those days) but as he was older than me, I did not find that humiliating. But then he

pointed to my naked torso. 'Why this?' he asked. 'Don't you know what good manners mean?'

'Certainly I do,' I replied, 'in my own country.' 'And what is that?' he asked. 'In this country,' I said, 'we don't think it's good manners for one man to remain seated and keep another man standing.' He was very pleased that a mere lad like me should have answered so boldly. He at once gave me a chair, and I explained that in India it is no breach of good manners to go naked to the waist in the hot weather. This he accepted, and went on to ask me which books I read, and then told the librarian to give me all the facilities I needed. Then there was the celebration of the birthday of Shivaji. My friends and I were discussing where it should be held. Shivaji was a lover of freedom, I said, so we should celebrate the day in the open air, not under any roof; we should go off to the hills and the jungles. So that was settled, but then a difficulty arose: the day was not a holiday. 'Well,' I said, 'we are studying Shivaji in the history class. We might cut that class and go off into the jungle then.' This was agreed; off we all went and held our commemoration with all solemnity. On the way back we began to talk about what would happen the next day, when we would surely be punished for our absence. I suggested that we each take a quarter-rupee with us to pay the fine.

In the history class the next day the teacher asked where we had been, and we said that we had been to the jungle to celebrate Shivaji's birthday. 'Couldn't you have done that here?' he asked. I answered like a shot: 'Shivaji the freedom-lover can't be commemorated in the halls of slavery !' The teacher didn't like that. 'You'll all be fined,' he said, and we all put our hands in our pockets and laid the coins before him.

In this way we had a lot of discussion and debate about special days and important topics, and a lot of vigorous argument went on in the course of our walks. There were about ten to fifteen of us friends, and we all wanted to undertake some public service. After a time we decided to give our group a more definite shape, and in 1914 we formed a 'Student Society' which held regular celebrations of the birthdays of Shivaji, Swami Ramadas and so on. We

also had study-discussion groups with talks on such topics as the works of the saints, love of country, the lives of great men, the development of character. At first we met in one another's homes, then later we hired a room for a few annas. I began by asking Mother for the money for the rent, but afterwards everyone subscribed. We got together a good library, about sixteen hundred volumes of biography, travel, history, science and so on. I had once given a talk on Mazzini, which my friends still remember. In fact I used to be the main speaker and I used to give talks with a serious sense of responsibility. It was in this Student Society that my public life began, and I believe that the foundation of Gram Seva Mandal (Village Service Society) by me in 1935 was, in a way, linked to that Society. I certainly profited by all the study needed for the talks I delivered, but the greatest boon the Society gave me was friendship; the friends I made in it have remained my friends for life and have never left me. In 1917 I returned to Baroda for its annual function, and suggested that the Society should propagate the use of the Hindi language. I wrote and told Gandhiji that I felt sure it would take up the work and be ready to carry on in Baroda his campaign for Hindi.

After High School I went to the College. But I found the 'education' being imparted there totally senseless. Once there was a notice that the Principal was indisposed; so there would be no class on that day. One of the students stood up and said, 'The Principal is indisposed. Let Mr. Bhave take the chair.' So I took a class of English poetry. What was there in that poem? It was just an average poem with words like 'white foot, light foot'. What does one require to teach such a poem? And the Principal was drawing a salary of Rs. 1200 for taking a couple of classes per week ! It was nothing but loot. I could not interest myself in such studies. Ultimately I discontinued them. Near our house in Baroda lived an old man who used to sit spinning yarn by hand for the 'sacred thread'.⁴ I and my friends looked upon him as a laughing-stock. 'What a relic of the primitive !' we would say. In later years many of us joined Gandhiji; we too were destined to spend our time spinning yarn by hand on the wheel !

Leaving Home

When I was ten years old I resolved to follow the path of brahmacharya and already, even in childhood, I was thinking about leaving home. I had three great examples before me: Gautama the Buddha, the Maharashtrian Saint Ramadas and the Jagat-guru (world-teacher) Shankaracharya. They exercised a powerful attraction. The Buddha had left behind his wife and little son; Ramadas had been impelled to abandon his bride while the wedding ceremonies were actually in progress; Shankaracharya had never married at all, but taken the vow of brahmacharya and left home when he was only eight years old. These three men were always in my thoughts, and I cherished the inward hope that someday I too would leave home. I was like a girl whose marriage has been arranged, and who in imagination abandons her parents' home and dwells already in that of her future husband. I too had inwardly left home, and I gave my attention to making sure that I did not go out into the world raw or 'half-baked'. I prepared myself of course by study and meditation, and in addition I did all I could to make my body a fit instrument of spiritual discipline.

During childhood I had got hold of a book which described a brahmachari's rule of life, and quoted from Manu the things forbidden to him: he should wear no shoes, use no umbrella, sleep on no mattress. So I too stopped using these things. Giving up the mattress and the umbrella cost me nothing, but going about barefoot, roaming on the tarred roads for hours on end in the fierce midday heat of Baroda, proved to be bad for my eyes. In Manu's time students would probably be living in an Ashram where there was no need for any footgear. But as a boy I was very rigorous about this discipline of the body. I also observed rules about eating and drinking. I never attended wedding feasts or similar festivities. My sister was married when she was still a child, and even at her wedding I stuck to my rule and told Mother that I was not going to eat the feast. Mother said nothing; she cooked some food for me and served me. But afterwards she told me, 'Vinya, I can understand your not eating the

sweets and other wedding delicacies, but why should you object to the plain dal and rice? How can it be wrong to eat the rice and dal cooked for the wedding, when it is exactly the same as what I have cooked for you now?’ How skilfully Mother managed it ! She didn’t argue: she cooked, she fed me, but then she made her point, and I agreed to eat the rice and dal as she said. I had a knack of putting my thoughts into verse. I would compose poems, taking two or three hours, some- times a whole day, over each one. Then I would chant the verses aloud and correct any shortcomings that I noticed, and when I felt fully satisfied with it I would offer the poem as a sacrifice to the god of fire. One day during the cold weather I was sitting by the kitchen fire keeping myself warm and burning poems. Mother noticed it and asked what I was doing. When I told her she said: ‘But I have never seen your poems !’ So after that, whenever I completed a poem, I would first recite it to her and then throw it into the fire. Later in Benares I would sit composing my poems on the banks of the Ganges, and after I was satisfied with them I would immerse them in the water.

Near our home in Baroda lived a potter who kept a donkey. When I sat down to study at night it would begin to bray, and I found it especially irritating when I was working at some mathematical problem. Could anything be done, I wondered. Then it occurred to me that though the braying was a nuisance to me, the other donkeys probably enjoyed it, and in that case it couldn’t be called ‘bad’. From that day forward I began to train myself to think of it as ‘good’. Whenever the donkey started to bray I would stop studying and attend to its discourse, trying to hear the music in it. Sometimes I would start braying myself in unison with the donkey, so as to feel more at one with it. I began to hear ‘compassion’ in the sound and named it, in high-sounding Sanskrit, ‘Theme Song of the Donkey’.

As a boy I was physically weak and sometimes had severe headaches. When the pain became unbearable I would say to myself, sometimes speaking aloud, ‘This aching head is not I, I am not my aching head ! I am not my head, I am

something else !’ It was a great help to me to use these words; they led me to practise the attitude of mind which declares: ‘I am not my body’.

I had also read the Yoga-shastra, and in it was a description of the posture of one who has attained Samadhi (the experience of ultimate unity). I would seat myself in this posture and imagine myself to have reached Samadhi, though all the time my mind would be running here and there. In Baroda the summers are extremely hot, so I would sit in this posture under the water-tap. As the water dripped from the tap above me and trickled over my head, I would imagine that I was the Lord Shiva himself entered into Samadhi. As I played these games my mind did sometimes grow so peaceful that I felt I really was in Samadhi. I don’t know whether it was what the scriptures mean by Samadhi, but it gave me a great joy and I felt emptied of all desire.

The Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaikwad, had installed a statue of the Lord Buddha in one of the public parks, the ‘Jubilee Gardens’, which I always thought of as ‘the garden of the Buddha’. The statue attracted me greatly because the thought of leaving home was in my own mind—put there by the life and teaching of Swami Ramadas, and reinforced when I became acquainted with those of Shankaracharya. It was kept continually before me by the statue of the Buddha, who in youth had turned his back on the pomp of kingship and the pleasures of family life, as being things of no account. There was no solitude to be found in my Garden of the Buddha, but I often went there nevertheless, in order to contemplate and reflect upon this image; it had a great influence on me.

Before I left home I made a bonfire of all my certificates, including my matriculation certificate. I wanted to cut loose, once and for all, from every cable that might tie me down, but Mother was very unhappy and asked why I should burn them. ‘I don’t need them now,’ I said. ‘Perhaps not now,’ she replied, ‘but what harm is there in keeping them?’ ‘No, I shall never take any salaried job,’ I said.

The thought of leaving home had come to me first in 1912, but I tested myself rigorously for four years before making my final decision. Once my mind was

made up I never looked back. I wanted to go to Benares, for two reasons. One was that I had read Western science of education, and also studied the lives of the saints, and therefore believed that my education would not be complete without travel. Benares was reputed to be a storehouse of knowledge, especially of Sanskrit and the Scriptures. There I could study the Scriptures. The second reason for going to Benares was that it lay on the route both to the Himalayas and to Bengal, and both these places had a powerful attraction for me.

I felt a great affection and devotion for my father and mother. I was so deeply attached to my mother that in 1918 I went back home to be with her on her death-bed. After her death I chose two of her things to keep in her memory.

One was a sari, her precious wedding sari; the other was an image of the goddess Annapurna to which Mother had always without fail made a daily offering. I used the sari as a pillow for many years, until we took the decision to use only khadi (homespun cloth) for all purposes, and the sari was not made of khadi. I went and bathed in the Sabarmati river and immersed the sari in its sacred waters. As for the image of Annapurna, I used it occasionally for meditation—which is a form of worship. But it had always been used for regular daily worship, and I began to feel that my mind would be more at ease if it were in the hands of some pious woman who would offer daily puja as my mother had done. I could have found many such, but I had a special faith in Kashibehn Gandhi.⁶ I said to her: 'This image was my mother's : will you accept it and offer the daily puja as she did?' Reverently and lovingly she agreed.

But love and attachment for my parents could not stop me leaving home. Everything else paled before the force of the spiritual quest. In those days one had to go to Bombay to appear for the Intermediate Examination, and a few of us set off from Baroda together. But I and two others, Bedekar and Tagare, left the Bombay train at Surat and took the train for Benares. I wrote to tell my father: 'Instead of going to Bombay for the exam, I am going somewhere else. You may be assured that wherever I go I

shall set my hand to nothing that is wrong.' That day, the day I left home, was March 25, 1916.

PART TWO:

Accepting The Yoke

(1916 - 1951)

In truth God is the only reality, there is no other. His name in itself is enough for us, for He is one without a second. And yet, as within one pomegranate there are countless seeds, so within the immeasurable reaches of His Being there are countless saints. In our hearts filled with devotion we feel that they too have a place of their own.

For my part, I can make Mirabai's words¹ my own, for they fit my case exactly:

On the path to freedom two guides are mine:

The saint to bless without, Ram to dwell within.

By the grace of God the blessing of the one rests upon my head, the place of the other is in my heart.

06. THE SERVICE OF THE SAINT

At Kashi

In my pursuit of Spiritual Reality I arrived at Kashi (Benares), and found a place to live on the second floor of a house at Durga Ghat. One of my two companions went back home after a short time, the other remained with me. His name was Bedekar, but we used to call him 'Bhola' ('the innocent') because he was so simple-minded and open. He had that genuine affection for me which asks for no return.

One day while we were still in Baroda, Bhola asked me to go with him to meet a sadhu, Narayan Maharaj, who had come there. I myself did not readily accept any sadhu without careful enquiry, but as Bhola was very eager to attend the meeting I went with him, and we watched and listened from the fringe of the crowd. Someone asked: 'Maharaj, where do you come from?' He replied: 'The dwelling-place of Narayan is everywhere in the universe.' I grabbed Bhola's hand and pulled him out. 'Why are you dragging me away?' he protested. 'If that is the kind of thing you want to hear,' I said, 'I could have read it to you any day from the Upanishads. The man ought to have given a straight answer to a straight question, and told them the name of his village. You really are a Bhola, a simpleton !'

Bhola had a fine physique. He would swim right across the Ganga and back again, while I could only stand and watch. But we had been in Kashi barely two months when he fell ill, and his sickness suddenly took a serious turn. I put him into the Ramakrishna Mission hospital, but it soon became clear that he would not recover, and he too realized it. I asked him if I should send word to his family. 'Where is the need?' he replied. 'They will hear about it somehow or other.' 'Then', I said, 'who would you like to light the funeral pyre?' 'You should do it,' he said, and I agreed. He died the following day.

This was the first time I had such an experience. I had never even attended any cremation. The expenses were no problem. I possessed two rupees, which I had

earned by teaching English in a private school. The teacher did not know much English, so I offered to teach for an hour or so each day. 'What will you charge?' they asked, and I replied that two rupees a month would do. 'Is that enough?' they asked, and I told them that as I was getting my meals free I needed no more. We used to go to a charitable kitchen for our midday meal, and there each of us was also given two pice,² which was enough to buy a supper of curds and sweet potatoes.

Two rupees were enough for several cremations, for the main expense was for the firewood for the pyre. I arranged for the cremation on the banks of the Ganga, and recited the prescribed mantras. Next day, when I went as usual to take my meal in the charitable kitchen I found gossip going on; some people were saying that I had conducted the cremation without the proper rites. I retorted that there were no limits to the power of the Ganga; any human being, even any crow, cremated by the Ganga would go straight to heaven, as assuredly Bhola had gone.

I am apt to live in the present, with little thought of the past or care for the future, but I do not forget the happenings which meant a lot to me, and this loss of my friend Bhola is the main thing I remember about Kashi. Among other memories is that of the Central Library. It had a great many of the scriptures in Sanskrit and Hindi. I spent hours there daily and had soon finished them all. I wanted to study Sanskrit and asked a pandit how long it would take. 'Twelve years,' he replied. I told him that I could not spare so much time. 'How much time can you give to it?' he asked. 'Two months,' I said. He stared at me in amazement.

Every evening I spent an hour by the side of the Ganga. Sometimes (as I have said) I composed poems which I then consigned to the river. Sometimes I sat in meditation or in deep thought, sometimes I listened to the debates between the pandits which took place daily at the riverside. One day there was a debate between the advocates of advaita (non-duality) and those of dvaita (duality). The advaita party was declared victor. I stood up. 'Mr President,' I said, 'I want to say something.' The President saw that I was a mere boy, but

he gave me permission to speak. 'Sirs,' I said, 'what you have just witnessed is the defeat of advaita, not its victory.' This contradiction of the judgement startled them, but I went on: 'How can anyone who really believes in advaita enter into debate at all? Those who involve themselves in such arguments have lost their case from the start. It's not possible to have an argument at all without recognizing the principle of duality.' So I said my say, and left them. While in Benares I needed a lock, and bought one from a shop in the street leading to the charitable kitchen. When I asked the price the shopkeeper said ten annas. I took the lock and gave him the money. 'I am paying you what you ask,' I said, 'but the proper price of this lock is two annas; you are asking far too much.' The shopkeeper said nothing, and I went on my way. I had to pass his shop every day on my way to the kitchen, but I carefully avoided looking in his direction. Two or three days later he called me. 'I charged you too much for that lock,' he said. 'It was wrong of me.' And he gave me back the money. This moved me very much and won my respect.

I had brought just one book along with me from home. It was Jnaneswari³, a book for which I had a great reverence. One night I was troubled by a dream, so the next day I began to use my Jnaneswari as a pillow for my head at night, and the dreams stopped.

I spent two months and some days at Kashi, and then turned my steps towards Bapu.⁴

The Satyagraha Ashram

During my boyhood I had already been attracted by Bengal and the Himalayas, and dreamed of going there. On the one hand I was drawn to Bengal by the revolutionary spirit of Vande Mataram⁵, while on the other hand the path of spiritual quest led to the Himalayas. Kashi was on the way to both places, and some good karma had brought me as far as that. In the event I went neither to Bengal nor to the Himalayas; I went to Gandhiji, and found with him both the peace of the Himalayas and the revolutionary spirit of Bengal. Peaceful

revolution, revolutionary peace: the two streams united in him in a way that was altogether new.

When I had reached Kashi the air had been full of a speech which Bapu had delivered at the Hindu University there. In it he had said a great deal about non-violence, his main point being that there could be no non-violence without fearlessness. The violence of the mind, shown in violent attitudes and feelings was, he said, worse than open, physical violence. It follows from that that the most important aspect of non-violence is inward non-violence, which is not possible without fearlessness. In the same speech he had referred critically to those Indian Princes who had come to the meeting decked out in all kinds of finery. This had all taken place a month before I arrived, but it was still the talk of the town. I read the speech, and it raised all kinds of problems in my mind. I wrote to Bapu with my questions and received a very good reply, so after some ten or fifteen days I wrote again, raising some further points. Then came a postcard. 'Questions such as you have raised about non-violence,' he wrote, 'cannot be settled by letters; the touch of life is needed. Come and stay with me for a few days in the Ashram, so that we can meet now and again.' The idea that doubts could be set at rest by living rather than by talking was something that greatly appealed to me.

Along with the postcard came a copy of the Ashram rules which attracted me still more. I had never before encountered anything like them in any institution. 'The object of this Ashram,' I read, 'is service of our country in such ways as are consistent with the welfare of the world as a whole. We accept the following vows as needful to attain that object.' Then followed the eleven vows: truth, non-violence, non-stealing, self-control, bodily labour and so on. This struck me as very surprising indeed. I had read a great deal of history, but I had never heard of vows being regarded as necessary for national freedom. Such matters, I thought, are found in religious texts, in the Yoga-shastra, and for the guidance of devotees; but here is someone who insists that they are necessary for national service too. That was what drew me to Bapu. Here was a man, I felt, who aimed at one and the same time at both political

freedom and spiritual development I was delighted. He had said 'Come', and I went.

I alighted at Ahmedabad railway station on June 7, 1916. I had not much luggage, so I put it on my head and started out, asking my way as I went. I crossed Ellis Bridge and reached the Ashram at Kochrab at about eight in the morning. Bapu was told that a new man had come, and sent word for me to meet him after I had taken my bath. I found him busy cutting vegetables. This too was something new; I had never heard of any national leader who occupied himself with such a job, and the sight of it was a lesson in what was meant by bodily labour. Bapu put a knife in my hand, and set me to work at a job I had never done before. That was my first lesson, my 'initiation'.

As we sat cutting the vegetables Bapu asked me some questions, and then said: 'If you like this place, and want to spend your life in service, I should be very glad to have you stay here.' Then he went on: 'But you look very weak. It is true that those who seek self-knowledge are not usually physically robust, but you look ill. Those who attain self-knowledge never fall ill.' That was my second lesson ! I can never forget what Bapu said to me then.

After that, I had no more talks with Bapu except about the immediate work in hand. I was usually fully absorbed in my work, but I also used to listen to his conversations with the many people who came to see him. He knew that I was a well-intentioned lad, though others were apt to consider me rather a dullard. During one of these conversations Bapu had commented that some remark was 'just a secondary expression'. I interrupted. 'No,' I said, 'it's the language of devotion.' 'You are right,' said Bapu at once, 'The language of knowledge and the language of devotion are not the same.' It was just like him to listen with respect to someone like me, hardly more than a child, and accept what I said. Others too began to listen to me after that.

Nevertheless the general low opinion of me was certainly justified. At twenty-one I was a very raw youth, and as my friends know, I had very little of what is called polish or good manners. I hardly talked to anyone; I busied myself in my work, or was engrossed in study, meditation or reflection. I had risen early one

morning and was reciting an Upanishad in my room. Some of the others heard me, and told Bapu that I knew Sanskrit. He asked me some questions and from that time he occasionally asked me to say something during the time of common prayer. So life went on.

Bapu, it seems, had decided to take me in hand and get me into shape, and later, when enquirers visited him at Sevagram, he would ask: 'Did you meet Vinoba? If not, you must certainly do so.' One of these friends was a well-known Indian revolutionary. As Bapu suggested it he walked over to Paunar to see me. When he arrived, I was digging in the field. I happened to raise my head, and seeing him standing there asked why he had come. 'Simply to have your darshan,'⁶ he replied. What could I say? He remained there for some time, but said no more. Later he complained to Bapu: 'What kind of a man did you send me to see? He didn't even speak to me !' Bapu had a shrewd idea of what had happened. 'What was he doing?' he asked. 'Digging in the field.' 'Then what is there to be angry about? Vinoba was working; how could he have talked to you then? My dear man, don't you know that if you want to meet someone you should first make an appointment?'⁷

That was how Bapu dealt with the visitor, but the next time I saw him he scolded me: 'My dear fellow, when someone comes to see you, it's part of your job to meet him and talk with him.' In this way, little by little, Bapu moulded me into shape; wild creature that I naturally am, he tamed me, and as I sat at his feet he transformed me from a barbarian into a servant of all. It was in his company that I began to hunger for service, that service which is now for me an instrument of worship, seeing the Lord in humanity.

I don't know whether Bapu ever tested me, but I certainly tested him, and if he had seemed to me to fall short in any way I would not have stayed. He kept me with him, in spite of all the failing which his scrutiny must have revealed, but I for my part would not have remained if I had found anything wanting in his devotion to truth. I have seen reputed 'Mahatmas' who regarded themselves as liberated spirits, perfect beings; none of them had any attraction for me. But Bapu, who always considered himself imperfect,

attracted me enormously. 'I'm still very far from perfect truth,' he would say, and he had a far greater influence on me than any of those who claimed to have attained it.

When I met Bapu, I was enchanted by the unity in him between the inward and the outward. It was from him too that I learned the meaning of Karma-yoga (the path of action for spiritual liberation). This is spoken of in the Gita, of course, but it was personified in Bapu's life; in him I saw it in practical terms. The Gita has a description of a Sthitaprajna, one who lives in steadfast wisdom. To meet such a person in the flesh would be the greatest of blessings; I have seen with my own eyes one who came very near to that great ideal. I gained much from being with Bapu in the Ashram, where life was experienced as one and indivisible. Bapu never thought of himself as anyone's guru or anyone's disciple. Neither do I; I am no one's guru, or disciple, though I fully agree that a guru may have great importance. A guru who is a fully perfected soul may indeed be able to liberate a disciple by darshan, by a mere touch or a single word, even by the inward will alone. But for me that is theory only, for in practice I have met no such guru. I can only say that the things I learned from living with Bapu have stood me in good stead to this day. It was like living as a child with his mother, and so gaining insights which nothing else could give.

At one point there was a plan that Bapu should go to help Abdul Gaffar Khan⁸. He felt that it was possible that he might not return, so he called me to talk things over. I spent about fifteen days with him, and after he had spent two or three days questioning me I began to question him, and asked him about his own experience of God. 'You say that Truth is God,' I said. 'All right, but you also told us that before you undertook your fast an inner Voice spoke to you. What do you mean by that? Is there something mysterious about it?' 'Yes', he said, 'there certainly is. It is something quite out of the ordinary. The Voice spoke to me very clearly. I asked what I should do, and was answered, you must fast. For how long? I asked, and was answered, twenty-one days.' That is the story of a personal encounter, in which one party asks and the other

answers, just as (in the Gita) the Lord Krishna talks with Arjuna. Bapu was a votary of truth, so the accuracy of his report is not in doubt. He said that the Lord had spoken to him in person, so I asked him, 'Do you think it possible for the Lord to take visible form?' He said: 'No, I don't think so, but I did hear a voice clearly.' 'How can that be?' I replied. 'If the form is transient, so is the voice. And if He speaks in a voice, why should He also not appear in a form?' Then I mentioned similar mysterious experiences of others and recounted some of my own experiences. In the end he agreed that although he himself had heard only a voice and seen no visible presence, that did not mean that a vision of God is impossible.

At the time when his Autobiography was being published, he asked me what I thought of it. 'You are a votary of truth,' I replied, 'and you would write nothing false, so it can do no harm. I can't say how useful it will be, for each reader will take from it what suits himself.' 'You have given me what I wanted,' said Bapu. 'It is enough if it will do no harm.' He drew a big circle in the air with his finger. 'In the end,' he said, 'all our efforts come to zero. All we can do is to serve, and leave it at that.' Those words of his are enthroned in my heart; they contain Bapu's whole philosophy.

On Leave for a Year

In 1917, with Bapu's permission, I took a year's leave from the Ashram, partly in order to restore my health, partly for study. I planned first to study Sanskrit at Wai. Because of my love for the Gita I had already made a start at home with the help of my friend Gopalrao. At Wai there was a good opportunity, for Narayan Shastri Marathe, a scholar who was a lifelong brahmachari, was there teaching Vedanta and other systems of philosophy. I had a keen desire to study under him, and I stayed there a good long time, studying the Upanishads, the Gita, the Brahma-sutra (with Shankaracharya's commentary), and the Yoga philosophy of Patanjali. I also read the Nyaya-sutra, the Vaisheshik-sutra, and the Smriti of Yajnavalkya. That satisfied me, for I now felt that I could go on with my studies, if I so wished, independently of a teacher.

My other purpose was to improve my health. The first step was to walk regularly ten or twelve miles a day. Next, I began to grind six to eight kilos of grain every morning; and finally I performed the yoga exercise called Surya-namaskar (salutation to the sun) three hundred times a day. These physical activities restored my health.

I also thought carefully about my food. During the first six months I took salt, but later gave it up. I did not use spices at all, and took a vow never to use them again. I lived for a month on bananas, limes and milk only, but found that that reduced my strength. In the end I settled for about three quarters of a seer of milk, two chapatis (pancakes) of millet flour (weighing about twenty tolas), four or five bananas and (when it could be had) one lime fruit. I had no desire to eat anything merely because it was tasty, but I felt uneasy that this diet was rather costly. I was spending about eleven pice a day, four pice for the fruit, two for the flour, five for the milk.

I had settled on this diet to maintain my health; but I had also in mind the practice of the eleven vows. I was away from the Ashram, but I was nevertheless determined to follow its way of life. I not only kept the vow about control of the palate, but also that of 'non-possession'. I possessed only a very few things—a wooden plate, a bowl, an Ashram lota (brass vessel used as a mug), a pair of dhotis, a blanket and a few books. I had taken a vow not to wear a shirt, cap or coat, and I used only Indian hand-woven cloth and nothing of foreign make. This meant that I was also keeping the vow of swadeshi. I believe that I did also keep the three vows of truth, non-violence and brahmacharya, so far as I understood them.

Along with this personal discipline I took up some public service. I conducted a free class on the Gita for six students, taught them the whole text and explained the meaning. Four other students studied six chapters of Jnaneshwari with me, and two more studied nine of the Upanishads. I myself did not know Hindi well, but every day I read Hindi newspapers with my students and so did my share in popularising Hindi in the Marathi-speaking areas of the country.

In Wai I started 'Vidyarthi Mandal', a students' club, and fifteen of the boys joined with me in grinding grain, so as to earn some money to equip a reading room. We charged people only one pice for grinding two seers of grain and the money so earned went to the reading room. My fifteen volunteers were all Brahmin boys in the High School, some of them very rich. Wai was an old-fashioned place and people thought we were fools, but nevertheless we carried on for about two months and the reading room got about four hundred books out of it.

During that year I also covered about four hundred miles on foot, visiting four or five districts of Maharashtra in order to extend my knowledge. I saw some of the forts renowned in history, such as Raigarh, Sinhagarh, Torangarh. I also visited places associated with the saints, mixed with people and observed what was going on. I was specially interested in some of the treasures of knowledge that were hidden away in people's houses—old books and manuscripts and so forth. I enjoyed historical research, and especially examining documents of a spiritual nature. I had a great advantage in being comparatively unknown. I could do what Saint Tukaram describes: 'enter the heart, touch a man's feet in humble reverence, and get from him his hidden treasure.' Nowadays I get no chance to bend and touch anyone's feet!

While on this tour in Maharashtra I used to give talks on the Gita. I could not be said to have any real experience; I was only twenty-three, and only the Lord Krishna knows how far my understanding went. But I poured out my inward feelings, becoming totally absorbed as though in a kind of repetitive prayer. As water falls drop by drop on to the Shiva-linga,⁹ so do thoughts continually repeated imprint themselves on the heart. In that spirit I would give my talks; they were an expression of my inner devotion to the Gita.

I never stayed more than three days at any village. The first day I got to know the place and the people, and then at nine in the evening I gave my talk, and if interest was shown I stayed two days more. It usually happened that on the first evening sixteen or twenty men and women would assemble, but I

addressed them as if they had been a thousand; the second day the number increased—two or three hundred would come.

It so happened that the Shankaracharya of Sankeshwar Math was visiting a particular village at the same time as I was. He used to give his discourse in the mornings. Hearing that there was a young sadhu there whose talks were well liked, he hinted that he would like to meet me. My time that day, however, was so occupied that I could not go. Then I received a letter from him, and went and bowed before him. 'I'm very glad to meet you,' he said. 'If the calf had not come to the cow, the cow would have had to go to the calf !' My eyes filled with tears; I still remember those words, for they won my heart. He asked whether I had read Shankaracharya's commentaries. I told him that I had read the commentary on the Gita and was then studying that on the Brahma-sutras. This pleased him very much.

At Tasgaon village I had to stay for a week; I was unable to walk because of an abscess on my leg. On the first day, before it could be lanced, it gave me continuous pain. For those seven days I sat on a bullock cart to give my evening talks. I noticed with interest that as soon as the crowd had gathered and I began speaking I no longer felt the pain, and only became conscious of it again when the people had gone to their homes at the end of the talk. During that enforced seven-day stay I spent my time reading, and finished my study of Shankaracharya's commentary on the Brahma-sutras.

In every village I would get in touch with the young people and invite them for walks. I would start very early, as soon as I had bathed, and if I had company, as I usually did, there were vigorous discussions. Occasionally I was alone, and spent the time in my own thoughts, returning by eleven or twelve o'clock. The days thus passed pleasantly. I also tried to make known the principles of the Satyagraha Ashram both by my words and by my conduct. Waking or sleeping, even in dreams, one prayer, one refrain, was always with me: may God accept my service, may this body be an instrument of His will.

I had told Bapu that I would come back in a year's time, and I returned to the Ashram exactly a year to the day from the time I had left it.

Bapu: an Abiding Presence

Bapu loved and trusted me very much, and I for my part had laid my whole being at his feet; so long as he lived I simply carried on my work untroubled. Now however I wonder whether, if I had left the Ashram and joined in his work outside a few years earlier, I might perhaps have had the privilege of giving my life for the cause before he did, even though I might not have been able to extinguish the fire which consumed him. After he had been shot, I had the feeling that at the least, if I had joined Bapu in his wider field of work when I was released from jail in 1945, I might have been able to shield him and take on myself the fatal attack made on him.

But, by God's decree, things take their course. Gandhiji was killed by a man of unbalanced mind, and I got the bad news at Paunar two hours later. At first, for a day or two, I remained calm; I am by nature slow to feel the impact even of such a blow as this. It came home to me two or three days later and I broke down. It was my duty to speak daily at the evening prayer at Sevagram, and my tears overflowed as I spoke. 'What, Vinoba,' said one of those present, 'are you weeping too?' 'Yes, brother,' I replied. 'I thank God that He has given a heart even to me.'

Nevertheless it was not Bapu's death that set my tears flowing. He had died, I believe, as it behoves any great man to die. I was upset because I could not prevent my brother men from putting their faith in murder. When I heard of Bapu's death my immediate reaction was: now he has become immortal. Time has only strengthened that conviction. When Bapu was in the body, it took time to go and meet him; now it takes no time at all. All I need do is close my eyes and I am with him. When he was alive I buried myself in his work, and went to talk with him only now and then. Now, I talk with him all the time and feel his presence near me.

'There are sages who strive through birth after birth,' wrote Tulsidas,¹⁰ 'and yet at the moment of death they do not have the name of Rama in mind.' Not so with Gandhiji; his last words were 'He Rama'; no devotee could have done

more. Some of his ashes were immersed in the river Dham at Paunar. As I stood that day on the banks of the Dham it was as though I were witnessing a new birth. What I felt as I recited the Ishopanishad cannot be put into words. The sages speak to us of the immense range of the soul, the Self; we reverently accept their teaching, but only on that day did it come home to me as a reality. So long as a great soul lives in the body his power is limited, but when he is released from the body his power knows no bounds.



With Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at all-party Gramdan Conference at Yelwal (1957)

07. THE HOLY TASK

(April 1921 - February 1951)

All our friends, for one reason or another, were busy with political work. Even those who felt drawn to constructive work were caught in the political current. To keep out of it, while maintaining one's breadth of outlook, is really a form of Yoga,¹ and by the grace of God I was able to do it. For thirty years I continued my work, keeping the world under observation, but keeping aloof as though nothing whatever were happening in it. Thanks to the combination of the experience of this work and disinterested observation, I was able to grasp a number of things in a way that was not possible for those who were carried away by the current.

Fundamental Principles

During the thirty years from 1921 to 1951, except for the unavoidable trips to prison, I spent my whole time in educational and constructive work, and I also thought a great deal about the principles on which it should be based. I was teaching, studying, reflecting and so on, but I took little part in the political movement as such, except in the Flag Satyagraha, Individual Satyagraha and the '1942 Movement', which were matters of inescapable duty. Apart from that, the whole thirty-year period was spent in one place. I kept in touch with events in the outside world, but my own time was given to an effort to discover how far my work could be carried on in the spirit of the Gita, of 'non-action in action'.

I entered on this task with such single-mindedness that it was something peculiarly my own. But I knew that 'single-minded' must not mean 'narrow-minded', that one must keep the whole in view. So while I was working in the Ashram, attending to village service and teaching students, I also kept myself informed about the various movements going on in the world. I studied them from the outside, but I took no part in them. I was in fact in the position of the

onlooker who can observe the game better than the participants. If any leader or thinker visited Bapu at Sevagram he would direct him to me; it was not my habit to impose my ideas on others, but there were useful exchanges of thought, and in this way, even though I remained in one place, I had good opportunities to get to know what was going on and to reflect on it. These thirty years of my life were shaped by faith in the power of meditation. I never left the place, I stuck like a clam to Paramdham Ashram and the river Dham. After the painful events in Maharashtra which followed Gandhiji's demise, Sane Guruji² was much perturbed and undertook a twenty-one day fast. He sent me a letter. 'Vinoba,' he wrote, 'won't you come to Maharashtra? You are badly needed.' I wrote back: 'I have wheels in my feet, and from time to time I have an urge to travel, but not now. When the time comes, no one in the world will be able to stop me. (It's possible of course that God might stop me, He might take away my power to walk, but that is a different matter.) And until my time comes, no one in the world can make me get up and move.' That reply shows the stubborn and obstinate spirit in which I stuck to my own work. Nevertheless the touchstone of all my constructive work was whether it would contribute, however little, to Self-realization. I did my best to nurture in those around me a spirit of goodwill, and to turn out good workers. Both we and the government are interested in constructive work. The government will certainly take it up, and no doubt people will derive some benefits. But these benefits, and a revolution in one's values, are not the same thing. They would be the same, of course, if we measure 'benefits' in terms of the eternities; otherwise such temporal, worldly benefits and the change in values are altogether different.

This change of values is what we mean by 'peaceful revolution'. A revolution is not just any kind of change; a real revolution means a fundamental change, a change in values, and that sort of change can only take place peacefully, for it takes place in the realm of thought. This principle was the foundation of all my thinking, and my experiments were conducted on this basis.

I look upon myself as a manual labourer, that is why I spent thirty-two years, the best years of my life, in that kind of labour. I did different types of work,

including those which human society cannot do without, but which in India are looked down upon as low and mean—scavenging (removing human excreta), weaving, carpentry, agricultural labour and so on. Had Gandhiji lived I would never have left these jobs; the world would have found me totally absorbed in some work of that kind. I am a manual labourer by choice, though by birth I am a 'Brahmin' which means one who is steadfast in Brahman, the Supreme, and follows the principle of non-possession. I cannot give up the faith in Brahman, so all that I do has one basic purpose, a deeper and wider realization of the Self.

At the earnest request of Jamnalalji Bajaj, Bapu decided to open a branch of the Satyagraha Ashram at Wardha, and directed me to take charge of it. So with one fellow-worker and four students I started work there on April 8, 1921.

Spinning as the Service of God

After I joined Gandhiji in 1916 I tried out many kinds of work, and I was one of the first to learn to weave at his instance. To begin with I wove nivar,³ and worked very hard at it, because by weaving twenty-five yards a day one could earn one's keep. But no matter how hard I worked I couldn't weave twenty-five yards in eight hours. In the end I managed to make twenty-five yards in ten hours; that meant really hard labour until 9.30 at night. At that time, in 1916, all our yarn came from the mills. Then it dawned on us that mill yarn would not do India any particular good. So slowly we began to turn our attention to the spinning wheel. We sat down to spin, and next came the carding of the cotton and after that the combing of the fibre. I began to try out improved methods for all these processes. I would spin for hours, weave for hours, paying attention to every stage of the work and experimenting with it. Next I began to calculate what wages ought to be paid for spinning, and in order to arrive at a fair wage I began to spin four hanks of yarn a day. I would spin for hour after hour and live on my earnings. This experiment continued without a break for a full year.

When I began this sacred exercise it took me eight and a half or nine hours to spin four hanks. I practised spinning in different postures. I would spin standing for two or two and a half hours, and then sit on the ground, sometimes using my left hand and sometimes my right. To these four alternative postures one might add a fifth, sitting on a bench with feet on the ground. For part of the time I would teach as I spun, and for the rest remain silent. As I drew each length of yarn I would chant the closing words of the Gayatri Mantra,⁴ and as I wound the thread on to the spindle I would chant the opening line. All this made my task as light as air, and it seemed no labour at all to produce my four daily hanks of yarn.

My daily routine was usually to spin for about nine hours, during two of which I also taught—so that I once added up my account of my twenty-four hour day to twenty-six hours ! I tried to give four or five hours to other things, such as correspondence, while ten hours went in attending to bodily needs, including sleep.

I slept each night at the Kanya Ashram and spent the day in Nalwadi, returning to the Ashram at six in the evening. There I had talks with Bapu, Balkoba, Babaji (Moghe),⁵ Shivaji and others; then came the evening prayer, more spinning, and sleep. After the early morning prayer I held classes in the Upanishads for the boys and girls of the Ashram and some teachers. After the class I would start for Nalwadi and reach there by six a.m.

On September 1, 1935 I started a new practice, though in fact it was not really new, it merely became more noticeable. The whole spinning exercise was designed to demonstrate that a man could earn his living by spinning, provided he received the wages I had calculated, and the market prices remained steady. On this basis I reckoned that one should be able to live on six rupees a month; the diet included fifty tolas of milk, thirty tolas of vegetables, fifteen to twenty of wheat, four of oil, and some honey, raw sugar or fruit. This principle, that a spinner should be able to earn his living by his work, had always been accepted from the first years at Wardha, 1922-23. The new practice we began at Nalwadi in 1935 was that at four o'clock each afternoon

we reckoned up how much work had been done. If it was found that by six o'clock (after eight hours of work) the spinners would have earned full wages, then the evening meal was cooked. Otherwise, the workers had to decide whether to forego the evening meal, or to work extra time and earn the full wages. Sometimes the ration was reduced when the earnings fell short. My students were quite young lads, but they worked along with me enthusiastically to the best of their power.

The Charkha Sangh (All India Spinners Association) had fixed wages which amounted to only five rupees a month for four hanks daily, that is, for nine hours' work a day. In my opinion a spinner should receive not less than four annas (a quarter-rupee) for his daily quota; Bapu would have liked it to be eight annas. But that would have put up the price of khadi, and the gentry would not be prepared to pay a higher rate. What could be done? The only way was for someone like me to experiment in living on the spinner's wage. Bapu soon heard of my experiment. He was living at Sevagram, but he was alert to everything that was going on. When we next met he asked me for details. 'How much do you earn in a day,' he enquired, 'calculated at the Charkha Sangh rate?' 'Two annas, or two and a quarter,' I said. 'And what do you reckon you need?' 'Eight annas,' I replied. 'So that means,' he commented, 'that even a good worker, doing a full day's work, can't earn a living wage !' His distress was evident in his words. At last, thanks to his efforts, the Charkha Sangh accepted the principle of a living wage, though in practice we are still a long way from achieving it.

This debate about wages went on for two or three years. The Maharashtra Charkha Sangh made the first move, and as no adverse consequences followed, they were emboldened to take a second step, bringing the wage to double what it had been. An ordinary spinner could earn four annas by eight hours' work, while a good spinner could earn six annas. Some specially skilful and hard-working individuals might occasionally earn as much as eight annas—the amount Gandhiji had proposed as the standard. But though the Maharashtra

Charkha Sangh adopted the principle, it still seemed impracticable to people in the other provinces.

After I had succeeded in spinning four hanks of yarn in nine hours on the wheel, I planned a similar experiment with the takli (i.e. using a spindle). But my speed was so slow that I felt it was beyond me to achieve satisfactory results. I wanted some more capable person to take it up, because it was only by such experiments that the idea of khadi could really gain ground. I myself experimented for a full year with takli spinning by the left hand, and found that there was a difference of twelve yards in the production of the right and left hands. The purpose of the exercise was to find out whether a full day's wage could be earned on the takli, spinning for eight hours with both the hands. My fellow-worker Satyavratan was able in this way to produce three hanks of yarn in eight hours.

In those days, about 1934, we used to come together every day at noon for takli spinning. I looked upon this as a form of meditation, and I told my fellow-workers that while I had no wish to impose my ideas on others, I did hope that there would be a better attendance at this takli meditation even than at meals. If this does not happen, one reason is that we do not pay attention to the principles upon which it is based. Meditation stands as it were midway between practical affairs and knowledge—knowledge of the Self—and acts as a bridge. Its task is to enable us, who are preoccupied with practical activities, to reach the Supreme Truth. Meditation appeals first to practical benefits, and by concentration on these benefits leads us to the further shore, to peace, contentment and knowledge of the Self. Let a person begin with the thought that if every inhabitant of India were to take to the takli or the charkha, many of the country's ills would be remedied. If he starts spinning for that reason it will bring peace of mind. Whatever we undertake in this spirit of reflection or meditation brings both outward and inward benefit, and experience of the takli is of this kind.

A good deal of suffering and sacrifice has been associated with the takli. In those days it was not permissible for a prisoner to keep one in jail, and Gopal Shankar Dandekar was allowed to have one only after he had fasted for it.

Kakasaheb had to fast eleven days for it. Many others too, both men and women, had some severe struggles to get it. The story of their sacrifices on behalf of the takli is as interesting as the tale of Robinson Crusoe, and could be written in just as fascinating a way as the stories of the Puranas.

I feel convinced that the country will not achieve unity without this kind of meditation. It is not inter-marriage nor inter-dining between various groups, nor a common language, which will make us one nation; it is common feeling.

A nation is an expression of the feeling of oneness. Where can we experience that oneness, that equality, except where we pray and spin together? Elsewhere, we are given divisive labels: teacher and taught, rich and poor, healthy and sick, and so on. I use the word 'meditation' both for prayer and for takli (or charkha) spinning. Spoken prayer is meditation in words; takli spinning is meditation in work.⁷

Living on Two Annas a Day

In 1924 I began to study economics. There were not many books to be had in my own language, so I read a number in English. To make my studies realistic I lived on two annas a day, as the average income per head in India was at that time two annas or less. I had three meals a day; of my two annas (eight pice) I spent seven pice on foodstuffs and one on firewood. The foodstuffs were millet flour, groundnuts, some vegetable, salt and tamarind. While this was going on I had to go to Delhi, as Bapu was fasting there. In Delhi the millet flour could not be had; wheat flour cost more, so I had to give up groundnuts. This practice continued for a year, and someone may perhaps ask what this austerity had to do with the study of economics.

I hold that we can only properly digest any subject when we adapt ourselves to it, and harness our senses and faculties accordingly. For two years, when I was

concentrating on the study of the Vedas, I lived on milk and rice alone, with nothing else. It is my custom to establish this kind of link between my lifestyle and my study, and it seems to me essential to do so. In this way I matched my standard of life to my study of economics. This study benefited me a great deal and I forgot what seemed useless to me. But I made a thorough study of such thinkers as Tolstoy and Ruskin.

Under Bapu's Command

In 1925 there was a satyagraha campaign at Vykom in Kerala on the issue of temple entry. The Harijans were not only kept out of the temple, they were not even allowed to use the road which led to it. satyagraha had been in progress for some time, but seemed to be having no effect. I was then at Wardha, while Bapu was at Sabarmati. He sent word for me to go to Vykom and have a look at what was going on. He gave me a double job: to meet the learned, orthodox pandits and try to convince them, and also to make any suggestions I might have about satyagraha itself. I had neither knowledge nor experience then, yet Bapu put his faith in me, and I also in faith plucked up the courage to go. I had many discussions with the pandits at several places, and as they preferred to speak Sanskrit I did my best to speak it also, but I did not succeed in bringing about any change of heart. As for the rest, any satyagraha, if it is pure, is bound in the end to prove effective. I was able to make a few suggestions to those who were conducting it, and reported to Bapu what I had done. Later Bapu went there in person, and the problem was solved.

I tried to participate as well as I could in whatever activities Bapu suggested. In 1921 he called on us to get ten million members enrolled in the Congress, and to collect a Tilak Swaraj Fund of ten million rupees. I was then living at Wardha, and I took part in the work there. I went round the city from house to house, explained the principles of the Congress, and enrolled as members those who accepted them. Working for five or six hours a day, I could get only five or ten people to join, whereas others were enrolling two or three hundred

members a day. I could not understand why there should be this difference, and asked if I might accompany them for four or five days and learn how to do better. 'No,' they said, 'please don't. You are doing well. Our trick is to get some big employer to pay fifty rupees, and enrol two hundred of his workers en masse at a quarter-rupee a head.'

At that time I was myself a member of the Congress, but in 1925 I resigned, as Bapu also did in 1934. It happened in this way. Without my prior consent I was appointed from Wardha to the Provincial Committee in Nagpur. The meeting was called for three in the afternoon, so I left Wardha at noon, taking with me a copy of the Rigveda to read on the train. When the meeting began all the members were given copies of the constitution, and at the very outset one member raised a point of order. 'This meeting is irregular,' he said, 'because insufficient notice was given. It should have had so many days' notice, see rule five on page four of the constitution.' We all turned to that page. 'Yes, that is the rule,' said another speaker, 'but in special circumstances meetings may be called at shorter notice.' He too referred to some page or other, and a discussion arose about which rule should be followed. I looked at the rules in the book, which I had not before seen, and thought that if the meeting was declared irregular we should indeed prove ourselves to be fools ! Finally it was decided that it was in order and business could begin, but by then it was dinnertime and the meeting was adjourned. It met again after the meal, but I did not attend. When I got back to Wardha next day I resigned both from the Committee and also from the Congress itself, for it seemed to me that rules were being treated as more important than human beings, and the proceedings had no interest for me.

From the time I met Bapu, I have spent my life in carrying out his orders. Before that there was a time when I used to dream of doing some act of violence, so earning fame for myself and sacrificing myself on the altar of the country. Bapu drove that demon out of my mind, and from that time I have felt myself growing, day by day and year by year, and making one or other of the great vows an integral part of my life.⁹

Village Service

From 1932 onwards, with Nalwadi¹⁰ as our base, we began going from village to village, trying to be of service to the people. After two or three years we came to the conclusion that a solid integrated plan ought to be chalked out for the whole neighbourhood. As a result of this thinking, in 1934 we set up the Gram Seva Mandal (Village Service Society), drew up a scheme of village work for the whole of Wardha tehsil,¹¹ and started khadi, Harijan uplift and other activities in a few selected villages.

I have no particular attachment to institutions. I have lived in Ashrams such as Sabarmati, of course, and I even directed the Wardha Ashram. These Ashrams have moulded my life, and become a part of me, but I was not responsible for starting them. It was Gandhiji who started the Sabarmati Ashram and Jambhalalji who was responsible for that at Wardha.

In 1959, when the Gram Seva Mandal was twenty-five years old, I wrote to its members that in spite of lack of attachment to institutions as such, I had so far founded three of them. These were the Vidyarthi Mandal of Baroda (in 1911-12), the Gram Seva Mandal of Nalwadi (in 1934) and the Brahmavidya Mandir at Paunar (in 1959). One was the work of my early youth, the second of the prime of my life, and the third of my old age.

The first was not meant to continue indefinitely: it was active for the five or six years of our lives as students. It fully achieved its purpose. Of its members Babaji Moghe, Gopalrao Kale, Raghunath Dhotre, Madhavrao Deshpande, Dwarakanath Harkare and a few others joined me in public service and were engaged for the rest of their lives in one activity or another. Mogheji was with me even in the Brahmavidya Mandir.

The second institution is the Gram Seva Mandal. The seed-idea had in fact been sown in the Vidyarthi Mandal in 1912. This institution cannot be said to have succeeded one hundred per cent but I am well content with it, for it has done many kinds of service and produced a number of good workers.

In 1957, during the bhoodan (land-gift) movement, I suggested to the Mandal that the time had come for it to base itself on bhoodan. From the very beginning it had given the first place to non-violence and village industries; it should also work now for the establishment of a party-less society in the Wardha District. To this end those who were working for bhoodan in the district should be enrolled as members, and the Mandal should thus become the centre of work for the Gramdan-Gramraj revolution. Its emphasis on productive work and self-sufficiency should be maintained, but it should also do as much extensive work as possible. In other words, one aspect should be work of a permanent, self-reliant nature, while the other aspect should have a wider scope and it could be financed by sampatti-dan.

There is one more view of mine regarding the planning of our lives: it is not right that one individual should spend his whole life in one kind of work. When the work has taken shape, perhaps after twenty or twenty-five years, the senior workers should gradually withdraw and become vanaprasthis.¹³ I have always held this view, and there are not many senior workers in Paramdham. Like the ever-new waters of the river Dham, Paramdham itself remains ever new. I would like the Gram Seva Mandal to do the same.

Serving Broken Images

During our visits to the villages (from 1932 onwards) we made it a point to observe what was needed, and to hold regular discussions of how the needs might be met. We had no idea that we should find leprosy to be so terribly common, but it quickly compelled our attention, and the question of how to tackle it arose. We agreed that we could not ignore it, though at that time leprosy work had not been included in Gandhiji's constructive programme. With the vision of all-round service before my eyes I could not neglect this aspect of it.

Our friend Manoharji Diwan was inspired to take it up, for the situation distressed him very much. He was living in our Ashram, busy with spinning, weaving, cooking, scavenging and other community work, and taking part in

the village service. He came and told me of his desire to take up leprosy work, and I warmly encouraged him. But his mother, who lived with him, had no wish to see her son devoting himself to such work, and she came to me. I said 'Supposing that you yourself were to become a leper, would you still ask Manoharji not to serve you?' She thought for a moment and replied: 'He has my blessing.'

In 1936 therefore the Kushthadham (Leprosy Centre) was opened at Dattapur with Manoharji in charge. For the first time I came into contact with leprosy patients. Two years later I went to live at Paunar, and while I was digging there I unearthed several images. They were ancient figures, perhaps thirteen or fourteen hundred years old, and after lying in the ground so long they were defaced; noses were disfigured, arms or other limbs were missing. Their faces reminded me of those of the leprosy patients, and now whenever I see the patients I think of the images. They are all images of God. The most beautiful new statue cannot call out devotion such as I feel for these old ones from the field, and when I see the patients in Kushthadham I feel the same reverence for them, and I have the greatest respect for those who serve them. On one of my visits to Kushthadham I asked to work alongside the patients for a time, and joined those who were sowing seed in the field. It is not possible for me to put into words the joy I felt then.

When the Brahma Vidya Mandir was established I suggested to Manoharji that now that he had spent twenty-five years in this service he should withdraw and 'just live' in the Mandir. He agreed, and came. Then twelve years later I asked him to go back to the Kushthadham, and once more he agreed. I felt that we should undertake to teach Brahma Vidya to leprosy patients, that someone should live among them twenty-four hours a day and give them spiritual teaching; teach them prayers, sayings of the saints, the Rigveda and Upanishads, the shlokas of the Gita, the verses of the Koran, the teachings of Jesus, the Buddha, Mahavira. The teaching should include asanas (bodily exercises of Yoga), the practice of meditation, and pranayam (the control of breathing). I hoped that in this way some of them might emerge as fine workers, and be inspired inwardly to go and work in other places. As the

patients were introduced to Brahmailidya they would understand that their disease was only of the body, that their true Self was other than the body. 'Let the Self lift up Itself.' If this teaching were neglected, our service would do them no real good.

Accumulating Love

In 1935 I was forty years of age. I do not usually remember my birthday, but on this occasion I had many reasons for doing some intensive reflection. I was responsible for a number of institutions and individuals, and it is not surprising that someone in such a position should take stock of his resources from time to time. On that occasion, with forty years completed, I examined both the past and the present. From the standpoint of arithmetic, forty years of one insignificant person's life are as nothing in the endless vistas of time; yet from the point of view of that person, limited though it is, forty years is a period deserving of some attention.

Twenty years of my life had been spent in my home, and an equal number had been spent outside. Where should the future years be spent? A man is helpless regarding the past and blind to the future; he can only leave them aside and think about the present. So, in 1935 two segments of my life had been completed, and I had made up my mind about how I wanted to spend the remainder—though in practice the whole future is in the hands of God. Broadly speaking, during my first twenty years or so I had accumulated knowledge, and during the following twenty years I had accumulated the power to observe the great vows. The next period, I decided, should be spent in accumulating love. In this task, as I realize, I have had the help of many noble-minded people. It is my great good fortune to have been in the company of the loving and the pure in heart. With such companionship one might spend many lives and come to no harm.

08. PARAMDHAM AT PAUNAR

In 1938 I was in poor health: my weight had gone down to eighty-eight pounds, and it seemed that the hour had come for the Lord to take me to Himself. I was quite content, but my friends were unhappy. Bapu heard about it; I received a summons and obeyed. 'Stay here,' he said. 'I shall look after you.' 'I have no faith in your nursing,' said I. 'You have fifty-odd jobs to do, and looking after the sick is only one of them. Besides, I should only be one of your fifty-odd patients—what good would that do?' Bapu began to laugh. 'All right,' he said. 'Go to a doctor.' 'Rather than that,' I replied, 'I'd better go to Yamaraj !'¹ 'Then,' said Bapu, 'go to some place for a change of air.' He went on to suggest a number of places, such as Nainital and Mussoorie, and described them with gusto. 'All right,' I said at last. 'I'll agree to go somewhere to restore my health; but my choice is different. Jamnalalji's bungalow at Paunar (six miles from Wardha) is lying empty. I'll go there.' 'Very well,' said Bapu. 'Those cool places are for the rich; how can poor folk like us go so far for change of air? You may go to Paunar, provided that you leave behind your whole load of work, and leave it completely, without any anxiety or worry about the Ashram or anything else.' 'All right,' I said. 'That is what I will do.'

I had become so weak that I could not walk, so I went from Nalwadi to Paunar by car. The car reached the village and began to cross the bridge over the river Dham. As it did so, in accordance with my promise to Bapu, I repeated to myself three time over: 'I have renounced—renounced—renounced.' So when I reached the bungalow, on March 7th 1938, my mind was completely vacant. I spent the days doing nothing in particular; I just walked in the hall and did a little digging in the field. My main occupation was to sit in the field picking out the stones and collecting them into heaps. That would easily have kept me busy for about two years, and if anyone came to meet me he too would join in the task.

In the middle of the day I spent some time watching the traffic on the Wardha-Nagpur road. I made a game of it, counting the number of cars, bullock-carts, cycles and pedestrians going by between eleven o'clock and twelve o'clock, and then again between twelve and one, and so on.

I did this without putting my mind into it. This detachment of mind was no activity. Otherwise I should have had to exert myself twice over, first to do the job, and second to prevent myself thinking about it. It is certainly better to bear the burden of one rather than two activities.

I started the digging for the sake of physical exercise. On the first day I spent only five minutes at it, on the second day two minutes more, and two minutes more again on the third day, so that in the end I was digging two hours every day. I did it scientifically. I would dig for an hour at a stretch, but during the course of it I would pause for a few seconds from time to time so that I did not become exhausted. This exercise was very beneficial; I gained forty pounds in ten months and my weight increased to a hundred and twenty-eight pounds. Paunar village was on one side of the river Dham and I was staying on the other. I therefore named it Paramdham, 'beyond the Dham.' The word occurs in the Gita: 'From my Paramdham, once reached, no man returns.' There, as my health steadily improved, I had more and more contact with the village. I started a workshop there, where the village people came to spin. I also built a shed in Paramdham and set up looms for weaving there. Boys from Paunar and Kanhapur villages began to come to learn weaving, and they are still doing various kinds of work at Paramdham.

On one occasion I went to the market in Paunar to buy a blanket. The woman who was selling asked one and a half rupees for it. I began asking questions: how much did the wool cost, how long had the weaving taken, what was the cost of keeping the sheep? She recognized me as the man from the Ashram, so she answered my questions readily. I did some calculations. 'This blanket,' I said, 'has cost you not less than five rupees. Why are you selling it for only one and a half?' 'How could I ask five rupees?' she replied. 'Even when I ask one and a half, people try to beat me down to one and a quarter !' I took the

blanket, gave her five rupees, and left her wondering whether she was still living in this world of sin, or whether the long-lost golden age had returned !² And what happened next? The boys who came to spin in the workshop or weave in the Ashram earned three or four annas a day, whereas at that time a labourer's wage was normally only two or two and a quarter annas. I told these boys about the blanket. 'You must learn to raise the market rates,' I said. 'Otherwise, we are stealing from the poor. You boys are getting three or four annas in wages, so do one thing. In this rainy season women bring head-loads of grass to sell; go and buy one, and pay two annas for it.' Off they went to the market. A woman was there asking three pice (three quarters of an anna) for her grass. 'No, two pice,' said the buyer. 'The proper price is two annas,' said our boy. 'What nonsense !' said the buyer. 'Who is going to pay two annas for it?' 'I am,' said one of the boys, and he paid the money and took it. We are all guilty of this kind of theft, because we have no feeling for the common good. In the Gita the Lord tells us to care for one another and so take our part in the common welfare. That was what I was teaching the boys, and that is the kind of feeling which we ought to promote in our society.

A Gift of God

One day while I was digging I struck something hard in the ground. I probed here and there with my pick-axe and found it was a big stone. I was not strong enough to lift it out, but others did so, and it turned out to be a fine piece of sculpture; the subject was the reunion of Rama and Bharata.³ In 1932, when I was in Dhulia jail, I had given talks on the Gita, and when I reached the twelfth chapter and dealt with nirguna and saguna⁴ types of devotion, I used Lakshmana and Bharata as my examples. If I were an artist, I had said, I would have painted that loving scene, when Bharata and Rama met after the fourteen years of separation. This sculpture was just what I had then tried to express in words.

I was overjoyed to have found such a carving. I took it as a gift from God, and treated it with the greatest reverence and devotion; two or three years later I installed it in a shrine with Vedic rites. I made my offering and recited some

Vedic hymns and one of Jnaneswar's about the awakening of spiritual freedom. Day after day I would sit there, singing the melodious hymns of the saints, of Jnanadev, Tukaram, Namadev, Ekanath or Tulsidas.

People asked me whether I approved of the custom of installing images. I replied that I would not do it as a general rule, but that when this image had come into my hands out of the ground I could not be so stony-hearted as to treat it as a mere stone ! I installed it in a place of honour because I regarded it as a gift from God.

A Message from Bapu

One fine morning in 1940 I got a message from Bapu asking me to go over and meet him. We lived only five miles apart, but I did not go unless he called me. We might perhaps exchange letters two or three times a year. He knew I had plenty of work to do, and he did not wish to disturb me. That day the message was unexpected, and I went over at once. 'I don't know whether you are free or not,' said Bapu, 'but I am in need of your help. We must start an Individual Satyagraha, and I want you to get ready for it, if you can free yourself from other work without too much trouble.'⁵

I laughed. 'In my eyes,' I said, 'your call is just about as imperative as that of Yamaraj himself. I don't even need to go back to Paunar. I can start straight away from here.' My words set Bapu's mind at rest.

The position in fact was this: I had undertaken many kinds of work, there was hardly any aspect of the constructive work programme which I did not touch, and I had other work of my own. But I had had the guidance of the great Saint Ramadas Swami. Even as a boy his words had made a deep impression on me: 'The way of devotion should be established without getting oneself entangled on the path.' Then, of course, I had the guidance of the Gita. Accordingly, I had taken care to organize all my work so that it could be carried on without me. When I told Bapu this, he was pleased, and a few days later I went out as an individual satyagrahi and so arrived in jail.

09. PRISON ASHRAMS

It was in jail that I experienced a real Ashram life. All I had were a few clothes, a tumbler and a bowl. What better place could there be for following the vow of 'non-possession'? Bathing, eating, working were according to rule, going to bed and getting up by the bell—a perfectly regular life ! One was not even allowed to fall ill ! The vow of control of the palate was practised every day; even the Ashram was not a better place for that. There was also plenty of time for thought and reflection. So even the jail could be made a part of the spiritual exercise of Ashram life.

I was greatly benefited by the chance I got in prison to live alongside all kinds of people. Before that individual satyagraha I had been in jail twice. I was arrested first in 1923, in connection with the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha. At first I was in the Nagpur jail, and was later sent to Akola. On that occasion I was treated like an ordinary criminal and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment with hard labour (breaking stones).¹ I was even given a period of solitary confinement in a cell measuring nine feet by eight. In one corner was a stone hand-mill and in another an earthenware piss-pot. There was no work to do, no book to read, no pencil or paper, no chance even to go out. It was enough to drive a man mad.

However, I drew up a daily timetable for myself: ten hours for sleep, two or three hours for meditation, about three hours for eating, bathing etc., and eight hours for walking up and down. I covered at least ten miles each day, reckoning my speed at about one and a half miles an hour. As I walked I sang all the hymns I knew by heart.

Once I was pacing to and fro like this at about one o'clock at night, engrossed in thought. The warder came on his rounds, and puzzled at seeing me walking about, he knocked on the door. As I was completely absorbed I failed to respond, and the poor man became alarmed. He came in and shook me and asked me what was the matter. I tried to explain what I was doing and what the fruits of such contemplation might be, and he was very pleased. The very

next day I received a real boon—he arranged for me to walk a short time daily in an open place.

I felt quite at ease in that cell. During the night I would meditate for about three hours, and one of the warders, who noticed this, would come and sit near me. One day he came with a lantern, and found that my eyes were closed. After waiting for some time he said: 'Babuji, may I speak to you?' I opened my eyes and he said: 'I am leaving tomorrow. Please give me some teaching to guide me.' Seeing me sitting every day with closed eyes he thought I must be some sadhu or yogi. So I gave him a few suggestions to satisfy him, and he went away happily.

I was kept in that cell for fifteen days, and during that time I realized the meaning of that verse in the Gita,² which says: 'One who sees non-action in action, and action in non-action, is truly an enlightened being.' Finally, seeing that solitary confinement was no hardship for me, the gaoler sent me back to the 'general ward', and there too I felt equally happy.

In 1932 I was in Dhulia jail for six months. Many of my companions there found jail life very dull, because they had not learned the art of acceptance, and were feeling very rebellious. I decided that it was my job to cheer them all up. There was no question of seeking pardon or release from the Government, so I set to work to help them not to lose heart, and to find some interest in life in jail. Those who had known me earlier, and then shared the jail life with me, noticed my conduct. 'When Vinoba goes to jail,' they would say, 'he completely forgets his love of solitude.' I got to know personally every political prisoner in Dhulia jail. We would talk for hours together and I did everything I could to help and cheer them up.

At that time only 'C' class political prisoners were given work to do. I was in 'B' class, but I did not want to accept such 'privileges', and as soon as I reached the jail I asked for work. 'How can I give you work?' asked the gaoler. 'You are not strong enough.' 'I am eating here,' I said, 'and I don't believe in eating without working. If I don't get work by tomorrow I shall stop eating.'

'Very well,' he replied, 'but I will not give you work. You yourself may do whatever kind of work you please.'

During that time of imprisonment I had to take it on myself to control all the political prisoners; conditions were such that if I had not done so there would have been no discipline at all. They were bent upon rebellion and would listen to nobody. There were about three hundred of them, all 'freedom-fighters'. In my view, a soldier of freedom ought to do some bodily labour every day as part of the discipline of freedom. The jail discipline was to require every prisoner to grind thirty-five pounds of flour a day. I told the authorities that these political prisoners would refuse to do such work in obedience to an order, even if they were put in iron for disobedience. 'Please don't insist on it,' I said. 'Instead, we will voluntarily supply the whole prison with all the flour that is needed, and we will take responsibility for all the kitchen work also.' They agreed to this proposal, so my next job was to tackle the prisoners. Everyone, I said, even those sentenced only to simple imprisonment, ought to grind at least twenty-one pounds of flour daily. They did not all agree at once because they suspected that I might be letting them in for something which I would not do myself. But when they saw me grinding, they all began to work enthusiastically, old and young, seniors and juniors. They not only did their own full quota, they ground also for the sick and the aged. As we worked we talked, discussing ideas and extending our knowledge. The place was no longer a jail; it became an Ashram.³

We had also undertaken to run the kitchen, and our very best people were engaged in this work. After the pulse was cooked, we mashed it into a thick, smooth soup, which took as much time as the actual cooking. We all remember it even now. It was so good that people declare that they would never get the like of it anywhere else. There were only ten or twelve of us who did not take spiced food: all the others were accustomed to spice. Little by little, however, all the political prisoners joined us in eating unspiced food, and then the other prisoners also began to ask for it. The number became so large that the gaoler came to consult me. 'I am responsible for the health of these prisoners,' he

said, 'and I am required by the rules to give them the fixed rations, which include chillies also. Please don't disturb these arrangements.' So I told the prisoners that when they got back home they could do as they wished, but that so long as they were in jail they should accept what was given. I had to deal with so much business of this kind that people began to wonder why I had become so fond of society when I was reputed to like solitude. 'Do you count me among the anti-social elements?' I would ask. I mixed with the others in order to keep them all in good spirits. Sometimes it would become known that a letter had arrived but that the gaoler had kept it back. When I asked why he didn't give the poor man his letter, he told me that it was not suitable to pass it on. I referred to this in one of my talks on the Gita. 'There is a message for you in every wind,' I said. 'Why should you feel so sore if you do not receive that letter?'⁴ I would also tell them individually that if they were so unduly anxious it seemed they had no faith in God. In this way I did my best to strengthen and comfort them.

'Talks on the Gita' is Born

In Dhulia jail I was in the company of the saints, for men like Sane Guruji, Jamnalalji Bajaj and Apte Guruji were there with me. They suggested that I should give regular talks on the Gita; I agreed to do so and started to give a talk every Sunday. Sane Guruji wrote them all down word for word; it was surely by the grace of God that I was given such a wonderful scribe, for his heart and mine were as one and our feelings were in complete harmony. This recording of the talks proved to be a boon to the world, though at the time no one dreamed that these jail talks would later be read in every language throughout the country. But what God wills comes to pass. In jail-life nothing is certain; anyone, at any time, may be sent anywhere. The Government might have sent me or Sane Guruji elsewhere, or released one of us. But nothing of the sort happened. We were able to complete the talks on all the eighteen chapters. The Gita itself had been delivered on the battlefield; we too, in the jail, felt ourselves to be soldiers in a battle, the battle of freedom.

I can never forget that sacred experience, nor can I ever put into words what I felt when I gave those talks. But if God ever speaks through the lips of a man, then surely He spoke through my lips during those days. I never felt that it was I who spoke, and to the listeners too it seemed that the words they heard were not merely Vinoba's.

To begin with I gave the talks to the male prisoners only, but the women asked the gaoler to give a chance to hear them also. Male prisoners were strictly forbidden to enter the women's quarters, but the gaoler, whose name was Vaishnava, ruled that in this case Vinoba should be regarded as a woman, and boldly gave permission for me to talk to the women. I invited him to be present himself, and he not only attended the talks, he brought his wife with him. So I began a weekly talk to the women, and it was not long before the ordinary prisoners also asked permission to hear me. The gaoler asked me if I was willing, and I said that I would be glad to talk to them, provided that he could give them an hour's leave on some day other than Sunday. This was in the middle of the non-cooperation movement, but even so that fine gaoler gave them an hour's leave every Wednesday for my talks. Some of these prisoners worked in the garden, and they used to make and bring flower garlands to show their affection for me; some others were under sentence of death, but they too were allowed to attend the talks. As a result, the whole atmosphere of the jail was spiritually enriched.

Meanwhile, my Gitai⁵ was being printed in Dhulia, and while in jail I was correcting the proofs. When the ordinary prisoners heard that I was soon to be released, they asked the Superintendent for two annas each from their jail earnings which were deposited in his keeping. 'What do you want it for?' he asked, and they said that one anna was for a copy of the Gitai, and the other was their dakshina⁶ for Vinoba. I can never forget the great affection which these prisoners showered upon me.

A Sacrifice in Faith

During the individual satyagraha of 1940 I was arrested three times and spent altogether about a year and three quarters in prison. By Bapu's orders I had undertaken this Satyagraha in the name of the whole country, so when I got to jail it seemed to me that as the representative of all India, I ought to learn all of the India's languages. In my own mind even that was not enough; I aspired to represent the whole world of humanity, and that meant learning world languages also. So I studied a great deal, and very deeply, both during these imprisonments and during that which followed August 1942: about five years in all. I studied for fourteen or fifteen hours a day, and while I was in Nagpur jail I used to listen to the Koran on the radio to get the correct pronunciation of the Arabic.

To go back to the period before the 1942 movement: Gandhiji was thinking that if he should be imprisoned he would start fasting from the moment he set foot in the jail. Jail-going was not now something novel; now his mind was churning this new idea: if we refused to recognize British rule and asked the British to 'Quit India', we should begin to fast as soon as we entered their jails. Only one whose heart is filled with love is capable of such a sacrifice. Even if it were possible for an individual, could it ever become a movement? Of course thousands of people join an army, but would they join a fast? Gandhiji thought that it was possible; he himself, he said, would take the lead. This idea alarmed everyone, and those around him felt that it had to be stopped somehow. There can't be such a thing as chain-fasting, they said. There can be no army of fasters, for such things can't be done to order.

Bapu then called me to Sevagram and put his idea before me. The question was: if a wise man can do a thing in the fullness of his wisdom, could it be done by one of his followers from faith in him? 'Yes,' I replied. 'What the Lord Rama can do in the fullness of his knowledge, Hanuman⁷ can do in the fullness of his faith.' There the matter ended; there was nothing more to be said and I got up and left.

Then, on the ninth of August, Bapu was arrested, but he did not think it proper to begin to fast immediately because he planned to have some correspondence with the Government on the issue. I did not know about this later development till afterwards.

Pyarelalji had not been arrested, and Bapu told him to send me word not to begin to fast as soon as I entered jail. For Bapu knew that after what I had said to him, that is what I would do, even though he had given no orders but merely asked my opinion. As it was, I had got from him something much more imperative than an order.

Soon afterwards I too was arrested. As soon as I reached the jail I said to the gaoler: 'You know me well. You know that I have always obeyed the rules meticulously and got others to do the same. But this time it is different. I have already had a meal, so I do not need the midday meal here. But I shall take no food from this evening on, and I don't know for how long. I am not doing this to violate your discipline, but for the sake of an inner discipline of my own.' So I entered the jail, but two hours later I was summoned to the office. Pyarelalji had sent on Bapu's message to Kishorlalbhai,⁸ who had asked the Deputy Commissioner if the message could be passed on to me. The D.C. referred it to the Governor, who allowed it on condition that not a word should be added. When the D.C. told Kishorlalbhai that the message would be given, Kishorlalbhai pointed out that Vinoba might not accept it as genuine unless one of our own group could deliver it personally. So in the end Gopalrao Valunjkar came and read Bapu's message to me, and I gave up my fast. Nevertheless I feel I can honestly claim that I would have fasted not a whit less happily than Bapu himself, but I would have done it not from knowledge (like Bapu) but from faith. I have no doubt at all that an individual can make such a sacrifice, with the fullest reverence and love, in obedience to an order accepted in faith.

Vellore and Seoni Jails

From Wardha jail I was sent to Nagpur, and then to Vellore as I was classified as a 'dangerous' prisoner. When I arrived, the gaoler asked what I needed. 'I

need two things,' I said, 'a barber for my hair, and someone who can teach me Tamil, seeing that I am now in a Tamil-speaking province and shall be eating its food.' By eight o'clock I was shaved and had a bath, and the gaoler had sent me a teacher. He did not know much Tamil, however, and although there were many Tamil-speaking people in the jail, I was kept apart from them. The man sent to me knew some English, and I began to learn Tamil from him. Ten or twelve days later I started to learn Telugu, and after that Kannada and Malayalam, so that within a month I had begun to learn all the four languages of the South. Someone asked me why I was studying four languages at once, and I replied: 'Because there isn't a fifth !' By studying the four languages together I was able to compare them and so learn more.

In Vellore jail all sorts of facilities were to be had for the asking, at government expense. This seemed to me to be a most enervating practice, designed to rob our movement of all vigour. I disliked it. There was famine in Bengal, yet here were we, asking for things like cots and chairs, making a fuss when we did not get them, and calling it 'a struggle'. When in the end the Government conceded our demands, we called it a triumph, a victory. What a triumph ! What a victory ! It was nothing but folly and defeat.

Finally I was sent from Vellore to Seoni (in Central India), where I had the company of the late Bharatan Kumarappa.⁹ He asked me to teach him Hindi and I agreed and chose the Ramayana of Tulsidas for our text book. I told him at the start why the Tulsi Ramayana was important. 'For Hindi studies,' I said, 'it is like the Bible and Shakespeare combined.' After two months' study he said to me: 'What you said is absolutely true. You gave me the essence of it in one sentence.' I replied: 'The Bible is the Christian Scripture, and its language is sweet and simple. Shakespeare, great poet and dramatist as he was, is unrivalled in his use of the English language. He is great as a writer, the Bible is great spiritually. In Tulsi Ramayana there is a happy combination of the two.'

Political prisoners had the privilege of getting books to read. The jail officers would examine the books that were sent in, reject 'objectionable' books, and

give the rest to those who asked for them. The books I asked for were never rejected, for I asked only for such books as the Gita and the Upanishads. 'I asked for seventeen books,' said one of my fellow prisoners, 'and got only one or two, while Vinoba gets everything he asks for !' 'That is because the Govern- ment is a blockhead,' I replied. 'It doesn't understand what is really dangerous. If it did, it would certainly stop the Gita and the Upanishads. Gandhi would not have become that 'dangerous' Gandhi, Tilak would not have become Tilak, nor Aurobindo become Sri Aurobindo, without the foundation laid by the Gita. Only those books which deal with the basic principles of life have the explosive force to destroy tyrannical power.'

Political prisoners in Seoni jail were allowed to write letters to their kinsfolk but not to others. I did not approve of the distinction between 'my' people and the rest, so I wrote no letter to anyone during my time there. One day the gaoler was talking to me. 'Is there nothing at all that troubles you?' he asked. 'You always seem so cheerful and contented.' 'There is one thing that distresses me,' I replied, 'but I will leave you to find out what it is, and I will give you a week's time.' At the end of the week he came back. 'I can't guess what your difficulty is,' he said. 'Please tell me.' 'It is this,' I said. 'In this jail, I get no chance to see either the sunrise or the sunset; that is my trouble.'

Freedom from Institutions

As soon as I was released from jail after the individual satyagraha, I went to see Bapu. I remember that he said to me then: 'Vinoba, this is not the last of your trips to jail, you will have to go again.' 'I am quite ready,' I said, and we went on talking. 'Have you brought any new ideas back with you from jail?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'I think that I should now free myself from all institutions, for otherwise I shall not be able to make any progress in non-violence.' He said at once, 'You are quite right.' Then he went on, translating my thought into his own language: 'That means that you will be of help to all the institutions but will not accept office in any of them.'

Ashadevi¹⁰ was sitting near. Bapu said to her: 'It is good that Vinoba should free himself from these things. It is only when we can get away from such involvements that we are able to think to good effect. If our hands are loaded with daily affairs, we are not at liberty to think, and no new discoveries will be made.' So Bapu set his seal of approval on my decision, and no one could say much against it. Bapu himself acted on my behalf, and explained my decision to those who were managing the institutions.

My last trip to jail was in the 1942 Movement, and I was released in 1945. I had done some more thinking during that time, and decided that after my release I must do scavenging work, so as to help in 'the raising of the lowliest'.



10. TO RAISE THE LOWLIEST

If someone were to say: 'This man has forgotten the Harijans,' I should have to reply that in that case no one else cares for them. The word Sarvodaya means that all should rise, should grow, and all includes the lowliest and last.¹ But I don't like treating them as a separate group. If we do that, when we go to a village people will say: 'Here comes the Harijan worker,' or the 'khadi worker' and so on. Our work cannot be carried on in this splintered, divided way. However, though I am convinced of this, I devoted myself for years to three kinds of work in order to identify myself with Harijans: scavenging, leather work and weaving.

My connection with Harijan work is a very old one, and began in the Sabarmati Ashram. In its early days scavengers were employed there and were paid for their work. When the head scavenger fell ill, a son took his place. Once it happened that a very young son of his was carrying the bucket full of excrement to pour it into the pit in the fields. The bucket was too heavy for him to manage, and the poor little lad began to cry. My younger brother Balkoba noticed him, took pity on him and at once went to help him. Later Balkoba came to ask me if I would agree to his taking up scavenging himself, as he wished to do. 'That's excellent,' I said. 'Do take it up, and I too will come with you.' I started to go with him, Surendraji² also joined us, and that was how the scavenging began.

That Brahmin boys should take to scavenging was something absolutely new. Ba (Kasturba Gandhi) did not like it as all, and complained to Bapu. 'Could anything be better,' he asked, 'than that a Brahmin should take up scavenging?' So it all started with Balkoba's devoted efforts and Surendraji's assistance. From that time on I have been closely associated with this work.

In 1932, after I was released from jail, I went to live in the village of Nalwadi near Wardha.³ There were ninety-five Harijan families, and five of other castes. I started working for the Harijans there, and in order to provide a new village industry for them, it was necessary to learn how to flay and tan hides.

We sent two Brahmin boys to be trained for the work. They had many difficulties to face, but difficulties notwithstanding they became skilled workmen, and the two together ran a tannery at Nalwadi, which they started on July 1, 1935.

Then in 1946 I made a solemn resolve to take up scavengers' work⁴ myself. By that time I was living at Paunar, and I began my scavenging in Surgaon, a village three miles away, setting off every morning with a spade on my shoulder. It took an hour and a half or two hours to come and go, and I spent an hour or an hour and a half on the actual work. I worked as regularly as the sun himself, except that I had to miss three days because of illness. I kept it up without a break throughout the year, through cold season, hot season and rains.

One day it rained so heavily that the whole road was waistdeep in water. There was also a deep gully which had to be crossed to reach Surgaon. Floodwater was rushing through it and it was impossible to cross. I stood on the bank and shouted across to a villager on the other side: 'Please go to the temple and tell the Lord that the village scavenger came, but could not reach the village because of water in the gully.' 'All right,' he said, 'I'll go.' 'And what will you say?' I asked. 'I'll tell the priest,' he replied, 'that Babaji had come.' 'No, no, you have misunderstood,' I said. 'You must tell the Lord and tell Him that the village scavenger came, but could not reach the village because of the water.'

So I went back again to Paunar—but why did I set out at all that day? When the water on the road was waist-deep it was obvious that I could not reach the village, and yet I decided to go as far as I could before turning back, because for me the work was a form of worship. 'How long will you go on with this work?' people used to ask, and I would reply, 'For twenty years, until the present generation makes way for the next. It is a question of changing the people's mental attitude.' In fact I could carry it on only for a year and three quarters; then, after Gandhiji passed away, I had to give it up. So long as it continued it took up five or six hours every morning. Sometimes people wanted to consult me, but I always told them that I would not be free before eleven,

because up to then was my time for scavenging. For me this despised kind of work was a form of prayer, so I did not take a single day's leave. Along with the scavenging I was able to teach a number of things especially to the children. 'Baba,' they would say as they greeted me, 'today we have covered our excrement with earth'—and I would go with them to inspect. When the time of the Ganapati⁵ festival came round, I found the whole village spotlessly clean and there was no work left for me to do. The villagers had decided the day before that as the next day was a holy day they would do all the scavenging themselves—so they had cleaned the whole village. 'Here is a revolution indeed !' I thought. If Gandhiji were still alive, I would even today be doing scavenger's work in Surgaon.

The Service of the Cow

I took up the whole programme of constructive work and carried it out to the best of my ability. But it seemed to me that no aspect of it demanded such purity of mind, as did the service of the cow. This is a work that needs intensification of love. As love increases so does the quality of the work and so does the well-being of the cow. Her well-being depends on the love that human beings give her. It follows that those who undertake to care for the cow must learn to be as lowly as the cow herself. Their own nature must come to resemble the nature of the cow they worship. I have used the word 'worship' rather than 'tend' or 'serve' because it reflects my own feelings towards the cow.

In the Ashram we regarded milk as necessary, and therefore we began to keep cows. From that day to this the work has been part of our ordinary routine. However, on three occasions previously I had tried giving up milk, with the idea of caring for the cow without taking anything from her. One experiment lasted two years, the second three years, and the third two years—seven years in all. But I did not succeed, and in the end I gave it up. I might possibly have succeeded if I had concentrated on it and made it my first task, but it was only one of the various activities in the Ashram. Not only did it not succeed, it made

me very weak in body. When Bapu heard about it he said: 'If you consider this to be your life-work, you should concentrate on it completely; if not, there are other urgent matters which demand our attention.' Accordingly I began to drink milk once more, and to consider how work for the cow could be combined with other important work.

In Surgaon, one of our projects was to run an oil-press and supply the village with oil. One press was not enough to meet the demand, and we started a second one so that there should be no need to buy oil from outside. Then however a new problem arose: what to do with the oilcake? There was no demand for it in the village, so we decided to keep as many cows as the oilcake could feed, and in this way the welfare of the cattle was linked with the oil-press. It is only when the need for khadi cloth, for oil and for cattle are considered together that our projects can be made meaningful and successful—otherwise they will fail⁶.

During the period when these projects were being conducted in the Wardha tehsil, I once stayed for four months at Paunar. I noticed that there were many cows in the village. The people made butter from their milk, and took it by the head-load to Wardha for sale. The merchants there bought it, but decided among themselves what price they would pay. The villagers used the money they got to buy cloth, also at the merchants' price. The merchants profited both ways, buying butter cheap and selling cloth dear. Butter is meant to be eaten: people ought not to have to sell it. Tulsidas the poet says: 'For one who is dependent on others there is no happiness, even in dreams.' His words inspired me to suggest a slogan for Paunar: 'Eat your own butter, make your own cloth.'

Serving Peace in the Name of God

In 1948, after Bapu's death, his 'family' of fellow-workers met at Sevagram. I had been thinking already about what my duty was; it had struck me that I might perhaps have to leave my base. During that gathering at Sevagram I announced—considering how Pandit Nehru was situated and that he had asked

for our help—that I would give six months experimentally to the service of those made homeless by the partition of the country. Some constructive workers were telling Pandit Nehru and other political leaders that they expected the Government to help forward the constructive programme. But for my part I made a point of saying, especially to Pandit Nehru, that I didn't expect any kind of help, but would feel happy if I could be of service to him. Along with some fellow-workers I therefore started work for the resettlement of the refugees. It would take a whole book to describe all the interesting things we saw during those months. I had to do liaison work, in my own language the work of Naradmuni, carrying messages to and fro. I soon found that Panditji would say one thing, and the men who had to carry out his instructions had different ideas, so nothing got done. If I made suggestions, Panditji would reply: 'That is exactly what I want, and I gave orders three months ago for it to be done.' Even then nothing came of it. I worked very hard during those six months, and there were certainly some results; but I did not get what I was looking for, so in the end I came away.

I went from Delhi to Haryana and Rajasthan to resettle the Meos,⁷ but there too I did not feel that my purpose would be realized. I had hoped that the power of non-violence might be demonstrated to some extent through the resettling of the refugees and of the Meos. I wanted to put my hands to something that could be called a practical beginning of Sarvodaya, of the non-violent revolution. I had realized that if I could find this starting-point, the work of khadi and village industries would also develop; but otherwise no one would be interested in either of them. So far, I had been unable to find that starting-point.

In those days there were many conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims of Ajmer felt themselves to be in great danger. I went and stayed there for seven days, and visited the holy Dargah every day. That place is regarded as the Mecca of India. The Muslims welcomed me with great affection, and I told them all, Muslims and Hindus alike, that this kind of conflict was not right. They listened to my advice, and as a result they all sat side by side there for prayer.

The next day I went there again for the namaj (prayer). I found all the devotees sitting there peacefully; they showed me much love and trust, and every one of them came and kissed my hand. But I noticed that there was not a single woman among them, so at the end, when they asked me to say a few words, I said: 'I was delighted to attend your peaceful prayer, but I could not understand one thing: why should there be discrimination, even while offering prayers to the Lord? Muslims must surely reform their practice in this respect.'

Kanchan-Mukti

It was in 1935-36 that I began to feel that we ought to dispense with money. A dislike of money had been with me from the beginning, and in my personal life I was doing without it already. But during that year I began to feel that I must devote myself to getting public institutions to follow the principle of non-possession and to give up using money, and sacrifice myself for this cause. I suggested that those to whom my idea appealed might also try the experiment. It could never end in failure, I said; it was bound to succeed, whether we live to see it succeed or not. To carry it on just one thing is needed: a complete change in one's way of life.

At Paunar I used to sit and chat with the labourers. I said to them: 'Why don't you pool all your earnings and share the money equally all round?' To my surprise they all agreed. 'We have no objection,' they said. 'We can do it.' But in actual practice, how could it be done if I kept aloof? If I were to join in, they and I together could make it work. I told my colleagues that they should lay aside all other activities and pay attention to this—this was real politics. Kishorlalbai was insisting that teachers ought to be paid at least twenty-five rupees a month, but the teachers in Paunar, who were paid sixteen rupees a month, were objects of envy for the labourers. Some time before, I had nearly lost my own life by attempting to live on a spinner's rate of pay, and was only saved when the rate was increased. How could I feel at one with labourers who could earn four annas at the most by spinning ten hours a day, while I could not

live on less than six annas? The real dignity of the labourer can only be ensured by paying him a full and just wage.

After Gandhiji's death my mind turned continually to the idea that there should be a class of social workers, spread throughout the country, who would work as he had done to build up a worthy form of society by the power of living example. I was not at all pleased with what was going on around me, but darkness can only be dispelled by light, so I did not harp on my discontent but prayed for light.

In 1949 I spent a few days at the Mahila Ashram.⁹ I was planning to go to Bihar from there, but I postponed the journey because I was not well; I had severe pain in the stomach and returned to Paunar. There I announced my conclusion that the chief cause of the inequality and turmoil in society today is money. Money corrupts our common life, and we must therefore banish it from among us. 'Here we are,' I said, 'engaged in an experiment in self-reliance. The saints, for the sake of spiritual discipline, always prohibited the use of gold. Today it is necessary to prohibit it even to purify our ordinary life. We here must begin to experiment in doing without money.'

We began with vegetables. I announced that from the first of January 1950 the Ashram would buy no vegetables. I had with me some educated young men who were eager to try the new way. A vegetable garden was started in the Ashram compound. This had to be watered from the well, which had a Persian wheel which we worked ourselves. We fixed eight poles to the wheel at chest height, and with two men to each pole we turned it together. As we turned it we recited our morning prayer. We also recited the Gitai, one shloka (verse) to each round, so that when we had completed its seven hundred shlokas we had also done seven hundred rounds. One day Jayaprakashji came to meet me, and joined us at the Persian wheel. It gave him new inspiration.¹⁰

The land that we had taken for the experiment was not enough to produce all our needs. We began working another piece of land where there was no water supply. So one morning, as soon as I got up, I went off to that field and started to dig a well. Everyone joined in. They were all strong young men, with twice

the strength that I had, but I found they could do only half my work. This was because I did all my work by mathematics. I would dig a little while in silence, then stop for a few seconds, and so on every few minutes. But these strong youths would shovel furiously until they had to stop from sheer exhaustion, so that on the whole they needed more rest than I did. I also used my shovel in a scientific way, and discovered that our tools needed much improvement. Mathematics plays a part in all my doings, and I sometimes think that mathematical calculations would play a part even at the time of my death ! We had dug a channel from the original field to bring water from the well there. We were all new to the job; those who worked with me were College students, and though I liked physical labour I did not have the necessary knowledge. We dug the channel, we let in the water, but the water did not run into the new field. We could not understand why, but discovered later, through observation and experience, that the field level was two inches higher than the channel, so that the channel soaked up all the water and practically none reached the field. Later I used our experience with the channel to illustrate what happens to the welfare schemes of the Government of India: a lot of the 'water' gets soaked up by the 'channels' so that very little reaches the needy. This rishi kheti¹¹ at Paramdham attracted a lot of attention. A camp for the peasants of Khandesh was held there. They were experienced farmers with a good knowledge of agriculture. They liked the Paramdham farm so much that they said they would try out the method in their own fields. When I first suggested rishi kheti, people did not think that it would work. One of their doubts was that to do everything by hand, without the help of bullocks, would mean excessively hard work, beyond human capacity. Another objection was that it could not produce much and would turn out to be too costly. But our young men carried out my suggestions, undertook an experiment, and after two years' work placed the results before the public.

This experiment was made on a field of one and a quarter acres, and needed 1140 man-hours of work in a year, that is to say four hours a day for 285 days. In other words, a man who worked eight hours a day could comfortably cultivate two and a half acres of land by his own labour alone. I say

'comfortably' because I am leaving eighty of the year's three hundred and sixty-five days out of account.

Only the digging should be reckoned as really hard labour. We spent three hundred and thirty-seven and a half hours in digging our one and a quarter acres; two and a half acres would have taken us twice as long, six hundred and seventy-five hours. Most of those who did this work were High School and College students who had never done such work before. Their rate of work must have been very slow. A villager would certainly have needed much less time, say five hundred and seventy-five hours. This means that two hours' digging a day, one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening, is on the average all that is needed.

Digging is a healthy exercise for the body. I myself did digging work for years, and it did my body a lot of good. People used to tell me that in those days I had the body of a wrestler. I mention this so that no one should feel afraid of it. And besides benefiting the body, I also found that it benefited the mind in a remarkable way. It is good fortune indeed to have an opportunity to stand upright beneath the wide sky, in the fresh air, caressed by the rays of the sun. I am of the view that it would be more useful in every way to take physical exercise in the fields, digging, than in gymnasiums which produce nothing at all.

If one considers this experiment in its productive aspect the results are not meagre. Calculated at the market rates of 1953 our one and a quarter acres made a net profit of 285 rupees, the equivalent of a wage of four annas an hour. The male labourers in the fields around Paramdham were paid thirteen annas for an eight hour day, the women only seven annas, so the average wage was ten annas a day or one and a quarter annas an hour. The wages earned by our rishi kheti are more than three times as large. But there is more to it than that, because the workers in Paramdham were both labourers and owners, and earned four annas in both capacities. Now in 1953, the landowner could not realize any more himself than he paid his labourers, so if owner and labourer are the same man he should expect to have double the rate—two and a half

annas an hour. Even so, rishi kheti is over fifty per cent more profitable than ordinary bullock farming.

One must also take into account the fact that in Paramdham, not only did the workers have no experience of farming, but the land on which they worked was not even second class. It was on a mound, and was full of bricks and stones and (as I have described) statues. Even after two years' labour, it can still be reckoned only third-rate, if that. Also, this plot was dependent on the rainfall. I have not the least doubt that with irrigation facilities it would have produced even more.

There is no reason why rishi kheti and rishabh kheti¹² (bullock cultivation) should be regarded as rivals. In Paramdham we use both methods, and we are also trying out an engine to lift water for irrigation from the river. I do not believe in using machines indiscriminately and keeping bullocks idle, but I have given permission for this on an experimental basis, so as to make full use of the river in case of special need. 'Enmity towards none' is the maxim of our striving for harmony. We continue to regard bullocks as an inseparable part of our family, and at the same time we carry on rishi kheti and also try out modern machinery on a limited scale. Rishi kheti, rishabh kheti and engine kheti are all going on side by side in Paramdham; we are bold enough to try them all.

This experiment offers a partial solution to the problem of unemployment. It can be used by farmers who have no bullocks; it gives scope for thoughtful study and wide-ranging experiments in agriculture; it is a boon for Nai Talim;¹³ it is also a far-sighted step to take, considering the ultimate meaning of non-violence.

The human population of the world is increasing, and the land available for each individual therefore decreases proportionately. That is why in a crowded country such as Japan farming is done by hand. 'A meat-eater needs one and a half acres to produce his food, a lacto-vegetarian three quarters of an acre, a vegetarian half an acre.' As time goes on, human beings will certainly realize the significance of these figures and consequently will first give up meat and

then limit their use of milk. A time may come when they will question whether they should keep cows and bullocks at all. For the present, however, we need to maintain our cattle, and at the same time to try out rishi kheti. The future is going to witness the clash of two ideas: Communism and Sarvodaya. Other ideas may seem influential today, but they will not last long. Communism and Sarvodaya have much in common, and just as much in which they are opposed. What the age demands is Sarvodaya. It is our task to demonstrate that a society free from money and political power can be established. No matter on how small a scale, we must be able to show a model of it. Then and then only can we hope to stand our ground as an alternative to Communism.

I used to tell my companions over and over again that if we could do this agricultural work in the right way it would purify our whole outlook, and to some extent that of our society too.

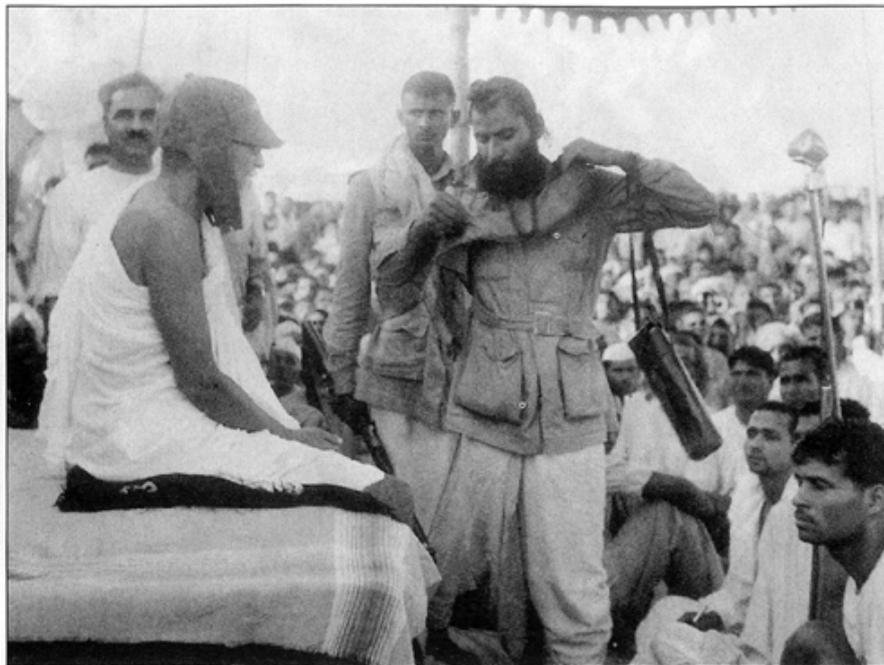
‘People are in great need just now,’ I said, ‘of something that will set their minds at rest. The common folk are like a man whose mind is afflicted, and who needs something, some diversion, to help him out of his misery. No one in particular is to be blamed for this state of affairs. All of us are responsible for it. But of what use is it to discuss that? What is needed is to put things right, and for that there is a way, a simple, easy, effective way which is open to all—the way of life we are following in Param-dham. And although we are not yet following it as well as we could wish, we are making sincere and strenuous efforts to do so, and we do not grow weary. That is something that can bring great peace of mind.’ So I thought, let this work in Paramdham take proper shape, and after that I may move out, supposing that there should still be any need to move out.

Meanwhile, however, it was arranged that I should go to the Sarvodaya Sannelan at Shivarampalli near Hyderabad. There everything happened so unexpectedly that I felt that in this too was the working of the will of God.

When I came back to Paunar after my travels through Telangana, I told my companions that I had been able to speak to the people there with self-

confidence because of the work going on in Paunar itself: 'Our experiments here strike at the very roots of present-day society, and if we can carry them out in full there is no doubt that they can transform the world. Their importance should be as evident to anyone who thinks about the matter as it is to me.'

This work of mine is not confined only to the Ashram. In the Ashram I am, as it were, making curd.¹⁴ When it is ready it can be mixed with a great deal of milk and turn it all into curd also. The idea should be tried out first in a number of villages, and after seeing how far it is successful there, the experience gained should be placed before the country. What I aim at is nothing less than to set up Ramarajya, the Kingdom of God. That is something very big indeed, but I can speak in no smaller terms, for God has put the words into my mouth.



Surrender of dreaded dacoits in the Chambal valley
(1960)

PART THREE:
Wearing the Yoke
(1951-1970)

I should say that I am by nature a hard-hearted sort of man. No one's death grieves me, no one's birth gives me joy, no one's sickness causes me much anxiety. But the experiences which have come to me in the bhoodan (land-gift) movement have softened me, so my heart is now easily melted. I have received the gift of bhakti, of that loving devotion to God which, with all my diligence on the path of meditation and knowledge, I have never before been able to reach. I have had very sacred experiences, for I have become aware of the great purity of heart to be found among ordinary people, and have realized what a strength this is to our country. It is the foundation upon which, if we will, we may build a strong nation.

11. ON FOOT THROUGH INDIA

Inarticulate Feelings

After India got swaraj (self-government), and especially after Gandhiji's death, my mind was in a whirl, churning over questions of how the country should go forward, and which road we ought to take.

In those days I had a lot of travelling to do, and for certain reasons (which are now of no importance) I took upper-class tickets on the trains for the first time in my life. I travelled over more than half of India, and was able to see for myself what was going on in places which had only been names to me previously. I certainly benefited from this, but all the time I was asking myself uneasily: 'Can the coming of non-violence really be hastened by my travelling about like this? Is it possible by such methods to bring about the social change that we desire?' After all, I thought, I could not even claim that my travels themselves were based on non-violence, and my mind dwelt continually upon such matters as how the railways had been built, and where I had got the money needed for my journeys. It also seemed to me that these speedy means of travel tend to excite the mind rather than to encourage deeper reflection; if that were so, how could they be used to preach non-violence? Could they ever help me to reach the common people?

During that period a fund was being collected in memory of Gandhiji, with the purpose of carrying on his work. The plan did not appeal to me. I had a nagging feeling that such a fund, even though it was to be used for Gandhiji's own programmes, might easily do more harm than good. I reflected too on the ways in which we ran our Ashrams and managed our own lives. Pondering on these things, I came to the conclusion that the changed times and the new age required of us a new kind of work—that having obtained our political freedom we must take in hand a more radical and much more difficult task, that of social and economic revolution. The old ways would no longer serve our purpose.

At that time (in April 1948) I was working for the resettlement of the refugees and the Meos.¹ Amongst those who had come from West Pakistan there were many Harijans. They had asked for land, but the matter was still under discussion and nothing had been settled. Finally it was announced that the Government of Punjab would allocate a few hundred thousand acres for their use. This assurance was given in a meeting with Rajendra Babu² at which I was present. It happened to be a Friday, and I went direct from the meeting to attend the prayers at Rajghat.³ There I told those present the happy news, and congratulated the Government of Punjab on its decision to give land to the Harijans.

Two months later, however, a different story was heard: 'the thing could not be done'. There may have been good reasons for this change of face, but the Harijans were very unhappy about it, and Rameshwari Nehru⁴ was greatly troubled. She came and told me that the Harijans wanted to undertake satyagraha; did I think that they should be allowed to do it? I thought the matter over. A promise had been made, and now it was being broken, but I did not see the way clear. I said to the Harijans: 'In view of the present state of the country I cannot advise you to undertake satyagraha. I feel very sad that I am unable just now to give you any help with your problem'.

But although I said no, I could not so easily dismiss the matter from my mind; deep down, there was an urge that some way must be found of letting the landless have some land.

Moreover, our constructive workers had also become very down-hearted. Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel⁵ (a man who used to spin every day and produce very fine yarn) had made a speech in which he said; 'We have been working for so long at khadi and the constructive programme, but no one today has any faith in khadi. If people did not listen to Gandhiji, why should they listen to us? India is now a free country, and what we need now is to set up the kind of industry which has a war-potential.' That phrase 'war-potential' had set me thinking. It seemed to me that what the world needs is not so much 'war-potential' as 'peace-potential', and that we ought to be setting up industries

and activities such as have peace-potential. As I thought about it, I decided that I must travel throughout the country, on foot, in order to spread the idea. However, I kept this decision to myself, I spoke about it to no-one. My opportunity arose later, in a perfectly natural way.

The 'Ganga' of Bhoodan: It's Source

There were plans to hold a Sarvodaya Conference at Shivaramapalli near Hyderabad in April 1951. If one goes by train, Hyderabad is only an overnight journey from Wardha. I decided however to go on foot.

Why not a train, people will surely ask, or even an aeroplane? I could have used a plane, of course, and personally I would be glad to see aeroplanes become even speedier than they are now. But there is a place for everything.

Spectacles may be of very great service, but they cannot take the place of eyes. In the same way, aeroplanes and other speedy means of travel certainly have their uses, but it is still important to have legs. Walking has advantages which aeroplanes cannot provide.

People did ask me how my work would benefit by taking a month over a journey that could have been done in a day. 'I have only one task,' I replied, 'to repeat the name of God, and to teach others to do the same. I know of no other source of strength by which my work may be done—except this, the name of the Lord.'

I had decided that during this journey I would say nothing about my own ideas and opinions, but would leave things to take their natural course, and would simply help to provide the opportunity. I made no plans about how I would travel or what I would aim at. I simply wanted to meet and talk with people in the various places I passed through. If I found they had any difficulties to which I could see a solution, I would suggest one. I had no plans for the future; that could be decided after I reached my destination.

Going on foot brings one closer, both to the country and to the people, than any other form of travel; that was why I did it. It is true that I saw nothing

which I might not have imagined, but unless I had gone on foot I would not have seen it for myself.

The people in the villages had a great liveliness of spirit. True, there was also plenty of liveliness among the towns- folk, but in the villages it had a special quality which made me realise how important it was for me to have visited them. Whenever possible I stayed in the smaller villages and visited the people in their homes. I cannot speak Telugu, but I can understand it, and even this limited knowledge of the language was a great help in creating a friendly atmosphere. At the prayer meeting I would recite in Telugu the passage in the Gita about 'the man of steadfast wisdom', and I could see how the message went straight to listeners' hearts. It made them feel that I was one of themselves, and they welcomed me with great affection.

There were a number of villages where I would have liked to have stayed on for a few days, if I had not needed to reach Shivaramapalli on time. It seemed too bad to visit a place, see where things were wrong and how they might be put right, and then go away without doing anything about it. But I could not help it, so wherever possible I tried to get the local people to take up the work. But this experience, in short, convinced me that if each one of us were to settle down in a friendly spirit in one village, work of great importance could be done.

In 1949 I had had the good fortune to meet my fellow-workers at the Rau Sarvodaya Conference, and it was a great joy and pleasure to see them all again at Shivaramapalli, where we met from the 7th to the 14th of April 1951. I thought that when the meeting was over I would walk, God willing, through the Telangana region where the Communists had been at work,⁷ and which was reported to be in a disturbed state. This Communist question had been much in my mind, I had heard a lot about the bloodshed and violence which had occurred, but it did not shock me, because I had made some study of how human society develops. Whenever a new culture establishes itself, the process has always brought friction and bloodshed.

The Government had sent police to keep the peace in Telangana. The police however do not deal in ideas. They can hunt down tigers and keep us safe from them, but in Telangana the problem was not one of tigers but of human beings. The Communists' methods may be wrong, but their actions are based on a principle, and where principles are involved the police cannot provide an answer.

Thinking on these lines about the immediate problem of Telangana, I decided to tour the area. The question was how it should be done. In dealing with ideas peaceful means must be used. In former days men like Shankaracharya, Mahavir, Kabir, Chaitanya and Namadev had travelled about India on foot. If they had so chosen they could have ridden on horseback. They used no such speedy transport, because their aim was to correct people's mistaken ideas, and the best way to do that is to go on foot. This is something that does not readily occur to us nowadays, but if one thinks things over quietly, it will become clear that there is no alternative. I too then would go on foot.

The first thing was to meet the Telangana Communists, understand their point of view and have a heart-to-heart talk with them. The leaders were in jail in Hyderabad, and I asked the Government's permission to meet them. This was granted, and on Ramanavami⁸ day I had a talk with them which lasted two hours. I believe I was able to convince those I met that I sincerely desired their good. This was so both in the jail and with those I met outside, and even with those to whom my views could reach indirectly.

On this tour I had to deal with three groups of people—the Communist terrorists, the prosperous villagers and the common people. To the Communists I said: 'You must at least admit that the ideal you aim at has never yet been realized by any nation, and that no one can say when it will be realized. Secondly, even if we agree that the use of force cannot be completely ruled out, and in some circumstances may be necessary, it would be a mistake of the first order for you to use it now, when India is free and adult franchise has been granted. Force should be discarded, so far as your aims are concerned.' These arguments, I believe, made a considerable impression on them.

The prosperous people from a number of villages had fled to the cities because they were afraid to remain in their village homes. I met with some of them, and they told me frankly that they dared not stay in the village; if they had to visit it, they got the police to go with them. To them I said: 'You are wealthy men; God is testing you about your care for the poor. You should take a vow before Him to serve the needy, and then go back home boldly and live in that spirit of service: If you should be murdered, take it as a boon from God—is it not worse than death to be doomed to spend your life in hiding and in fear? If you ask me who can be fearless, I answer: 'Those who love and serve the poor.'

To the common people I said: 'Your whole village ought to have such a spirit of unity that those who are wealthy are held in as much affection as the rest; the whole village should take the responsibility of giving them whatever protection they need.' I said all this boldly, for I felt it was very important. When I first decided to go to Shivaramapalli it was with no definite plans or expectations. Before I left Wardha, however, a small farewell meeting had been held at Lakshminarayan temple. As I took leave of the people there I told them that they may regard this as our last meeting, for I did not know when we should meet again. I knew that I was going into an area of turmoil. If some way of calming that turmoil were to be discovered, well and good; if I myself were to be involved in it, that also was well and good, for some peaceful way might open itself out of that experience. These were the thoughts with which I set out—and by God's grace there came about a complete change in the whole atmosphere.

On the 18th April, the third morning of my tour, the Harijans of Pochampalli village come to see me. They said that if only they could get a bit of land, they could work the land and so make a living. They needed eighty acres, they said. 'If I can get the land for you,' I replied, 'you must all work it together; you would not get separate individual holdings.' They agreed, and promised to cultivate the land together. 'Then give me a statement to that effect', I said, 'so that I can send your petition to the State Government.' At that a man who

was present in the meeting, Shri Ramachandra Reddy, offered on the spot to give the Harijans one hundred acres of his own land. There in my presence he gave them his word: 'I will give you one hundred acres'.

What was this? People murder for land, go to court over land, yet here it comes as a free gift. This was something so completely out of the ordinary that it must surely be a sign from God ! All night long I pondered over what had happened. It was a revelation—people may be moved by love to share even their land.

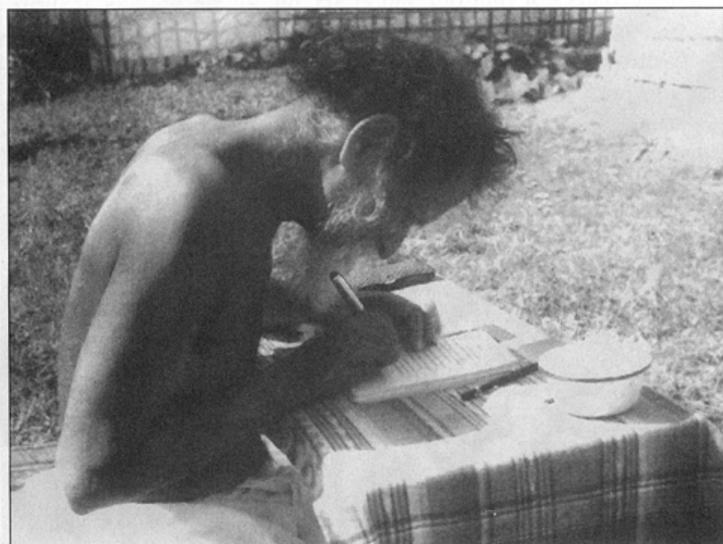
On hearing the news Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru sent me a letter to say how pleased he was. I answered that for my part I believe that any problem can be solved in a non-violent way, provided only that the heart is pure. Up to that time this had been for me a matter of theory and of faith, but now I had seen it in actual practice.

This problem of land is world-wide in scope; if we in India can solve it peacefully, we may indeed claim to have made a great discovery since we became a free country. If we let our minds dwell on this event we shall find hidden within it the seeds of world revolution. I don't think of it as my own doing, that would be false egoism. But I do say, because I have seen it for myself, that we have here a principle which can solve the problem of land, provided that we make the effort to understand and apply it.

This means that we must grasp and put into practice the essential principles which lie behind Communist activities. Brahmin as I am, I got the idea of acting the part of Vamana,⁹ and asking as he did for a gift of land. Little by little, the idea took hold and grew. God filled my words with power; people began to understand that this was a revolutionary work which is beyond the capacity of any Government, because it aimed at radical transformation of the whole life. I have called this land-gift movement a yajna, an offering to God. It is no ordinary offering. I have witnessed the great goodwill which inspires people to give away land; without doubt, this happening of our day and age is a remarkable thing. Wherever I go, I try to make it clear that the good results I hope for will not come about, if the donors make their gifts in a patronizing

spirit, imagining that they are granting a favour to the poor. Every human being has as much right to land as he has to air, water and sunlight; so long as there are people with no land at all it is wrong for an individual to keep more than he needs. When he gives it away it should be because he wants to right the wrong. That is the spirit of the land-gift movement, as I have said many times. If there was the slightest suspicion that land was being offered in a spirit of vainglory or with some base ulterior motive I refused to accept it. I had no intention whatever of amassing land at any price, by hook or by crook.

My travels have given me rich experiences, but they may be summed up very briefly. When I considered what words I might use to describe them, the only phrase which suggested itself was sakshatkar, direct vision—they had given me a kind of direct experience of God. I had done my work in the faith that the human heart has goodness in it, goodness ready to be called out; God let me see that goodness in accordance with my faith. If, on the other hand, I had expected to find human hearts full of back-biting, malice, greed etc., God would have given me that kind of experience. God, it would seem, is a Kalpataru;¹⁰ He appears to us in the form we expect.



"Along with all the other duties goes the study and teaching."

12. The *Bhoodan-Ganga* Flows On

With Tulsi and Soor as Guides¹

After my travels in Telangana I stayed at the Paramdham for a few weeks, and then on September 12th 1951, I set out on foot for North India, for Delhi. I had at first thought of starting after the rainy season was over, but as Pandit Nehru invited me to a discussion with the members of the Planning Commission I started somewhat sooner.

If while in Paramdham I had not previously undertaken those experiments in doing without money, and cultivating without bullocks, and if I had not had a full year's experience of working out these ideas, I do not think I should have had the confidence to work in Telangana as I did, nor to deal so frankly and fearlessly with the people there. God in His unbounded grace did not allow me, uncouth fellow that I am, to utter a single word which was lacking in humility. And that I believe, was the fruit of the experiments in Paunar, during which we considered it a privilege to take the peasant as our teacher in the art of cultivating the soil.

I announced that this new pilgrimage would have one main purpose, to get land for the poor. Mother Earth must no longer be separated from her sons; she and they must be brought together again. The winds of generosity, of giving, must be set blowing across the whole nation. If it were true (as some said) that in Telangana people had given land only because of the Communist disturbances, there would be no hope of a peaceful revolution. But I for my part felt sure that if the basic idea of the bhoodan movement were placed clearly before the people, they would give land out of pure goodwill. If this hope of mine should prove to be well-founded, it would give a great impetus to non-violent revolution. If we could not give our principles visible form, over a wider area, we should simply be swept away by the current of our times. The times confronted us with a call and with a challenge.

I found great peace and inspiration at Gandhiji's memorial shrine at Rajghat, and decided to stay there while in Delhi. Though God is to be found in every place—as I myself know from experience—nevertheless there are some places where His glory cannot be effaced, and whose inspiration guides me on my way. It was Gandhiji, who inspired the bhoodan movement; whatever good is to be seen in it is his, and its shortcomings are mine.

In November 1951 I therefore spent eleven days at Rajghat in congenial company. Morning prayers, which began promptly at four o'clock, were attended by people who were in earnest about the spiritual life. During the prayer period I would share with them my thoughts on the nectar of devotion to be found in the Vinaya-patrika of Tulsidas. For the rest of the day I had a heavy programme with no time for relaxation, but the Vinaya-patrika enabled me to remain inwardly relaxed and quiet throughout. Then during the evening prayers at the Rajghat shrine I would give a brief address on bhoodan or other topics.

I held discussions with the Planning Commission and explained my ideas very clearly to those friends, who listened attentively. I had reason to believe that in the light of these discussions it would be feasible to modify the Plan to some extent.

During my journey from Paunar to Delhi about thirty-five thousand acres of land had been received. In Telangana the gifts had averaged two hundred acres a day, but on this journey they averaged three hundred. Thanks to the teachings of Gandhiji, and the cultural traditions of India, this plan for peace received the hearty co-operation of the people.

The total amount of land in the country is about three hundred million acres; I ask for one-sixth of this total. I ask every individual land-owner for a one-sixth share for the landless, on the basis that an average Indian family of five should accept a landless person as a sixth member.

What am I doing in all this? What do I want? I want change: First, change of heart, then change in personal life habits, followed by change in the structure of society. I aim at a triple change, a triple revolution.

I have been putting these things forward from the first as a matter of justice and rights. But by justice I do not mean legal justice, I mean the God's justice. We shall of course need to frame laws for land distribution, but laws are of two kinds. There is a kind of law based on coercion, which is a tool of violence; there is also a kind of law based on non-violence. I want to solve the land problem by non-violence.

I am not going around begging, even though as a Brahmin I am entitled to beg—only, however, for my individual needs. When I ask for land as a gift in the name of Daridra-Narayan, God in the form of the poor, I am not asking alms. I am asking men to accept initiation into a new way of life. I have come to the conclusion that God has placed on my weak shoulders the same kind of work as he committed to the Lord Buddha.² It is, I believe, the work of Dharmachakra-pravartan—turning the Wheel of the Law.

This Kalasi region has been famous for over two thousand years for the ashvamedh sacrifice.³ Like those dedicated horses I too wander about, dedicated to bhoodan. In the Mahabharata there is also a description of another sacrifice, the Rajasooya yajna (performed for the enthronement of a king). My sacrifice is a Prajasooya yajna; I want to see the praja, the people, enthroned. I aim at a political order which would make the labourer, the tiller of the soil, the scavenger and all such humble people feel that their needs are being cared for. That is what is called Sarvodaya, and the vision of it inspires all my wanderings.

A year had passed since that meeting at Pochampalli in April 1951. I had had a wonderful pilgrimage. I walked alone, and wherever I went I held one meeting each day about bhoodan; the appeal was made and the people donated land. During that year one lakh (100,000) acres were given. On I walked, without a care in the world. I remembered a line in one of Tagore's songs:

'Walk alone, O thou unfortunate, walk alone'.

I modified it a bit to suit myself:

'Walk alone, O thou most fortunate, walk alone'.

In the Vedas there is a question and answer: 'Who goes alone? The Sun, the Sun goes alone.' That saying kept me in good spirits.

During this year of solitary pilgrimage my fellow workers in the Sarva Seva Sangh were following events with much eager interest and sympathy. At the Sevapuri conference held near Varanasi (Benares) in April 1952, the Sangh adopted a resolution to collect twenty-five lakh acres of land within the next two years—a truly superhuman undertaking ! It meant obtaining twenty-five times as much land as I had collected during the past year, in only double the time.

While the conference was in progress the workers of Bihar came to see me and asked me to go to Bihar. I told them that I was considering my future programme, and that if Bihar could promise me four lakh acres I would come, otherwise I would go to Vindhya Pradesh or some other area. 'Agreed !' said Laxmi Babu. 'There are seventy-five thousand villages in Bihar; it will need only five acres from each village to make up the total.' So I set out for Bihar.

In the Land of Buddha and Mahavir

I entered Bihar on September 12th, 1952, and from that day forward I began asking for fifty lakh acres of land. One day a friend pointed out, 'You say you want one-sixth of the land; so Bihar's share is not fifty lakh acres but forty.'

From the next day therefore I changed my tune, and named forty lakhs, but our friend Baidyanath Babu, who is clever with figures, got me to agree that the correct amount should be thirty-two lakhs.

I walked through the holy land of Bihar with the regularity of the sun himself, and with him as my witness. Word spread across the country as if on the wings of the wind, that land would very soon be shared out.

In October 1952 I said to the people of Patna: 'Up to now I have been asking for gifts only of land, but from now on I shall accept gifts of money also. The donor will keep the money, but undertake to devote one-sixth of his wealth every year to public service. I will simply accept a written pledge, and the donor's

own conscience will be witness that the pledge is fulfilled.’ This is a novel way of doing things. If I were to collect a fund I should have to keep accounts, and all my time would go in that. But my job is revolution, so I say to the donors: ‘I don’t want you to give your money to me, I want your talent and intelligence as well. I want to bind you over and to remain free myself. I ask for two things, a share of your land and a share of your money.’

I spent two and a half months in flood-stricken country. It once happened that because of the floods our party could not even get a meal—something which has never happened elsewhere in all the three and a half years up to now. But in spite of everything, at one place hundreds of men and women came to the meeting in about two hundred boats. Such was their enthusiasm that they stood there on the wet ground in the pouring rain, and joined quietly in the prayer.

In one place a man made a gift of one-sixth of his land, but some of it was in very poor condition. ‘Friend,’ I said, ‘before you make a gift of it you should make it cultivable,’ and he at once agreed. Such things are happening not in some golden age of the past, but now in this age of darkness ! If we can’t take advantage of the great goodwill people feel towards us, we shall be called unfortunate indeed.

In Chandil in December 1953 I become seriously ill with malaria. I wondered whether God intended to liberate me from this body, or to purify my body and restore it for further work. In 1924 I had had a similar serious illness, and afterwards felt that I had derived benefit from it. If God willed to set me free from the body, what medicine could avail against His will? And if He willed to keep me in the body, what could prevent His will from being done? I decided therefore that there was no need for any medicine, and I refused to take any. My friends and well-wishers, however, were worried. Telegrams came from the President Rajendra Babu and from Pandit Nehru. The Chief Minister of Bihar, Shrikrishna Sinha, came urgently to see me. I saw how troubled they all were, so I agreed to take medicine, the fever came down and they were all relieved. The people in general were very puzzled. First I had refused medicine;

afterwards I agreed to take it ! A great many people wrote to me about it. Some were of the opinion that I had done right to take medicine. Others declared that I had committed a great sin and lost my faith in God. There was a third party who said that I had certainly done wrong, but that I might be forgiven because I had done it for the sake of public service. It all reminded me of the verse in the Gita about the fruits of action being of three kinds. I don't know whether or not these triple consequences will be loaded on to my head, and I have no desire to know. What God willed has come to pass—that is how I look at the matter, so I do not trouble myself about it.

It was in Sarvodaya Conference at Chandil that I urged: 'We must establish the independent power of the people—that is to say, we must demonstrate a power opposed to the power of violence, and other than the power to punish—the coercive power of the State. The people are our God.' I am not making this journey on my own strength; I derive the strength for it from the patient, painful, costly work of all those who labour in mills, in fields, in work-places everywhere, who toil on half-empty stomachs and yet are content, who inflict no injury on anyone yet suffer much themselves. It is this, their holy endeavour, which keeps me alert and on the move.

In Bihar I was given another kind of gift in the name of God. In Baidyanathdham at Deoghar I went along with some Harijans for darshan⁴ of the sacred image of Mahadev. We were not able to have that darshan, but we got our prasada⁵ in the form of a good beating at the hands of the God's devotees. Those who beat us did so in ignorance, so I did not want them to be punished. On the contrary, I was very pleased that the hundreds of brothers and sisters who were with me all remained calm. Not only that, those of my companions who got the worst of the beating all said that they felt no anger at all. I believe that this will prove to be the death-throes of the demon of discrimination.

I had no desire to enter the temple by force or by the authority of the law. It is my custom never to enter any temple into which Harijans are not allowed entry. I had made enquiries, and was told that Harijans were allowed to enter, so after our evening prayer we all went reverently for darshan, keeping silence

on the way. I myself was meditating inwardly on the Vedic verses in praise of Mahadev. That being the case, when we were unexpectedly attacked and beaten it was for me a specially moving experience. My companions encircled and protected me, intercepting the blows which were aimed directly at me. Still, I did get some taste of them to complete our 'sacrificial offering.' I remembered how, in this same dham, the one whose servant I call myself (Mahatma Gandhi) had received the same kind of treatment. I had experienced the same blessing, the same good fortune, as he did.

I walked through Bihar from September 1952 to the end of December 1954, and I received twenty-three lakh acres of land. But more important than that, I can say that as I went about Bihar I had visible tokens of the love of God. I cherished, and continue to cherish, high hopes from Bihar. I hope that 'the non-violent revolution with its roots in bhoodan and having its main focus on village industries' will be brought to pass in this land of Bihar. I count myself greatly blessed that I had the good fortune to spend so many days there, where every moment I enjoyed, with tear-filled eyes, the vision of God. I can never forget those gentle humble-hearted people. I found among them much less of what is called 'provincial spirit' than in other provinces. They accepted me as one of their own, and I had great joy and exceeding peace among them. Joy alone is at the core of the human soul; joy as broad as the broad heavens above. From the land of Bihar I took much of this joy, everywhere I felt the touch of the human heart, as all-embracing as the sky. And therefore I call this journey a journey of joy.

In the Home of Lord Chaitanya (West Bengal and Orissa)

Strengthened by the affection given to me in Bihar I next entered Bengal; I left the land of the Lord Buddha for that of Lord Chaitanya, and walked there, a pilgrim of love, for twenty-five days in January 1955. I visited the place where Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa had his first experience of samadhi.⁶ There I said that from now on what is needed is collective rather than individual samadhi. This great man Shri Ramakrishna had taught us during his life- time

that an individual may rise to a level which transcends suffering, and may likewise be set free from the urge to accumulate wealth. My claim is that I am working for a society where the miseries of discrimination have been rooted out, and where wealth and prosperity are shared by all. Ramakrishna Paramahansa could not bear to touch money; I am following in his footsteps and seeking a way to free the whole of society from bondage to money.

On the twenty-sixth of January (1955), when I set foot in Orissa, I said: 'I am very happy that after visiting Bengal, I have come to Utkal, this land of heroes. It was this land that turned the eyes of the emperor Ashoka towards non-violence, that transformed him from Ashoka of the sword to Ashoka of the dharma, the eternal law'.

I went to Jagannathpuri for the Sarvodaya Sammelan (in March 1955); and we went to the Jagannath temple, but had to turn back without entering. I had gone there in a mood of great devotion, but I had a French lady with me, and it was my principle that if she could not go in, neither could I. I began in early youth to study the Hindu religion, and I have continued to do so to this day; from the Rigveda to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mahatma Gandhi, I have studied the whole tradition as reverently as I could. I claim with all humility that I have tried my best to practise the Hindu religion as I understand it. In my opinion, it would have been a very unrighteous act for me to enter the temple and leave the French lady outside. I asked the authorities there whether she might enter along with me, and they said No. So instead of making my obeisance to the Lord, I saluted them respectfully and turned away. As I said at the time, I do not look down upon those who had refused us entry. I know that they too must have felt sorry about it, but they were enslaved by ingrained ideas and were unable to do the right thing. So I don't blame them much. I say only this: that such an incident bodes ill for our country and for our religion. Baba Nanak⁷ was also refused entry into this temple and was turned away from its doors. But that is an old story, and I hope that it will not again be repeated.

While I was still walking in Uttar Pradesh, in May 1952, I had received a gift of a whole gram, the village of Mangroth.⁸ It was a totally unexpected happening. After the experience I had had in Bihar, I told the people of Orissa that the Biharis had shown what they could do about bhoodan; 'now it is for you here to take up the idea of gramdan'.

By God's ordering I spent the four months of the rainy season in Koraput District. As I walked, and the clouds showered down rain from heaven, I would recite over and over again a prayer from the Vedas, intoning it at the top of my voice, as sonorously and loudly as I could, and asking my companions to join in. The rishi (sage) prays first that God will send rain from heaven in abundance, for rain is a token of His grace; let us also greet the rain with ceaseless paeans of welcome.

Secondly, prays the rishi, may there be no hindrance to our speed. We were not hindered in our travels by the rain, and the workers gained much in self-confidence. We might well have been held up, and our work slackened, during the rains; and especially in Koraput, famous as it is for malaria, we had not expected to accomplish much. But in spite of it all the tour went on without a hitch, and six hundred villages were offered as gramdan.

The rishi's third prayer is that just as we may feel in the thousands of raindrops the thousand-fold caresses of God's hand, so may our will-power be multiplied a thousand-fold. The experience we had in this district certainly increased a thousand-fold the power of our good-will, because it was communicated to and shared by thousands of people, and also because we as individuals found the power of our goodwill to be greatly strengthened.

In the Land of the Great Teachers (Southern India)

In olden days, those who undertook a religious pilgrimage took water from the Ganga, carried it to Rameshwaram, and there used it to bathe the divine image. When they had done that, half of the pilgrimage was over. They then took sea-water from Rameshwaram and carried it to Kashi, where they bathed

with it the image of Kashi Vishwanath. Only then was their pilgrimage complete.

In similar fashion I travelled from North to South. I reached Andhra in October 1955, and Tamilnadu in May 1956, bringing my gifts: lakhs of acres of land from lakhs of donors in Bihar, the thousand villages given as gramdan in Orissa. Bihar had shown that lakhs of acres might be given in a single State; Orissa had shown that thousands of villages might be offered as gramdan. So that from one point of view my work was finished; I had proved that such methods would work. What more could one man do?

The time had come, I thought, to add new programmes to bhoodan and to carry them with me back to my starting point in the north.

I had now been engaged in this pilgrimage for five years. During the first year (1952) I had interrupted it for two months of the rainy season and spent them in Kashi. But I found in practice that there were only thirteen days of really heavy rain, and it did not seem right to interrupt my journey for two months or more for the sake of thirteen days, so in the following years I went on with my pilgrim- age even during the rains.

Up to that time I had walked one stage daily, but after I entered Tamilnadu I began to cover two stages a day, camping at one place at midday and at a second overnight. This was not because I had any ambition to visit every one of India's five lakh villages. That kind of self-centred vanity would have made the work one of rajoguna.⁹ That does not attract me; it does not lead to works of righteousness. The fact is that I began to walk two stages a day simply because I had an inward urge to do so, a compulsion to work as hard as I could. Much hard work is needed to increase sattvaguna, that quality of goodness. I know very well that the bhoodan offering will not be made complete by anything that I do, but only when the whole community takes up the task. One of my friends asked me what impact would be made on the villages now that I am spending so much time merely in travelling. I answered that what he called travelling was for me prayer.

I had a letter about this from Charu Babu in Bengal. 'Now that you have started to walk twice in a day,' he wrote, 'it seems to me that you are changing your 'gentle satya- graha' into an even more gentle satyagraha, and we are all deriving strength from it.' I cannot say that I had thought of it in those terms, but the longing to become 'more gentle' is certainly there, and moreover it is happening. If I had gone on spending the whole day in one village, I should certainly have done some work there, and it would have had some impact. But now that I go two stages a day what happens is that I simply explain my ideas and then move on. In practice, that means that the work takes a 'gentler' from.

I do not feel elated when I get large gifts of land, nor discouraged when they are small. While I was in Bihar the average daily gift was three thousand acres, and three hundred or three hundred and fifty pledges of gifts. When a lawyer's practice grows his fees also grow, but here in Tamilnadu the people have 'degraded' me. I spent thirty-three days in Salem District and received only four or four and a half acres a day. But although the river has, as it were, dried up, the river in my heart does not fail. Even though the visible Kaveri¹⁰ itself were to dry up, the inward springs would never cease to flow.

In November 1956, at a meeting of our workers at Palni, I put forward the idea of nidhi-mukti.¹¹ 'Nowadays,' I said, 'many people make the mistake of thinking that the bhoo-dan movement is being carried on by salaried workers. They are not altogether wrong, there is some truth in it, but it is a mistake all the same. Here in Tamilnadu, as I have seen, there are about five hundred workers, and only about fifty of them are getting a salary. Nevertheless we ourselves are responsible for this mistake, because we think that our work cannot be done without some paid staff; in other words, that the work does depend on them. So let us get rid of this idea, and resolve that from the end of this year we shall stop all salaries. Don't prepare any budget for next year, and let some other way suggest itself. People are afraid that that would mean that all the work everywhere would come to a standstill. But I tell you that nothing

will be lost or spoiled. Let us all decide to look after one another, to leave no one uncared for, to share whatever food we have.'

Along with this nidhi-mukti there was also tantra-mukti.¹² Throughout India bhoodan committees had been set up to direct the bhoodan work. In two hundred and fifty of the three hundred districts of India such committees were at work, and they were getting some help from the Gandhi Memorial Trust. The trustees were very glad to give money for bhoodan work, for they believed that the message of Gandhiji could be spread better in this way than in any other. But after people had begun to donate whole villages as gramdan, it seemed to me that we should take another revolutionary step. Let us therefore cease to take any help from the Gandhi Memorial Trust for bhoodan work. Let us disband all the bhoodan committees. Any party which begins to operate on a large scale aims at strengthening its own organisation, but I aim at doing just the opposite. Future students of the history of the development of ideas will attach great importance to this concept. Indeed that is real history—the story of the successive stages in the development of human thought.

Why did I get rid of all this organisation? Because, though organisations may give ordinary kinds of service, and acquire some power, they cannot bring about a revolution in society. Revolutions need spirit rather than organisation and structures.

The dissolution of the bhoodan committees had two results. In some States, where there had been forty to fifty workers, there were now hundreds. In other States, where there had also been forty or fifty workers, even these disappeared. I had foreseen both results. But even if the disbanding of the committees had brought the work to a standstill all over India, I would still have regarded it as a right step. It is my basic principle that organisations can never bring about revolutions. An organisation is a mould, it is a method of maintaining control. Within it one has to work, and get others to work, in accordance with a fixed pattern. There is no freedom for the mind in that. In Tamilnadu I met the Shankaracharya¹³ of Kanchi (Conjeevaram), who is an old man. The Shankaracharya is always a sannyasi, one who has given up all his

possessions, but this man, after spending some years in the seat of authority, felt that he should give up this also. He therefore installed a disciple in his place and withdrew himself to a village not far away. There was nothing to be seen in his hut except an earthen pot for drinking water, two or three books and two or three grass mats. He was completely divested of possessions, and a great scholar. Thirteen hundred years after the death of the original Shankaracharya, a man like this, greatly revered throughout Tamilnadu, still carries on the tradition. I wondered about the basis of this ancient 'organization', still active after so many centuries.

My travels took me to Kanyakumari¹⁴ where I stayed for two days. On the second morning, the sixteenth of April 1957 I went to the seashore as the sun was rising, and watched the sea bathing Kanyakumari's feet. I felt the touch of the sea water, I saw the glory of the sun, I remembered Kanyakumari, and I renewed the pledge (taken in 1954 at the Sarvodaya Conference at Bodhgaya): 'We will work without ceasing, as heretofore, until the consummation of the freedom of India into the freedom of every village community.'

I had planned to stay there for two days specially in order to renew this pledge. I had a few friends with me at the time. Had I wished, I could have told them all and asked them to take the pledge also, but I did not, I took it alone. But when I did so I used the word 'we' instead of the singular 'I'. That in fact is now a habit of mine. I do not think of myself as a separate individual, so 'we' instead of 'I' comes naturally to me. The pledge can certainly be taken by an individual but I would like such a pledge to be in the minds of all. From Tamilnadu I went on to Kerala. There had been 'village gifts' in Orissa and likewise in Tamilnadu, and in Kerala I soon found that the people were no less large-hearted than elsewhere; there too hundreds of villages declared gramdan. That task, it seemed to me, was now completed.

13. New Steps Forward

People used to ask me what would happen after 1957, what form the work would take then. I told them that work of this kind is not limited by time or place. To my mind gramswarajya, freedom for every village community, has in essence been achieved. My mind dwelt upon Ramadas Swami, and how he had foretold the end of the tyranny of his own times. 'The forces of unbelief are fallen, destroyed,' he declared, yet the oppressive reign of Aurangzeb did not end until twenty-five years after his own death. He looked into the future and saw the city of Kashi, which was under alien rule, restored to freedom. 'Now,' he cried, 'is the holy water flowing freely for bathing and for the triple worship at sunrise, noon and sunset.'

I felt the same way about the freedom of the villages to govern themselves. Now was the time to set up a Shanti- sena, a Peace Army, to safeguard the freedom which had been won. I am an inveterate calculator, and I had reckoned that one 'peace soldier' would be needed for every five thousand of the population. On that basis, seventy thousand peace soldiers would be needed for our nation of three hundred and fifty million people. Let India raise such an army of devotees of peace. The task of the Peace Army was to prevent any outbreak of violence by being always alert for signs of tension. In normal times these 'peace soldiers' would work as servants of society, and get declarations of gramdan and so on; in an emergency, however, they would be ready to give their lives to restore peace.

I asked the people of Kerala to take the first step, and Shri Kelappan declared himself ready to act as Commander of the Peace Army. Previously he had been active in party politics, but he made his choice without hesitation and at once sent in his resignation from the party. The public of Kerala greatly respected him, and with such a man as leader many young men volunteered to join the army and act under his orders.

At one meeting eight or nine people stood up and pledged themselves there and then to join the Peace Army and give their lives if need be. It looked as if

ten or twenty more were ready to follow suit. However, I stopped them. For the time being, I said, I did not want any more; it was enough to have a few tried workers with whom I was already in touch. In that way, in Kerala, the Peace Army was established (On July 11th, 1957 at Kozhikode).

After the Shanti-sena was established, I said that it would need a Supreme Commander at the all-India level, and for that we must depend on God alone. I cannot speak in any other language than this, but nevertheless the indications are that I will have to shoulder the responsibility of all-India leadership. If that be His will, I am mentally prepared to do it.

I have appealed to the people of India for seventy thousand peace soldiers. If I fail to get so many I shall no doubt become a laughing-stock. But then, I like being a laughing-stock ! Laughter adds flavour to life; it's a good thing that people should get a chance to laugh.

I do my calculations and put forward figures of this kind to help us all to keep in mind the target we are aiming at. I asked for fifty million acres of land, and now that I have got only four million, people say, how about that? I have made myself a laughing-stock. If I had talked in terms of two or three million I should have exceeded the target by this time. I decided on fifty million, and those who laugh at me don't understand how one must go about things in this country. As the saying goes, 'Joy is in the large, not in the small.' I set myself a target which looks impossible, and then try to make it possible. And it is this which lends wings to my feet.

At Guruvayur there is a temple, so famous that it could be called the Pandharpur of Kerala. Years ago Kelappan had fasted there; Gandhiji had come and joined him. He asked Kelappan to give up his fast, saying, 'I will fast in your place.' Gandhiji thus took the fast upon himself, and after that the temple was thrown open to Harijans.

When I reached Guruvayur I had with me some Christian fellow-workers. I asked the temple authorities if they would allow us all to enter together. No, they said, they could not allow that, but they would be very pleased for me to enter and would feel sorry if I did not do so. 'I am sorry,' I replied, 'I do not

understand how I could have any experience of God if I were to leave these Christian friends of mine outside. I cannot worship in that way.' So I did not go in.

A great debate ensued in the Malayalam newspapers about my not being allowed in Guruvayur. Public opinion on the whole was against my exclusion. Only one or two papers criticised me for insisting that people of another religion should be allowed inside the temple. The rest, a score or more newspapers, said that I was right, and that it was a big mistake, which would do much damage to Hinduism, not to allow us to enter.

At other places my experience was quite the reverse. At Melkote in Karnataka there is a temple associated with Ramanujacharya, where Ramanujacharya¹ himself lived for fifteen years. He was a very large-hearted teacher who devoted himself to the spiritual welfare of the world, and Melkote is known all over Southern India. I visited the place with my companions, some of whom were Christians. I went into the temple along with them, we were all allowed to enter, and I was very happy to see it.

On another occasion during my pilgrimage in Karnataka the same question arose at the famous temple of Gokarna Mahabaleswar. There was with me a Muslim friend named Saleem, a loving soul of great piety. I asked the authorities and priests if they would allow this man to enter the temple with me; they said we might all enter, they had no objection whatever. I was very happy to be allowed to go into the temple along with companions of other faiths, and that the priests did not consider that the image of God was polluted by my doing so. And Gokarna Mahabaleswar is not just a minor place of pilgrimage.

If I do not insist on this principle of temple entry, Hinduism will forfeit the goodwill of the world. I have been very cordially welcomed everywhere, by Muslims in their mosques, by Christians in their churches, by Sikhs in their gurudwaras. And indeed, who would not welcome anyone whose heart is filled with nothing but love?

The first anniversary of the newly-united Karnataka State fell on November 1st, 1957. On that day I began using a new slogan, Jai Jagat, 'Victory to the World'. A united Karnataka, I explained, was only a first step, which must be followed next by a united India, and then by a united world. Fifteen years earlier we had begun to use the slogan Jai Hind, 'Victory to India'; now the time has come to move on to Jai Jagat. The mental outlook is changing all over the world, and very rapidly. Little by little the dividing walls between country and country will be broken down, and it will become more and more possible to create a united world family. The human spirit is being enlarged. So, from now on, our slogan should be Jai Jagat.

A long time ago, when I was still in Paunar, some soldiers of the Azad Hind Army² visited me. They greeted me with Jai Hind, and I responded with my own form of greeting: Jai Hind, Jai Duniya, Jai Hari.³ I wanted to help them to understand that in these times Jai Hind alone is too narrow an ideal. I explained that it could only rightly be used in conjunction with Jai Duniya; victory for one's own country must not mean defeat for another. Furthermore, the world as a whole might even become mad enough to forget God, and so I added the third slogan, Jai Hari. Jai Duniya is a broad ideal, Jai Hari is a deep one. Jai Hind alone is neither broad nor deep enough for today. That was what I said to those men seven or eight years ago, and now in Karnataka even the children are shouting Jai Jagat.

At the same time I had been thinking hard about the events of the past six years. Good work had been done; bhoodan had given birth to gramdan. But was all this just a crazy 'fad' of mine, or was there Truth behind it? I decided that the matter must be put to the test, so, through the Sarva Seva Sangh, I invited our national leaders to examine it dispassionately and give their opinion.

On September 21st and 22nd 1957 leaders of all the political parties met at Yelwal in Karnataka for a Gramdan Conference. Those who attended were people whose ability as practical thinkers was recognized by all.⁴ They gave their verdict, with one voice, in favour of the principle of gramdan, and the statement they issued is a kind of Magna Carta for it: 'All should encourage the idea of gramdan since it would lead to moral along with material progress.'

When I saw that phrase I asked myself whether any third kind of progress, apart from these, is possible for humanity? This endorsement was given, not merely by those who preach religion, but by leaders concerned with practical affairs. I, therefore, regarded gramdan as having been accepted by the nation. I also suggested to the conference that it should be looked upon as a 'defence measure'.

I also spoke to the conference of my fundamental faith that in each human heart's core there is a divine essence. The evils which appear on the surface are not found in the depths. We must find a way to penetrate the depth of each human heart and to draw out the goodness with which it is filled. My second point was that, by the grace of God, everyone in the world is a 'have', there are no 'have-nots' at all. Therefore whatever one has, whether land, or strength to work, or money, or intelligence, or affection, should be made available to the whole village community and not confined to one's own home. Otherwise some people would have only a duty to give, others only a duty to receive, and that could not possibly work well, for moral duty is the same for all.

In Karnataka I first put forward the idea of Sarvodaya-patra, a 'pot for Sarvodaya' (at Dharwar, in February, 1958).

The Gita says that in order to accomplish any kind of work we must take into account various factors, such as the field or base, the worker, and the means. For this work of revealing the spirit of non-violence the field or base has been found; it is bhoodan. Next comes the worker; assuming one worker for every five thousand of the population, there must be a Peace and Service Army of seventy thousand soldiers; intelligent, active people who would serve every village and every home, and would keep the peace through- out the country. In Kerala, a beginning has been made with a Peace Army of that kind. The next step is to provide the various 'means'. I have asked for two kinds of means, sampatti-dan and sammati-dan. Sampatti-dan means giving for the cause of non-violence a portion of one's sampatti or wealth. God may have given us much or little, but whatever it is, let us give a portion of it to society,

and so earn the right to enjoy what remains. We are enjoined in the Upanishads first to give, and only after giving to provide for our own needs. I therefore ask everyone to give, to give whatever he possesses, his labour, his property, his intelligence and so on. From such gifts great spiritual strength, and equally great material resources, can be generated in India. Sammati-dan means the gift of approval; it means to declare one's belief in Sarvodaya, Shanti-sena, gramdan and khadi. Whoever desires to help forward this work to the best of their ability should show it by putting aside something every day towards the welfare of society. When I ask people for sampatti-dan, I ask for one-sixth of their wealth just as in bhoodan I ask for one-sixth of their land. But in sammati-dan I ask for a daily handful of grain from every household in token of their faith in the work of non-violence. Let every household give a daily handful of grain, and let the hand be the little hand of a child. More grain would be given for Sarvodaya, of course, if the handful were that of an adult, such as the mother; but that is just what I don't want; I prefer that a little boy or girl should put a little handful into the Sarvodaya pot.

Why so? Because this is what will happen: When the child comes for the meal the mother will ask him if he has remembered to put his handful of grain into the pot, and if he has forgotten she will tell him to go and do it at once, before he sits down to eat. It seems to me that this would be very helpful in inculcating respect for the moral law. It would bring in some grain for Sarvodaya work, it would express the family's sympathy with our aims, but more than that, it would be an education for the children. This should take place in every home and should be expected of every family, for it belongs to the religion of humanity. It is something in which the followers of every faith can take part, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and all.

In short, the Sarvodaya-patra has a triple purpose. First, it is a pledge not to have any part in acts which disturb the peace; second, it is a practical vote for Sarvodaya; third, it is an education for all Indian children.

The tradition of charity which prevails today certainly benefits society to some extent, but it does not bring about any change in social structures. Grain

placed in the Sarvodaya-patras, on the contrary, will be used for the revolution, for creating a new social structure. To alleviate suffering a little, while allowing the old structure which causes it to remain, is just not enough. It is of course good to relieve misery, but relief does not strike at the root of that misery. The aim of the Sarvodaya-patra is to build a new society on a new foundation.

On the day when this idea of Sarvodaya-patra came into my head, I felt as though I had become a rishi, like the seers of old ! I had never felt like this with regard to bhoodan, but behind the idea of Sarvodaya-patra there is, it seems to me, a true vision. In one of the stories in the Upanishads a guru says to his disciple: 'Bring a banyan fruit, break it open, and see what is inside it.' The disciple sees a small seed in it. The guru says: 'Break that open too and tell me what you see.' The disciple does so, and says: 'Now I can see nothing at all'. Then the guru says: 'From such an invisible nothing has sprung this great tree. This seed-power, this power at the core of the seed, that is the Atman (the soul), and that is what you too are.' In the same way, the great tree of the people's power will spring from the invisible seed-power in that little handful of grain.

I told the friends in Karnataka that my feeling was that I should continue my travels. I would attend any camps or seminars which might be arranged, and that both in the camps and on my journeys I would continue to share my thoughts on Sarvodaya and allied topics. Nevertheless, I said, I would prefer to move about quite freely, without pre-arranged plans, from now onwards, since that would be helpful in giving the work a good shape.

Now that I am going on to Maharashtra and Gujarat, to the scenes of my birth and boyhood, I feel strongly that I should simply go like a naked child running to his mother, divested of all my 'armour' of bhoodan and gramdan. There is no further need, to my mind, of any acts which might 'acquire merit' for myself. It is true that whatever merit I may have obtained so far has not been individualist in intention, but it has nevertheless taken an individual form also. Now I want to abandon that form completely, and simply live, simply be.

14. NORTHWARD AND EASTWARD

In the Footprints of Jnanoba and Tukoba¹

(The Journey through Maharashtra)

After seven years of travel round India I reached Maharashtra (in March 1958). I said to the people: 'Here I want nothing from you except your love. Up to now I have been asking for gifts, gifts of many kinds, and all of them very much needed, but all of them must be given as tokens of love. I am hungry for love from one and all. I have come before the people of Maharashtra as a man with only two possessions, his thoughts and his love; I have nothing more. I stand before you in freedom of spirit, ready to reopen and reconsider even those principles of which I have become fully convinced. I have no organization of my own, and I do not belong to any. I am simply a man, as God made me. I possess only two conveniences, my spectacles and my dhoti (loin-cloth), and I do not feel easy in my mind that I should possess even these. But I keep them, out of regard for people's feelings, or for some such reason.

Forty years ago, in 1918, I had made a walking tour in some districts of this state. I was at that time greatly interested in seeing historic sites and examining historical documents, and I took every opportunity to do so. This time, however, my research is not into the past but into the present. I am trying to discover the needs of today, and how they can be satisfied. My first step was to say, give a little land. Then I began to ask for one-sixth of the land. After that I said to people, see to it that no one in your village is without land. Next, I began to tell them that it was wrong to think in terms of land-ownership at all, that land is for everyone, like air, water and sunlight. Then I began to talk about Gramswarajya (village self-government), Shanti-sena (Peace Army), and now of Sarvodaya-Patra (the welfare pot). I saw a banyan tree by the roadside one day, and I thought that bhoodan works very much like the tree does. Bhoodan is a tree of living thought which is always putting out new branches and new leaves.

So, at the age of sixty-three I came to Pandharpur² for the first time in my life, for the Sarvodaya Conference. Nevertheless, if someone were to conclude from that, that all these years I have absented myself, it could only mean that he understands nothing about my life. I affirm that I have really been in Pandharpur all the time, from the day I started thinking for myself up to the present. I hold that 'Pandharpur' is present in every place, and every place is therefore for me a place of pilgrimage. The holy shrines are not to be found only in Pandharpur or Rameshwaram, Mecca or Jerusalem. Every village and every house is for me a holy place.

Some people had announced that Vinoba, on reaching Pandharpur, would visit the temple with people of any caste or creed, and so pollute it. How could they have so misunderstood me ! My satyagraha, my campaign for truth, is not like that. Satyagraha means that I will go nowhere which is forbidden to me, no matter how much reverence I may feel for the place. But while I was still on my way to Pandharpur the authorities of the Vitthal temple sent me a written invitation and in this way the people of Pandharpur won my heart completely. I have no words to express what I felt then, as I stood in humility before the image of Vithoba. I told my hearers that I had never received a more precious gift, or a greater boon than this. With me were Christian, Muslim and Parsi women, and we all looked upon this holy image together. Maharashtra had given me the best gift it could possibly have made. As I see it, the event was without precedent in the Sarvodaya movement. Not long afterwards, some people from the Moral Re-armament movement came to see me. I told them that the inhabitants of Pandharpur had greatly strengthened the moral armoury. 'Yes,' they said, 'there is no doubt about it, our moral armoury is reinforced by what has happened.'

In this age of science the experience of Samya-yoga,³ of universal harmonious unity, is not to be sought only in the depths of individual meditation. It should be experienced by the whole of society. In former times, Samya-yoga was regarded as the apex; now it must be taken as the foundation, and the whole of life must be built upon it. The age of science demands nothing less.

In Gujarat, among Gandhi's People

When at last I set foot on the soil of Gujarat (in September 1958) it was the fulfilment of a desire of many years' standing. I can't describe how happy I felt to see the people of Gandhiji's native land. 'It is true,' I said, 'that the whole world was his, he belonged to the world; and of course he belonged to India, but in a special way he belonged here in Gujarat. And I too belong to you all; I have spent many years outside, in other states, but now I have come home.' I decided that so long as I was in Gujarat I would speak Gujarati. When I first met Bapu (Gandhiji) I had to talk with him in Hindi, but I noticed that at that time he did not know Hindi very well. So I set to work to study Gujarati, and mastered it in a short time; from then on I always talked to him in Gujarati. Gujarat has given me a great deal, so I told the people there not to expect me to offer them knowledge; I would try to the utmost of my power to give them service. All the people, of all political parties and of none, helped to strengthen my hands. I told them that the ideas I had brought with me were the 'highest common factor' of their various ideologies. There are many differences of opinion in the world, but the main principles, which I have been trying to spread during my tramp around India, have now won general intellectual acceptance. It now remains to win for them the love of the people's hearts.

Last year, when I went to Kerala, the four Christian churches issued an appeal of their people, asking all Christians to give me their full cooperation, because I was 'doing the work of Jesus Christ'. When I was in Uttar Pradesh and went to Sarnath, the Buddhist monks there welcomed me, saying 'Baba, we accept your claim that you are carrying forward the work of the Lord Buddha, and turning the Wheel of the Law.' They also gave me a token of their love, a copy of the Dhammapada which I took with me to Bihar. Then, when in the course of my bhoodan pilgrimage I reached Malabar, the Muslims there told me, 'What you say is exactly what is said in the Koran.' 'I have read the Koran,' I replied, 'read it with reverence, and I am very happy that you should think so.' In

Tamilnadu the man most revered is Tiruvalluvar;⁴ a book was published which said that Vinoba was preaching just what Tiruvalluvar taught, and that all Tamilians should cooperate with him. This principle of mine has thus been endorsed by various schools of thought which hold sway in the world. What remains to be done is to endear it to the people.

My travels in Gujarat took me to Bardoli, and I spoke there about how Gujarat combines a pious heart with a practical turn of mind. When the two are yoked together, Krishna the Lord of Yoga, and Arjuna the bearer of the bow, become one; so there assuredly are fortune, victory and prosperity.⁵ Then I visited the Sabarmati Harijan Ashram.⁶ I told its inmates that it had almost become a village, and had the same problems as any other village; so if they were to decide on gramdan, these problems could be solved. Gramdan, in fact, means abhaya-dan, the gift of fearlessness.

In Dargah Sharif

During my journey through Rajasthan, a Sarvodaya conference was arranged at Ajmer, because the Dargah Sharif⁷ there is a famous Muslim holy place (just as, if a Sarvodaya conference were held in Palestine, it would naturally be at Jerusalem). I am no sectarian, but I hold such places in great honour because they are the site of austerities undergone with reverence and faith.

I had an invitation from the Nazim (manager) of the Dargah Sharif, who wrote to one of my companions: 'We very much wish that Vinoba will come to the Dargah, we want to welcome him here because our great Saint (whose Dargah this is) was a devotee of peace and love. Along with Vinobaji I am inviting all his companions; they are all welcome.' I therefore invited all who were attending the conference to go with me, and insisted specially that the women should join. Just as all castes and creeds had gone to the Pandharpur temple, so it should happen here. Islam has a high and holy message. It makes no distinction between the rich and the poor. It strictly forbids the charging of interest on loans. It is an example of true democracy. I wish to proclaim myself both a Muslim and a Christian. I visited the Dargah once ten years ago, when

people's minds had lost their balance in the aftermath of the partition of the country in 1947, and I spent seven days there. I used to hold my prayer meetings in the Dargah.

The next day therefore I was accompanied to the Dargah by thousands of others belonging to all faiths. We were very cordially welcomed. I said to the gathering: 'There are some temples and mosques which do not allow all people to enter. That is not right. Everyone without distinction should be allowed to enter any place of worship. All these distinctions must go.' The truth is that worship does not need either a temple or a mosque, one may worship God anywhere. Devotion, as the Holy Koran says, requires only three things: sabr (patience), raham (compassion) and hak (truth). I call it love, compassion and truth.

In the Beautiful Land of Lalla⁸ (Kashmir)

No words could describe the joy I felt when (in May 1959) I entered the state of Kashmir.⁹ Some Muslim brothers came to Pathankot to meet me, and nothing could have been better than the gift which they brought me. It was a beautiful copy of the Koran, and I took it as a blessing on my entry into Kashmir. I told the people there what I hoped to do. 'On my own account,' I said, 'I want nothing. What God wills comes to pass, as I have seen. I have cast all my cares and all my life upon Him, and nothing has ever happened to me which has not been good for me and for the country. I rely on Him. If it should be the will of Allah, I want to do three things: I want to see, I want to hear, and I want to love. I want to use, here in Kashmir, the whole power of loving with which God has endowed me.'

During my travels I usually covered nine or ten miles each day, and it was my custom to eat something in the early morning before starting my walk. On the day I entered Kashmir however I gave up eating one meal. My stomach does not allow me to eat double at the second meal when I have given up the first, so I cannot make up for what I have missed. Still, I thought, I will fast a little and so purify myself. So I gave up one meal in the name of Kashmir.

To enter the Vale of Kashmir one must cross the Pir-Panjal pass. Before I reached it I was held up by rain for six days in the market town of Loran. I decided that if the rain continued and we could not cross the mountain range, I would take it as a sign from God that I should not enter Kashmir itself, and I would return to Punjab. I am guided by such signs, and made up my mind that if I could not cross the Pir-Panjal range I would not go by any other route. But in the end the rains stopped, and I was able to cross the mountains and go ahead.

A man came one day to give me land because his wife had told him to do so. She had seen a photograph in some newspaper which showed someone giving me a hand to help me over a difficult stretch of road. The picture made her feel that when a man is taking so much trouble to help the poor, it would not be right to refuse him land. That woman, who was inspired by that picture to do something for the poor, was she at all wanting in culture? In my view, her human stature touched greater heights than that Pir-Panjal which I had crossed at an altitude of 13,500 feet !

I am happy to say that every group I had the opportunity to meet, political, religious or social, large or small, all of them felt me to be one of themselves, to whom they could open their hearts and speak their minds without misgiving. They trusted me and told me what they thought, so I was able to get what I wished, and hear what I wanted to know.

My third aim was to love, and during those four months I know of no occasion when anything but love entered my mind. By the grace of God, my wish to love was fulfilled.

The people there reminded me three or four times that Shankaracharya had once come to Kashmir on the same kind of mission as mine. I agreed with them that my mission could be compared with his in its purpose, but I cannot be compared with him. He was a great master; I am a mere servant, a slave of Allah. I claim no knowledge, but I do claim to practise the little that I know. I myself am nothing, but the mission on which I have come is not nothing, it is

something which offers freedom not only to Kashmir, but to India and to the world as well.

When I entered the state of Jammu-Kashmir I was given a book, an English translation of the sayings of Lalla. Lalla lived six hundred years ago, but even today the people have not forgotten her. In the meanwhile many rulers have come and gone, but which of them do the people remember? Everyone remembers the name of Lalla, the Saint, the great Soul. So as soon as I set foot in Jammu and Kashmir, I began to describe the fundamental purpose of my pilgrimage in this way: 'The problems of Kashmir, of India and of the world will not be solved by politics, but only by the recognition of spiritual principle. The days of sectarian religion and of politics are over. From now on only spiritual principle, and science, will be of any use to the world.' Only when our hearts become large enough to get rid of our disputes about religion, nationality, language etc., only then will Kashmir and India become strong. And when they do, that strength will be such as to bring ease of mind to everyone in the world.

At the Feet of Guru Nanak (In Punjab and Himachal Pradesh)

I came down from Kashmir to the Punjab, and was there from September 1959 to April 1960. While there, I visited the Gurudwara in Amritsar. I had once been consulted about the affairs of the Gurudwaras. 'These quarrels which are going on nowadays,' I said, 'show a lack of wisdom. They are a danger to the Sikh religion and to India as well. In politics people quarrel for majorities, but it is a very dangerous development that the same quarrels have started in the field of religion. I have begged the political leaders over and over again to give up the present party politics and find non-partisan ways of managing public affairs. So long as politics are based on minorities and majorities, India is the loser. It would be extremely unwise to let this same party spirit take hold of religion; I cannot imagine anything more disastrous. Can questions of religion ever be decided by majority vote? In Guru Nanak's mind a living seed of religion germinated and grew. The basic principle of the Sikhs is this—and a very great

one it is—that the whole world belongs to one race, one community, in which there are no divisions, no caste distinctions. The worship of images is neither enjoined nor opposed. God is One, that is the message. This basic idea is bound to spread, but the very group of people which has given it to the world is itself becoming infected by politics and its tricks, and this is an extremely dangerous thing. I would like to warn you all against it. If I had my way, I would have everyone leave his politics along with his shoes outside the Gurudwaras. Politics are worth no more than shoes. The politics of today, whether in India or in the world, are not something to be carried proudly on the head; at the very most they are for the feet, and such footgear is not fit to enter either Gurudwara or Church, Temple or Mosque. Don't take it in, for if you do, the house of God will become a place of devils.'

In Punjab I made public a decision I had come to, which I had been thinking over for a year or two, and which I now placed before the Sarva Seva Sangh in a letter from Pragpur in Kangra. 'I have now been walking for the last eight and a half years,' I wrote, 'and I have visited all the states except Assam. I have been dwelling among the people (janavas), though in our traditional language it could also be called dwelling in the forest (vanavas). What I need now is to dwell in the unknown (ajnatavas). I would go on walking, but all that the country outside would know is that I am somewhere in Punjab, and all the people in Punjab would know is that I am somewhere in Kangra (or elsewhere). The Kangra people would know the details for five or six days ahead, so I should not be completely a dweller in the unknown; I should not be like either the Pandavas¹⁰ or those modern Pandavas who go underground; my whereabouts would not be entirely unknown.

'It is clear that there will be drawbacks. The gains may be spiritual, especially considered as research in non-violence, provided that the mind can absorb this magnificent idea. Whether it can or not, can only be known by experience, and I would be watching for it. I propose to begin the experiment from Amritsar. There is to be a meeting of writers there, and after that I shall cease to be a forest-dweller and become a dweller in the unknown.'

A man who is a dweller in the unknown may go wherever he pleases, but it was in my mind to go towards Indore. Whether I went by a round-about route, or as direct as Euclid's straight line, would depend on circumstances and the actions of those around me.

This experiment of mine lasted for four or five months. I let people know my plans for three days in advance, no more. There is no doubt that it was a great benefit as a help to reflection and meditation. Then I crossed a corner of Uttar Pradesh and entered Madhya Pradesh.

Was it a Dream, What I saw in Madhya Pradesh?

What happened in Bhind-Morena, after I had been walking there for ten or twelve days, moved me to the depths of my heart, for I saw how the light of God indeed shines through all. In former days I had accepted this in theory; now it was demonstrated in practice. In former days I had read about non-violence in books; now I encountered it in my own experience. Three times I witnessed its power in human society; the first time was in Pochampalli, the second in Bihar, and the third here in Bhind, in Madhya Pradesh.

In this part of Madhya Pradesh the ravines around the Chambal river were infested by dacoits, armed robbers, some of them followers of the rebel leader Man Singh. My peace campaign in the area had a totally unexpected outcome. Non-violence is a spiritual force of great power. Mahatma Gandhi used it in the political field, and later it has been used in the social and economic field. Now I tried it out in what is commonly called the dacoit region. Something new happened which had never happened before. Hard hearts were melted; the whole atmosphere was saturated with the spirit of God. People for whom dacoity had become a means of livelihood repented, came to me completely transformed, and abandoned their former ways. One can only conclude that God had penetrated their hearts with His divine radiance. As for me, I can only feel profoundly thankful to that Lord of All, in whom I put my trust as I try to walk in the way of truth, love and compassion.

While I was still in Kashmir Tahsildar Singh, the son of dacoit leader Man Singh, wrote to me from jail. He had been condemned to death and he wanted the privilege of seeing me before he was hanged. At the time I had with me in my party General Yadunath Singh who comes from this same area, and I asked him to go and see Tahsildar Singh on my behalf. Tahsildar Singh told him of his desire that I should visit the Chambal ravines and meet his dacoit comrades. I went there in response to his request, and spoke to the people about the principle of love, and I appealed to the robber gangs to come to me as their friend. I assured them that they would be treated justly, without brutality, and that their families would not suffer.

By the grace of God, twenty of them came to me at Kaneragram on the nineteenth of May (1960). They laid down their guns—costly weapons, equipped with powerful gunsights—and surrendered themselves to me. Then they met their wives and children, and we went with them to the jail, where they gave themselves up. They will reap the fruit of their misdeeds, but they will have earned the forgiveness of God. A way has been opened.

In the City of Ahilyabai¹²

During my tour of Madhya Pradesh I was able to stay for some weeks at Indore. This city has a good climate, it is beautiful, and its citizens are well-disposed. Bhopal is the administrative capital of Madhya Pradesh, but to my mind Indore is the cultural capital; I asked its citizens to make it a Sarvodaya city. But as I went round the city during those five weeks I saw an ugly thing which shocked me deeply. In a number of places filthy cinema posters were on display; how could such a shameless thing be tolerated? My eyes were opened: India would never be able to stand upright so long as such dirty sights and dirty songs were the order of the day—all the country's vigour would be drained away. There seemed no bounds to the dismay I felt at the sight of those filthy, offensive posters.

Along with the bhoodan movement, I decided, there must be a purification campaign. If I had not come to Indore, I would not have thought of it. I told the

public that their children were being given 'free and compulsory education in sensuality,' and that they must undertake satyagraha (non-violent action) against it. I asked the Municipal Councillors to get all these objectionable posters removed from public places, and not to be swayed by greed for the income they might lose. I made a special appeal to the women. 'The very basis of the householder's life,' I said, 'is in danger. Our sisters and mothers are being depicted in public places in a very bad light. I am giving you women the task of guarding the peace and the purity of this country. Wake up, women of Indore ! Don't put up with all these posters for one day longer. Tear them down ! Burn them !'

I also held another kind of purification campaign in Indore. We observed a 'Clean Indore' week, and went to various parts of the city, to do what people called 'plucky deeds'. I decided to clean latrines, and went to a place where faeces, urine and water (sattva, raja and tama)¹³ were all mingled. The women scavengers who worked there daily must be using their bare hands for the job; I did the same, except that I wore gloves. Even so, when I got back to my lodging place I wanted to wash my hands many times over. For scavenging I also took off the rubber slippers which I was wearing, even though Appasaheb¹⁴ said that I should have something on my feet. 'No,' I replied. 'The things are called slippers, and they would be sure to slip, and then there would be a regular scene—so I won't wear them.' But what with the rain falling from above, and all the nightsoil below, my feet got extremely dirty. Back in the house, I felt like putting them in the fire, to refine them like metal and get rid of the filthy scum.

A number of people had joined me in this work. 'You have shown plenty of pluck,' I told them, 'but now you must show some intelligence as well. We must discover how to relieve humanity completely of the need for such work. You must all put your heads together and find some way of eliminating scavenging altogether.'

I chose Indore as a Sarvodaya city, and spent a comparatively long time there, because it not only has links with the good Queen Ahilyadevi, it is also

the site of Kasturba-gram, the centre of the work being done in memory of Mother Kasturba, 15 where I stayed for seven days.

The Eastern Frontier Region

When my time at Indore was over I resumed my pilgrimage, but I had not gone far when I received a letter from Pandit Nehru. He suggested that I should go to Assam, which at that time was in a disturbed state. I replied that in any case I needed to go to Assam, which up to then I had not visited, to do my gramdan work, and that I could do the peace work which he desired at the same time. 'But,' I said, 'the tortoise will go at its own pace; it will not compete with the hare.' When Rajendrababu heard this, his comment was: 'It's always the tortoise, not the hare, that wins the race.' My companions were eager for me to reach Assam quickly. 'If I did that,' I said, 'it would make the people of Assam feel that they were badly at fault, so that I had had to put aside everything else and go there. It seems to me, however, that they have not gone badly wrong; they were carried away by an evil current.' Meanwhile, someone had told Panditji that I had set out on foot, not by the direct route but according to the plan I had already made. 'If I were in his place I would do exactly the same,' he replied.

So I travelled to Assam by my own route, and passed through Bihar on the way.

'You gave me a pledge,' I said to the Biharis, 'to get thirty-two lakh acres of land in bhoodan, and you have not yet fulfilled it. You had better get busy. I suggest that you should ask every land-owner for one kattha in every bigha of his land (i.e. a one-twentieth part of it).' This started a new 'one in twenty' campaign. I also spent two days in Samanvaya Ashram¹⁶ at Bodhgaya, and visited the Buddha temple, where I recited the Dhammapada Navasamhita in full.

On my very first day in Assam (5th March 1961) I spoke of gramdan as something which could raise the level of the whole of society. 'A man who makes himself out to be a landlord,' I said, 'is no true Vaishnavite. It is Vishnu

who is Lord of the land, Lord of all creation.’ (Most of the people there are Vaishnavites, worshippers of Vishnu.)

The State of Assam is almost surrounded by foreign countries, and is joined to the rest of India only by a narrow corridor. Its frontiers with Burma (Myanmar), China, Tibet and East Pakistan¹⁷ add up to about two thousand two hundred miles, while its link with India is only fifty or sixty miles across. Assam is the bottle-neck of India, so that India needs to keep in touch with it and attend to its development.

When I reached Assam I found that one matter was being talked about everywhere: the problem of ‘infiltration’. There were differing estimates of the number of people who had come in from Pakistan; some said that they were very numerous, other thought not, but all recognized the problem. This ‘problem’ however would solve itself if land were all owned by the village and there were no buying or selling of it, for then those who came in order to get land would find that they could not do so. That was the best possible solution; nobody need worry about how to control the frontier—about putting up barbed wire, or building a wall, or providing armed police or calling in the military. The solution, I repeat, lies in gramdan. The land would all be owned by the gramsabha, the village assembly, and no individual would be allowed to sell it. And if land cannot be had, there is nothing to attract people from outside to come and settle.

I found Namghars (shrines where Names of God are recited) in every village; I also found that just as Jnanadev and Tukaram exercise much influence on the Marathi people, and Tulsidas on the Hindi-speaking people, so Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva¹⁸ have a wide influence in Assam. These great souls derived from the Gita their gospel of Ek Sharaniya, ‘total surrender’, and established in Assam a great tradition of devotion. Even in the smallest village there is a Namghar, and this promotes a family feeling in the village as a whole. Even now, in every house, the women sit weaving on the handloom. It seemed to me that the foundation for gramdan had already been laid, and that if along with

the Namghar we were to build a Kam-ghar, a centre for village industries, this State could soon stand on its own feet.

While I was at Indore I had received a letter from a sister in Assam. 'If you want to build up women's power,' she wrote, 'you should come here.' She proved to be absolutely right. There was and is a very good group of spiritually-minded women who observe chastity and engage in social service. Amalprabha Das is the source of their inspiration; the influence of her work is felt throughout Assam.

One thing I did there was to try to teach Marathi to two Assamese sisters who accompanied me on my travels, by using my Marathi Gitai as the text-book. It's a long way from Assam to Maharashtra ! Nevertheless I noticed that there were some Assamese words which were not unlike Marathi ones. The two sisters knew the Nagari script, so I used that script, along with the ideas of the Gitai, in teaching them, and they began to read, write and speak Marathi. I do not think that India can be united by using a single language, but I do think that a common script might do it. What is needed is that all the languages of India should be written in the Nagari script in addition to their own. I am not a hee man, I am a bhee man; I don't want the Nagari script only (hee) to be used, I want it to be used also (bhee), alongside the local one. If the great spiritual literature of every language were also available in the Nagari script, it would make it easier for people to learn one another's languages, and it would help to increase the sense of national unity.

I stayed in Assam for a year and a half, up to September 1962. I made the round of the whole state almost twice over, and then the time came to move on. I was right on the frontier of India, and I could have gone on to China, Burma or Pakistan. I decided, however, to go back to West Bengal, and the way led through East Pakistan. I planned to take that route, and the governments of India and Pakistan both approved. I set out for East Pakistan.

15. To the Starting Point—To Start Again

At the very first meeting in East Pakistan I told the people how glad I was to be there. 'It's my own country,' I said. 'I don't feel that Hindustan and Pakistan are any different; they have the same air, the same soil, the same people, the same human hearts—there is no difference at all. The whole earth is ours, and we are all its servants. It is a mere accident that we are born and die in one country rather than another. I feel that I belong here, for all human society is my home, and wherever I go I say Jai Jagat.'

At my first two or three meetings people shouted Pakistan Zindabad—'Long live Pakistan'. Jai Jagat, I responded, and gradually the phrase caught on. Jai Jagat brought everyone together in love and harmony.

By this time I had completed my selections from the Holy Koran, and they were about to be published in book form. Before the book appeared however the newspaper Dawn of Karachi attacked me. This infidel, it said, was taking liberties with the text of Holy Scripture. Muslim periodicals in India at once took up the cudgels on my behalf; it was wrong, they said, to criticize a book without reading it. Their support touched me very much.

In East Pakistan I followed the practice of silent common prayer, and thousands of Hindus, Muslims and Christians all came to take part. Dawn criticized this too, and accused me of introducing Hindu prayers, but the papers of East Pakistan made no such accusation. 'I am doing nothing,' I replied, 'against the worship you practise in your own homes, whether you use an image, or offer namaj, or follow any other form. But can there, or can there not, be a form of prayer in which all of us may unite? If the answer is No, God Himself will be cut to pieces.'

On the very first day I asked for land, and a Muslim donor stood up to pledge his gift. This was a good beginning; it opened the door. It showed that the human heart is the same everywhere, and that in East Pakistan also the land problem could be solved by love and non-violence. I am much touched by the

affectionate treatment I received among my Pakistani brothers. The government too deserves my thanks for all the arrangements it made to ease my pilgrimage. All the inhabitants gave me brotherly love, and I believe that even those journalists who at first were critical became my friends in the end, and were convinced of my good intentions.

At the time of my visit to East Pakistan I had been turning over an idea in my mind for about a year. I realized that while gramdan was fully in line with human social instincts, it did not accord so well with the instinct of self-preservation. I began to look for something which might satisfy both instincts together, and hit on the idea of what is called sulabh (easy) gramdan. This means that each individual owner surrenders one-twentieth of his land for distribution to the landless, and that the legal ownership of all the land is vested in the village community. The former owners however continue to cultivate the remaining nineteen-twentieths of their original holdings, and may not be deprived of that right without their own consent.

I put this idea before the people of (West) Bengal. The workers responded with new enthusiasm, and a number of villages were donated in this way. One of them was the village of Plassey, the site of the battle which marks the loss of India's freedom. There in Bengal I met Pandit Nehru (for the last time) and as we talked together I gave him this news. 'I am delighted to hear it,' he said. 'It brings Milton to mind, how he wrote first Paradise Lost and afterwards Paradise Regained. Now we too have our Plassey Lost and Plassey Regained !' He went on to speak of it that day in his public meeting. 'Our real battle,' he said, 'is with poverty, and for that battle Baba's (Vinoba's) proposals for gramdan will be of very great service.'

At the same time I was also thinking much about khadi. Khadi workers from all over India met at Navadwip in Bengal in February 1963, and I shared my thinking with them. 'So far,' I said, 'khadi has been government-oriented, that is, it has depended on government help. From now on it should be village-oriented. My idea is that every individual (spinner) should have a few yards of cloth woven free of charge. This would encourage village people to spin, while

at the same time the village would become self-reliant for its cloth. If a village by its own efforts can produce its own food and its own cloth, it will be really strong, and so in consequence will the country. This is a real “defence measure”, and I ask you to take it up on a war footing. Listen to the poet Browning:

I was ever a fighter, so one fight more,
The best and the last.

I believe we must fight this last fight for khadi—let khadi be enthroned as king, or else it will wither away.’

On the eighteenth of April 1963, the day when I completed twelve years of pilgrimage, I was on my way to Gangasagar.¹ I looked back, that day, on those twelve years of daily speaking. ‘It has been a consecrated, strenuous effort,’ I said. ‘People have named it the Bhoodan Ganga, and like Mother Ganga herself the bhoodan stream should also merge into the ocean, here at Gangasagar. From now on my pilgrimage will be a tyaga-yatra, a journey of renunciation. I shall shed all my burdens and simply set out to enjoy myself, to indulge in happy play. My main interest will be to build up a cadre of workers, bound together through the length and breadth of India by ties of mutual affection and by a common agreed approach to the principles of their work.’

Worshipping a Trinity

For a number of reasons I had ceased to attend Sarvodaya conferences. All the same, I did attend the Raipur conference in 1963, and placed before it a triple programme:

(1) Gramdan—Without gramdan we cannot fit ourselves for the new age of One World. Today a family is too small a unit; it must be enlarged to include the whole village. Only when this is done can we talk of world peace. Gramdan is at one end of the scale, and Jai Jagat at the other.

(ii) Shanti-sena—We cannot claim that non-violence has any real power until we have such a widespread Peace Army that there is no need of a police force,

and no occasion whatever to use the army. The Shanti-sena, the Peace Army, is a must.

(iii) Village-Oriented Khadi—Khadi today depends on government help and rebate, and so loses all real power. Khadi should be a vehicle of the people's revolution. Village-oriented khadi is what Gandhiji himself wished to see. The conference passed a resolution accepting this triple programme, and as soon as the meeting was over I left Raipur for Maharashtra, for the Vidarbha region, for Wardha.

Coming Back to Where I Started

I returned to Wardha by the same road along which I had set out for Delhi almost thirteen years earlier. As we drew near to Wardha my companions asked me how I felt, did I have a special feeling for the place? 'As I see it,' I replied, 'the whole world is my home, but the land of India is my home in a special way. It is for me what in Marathi is called "the middle house", the central room. Maharashtra is like an alcove for worship within that room, and the Wardha district is the inmost shrine in the alcove, the "holy of holies".' I reached Paunar on the tenth of April 1964, thirteen years three months and three days after I had left, and for the first time since the Brahma Vidya Mandir had been founded in 1959. People felt anxious about my bodily health, and at their request I agreed to stay at Paunar for a fairly long time. My point of view however was different from theirs. It would be a credit to me, no doubt, to go on carrying the message of bhoodan-gramdan to the people, but it would be no credit to them, to those other men and women, that I should still have to do so, even after thirteen years. In order to be clear about my duty in this situation I agreed, rather half-heartedly, to 'rest'.

When a decision has to be made about one's duty, one must first and foremost examine oneself inwardly; one must also consider outward circumstances. I agreed to stay at Paunar partly for this self-examination, but I had another reason also. I had been instrumental in founding six Ashrams, all of which had the same central purpose, the education of workers. It was my duty to give

some attention to them also, and during this period of rest I hoped to do some thinking about it.

The Typhoon-Pilgrimage

While I was living in Pauniar the Sarva Seva Sangh held a session at Gopuri, Wardha. People came together from all over India, and those from each State came as a group to meet me. I said to the Biharis: 'Why not set to work to raise a regular typhoon? 2 Ten thousand gramdams in the next six months ! If you will do that, and need me, I will come.' They agreed to do it, and off I went to Bihar. (August 1965)

It had been decided that I should go on from Bihar to Orissa, and a programme had been drawn up for me. But suddenly I fell ill with fissures and was obliged to remain in Jamshedpur. During this illness I continued to think about my situation. If I had called on people to raise a 'typhoon' while I myself sat still in Pauniar, that would merely have reflected my own arrogance. But I had moved out, I had shared fully in the work in Bihar, and now I was compelled to stop, to rest. I felt that this was a sign from God, and that to insist on moving about would be to disregard His will. I benefited a lot, for the greater part of my time was spent in reflection and meditation. Telegrams poured in daily with news of gramdams. The 'typhoon' had reached a speed about half of what I had hoped for.

I left for North Bihar on March 16, 1966.

Sookshma-Pravesh: Entering a deeper inward path³

In those days I began to feel an inward call that I should now stop putting so much pressure on the people to accept my ideas. The people themselves, it is true, did not regard it as pressure, but it is pressure nevertheless when a man gets after them over and over again with the same appeals. It seemed to me that during the course of that year I should decide to put an end to this. If people came to me of their own accord I would give them my advice and so on,

but my own efforts would be directed towards a more inward form of activity. I had a specific date in mind. The seventh of June was drawing near, and that was the fiftieth anniversary of the date when I first went to Bapu. 'If the Lord does not take me away before then,' I thought, 'I will ask Gandhiji on that day to release me from service.' Not release from truth, of course, nor from non-violence, but from the labours in which I had been engaged at his behest for the last fifty years. Gandhiji would surely not be unwilling to set me free, for no one expects someone in the prime of life to give the same service as a child, nor that those who have reached old age should give the same service as those in their prime.

On June 7, 1966 I therefore announced that I was feeling a strong urge to free myself from outward visible activities and enter upon this inward, hidden form of spiritual action, and that I would begin to practise it that very day. 'It was on this date,' I said, 'that I had my first meeting with Bapu. That was in 1916, exactly fifty years ago. In that same year, a few months earlier, I had left home in the name of Brahma, the Supreme. Now I have received an inward call to lay at the feet of the Lord whatever outward visible service I have given, and to enter the realm of the hidden, the inward. It is a process to which I have given a new name: Sookshma Karmayoga—the hidden, more deeply inward path of action, rather than calling it meditation, or the pathway of devotion, of knowledge and so on. For me this is not a new thought, but an old one. Today I am beginning to act on it, to start reducing myself to zero. As a first step, I am going to put a strict limit on my correspondence.'

I believe that a lot of work is done in this innermost hidden way, and that those whose personal desires have been blotted out in the contemplation of God and His creation may be of the greatest service, invisible though it be.

In this Sookshma Karmayoga, this innermost hidden path of action, there is no abandoning of compassion, of generosity or of self-control. Our triple programme calls for them all. It is compassion that inspires the Shanti-sena—compassion pitted against anger. Gramdan is the work of generosity—generosity pitted against greed. Khadi is the work of self-control—self-control

pitted against self-indulgence. This being so, even when I abandon the outward visible way for the inward hidden one, my heart will always be in these works of compassion, generosity and self-control.

So the 'typhoon' went on, but letter-writing was almost at an end, and I did little speaking. My thoughts were on the call to inwardness and how I might enter into it more deeply. 'I have been talking for seventeen years,' I said, 'and it is not right to go on talking indefinitely. I must keep my links with all our fellow-workers, but these should be of an inward nature. I have therefore had a list prepared with the names of all the workers of Bengal, and I would like to have similar lists of workers from all over India. I want to keep an inward bond with them all, and remember them in meditation. Most people do not recognize what power this inward bond may have, but the bond is only there when one is emptied completely of self.'

Spiritual resolutions of this kind are within the compass of the will of God, and yet they can be made as free decisions. A devotee acts on his resolve, and God helps that devotee. To receive such help is one thing, to receive a command from God is another. Seventeen years ago at Pochampalli in Telangana I asked for eighty acres of land for the Harijans and received one hundred acres. I could not sleep that night; I turned to God. The word came, the divine command: 'You must take up this work.' I have been on the march ever since. Then, during the meeting of the Sarva Seva Sangh at Gopuri (Wardha), the slogan 'typhoon' arose; I set out on my travels once more, by car, and that slogan has caught on. To me, that too is a sign that the orders came from God.

Acharyakul: a Family of Teachers

In December 1967 again, at the conference of scholars at Pusa Road, I felt myself to have received a divine command. I do not remember such a conference being held before, either during my earlier travels or even during the time of Gandhiji. In old days such gatherings were called Sangiti, and I felt that this was a special event. Moreover the idea was not mine, and I had done nothing to arrange it. Karpoori Thakur⁴ made all the arrangements, and he told

me that not a penny of Government money had been spent. That made me feel that God was behind it, and that if we obeyed His orders we could bring about a non-violent revolution in education.

At the conference I said that the guidance of the affairs of the whole country ought to be in the hands of its acharyas, its teachers. Today however teachers have been relegated to the ordinary ranks of service; the educational institutions do not, unfortunately, have the same measure of independence as the judiciary. Even though the salaries of the judges are paid by the Government, the judiciary is independent; the judges are not subject to authority. The teacher ought to have a similar independent position, even though the salary may be paid by the Government from public funds. But for the teachers to become independent in practice, in the real sense of the word, there is one necessary condition: that the teacher should develop his own strength and not run after power-politics. He must keep clear of that dirty game, rise above narrow 'isms', and go in for the politics of a humane world order based on the moral power of the people—for what I call loka-neeti, the politics of the common man.

Secondly, I said, there are two ways of dealing with unrest. They might be called the Departments of Alleviation and Suppression. The acharyas belong to the Department of Alleviation, while the Government's police force is the Department of Suppression. If the teachers can succeed in allaying unrest (by getting the basic causes removed) there will be no need whatever to suppress it. This means that the field of action of the acharyas is the whole life of India; its scope is not confined to the premises of the University. If the police have to be called in anywhere we should regard it as a blot on the acharyas' record. On the basis of these ideas the Acharya-kul was inaugurated at Kahalgaon in March 1968. Kahalgaon is an ancient place whose name commemorates the sage Kahol, who took part with other sages in the assembly (described in the Brihadaranyak Upanishad) which was called by Yajnavalkya for a discussion on Brahman, the Supreme. When I spoke at Kahalgaon I said: 'I have come to Bihar this time looking forward to two things. First, that the whole of Bihar should

become a gift state.⁵ Second, that the teachers should realize their autonomous power. Let there be a fellowship of all teachers and acharyas, and let it be called Acharya-kul.'

I went to Bihar with two slogans, 'typhoon' and 'six months', but I stayed there for four years. The people of Bihar did splendid work. No one failed to do his utmost, and the result was that every district in Bihar declared itself 'gifted'. By October 1969, at the Rajgir Sarvodaya conference, the whole stage proclaimed Bihar-dan.

I would like to repeat something I said during the early days of the bhoodan movement. We shall have to decide, I said, what kind of society we want to create. 'Many alternatives are open to us today; all of us are faced with a crucial decision concerning our social and economic structure. Which road shall we take? What method shall we adopt? If we use bad means for good ends, India will be faced with endless problems. If we use non-violent means to solve our problems, there will be no problems left. This is the work of Dharmachakra-Pravartan, turning the Wheel of Righteousness. I believe that by such endeavour we shall find the key to non-violence in our hands.'

I cannot complain that God has given me a sorrowful lot, for everywhere I have found happiness in plenty. I cannot return even a fraction of the love I have been given, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from the west to Assam in the far east. I cannot imagine that I could ever repay this debt of love, so richly have I received. I can only say to the people, in the words which Saint Madhavadeva wrote to his guru: 'I can do nothing except bow before you.' I salute you all, with reverence and devotion.

16. STUDYING, TEACHING, WRITING

Study and Teaching

The Upanishad¹ has given us a command: 'Follow truth, and study and teach. Practise peace of mind, control of thought, and study and teach. Master the senses, and study and teach. Honour and serve the guest, and study and teach.' Along with the doing of all these duties goes the study and the teaching. The scriptures themselves use the image of a casket, in which all human duties are contained (like peas in a pod) between the encapsulating walls of the study and the teaching of the sacred books. Every duty should be carried out within this enclosing casket. For myself the command means: 'Appeal for gifts of land, and gifts of villages—and study and teach. Build up a Shanti-sena and study and teach. Work for village-oriented khadi and study and teach.' That is what I have been doing. The duty of study and of teaching has never been far from my mind, and I owe much to those great souls who commanded me to follow this principle.

I have been a student all my life; I have never ceased to be one. A man who has a taste for study can never give it up; he must seek knowledge of many kinds—spiritual knowledge, scientific knowledge, knowledge of the principles of health, of medicine and so on. That was my aim; I studied as wholeheartedly as any university student, and went on studying all through my bhoojan and gramdan pilgrimages.

Teaching is itself one form of study, and I have been teaching without a break since 1911. Educating the people is also a kind of teaching. For fourteen or fifteen years I gave public speeches; I must have spoken at least three times each day, which add up to around fourteen thousand speeches.

Three Stages

My education began, after a fashion, at Gagode in 1901, but most of it was acquired during the eleven years I spent at Baroda. During that period I read

literally thousands of books. I became acquainted with six languages, Marathi, Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, English and French, and read some of the greatest literature in each of them. During that time I read the Ramayana of Tulsidas in the original (Hindi) and in the Marathi translation. I read the great writers of Gujarat, including Narasinh Mehta and Akha Bhagat. In French I read Victor Hugo's 'Les Miserables'; in English poets such as Milton, Wordsworth and Browning made a great impression on me. I did not know much Sanskrit but I read the Gita. At that time, however, it was the books of the Marathi saints which influenced me most. That was only natural, since Marathi was my mother tongue, and no great effort was needed. I got by heart thousands of the spiritual hymns of Jnanadev, Namadev, Tukaram, Ekanath and Ramadas—about ten thousand verses, all told, from the five of them.

My mother died two years after I had left home to seek spiritual knowledge; I was with her at the time. I remembered a verse in Jnaneshwari²: 'No mother can equal the sacred Veda in its power to wean the heart from evil and prompt it towards the good.' So, that very day, I began to study the Vedas. That was in 1918; I continued it till 1969. During those fifty years I studied the Vedas, the Upanishads and the other Sanskrit spiritual books—I do not think that I missed out a single one. I read the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata, the Yogavasishtha, the Yoga-sutra, Brahma-sutra and Sankhya-sutra. Then I read the commentaries, twenty in Sanskrit, thirteen others, thirty-three in all. In this way I read a great deal of spiritual and religious literature. Not that I made a complete study of every book. There were some that I studied thoroughly, some that I committed to memory, but others I read in a more cursory fashion. I regard the Vedas, however, as the quintessence of them all.

Now, in 1975, I am an old man, and in my old age, following the bidding of Shankaracharya, I take refuge in two books, the Gita and the Vishnusahasranama. Day and night, waking or sleeping, the Sahasranama, the Thousand Names of the Lord Vishnu, are always with me.

Thus, in the first stage of life, came the influence of the five (Marathi) saints; in the second stage the main influence was that of the Vedas; in the third stage

the greatest influence is that of the Vishnusahasranama. What lies ahead must surely be freedom from all books whatsoever !

A Panoramic View

When I was a boy I read the monthly magazines, but I would skip the stories and poems, glance casually over the essays, and give all my attention to the historical material, the biographies, the scientific articles and such like. I read every one of the biographies to be found in the library at Baroda. I began at the letter A, with the life of Abdul Rahman. It gave a good account of the efforts of the Afghan people to keep their independence. Then came B, and a life of Buddha, which dealt with the eighty years of his life in eighty chapters. I used to read through big volumes in ten or fifteen minutes. In 1936 when I was in Faizpur, Pandit Nehru's Autobiography came out, and I glanced through it for ten or fifteen minutes. In one place he writes: 'I got married and we went to Kashmir. There was famine there, and poverty....' and then he starts describing the poverty of India. Nothing about his marriage except those three words, 'I got married'; all the rest about other things. 'This man,' I thought, 'has the power of detachment !'

In Sanskrit I read no romances, poetry or plays, except only Uttara-Ramacharitam. I did not read Shakuntala, and only two chapters of Raghuvansha. I did not even read the whole of Valmiki's Ramayana. I had begun teaching some- one and in that connection I read four or five chapters.

The demons, Mareecha and Subahu are described as brave and well-educated, and that much stuck in my mind—well-educated demons ! The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma-sutra were what I studied thoroughly. My friend Raghunath Dhotre used to read Marathi poetry and plays. He read them aloud to me, with dramatic gestures. He gave me a play called Keechakavadha to read, and I read it, but that was all. Sane Guruji gave me his book Patri, in which he had marked some ten or twelve poems. I read those poems, and later I looked through the whole book, but I did not read his other well-known book 'Shyamchi Aai' (Shyam's Mother).

I read only one of Shakespear's plays, and that was 'Julius Caesar', which happened to be a prescribed book at school. On the first page was a list of characters and their relationships. I kept my finger in that page as I read on, and when a new character appeared I checked him up—otherwise how was I to remember which was which? Another prescribed book was Scott's Ivanhoe. Three or four pages would be taken up in describing just one man. 'Why read all that?' I asked, only to be told, 'Because it is in the syllabus.' So I left it alone.

Tolstoy was a great man, each of his novels runs to a thousand pages. I took up 'War and Peace', read the beginning and the end, and put it down. But I read the Twenty-three Tales in full. Tolstoy himself says: 'These books of mine which people buy are of no real value. My short stories are my best work, and the first story, God sees the Truth, but Waits, is the best of all. I too liked that story very much.

I read Premchand's play Karbala. It is in Nagari script but uses Urdu words, and I read it to familiarise myself with those words. I used to look through Punjabi readers also for the sake of the Urdu vocabulary.

I read the whole of the Concise Oxford Dictionary—who else would do such a thing? I also read the Sanskrit dictionary Girvana Laghu Kosha, and a Tamil dictionary too. I studied ten or twelve books on English grammar.

The Study of the Gita

During my boyhood, Saint Jnaneshwar gave me a sense of reverence for the Gita. I was then about eight years old, and there was a copy of Jnaneshwari in the house. I took it up and read the first chapter. There was a tremendous description of imminent war—the conches blew, the earth trembled, the stars rained down from heaven like flowers of the Parijat tree.³ It seemed that universal destruction was at hand, and fearful warfare. Now, I thought happily, there will be something really worth while. But when I read on I was bitterly disappointed—the wretched Arjuna had cooled off ! Then in the second

chapter the Lord rebuked him, rebuked him so severely that my hopes began to revive; now, I thought, the battle will begin ! But what followed was an exposition of philosophy; it was too deep for me, I gave it up. This was my first introduction to the Gita, and I got the impression that there is no battle in it at all.

Then in High school I began to study Marathi literature. At that time I got as far as Jnaneshwari and read the whole of it. I read it as literature, but it made such an indelible impression on my mind that I decided to come back to it later when I could understand it properly.

Saint Jnaneshwar had taught me to revere the Gita; Lokamanya Tilak's⁴ Gita-rahasya (The Secret of the Gita) taught me to regard the study of it as essential. That was probably about 1912. I heard that Tilak had written the book in jail. I did not know Sanskrit then, but it was necessary to understand the Gita in order to understand Gita-rahasya, and so I began to study it. It took me thirty-two hours to read Lokamanya's Gita-rahasya, doing twenty-five pages an hour. I borrowed it from the library one Saturday evening and returned it on Monday morning.

My study of Gita-rahasya aroused a desire to go further, and to do some thinking on my own account, for some of the ideas which Lokamanya had put forward appealed to me, while others did not. My explorations therefore were of two kinds. On the one hand I reflected on the nature and meaning of life; on the other hand I acquainted myself with the ideas which had preceded and followed the Gita, its context of thought. It was easy enough to discover what followed, I had only to read the commentaries. It was a much more difficult task to study the currents of thought that had preceded it. But I had such a strong urge to do it that the difficulties were overcome, I did it. In the end it took me back to the Vedas, with their obscure language and archaic words, the language of a time when words themselves were being formed, so that I was driven right back to their root meanings. All this took a long time, but was well worth the labour, and as a result of all this study my faith in the Gita was fully confirmed. Then, so far as the life of a karmayogi would allow, I reflected on

the various religions, in order to understand them and compare them with the Gita. It was a marvellous panorama that opened before my eyes.

Ramayana and Bhagavata

From earliest childhood I have been listening to the recital of the Ramayana in my own home. There must have been very few days that passed without it. As I read and listened, it never occurred to me that this was something that had actually happened in history, or that there really had been a man named Ravana. I had never read of any ten-headed man in any of my history books, so that a book which speaks of such a man can never be regarded as history. Nor did I ever imagine that there was really a Dravidian named Kumbhakarna. Even as a child I understood, and was taught, that this was a war between the demons and the gods, a war that is being fought all the time within our own hearts. Ravana is the image of our demonic pride, Kumbhakarna the image of our sloth, Bibhishana the image of our better selves.

Can one imagine any devotee in the whole of India whose mind has never been captured, charmed, comforted and calmed by the Bhagavata? From Kerala to Kashmir, Kashmir to Kamarup, within this whole triangle there is no one who can escape the Bhagavata. And where no one can escape, how could I? I had to look at it, if only for my comparative study of the Gita. Saint Ekanatha made me read the eleventh chapter over and over again, and I must admit that while the Gita was my nourishing milk, the Bhagavata was the honey that sweetened it.

Regard for all Religions

In 1949, for the first time, I made a thorough study of the Koran Sharif. Before that I had read the English translation by Pickthall and Yusuf Ali's commentary. Then when I entered Kashmir during my bhoodan pilgrimage I looked into the translation produced by the Ahmadiya community. After reading Pickthall's English translation I began to study the Arabic. I would make out the words one

by one, but it was difficult to remember, and it was also a strain on my eyes, so I wrote out the whole thing in Nagari script and then I remembered it. Arabic seems to me to be easier than Urdu. Every Friday the Koran was recited on the radio for twenty minutes. I was in jail, and was able to listen regularly, and so to catch the correct pronunciation. Since 1949 I have been reading the Koran regularly.

While I was a student in High School, the Bible, the New Testament, came into my hands and I read it through. Later in connection with my study of religions, I read all the translations of the New Testament I could get. In 1955 when I was on tour in West Bengal some Christian men and women came to meet me and gave me a copy of the Bible, and I resumed my study of it that very day. I kept it up, and later when I reached Kerala the Bishops of the various churches came to visit me. They were pleased to see my Bible, with my markings and notes in it. They prayed according to their own custom, and blessed the bhoodan work, with which they showed much sympathy. Then in 1959 when I crossed the Pir Panjal to the Kashmir valley, we passed by a Christian mission. An old lady of eighty-five was standing ready to welcome us. I asked her if she had Schofield's Reference Bible, and she immediately went in and fetched her own copy to give me. In this way I was able to get various books quite easily, and I studied them in depth.

While I was still a boy, the Dhammapada came my way in a Marathi prose translation. Some years later I read some of it in the original Pali.⁵ I was engrossed in the Gita in those days, but nevertheless some sentences in the Dhammapada influenced me so much that in 'Sthitaprajna Darshan',⁶ I attempted to point out the relationship between the ultimate aims of Vedanta and Buddhist philosophy. It seemed to me that the Dhammapada was a kind of bridge between the teachings of saints like Namdeva and Kabir on the one hand, and those of the Upanishads and the Gita on the other, and I studied it very deeply from that point of view.

I first got a copy of the Granthsaheb,⁷ printed in Nagari script, by the kindness of the Shiromani Gurudwara Committee. I read it through from beginning to

end. From then on, the recital of the Japuji formed part of our morning prayer, so that we might study and experience the devotional practice of the Sikhs. I wanted to make a collection of Namadev's hymns. Nearly all of them are in Marathi, but there are a few in Hindustani also. I read through the Granthsaheb again, to look for them and make my choice, and in this way I got to know Guru Nanak and took him to my heart.

In the Company of Saints

In Hindi my studies have been chiefly of Tulsidas and Nanak, and while I made a thorough study of Tulsidas I paid less attention to Nanak, and of the rest I read only what happened to come my way. Beejak, Kabir's famous book, I read in 1918. How much I understood of it then, at the age of twenty-three, I do not know. But I got the impression that Kabir's thought was very much like the thought which Saint Jnaneshwar voiced in his Amrita-nubhava ('The Experience of the nectar'), and that Kabir owed something of his thinking to the Nirgunia and Sahajiya sects.⁸

At Sabarmati Ashram I had my first opportunity to see Tulsidas' Vinaya-Patrika. In those days, at the assembly for prayer, Pandit (Vishnu) Khare Shastri used to introduce the Ashram inmates to the writings of the saints, including some of the hymns of the Vinaya-Patrika. As a result I read the whole book three times over between 1918 and 1921, giving it my fullest attention. After that it lay in cold storage in my heart for the next seven or eight years. Then, a few years later, Balkoba⁹ started teaching music to the students of the Wardha Ashram, and taught them some new hymns from it. That made me pick up the Vinaya-Patrika and read it again, and for the next three years or so I was completely absorbed in it. I don't remember how often I read it during that time, but I knew a good deal of it by heart. Then it went into cold storage for another sixteen years. Later, after Bapu's death, I went to work for the re-settlement of the refugees,¹⁰ and the only book I took with me was the Vinaya-Patrika. I taught some of its most profound and meaningful hymns to Mahadevi, who was accompanying me, and during the next three years I pondered much over

them. Thirteen years later, during my bhoodan pilgrimage, the little children of a village school in Madhya Pradesh presented a copy of the book to me, and once more I began to study it.

I must have been about fifteen years old when the Nirnayasagar Press brought out a beautiful edition of the Bhagavata of Ekanath. I got hold of a copy. When I saw the size of the book I felt rather daunted, but in the end I tackled it, and read through the whole Bhagavata, regardless of whether I understood it or not. I had made up my mind to read one chapter a day. I don't remember which month it was, but only that it had thirty-one days, and that by the end of it the book had been finished. I had plucked up my courage to do it, thinking that when the writer has girded himself up to write, why should the reader accept defeat? I wonder how much I understood of that great book at that first reading, young as I was ! But Ekanath's devotion and the repetitiousness of his style did make some impression on me.

I closed the book and laid it down, marvelling that I had actually crossed that great ocean of print, and with a feeling of satisfaction that I had completed the task which I had set myself. Years passed before I opened it again. Then I needed to look at the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavata in order to compare it with the Gita, and I read Ekanath's book again. This time it gave me full satisfaction, boundless joy. Every page was rich in spiritual experience. I learned later that there is nothing in any Indian language which treats the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavata in so masterly a way. After that I would often dip into it here and there, as is my custom.

Meanwhile I had read Saint Ekanath's life-history. He captivated me, especially because I so easily lost my temper, and he was just the opposite, an ocean of tranquillity. The story of his life gave me the medicine I needed, and was very good for me. As I studied the Bhagavata, the secret of Ekanath's life was revealed to me. The more I reflected on it, the greater his stature became in my eyes. I feel that Mahatma Gandhi is his counterpart in the present age, in this and in many other ways.

I read the books of Saint Ramadas while I was still a boy. I was quite crazy about him, and took him as my model. His writings were so simple and straightforward that they introduced me to spiritual literature in an easy, natural way. From that starting point I followed on by easy gradual steps to my first acquaintance with saint Jnanadev, and then of the Sanskrit Vedas. I read Ramadas' books when I was a mere boy, when my young mind could grasp little of their meaning. But what I did understand left an impression so deep that it has lasted to this day. Devotion, detachment, discernment, many matters of this kind are to be found in his teaching, but the thing that impressed me most was his longing for friendly intercourse with his fellow-men.

Literature and Language

During my bhoodan pilgrimage it behoved me to study the literatures of the various provincial languages of India so that I might be able to touch the hearts of the people. It was a task which I undertook out of pure love. I am a student of world literature, and have an extraordinary respect for men of letters and their writings. I studied Marathi intensively, and in order to satisfy my spiritual needs I studied Sanskrit along with it. Even then I was greatly interested in the etymology and relationships of words, and in the question of how words were formed and the course of their development. In tracing the development of ideas it is necessary also to trace the history of words, and that in its turn demands the study of a number of languages. My main purpose, however, in learning the languages of India, was to be able to touch the hearts of the people and win their confidence.

I therefore made a thorough study of the spiritual literature of each State I visited; from Assam to Kerala, and a good deal of it I got by heart. I think I probably remember something like fifty thousand verses. In addition, I have studied the ancient Arabic, Persian, Ardha-magadhi¹¹ and Pali languages, and also some Chinese. At one time during my bhoodan pilgrimage a Japanese brother joined us for three months, and from him I had an hour's lesson in

Japanese every day. Then came a German girl, and with her help I learned some German. Another foreign brother taught me Esperanto. Learning these various languages helps one to become familiar with words, and I am fully conscious of the power of words. But for the word to reveal itself one must grasp its inner essence, and that cannot be done, in my view, unless the word is savoured, turned over and over, and thoroughly digested.

The Science of Ayurvedic Medicine

I have also studied books on Vaidyaka, the ayurvedic system of medicine. I read my first book in 1923, when I went to jail at the time of the Flag Satyagraha. A Vaidya, an Ayurvedic doctor from Karnataka, was in jail with me, and with his help I read the book by Vagbhata. The book is in Sanskrit, So I could understand it without difficulty. Next, I read the treatise of Charaka. The book is beautifully written in short sentences and it shows what meticulously careful observations were made even in those ancient times. The third book I read is named Sharangadhara. Although it is attributed to Patanjali, it is not possible to say whether it was actually written by him or by someone else.

The Science of Economics

I read Karl Marx's great book Capital, the Communist 'Bible'. While I was in prison during the Individual Satyagraha movement in 1940, a Communist friend said to me: 'I understand that you have not yet read any Communist literature; it's well worth reading.' 'Then,' I responded, 'will you please read some of it to me while I am spinning?' So he chose what he wished and read it to me. I had in fact already been able to read Marx's Capital before I went to jail, so I had no difficulty in understanding what he read. I used to listen for an hour and a half every day, and we kept it up for some months. Even though he read only selections, the constant repetition of ideas made a strong impression on my mind. It is not surprising that the minds of our young people, far from being

bored by this faulty repetitive style, are on the contrary charmed by it. Besides Marx, I also read Tolstoy, Ruskin and other writers on the subject.

Sharing Knowledge

People like me, who live in the freedom of joy, are in bondage to nothing in this external world; but they do feel the bonds of love, and they are eager to pass on to others, before they die, whatever may be of public benefit in the knowledge they have gained. As old age comes on and the prospect of death lies ahead they desire the more strongly to make over this knowledge to society once for all; when they have done so they feel free to depart to that real home where they long to be.

When I think of this, I really look forward to the time when I shall cast off this physical body and nestle in the cradle of the Lord. Nevertheless, before I pass away, I also wish to make society a gift of whatever knowledge I have gathered—whether it proves to be true knowledge, or some kind of ignorance which I have mistaken for knowledge.

Abhidheyam parama-samyam samanvayena

‘The goal is the supreme samya (equanimity¹² in spirit and equality in outward circumstances) attained by a linked chain of thought.’

I direct my thinking towards growth in mutual understanding, hoping that in the end I may thus attain this goal. We need to accept a progressive enlargement of understanding as the method of our thinking, and to aim at equanimity as the result. I have called the Gita the Samyayoga, the Yoga of equanimity, because the word samya, equanimity, lies at the very basis of its teaching. The thing to be attained is equanimity, the method is a progressive linking together of more and more strands of thought. My own philosophical discourses have been given from this perspective, and my philosophical writings take Samyayoga as the fruit to be sought, and samanvaya, a constantly enlarging linkage of ideas, as the method to be followed.

In 1923 I wrote four articles on the study of the Upanishads in the monthly Maharashtra-Dharma¹³; these were published in book form as 'Upanishadancha Abhyasa'. In my view the philosophy of the Upanishads is most exalted. The Gita holds a mother's place in my heart, and rightly so; but I also know that the Upanishads are my mother's mother, and I revere them accordingly. I have studied and meditated on them for many years in that spirit, and this book is a kind of distillation of their essence. It is the first thing I wrote; it is difficult to understand, but it has depth, and even now I feel no need to make any great change in it. If it had been written today it would have been in a simpler style, but there would have been no change in the thought.

This study of the Upanishads was not consciously linked with the Lord Buddha, but nevertheless I ended the book with a quotation from the Dhammapada. In Sthitaprajna-Darshan (The Steadfast Wisdom) I did point out the relationship between Buddhist and Vedic thought. In the winter of 1944 I was in Seoni jail, and the book originated in some lectures which I gave to a group of people there on the Gita's conception of 'a man of steadfast wisdom'. These lectures were published, and the book contains the interpretation of the subject which I had reached after thirty years of reverent study and meditation. Thus from 1923 to 1944 the Buddhists had never been far from my thought, and up to 1960 I continued to reflect on the need to bring together Buddhist philosophy and the Vedanta. When I use these terms, 'Buddhist philosophy' and 'Vedanta', I mean to denote two main streams of Indian thought. On the one hand, there are schools of philosophy and spiritual practice which take no account of God; on the other hand there are those who consider God's help to be essential. Buddhist philosophy relies on the Atma, the Self; Vedanta calls for God's grace. These two types of thought must be brought together; only then can there be a satisfying philosophy, and only then a satisfying way of life. There are therefore no 'isms' in any of the books I have written. Look at my Gita-Pravachan (Talks on the Gita); you will find no 'isms' there. The book deals with matters of everyday conduct, but it neither ignores the basic spiritual thought nor gets involved in any argument about it.

In 'Talks on the Gita' I had presented the Samyayoga of the Gita in a popular style, and I had been thinking for a long time of doing what I could to link it up in a chain of Sanskrit aphorisms, I felt an urge to compose these sutras during the months which I spent among the dense forests of Koraput district in the course of my bhoodan pilgrimage in Orissa. Sutas can be found in Marathi in the original version of 'Talks on the Gita' , but the Sanskrit sutras convey a much wider meaning, and I find them useful for my own thinking. From time to time, they are churned around in my mind. Thought-provoking words from the Vedas, the Upanishads etc. can be found in them. In Samya-sutra (Collection of these aphorisms on equanimity) also, my aim has been to build up the interconnections of thought.

The Essence of our Common Prayer

I have written some books also to help people to appreciate the essence of the prayers we use. Throughout India, during the independence movement, thousands of satyagrahis recited daily in their evening prayer the verses of the Gita which describe the 'man of steadfast wisdom'. Even now these verses form part of the prayer at a number of places, and we too recite them in our daily evening prayer. I have written my own commentary on these verses in Sthitaprajna-Darshan.

In the morning prayer we recite the Ishavasya Upanishad. I have written about that in my Ishavasya Vritti, which I wrote at Babu's behest. It was when I went to see Gandhiji in the Sassoon Hospital in Pune.¹⁴ He then told me of his wish that I should write something on the Ishavasya, and I agreed to do so; but it was not possible just then to find the time, so intensive were the activities in which I was then involved. Later, after the Harijan tour in Travancore Gandhiji gave me orders again. 'You may wait, if you wish, for a chance to write something that will satisfy your own mind, but you must give me something now, for my own use, even if it is only a little note.' So I wrote and gave him a short note accordingly. This was not intended for publication, but while I was in jail, some friends outside got it published, and a copy somehow reached the

jail. That alerted me, and I spent two months reflecting on it and writing the short commentary which I named Ishavasya Vritti. There are many places where it differs from earlier commentaries, but nowhere does it contradict them. The text can easily bear various interpretations. Moreover, if thought progresses and grows, it is a fulfilment of the labours of the earlier commentators. Where is the need to write, if one has nothing new to say? The Ishavasya Upanishad contains in brief the whole discipline required of a spiritual aspirant, and is therefore very valuable for recollection at the beginning of each day.

Vedas: A Mass of Letters

On our pilgrimage we would start out singing the hymn from the Samaveda which celebrates the seasons of the year, welcoming spring and summer, rains and cold alike. That hymn was a favourite, but when the heavens opened and the rain poured down we chose another, 'May He shower on us from Heaven', about the showers of Heavenly blessing. In this way the Vedas gave us much joy.

Of all Indian literature, it is the Vedas, the Vedanta (Upanishads) and the Gita which have had the greatest influence on me. If I were compelled to name only a single book I would undoubtedly choose the Gita, but I have studied the Vedas also for years. My mother died in 1918, and I started to study them on the very day on which she passed away.

For practical knowledge we need to study many books, but for spiritual benefit one book alone is sufficient. That one book should be read again and again to extract all the nourishment it can provide. I read and re-read the Vedas from 1918 to 1969. It is not enough just to glance through them. They are very ancient, and one needs years to penetrate into the meaning of each word used. I studied them for fifty years, and got by heart between four and five thousand verses. Out of these I selected 1319 verses which make up the book Rigveda-Sar, The Essence of the Rigveda. The book is the fruit of fifty years of study. It has been said of the Vedas that they consist not of words, but of separate

letters of the alphabet. To group these letters into words is in effect to write a commentary. A commentary is only a secondary thing, the text—the letters—is primary. Translations are of no use at all. How are you going to translate the word agni into English? The English word 'fire' is also used to translate vahni, but agni and vahni cannot be equated. The first words of the first hymn of the Rigveda are: Agnimile purohitam; vahni will not do in that context. Neither translation nor commentary constitutes the Vedas. The Veda means its samhita, the mass of letters. If I comment on it, it becomes 'my' Veda; if I break it up into words, it is also 'my' Veda. So all I did was to publish a selection of some of the hymns I had committed to memory. The Rigveda contains 10,558 hymns, of which I chose about one-eighth (1319) for publication, so as to make recitation easier.

In the Service of the Acharyas

I was attracted by Shankaracharya's thought because I found no narrow-mindedness in his attitude to the concept of spiritual discipline. He does not let any form of spiritual discipline become a burden; it is meant to liberate, not to constrain.

I owe a great debt to Shankaracharya, and the only way to pay it is to free myself from the feeling that I 'am' this physical body. I struggle on towards this goal, and I believe that by the grace of God I shall succeed. Meanwhile I might also repay my debt by sharing with others what I have received from him, and I therefore made a selection of his poems, hymns of praise etc., under the title Guru-bodh. This was published during my bhoodan tour in Kerala, while I was at Kaladi, Shankaracharya's birth place. There I laid it as my offering at his feet.

I also made a selection of passages from Manusmriti. I had named my 'essence' of Shankaracharya's teaching Guru-bodh, but I did not call the new book Manu-bodh, I called it Manushasanam, The Edicts of Manu. The two books differ. Shankaracharya's purpose was to teach, not to make laws, and teaching leaves both the teacher and the taught their freedom—you may follow the teaching or

not, as you please. Manu's words are edicts, they are commands. The Manusmriti lays down the duty of a father, a son, a brother, a ruler, everyone. In Valmiki's Ramayana, when Rama is in doubt about what to do, he says: 'If I were to act in this way, what would Manu say?' That means that he held that one should act in accordance with the edicts of Manu. Similarly in the Gita Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: 'O Arjuna, I am imparting to you what in the beginning I imparted to the Sun; the Sun imparted it to Manu, and thus it became known'. According to the Gita, Manu was the first in human society to follow the yoga of action, and we are all his progeny. The very word manava, a human being, means 'the people of Manu'. I am saying all this to explain why I called my book The Edicts of Manu.

What Manu says is like medicine—it is a good thing even when it tastes bitter. His book deals with sociology, but the times in which he wrote were different from the present ones, and therefore what he says cannot all be taken literally today. Some of it in fact is completely off the mark, so that one must exercise much discrimination in choosing what is appropriate. To give you an example: as a boy I was much influenced by Manu's commands, and I stopped wearing shoes because he decreed that students should go without them. Going barefoot in the fierce heat of Baroda had a bad effect on my eyes. In Manu's time students probably lived in Ashrams where there was no need for shoes. So I omitted that verse from my selections; that is what I mean by exercising discrimination.

My reverence for Manu is a matter of faith, and I regard that as very important. It is true that one should think for oneself and use one's own discretion, but this discretion also needs a foundation. I do not regret that my eyes suffered because I obeyed Manu Maharaj's commands. On the contrary it did me good, because it strengthened my convictions.

Many people now-a-days find Manu very irritating, and with good reason, for Manusmriti is full of mutually contradictory ideas. I do not think that Manu himself was the author of all of them; there must have been many later interpolations of various kinds. The statements which make people angry are

those which endorse social inequalities and if these are removed Manu is not discredited, for what he stood for was not inequality but good order. When Manu deals with mukti, liberation, he points out that one who draws near to God, and gains that highest knowledge, knowledge of the Supreme, attains to equality with all. That shows that Manu's social order was designed to lead towards equality; the ideas of inequality which have found their way into Manusmriti should never have been admitted, and have done harm to the country¹⁵. I have therefore left them out, and chosen only those parts which are essential to an understanding of Manu's basic teaching.

In the Service of Mutual Goodwill

Science has made the world smaller, and it tends to bring all human beings closer to one another. That being so, how can things work smoothly if human society remains divided, and each group regards itself as the highest and looks down on all the rest? We need to understand one another, to know one another as we really are.

My book of selections from the Holy Koran, Kuran-Sar (The Essence of the Koran), is a little effort to promote this understanding. With the same purpose I made a new arrangement of Dhammapada, and put my thoughts on the Gita before the public in Gita-Pravachan (Talks on the Gita). The same purpose also inspired the publication of Christa-Dharma-Sar (The Essence of the Christian Teachings) consisting of selections from the New Testament. The aim of my bhoodan pilgrimage, year after year, was this—to bring people together in heart-unity; indeed, my whole life's work has been inspired by this same purpose.

I had known the Dhammapada from boyhood, and had studied it in detail: its verses had arranged themselves in my mind in a systematic order, different from the arrangement usually adopted today, by which it is presented as a series of well-worded but disconnected maxims, whereby its all-embracing vision is somewhat obscured. I had felt for a long time that I should place the Dhammapada before the public in the order in which it had fixed itself in my

own mind. It was a bold thing to do, but bold as it was I did it in great humility. It was published as Dhammapada Navasamhita, 'a new arrangement of the Dhammapada'.

I have had many satisfactions in the course of my life. The latest, and probably the most satisfying of them all, is the Samanasuttam.

I had said a number of times to my Jain friends that they should have a book about their religion comparable to the Gita which gives the essence of the Vedic religion in seven hundred verses, or to the Dhammapada of the Buddhists, thanks to which the Buddhist religion is known twenty-five hundred years after its birth. For the Jains this was difficult, they have many sects and many books, but no one book which holds among them a position like that of the Bible or the Koran. I suggested again and again that their learned munis should come together for consultation and discussion, in order to bring out the best possible book on the essence of Jainism. At last Varniji, a scholar in Jain philosophy, was attracted by what I was saying. He prepared a book on the essence of Jainism, a thousand copies of which were printed and sent to scholars, both Jains and others. In accordance with suggestions made by these scholars some of the verses originally chosen were deleted, and others added. This revised book was published as Jinnadhammam. I then urged that a general assembly should be held to discuss it. The same was held wherein some three hundred munis, acharyas and other scholars took part. There ensued a series of discussions as a result of which both the name and the form of the book were changed. In the end, with unanimous approval, it was published as Shramanasuktam, which in Ardhamagadhi becomes Samanasuttam. This was a big thing, something which had not been achieved during the past fifteen hundred years or so. Though I was instrumental in getting it done, I am sure that it was possible only by the grace of Lord Mahavir.

During my bhoodan journeys in Orissa I got an opportunity to study the Bhagavata of Jagannatha Das, one of the great devotees. I chose the eleventh chapter for study, and, in the course of our walk we would all stop for half an hour or more, and sit down in some field or quiet place to study it together. I

would compare it with the original in Sanskrit, and with Ekanath's Marathi Bhagavata, along with the commentary of Shridhar. Bhagavata-Dharma-Sar was the result of this study.

At the beginning of our journey into Kashmir we studied Japuji together for a few days. Four years later the talks which I gave then were collected and published as Japuji. This book is intended not only for the Sikhs but for all humanity, and my commentary is written from that universal standpoint. Guru Nanak ought not to be identified with any one religious sect. He travelled the whole of northern India from the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna to Bhuvaneshwar and Jagannath Puri. 'The main problem,' he said, 'is how we may tear down the veil of falsehood and reach Truth. Meditation and reflection benefit only the truthful. And the way to become truthful is to follow the path prescribed by the Lord, to obey His orders, to follow His instructions.' That is Guru Nanak's teaching. His whole spiritual discipline can be summed up in two words: nirbhau, without fear, and nirvairu, without enmity. In these two words lies the solution of the problems facing humanity today. For the purpose of our work I add another word, nishpaksha, without partisanship. The Japuji itself points to this quality when it says that 'if a man gives thought to it, he would not tread the sectarian path'.

I agreed to the publication of Japuji, hoping that it would provide good material for the Shanti-sena to study.

The Gifts of the Saints

The chief fruit of my pilgrimage was bhoodan-gramdan, but there were many lesser fruits also. Whatever studies I undertook during that time were intended not for my own benefit but for sharing with others. One of these lesser fruits was the book of selections from the Namaghosha of Shri Madhavadeva, the great saint of Assam. From the point of view of my pilgrimage it may be called a 'lesser' fruit, but it is no small thing in its usefulness to the public, for it can contribute to heart-unity among the peoples of India.

I have made very little study of Assamese spiritual writings, but Namaghosha attracted me very much. In Assamese literature it is probably second to none, and deserves a place of honour among writings in all Indian languages. Madhavadeva has made the remembrance of the name of God the central focus, and around that he has woven many suggestive references to the real values of life. I read the book over and over again, and many of its verses became fixed in my memory. It gave me the same kind of pleasure as the company of a friend. I made selections for my own use, and later it was decided to publish this Namaghosha-Sar for the use of aspirants to the spiritual life.

After twelve years of bhoodan pilgrimage I arrived in Raipur for the Sarvodaya Conference, which I had not been able to attend for the past two or three years. When the Raipur meeting resolved to serve the trinity of sulabha gramdan, village-oriented khadi, and Shanti-sena, there came into my mind a line in Vinayapatrika about another trinity:

‘To Rama, Lakshmana and Sita I bow,
Who to Tulsi their heavenly friendliness show.’

I became totally absorbed in that verse, and repeated it inwardly as I travelled towards Sevagram, where I was to make public the new direction which khadi was to take. On my way there I passed through the little village of Darchura. The children of the primary school gave me a copy of Vinayapatrika, in which they had written, ‘With love to Vinobaji’. The gift brought me unbounded pleasure, for school children now-a-days tend to be somewhat lacking in discipline and reverence, so that to be given a copy of Vinayapatrika by school children seemed to me a unique and holy thing, and I began to study the book for the third time. For the next ten months I was lost in that ocean of the nectar of love, and was moved to publish an abridged edition of the book for my fellow-workers. This shortened version is called Vinayanjali.

Tukaram has helped me a great deal in self-examination and self-purification. I used to listen to my mother singing his songs in her sweet voice, and even today the memory brings tears to my eyes. I planned to choose about a

hundred of those abhangas¹⁶ (devotional songs) which most appealed to me, and put them before the readers of Maharashtra-Dharma,¹⁷ along with a brief commentary. Each issue of this weekly paper carried one abhanga, but the project could not be completed. Whatever did appear was collected in book form as 'Santanacha Prasad'. Later on I also selected some of Tukaram's devotional hymns and published them as 'Tukaramanchi Bhajane'.

I had read the Bhagavata of Saint Ekanath early in life. Later on I turned to his abhangas in order to discover his individual experience, and read the Gatha, the volume of his songs. All my reading in religion and philosophy has been done for my own satisfaction, to help me in my own thinking. For this purpose, as the years passed, I gradually built up my own personal collection of gems of experience from Ekanath's Gatha, and this was published for the first time while I was in jail in 1940. When the time came for a second edition I revised it very thoroughly, discarding some abhangas and adding others, and changing the arrangement a little. Now I feel satisfied both with the material selected and with the presentation.

Such volumes of selections are sometimes made in order to awaken the readers' interest and induce them to read the original works in full. My object is exactly the opposite of this. My purpose is to enable a spiritual seeker to find all that he needs by assimilating the selected passages, so that he has no need to wade through the original great tomes, and is saved all the hard labour which I had to undergo. My book of Ekanath's abhangas, selection though it is, is a complete whole, and I feel sure that Saint Ekanath himself would be satisfied with it !

Saint Namadev was the great 'publicist' of Maharashtra ! He made the name 'Vitthal' famous all over India. He even wrote poems in the Punjabi language, some of which have been included in the Granthasaheb of the Sikhs. He was an extremely prolific and versatile poet, and no definitive Gatha or collection of his work is therefore available. The work of selection was consequently very laborious. Then while I was in jail I heard that the Gatha from which I had made my selection had been lost, and I had to do all the work again from

another copy. Then the lost book turned up again, which was fortunate, for I could then compare my two versions. The fruit of all this labour is a choice collection of Saint Namadev's devotional songs, sweet as nectar as they are. The words are filled to the brim with a selfless love of God, and will surely help spiritual seekers on the path to inward purity.

Saint Ramadas has written a lot, but his two greatest books are Dasabodha and 'Manache Shloka'. I know the 'Manache Shloka' by heart. I have read the Dasabodha times without number, and have chosen for my own use what appeared to me to be the essence of it; I call it Bodhabindu. 'Manache Shloka' is a work of divine inspiration. The volume of Ramadas' collected abhangas has been continually before me, and it is natural that a number of them should have become fixed in my memory. They have all been published in book form as 'Ramdasanchi Bhajane', Hymns of Ramadas.

More of my own thought has been poured into my books 'Jnanadevanchi Bhajane' (Hymns of Jnanadev) and the Chintanika (Reflections) on it, than into any other of my books except Gitai and Gitai-Kosh. I cannot make a better selection of Jnanadev's devotional songs, and as for the Chintanika, it has a sweetness which can never grow stale.¹⁸

The Chintanika does not treat every hymn in the same way. Sometimes there is an extensive commentary, sometimes a brief note on the essence, sometimes a simple translation, sometimes a piece of free-ranging discursive thought. I, whose reflections these are, have put down whatever I felt at the time, and I would like every reader to interpret the book for himself in the way that will best purify his own life. The Chintanika only suggests what direction to take. It is a work based on my own view of the successive steps of sadhana, the spiritual quest or discipline. Whether or not it would please Saint Jnanadev himself depends on how far I have succeeded in becoming one in spirit with him. But I do not trouble myself about that. I do know this much that I have identified with Jnanadev more closely than with any other man.

Discharging a Debt to the Word

The pattern of my life has been one of experiment born of reflection and of reflection born of experiment. I call this nididhyasa, a state of concentrated contemplation in which ideas flash into the mind like living sparks. I do not usually feel disposed to write them down, but at one time when I was in a particular state of mind I did feel the urge to record them—not all of them, only some of the ideas that occurred to me. They are to be found in Vichar-pothi, (Random Reflections). Fortunately this urge did not last long; a few days later it faded away.

I had no thought of publishing Vichar-pothi, but some inquisitive persons began to make copies of it, and about one hundred and fifty such copies came into existence during the next twelve years. But now-a-days bad handwriting and careless mistakes have become all too common, and in addition not all the copies were made direct from the original. As a result, many errors crept in, and some sentences were rendered completely meaningless. It therefore became necessary to publish an authentic version.

These thoughts are not like apophthegms. An apophthegm has a form, but these are rather formless. Nor can they be called aphorisms, since an aphorism is bound by logic, while these are free. What are they then? I call them 'mutterings'. They certainly owe much to the old scriptures, but they are nevertheless my own independent ideas. If I may be forgiven for using a phrase of Jnanadev they are an attempt to discharge my debt to language, to the Word.

My Greatest Service

'Vinya,' my mother had said, 'why don't you translate the Gita yourself, into simple Marathi verse? You can surely do it !' It was my mother's faith in me which led to my writing the Gitai. As the Gita is written in Sanskrit, the language barrier prevents most of our Marathi people from studying it in depth and pondering over its teaching. I had wanted for a long time to make a

Marathi rendering, but it was not until 1930 that conditions were favourable, and the necessary mental concentration was possible.

When I was studying the meaning of the Gita, it had taken me several years to absorb the fifth chapter. I consider that chapter to be the key to the whole book, and the key to that chapter is in the eighteenth verse of the fourth chapter: 'inaction in action, and action in inaction'. The meaning of those words, as it revealed itself to me, casts its shadow over the whole of my Talks on the Gita.

I began writing the Gitai at five o' clock in the morning on October 7, 1930, after morning prayer. I started on that fifth chapter, for:

In music, the fifth note of the scale,
In colour, the fifth tint of the rainbow,
So, in the Gita, is the fifth of the chapters
worthy of reverence from seekers of the Path.

The task of writing was completed on February 6, 1931.

From my point of view, however, the task did not end with the writing; the writing must satisfy a practical test. The test I chose was to teach my Gitai to a class of little girls in the Ashram. Wherever they found the language difficult, I changed it. Then I asked some friends for their suggestions, and considered what they said. The final version for publication was prepared in 1932 in Dhulia jail, and I was still in the jail when the first edition was published. My book Gita-Pravachan (Talks on the Gita) was born during that same period in jail. As I talked, my words were taken down by Sane Guruji's auspicious hand. As God willed, these talks have now been translated into nearly all the languages of India, and are of service to the people throughout the country. The Bhagvad-Gita was told on the battlefield; and that is why it has a different lustre, no other treatise can match her. The Lord Himself told the Gita again, which is known as Anugita. But it is not even a pale shadow of the original. My writings and talks on the Gita elsewhere would not have the magic touch that these 'Talks' have. These were delivered in jail, which for us was a battlefield,

before the soldiers in the freedom struggle. The atmosphere in the jail at that time was charged with a rare sacredness.

The Talks put the essence of the Gita into simple language and so bring it within the reach of the common man. However, there was still a need of additional aid for those who wished to make a verse-by-verse study, and there was also a demand for a dictionary to explain words occurring in the Gitai. I took no notice of these demands, however, as I knew that I should have no time for the work. Moreover, a dictionary of the Gitai would need to be based on a finalised version of the text. My thoughts were already moving in this direction, and every new edition of the Gitai contained some revision of the text. Later, the Individual Satyagraha and Quit India movement gave me a whole five years of free time (in jail), during which I even observed silence for a few months. At that time I was able to complete the revision of the Gitai text.

After I was released, my younger brother Shivaji and I gave seven months, in 1945-46, to working together at the dictionary, and in this way the whole Gitai-Kosh came to be completed. When it was finished, I simply laid it aside, as it is my natural instinct to do. People were pressing me to publish it immediately, but I felt that a few years ought to pass before I did so. The understanding becomes deeper with the time. So we waited, and then we both went through the whole Kosh again; the revision took us five months.

There is one respect in which the Kosh is just the opposite of the Gitai. In the Gitai I had put aside my own individuality, whereas the Kosh is full of it; in other words, it reflects my own way of thinking about the Gita. I would never say, however, that everyone should think as I do. I myself am not bound to my own point of view—I might think differently tomorrow ! I feel no need now to change a word in the text of the Gitai, but the Kosh is concerned with meaning and thoughts about meaning can change for the better. When we revised the Kosh which we had written four years earlier it became a new book. But a line has to be drawn somewhere in this process, and at that time we did draw a line and allow the book to be published.

I have noticed that scholars find the Kosh helpful, but ordinary readers have neither the time nor the skill to use it for critical study of meanings. For them, therefore, I thought it would be good to print a commentary on each verse immediately below the verse itself. This plan has been carried out in the Gitai-Chintanika, which contains most of the important notes found in the Kosh, and a few new ones in addition. I also had a notebook in which I had from time to time jotted down comments on certain verses as they occurred to me, and some of this material too has been included. One may say, therefore, that the Gitai-Chintanika reflects my thought as it has developed up to the present. 'Talks on the Gita', 'The Steadfast Wisdom' and the Gitai-Chintanika together present the Gita from the standpoint of Samyayoga, so far as I have understood it. It may be that in course of time my other services to the world will be forgotten, but I believe that the Gitai and the Gita-Pravachan (Talks on the Gita) will not be forgotten, they will continue to give service. I say this because when I wrote the Gitai, and when I gave the Talks on the Gita, I did so in a state of samadhi, in that state of consciousness which transcends the world.

'There is Nothing of Vinya in it'¹⁹

None of the books I have written, are really mine. I am merely a servant of my Lord.

I have received something from the Masters, and that I distribute. The poet says: 'Even though I should swim like a fish in Thy vast and boundless ocean of knowledge, my thirsting mind could never be satisfied.' I am simply sharing with others some part of the wealth of thought I have received. I am just a retail trader, selling the goods I get from the big wholesale dealers. 'The message is that of the Saints. There is nothing of Vinya in it.'

17. Laboratories for Living

I walked through India for a full thirteen years, and after that for four and a half years or so I travelled about by car, visiting all the States and almost every district. In the course of these journeys I established six Ashrams, and I am glad to say that they are giving a good and useful public service.

I call these Ashrams experimental laboratories. A laboratory is situated in some quiet spot, not in the middle of the market-place. But the experiments it makes, and the material it uses, have a social purpose. The experiments are made in controlled conditions, but the results obtained are relevant to society as a whole.

All such work, formerly carried on by Ashrams, has come to an end with the passage of time. The Ashrams have ceased to exist, and our culture has consequently decayed. True, thanks to Shankara and Ramanuja, some monasteries have survived, and have kept some spirit of enquiry alive. But Ashrams concerned with social experiment no longer existed until, in our own century, such men as Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Shradhdhanand and Sri Aurobindo began to revive them. It was Gandhiji however whose experiments linked them directly with the people. He put his plan very clearly before the public. 'Our service in the Ashram,' he said, 'must not be incompatible with the welfare of the world as a whole, and we therefore observe the eleven vows in our work.'

Today we can carry this service further. There may be differences of detail in the practice of the various Ashrams, but there is none in their basic purpose. While speaking on one occasion about the starting of the Ashrams, I said that the bhoodan movement and the Ashrams are two aspects of the same undertaking. A parallel may be found in science. A discovery is made in the field of pure science; it is then put to use in society, and applied science is developed. Pure science forms the basis of applied science, applied science enables pure science to be used and disseminated. The two complement one another.

Our Ashrams similarly are complementary to our social programme. The thinking carried on in the Ashram will energize the work outside, and act as a source of inspiration and of guidance. The work carried on outside is a witness to the achievement of the Ashrams; it allows their light to shine out in practice, just as the achievements of pure science shine out in the practical uses to which they are put.

Our Ashrams must serve as power-houses for the areas in which they are placed. Let the power be felt throughout the neighbourhood, the power to build the kind of society to which we are committed: a society that manages its affairs non-violently, is unified by love and stands on its own feet, self-reliant and co-operative. Such a village society provides the best education, both spiritual and scientific, and takes care that every household should have full productive work. Such a village has become a joint family whose members seek to promote the common welfare, both material and spiritual. This is the kind of society the power-house should envisage, and its influence should be felt for twenty miles around. There may be another power-house for the next locality, so that the whole region may be covered.

This is what I hope that an Ashram will be and do. Our chief task is the creation of a wholly non-violent human society—non-violent, strong, self-reliant, self-confident, free from fear and hatred. Where, you may ask, could such 'power-houses' be built? I answer, wherever the members of the Ashram feel the power within themselves.

I set up Ashrams at a number of places in India, three in the far north, far east, and far south respectively, and three in more central regions. If they have life in them, they can be a means of influencing the whole country. Shankaracharya established Ashrams at the far corners of the country in an age when it was not possible for them to keep in touch with one another. In each of these Ashrams, so far apart, he placed a man whom he trusted, in the faith that they would be sources of light. And so it came to pass; that is what they were. If now, after twelve hundred years, time has somewhat dimmed their

lustre, that is only natural. On the whole, they have been of great service to India.

In these days we have the means of speedy travel, so to set up six Ashrams is no great matter, but they will be of no service at all if they are not founded on devotion to God. Each of these six Ashrams has its own distinctive purpose.

1. The Samanvaya Ashram, Bodhgaya, Bihar

I set up the Samanvaya Ashram on April 18th, 1954, and I chose Bodhgaya for a particular reason. Indian culture and life have evolved through a process of synthesis, and are based on two things—Brahmavidya or spiritual knowledge, and the concept of non-violence towards all living creatures. I expect the Samanvaya Ashram to undertake a study of the various schools of thought along with experiments in practical living.

The Shankara Math at Bodhgaya gave me a plot of land which is right opposite the Buddha Mandir. It is a quiet peaceful place, and it seemed to me that it might be well situated for linking various streams of thought together. At Bodhgaya there are Buddhist temples belonging to many countries—China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka and so on—with which the Ashram might be in touch. I suggested that its members should meet the pilgrims and Buddhist Bhikkus who visit Bodhgaya, for a mutual sharing of spiritual experience, offer them hospitality in the Indian way, and so build up an international fellowship. They might also, I said, plan a special pilgrimage each year on Buddha Purnima.¹ In India we do pay some attention to personal cleanliness but too little to public sanitation. I would therefore like to see the whole of Bodhgaya kept perfectly clean. If that work were to be properly done, visitors from abroad would see a standard of cleanliness here which would be both a service to them and a practical demonstration of our ideals. We should look upon cleaning, equally with physical labour, as a part of our daily worship. Besides the exchange of ideas and fellowship with foreign guests, I also wanted Bodhgaya to serve as a retreat for the bhodan workers of Bihar, a place where they could relax and enjoy peace of mind.

As for the spiritual aspirants who would be regular residents, I wanted them to live a balanced life and not become in any way one-sided. They should maintain themselves by physical labour, and not depend on any gifts of money, but on their own productive work, or if need be on gifts of such work from others. As for the cost of buildings, however, I would not exclude gifts of money for these, for I know that we are not doing our work in ideal conditions. There is no escape from the duty of serving our neighbours, but the neighbourhood need not be more than a small one. Even a tiny lamp banishes the darkness so far as its light extends. We should serve our neighbours in the same way, remembering to encourage the development of their own potential. I have already described² how the statue of Bharata and Rama had come to me as a divine gift when I went to Paunar in 1938 and began work there. The Samanvaya Ashram had a similar blessing. When the Ashram was started and they began to dig a well for water, they found a beautiful image of the Lord Buddha buried in the earth, and set it up in a place of honour. This gave me great satisfaction; I felt that the work of the Ashram had received a divine blessing.

2. The Brahmagyia Mandir, Paunar (Maharashtra)

During the bhoodan movement I had many opportunities for thoughtful reflection, and I found myself pondering repeatedly on the fact that the tradition bequeathed to us by Shankara and Ramanuja is still being studied and followed in India more than a thousand years later. I have had a chance to study the schools of thought which have arisen during this period, and I have found in Gandhiji's thought a complete philosophy of life which is the finest fruit of the traditions of the past.

The thought kept on recurring to me that this inheritance of ours, this tradition of knowledge so many-sided and valuable should be perpetuated, and I was considering how these foundations of thought might go deep. Shankara and Ramanuja were both men of spiritual experience, devotion and knowledge; in addition they were both social reformers and men of action. Both travelled

widely, but found no need to deal with every aspect of the common life, whereas Gandhiji, because of the foreign government of his time, felt it necessary to do so. Consequently his life embodied karma-yoga, the path of action, to a greater extent than theirs. But this 'plus' carried with it a corresponding 'minus'. We (his fellow-workers) took up the principles of non-violence, truth and so on which are of the essence of all religions, but we left untouched the foundation of Brahmavidya which lies at the root of them all. I myself had been attracted from boyhood by this Brahmavidya, this search for knowledge of the Supreme. I felt the lack of it in our activities, and I felt this more keenly after Bapu passed away. I become convinced that unless we had this spiritual foundation our super-structure, our various programmes, would not last, not at any rate in India, this land of spiritual knowledge. Without the attainment of this Brahmavidya the well-springs of our thought would dry up, the current would no longer flow full and freely. Having reached this conclusion, I decided to start a Brahmavidya Mandir. I did not stop to think whether this task was within my power. Faith and devotion count for more than power. I may not have the power, but I certainly have the devotion, and relying on my devotion I opened the Brahmavidya Mandir on 25th March 1959. I felt also that the management of such an Ashram should be in the hands of the women. The spiritual achievements of women have always remained hidden; and while they have certainly influenced individuals, it is needful that their sadhana should now be openly seen. Without the women, men alone cannot bring about the world peace which is the crying need of our present times. That being so, the running of the Ashram may safely be left in the hands of women.

So far as my knowledge of Indian history goes, it was Lord Krishna who first called out the power of women on an extensive scale. In a later age the same work was done by Lord Mahavira, who initiated women on a large scale into his religious orders. After these came Mahatma Gandhi, who also brought about a widespread awakening of women—a work to which I myself have also made a small contribution. Now this Brahmavidya Mandir, set up to provide a place of

collective sadhana for women, may be counted as another small contribution of mine.

In former days women tried to realize their spiritual strength as individuals, and their efforts bear fruit today, by inspiring us to believe that they may also realize themselves in community. The coming age will be one in which women play a major role, and their spiritual strength must therefore be called out. I look forward, in fact, to the time when women will produce new shastras. Women in India have become very great devotees, and as such have had a great influence in society, but they have not written any spiritual books, any shastras. So far, whatever has been written on Brahavidya has been written by men, and so tends to be one-sided. These works need to be revised. Let a revised Brahavidya be given to the world, and let the work be done by the women. Our perceptions of reality will only change when women dedicated to brahmacharya and working together as a community, produce new shastras. If I had been a woman, I should have been a very rebellious one, and I would like to see women in revolt. But a woman can be a true rebel only if she is detachment personified; her instinct of motherhood itself can only be perfected in detachment. Women will find their true liberty when there arises among them a writer of the stature of Shankaracharya, with as great knowledge and detachment, as great a devotion and dedication as he possessed.

At the opening of the Brahavidya Mandir I said to the sisters: 'It was on this very day, the 25th of March, that I left my home and went out in the name of Brahavidya; I am still living today in the same name. Now I am starting this Brahavidya Mandir for women, as a place for community sadhana. I have no words to describe how deeply I am concerned for it. I feel as keen an inward urge as I did in those days when I left home, but the purpose which then filled my mind of seeking Brahavidya is no longer there. Whether that is because it has been fulfilled, or because it has simply died away, God knows ! The urge I feel now is for collective Self-realisation, collective spiritual liberation. I had a feeling for community even in those early days, but not for a community of

spiritual striving. At that time I envisaged a community of service, but today my interest is in community samadhi, and it is that vision which urges me on.' I look forward to seeing the Brahma Vidya Mandir put an end to individualistic attitudes. In Brahma Vidya a community consciousness must be developed. I use that phrase, 'community consciousness', to describe the common inspiration which is felt when self-regarding attitudes are overcome. With this in mind I suggested that everyone should take part regularly in planning the work by mutual agreement. For Brahma Vidya this is very necessary. It usually happens that the people of the world follow their own inclinations, while spiritual aspirants treat their inclinations as enemies to be subdued. I want a third alternative, that of acting from a plane higher than inclination. The first simple step towards this is to decide on our activities by common consent. That is a step in the right direction, towards overcoming personal preferences. The mathematical rules which are true for a small triangle are equally true for a big one. The many problems which confront us today on a world scale are present also on a smaller scale, in a village. And just as the solution of world problems may be discovered by experiments in villages, so on an even smaller scale experiments in Brahma Vidya Mandir may point the way.

In ancient days Brahma Vidya took shape in the forests. The genius which inspires the Upanishads was kindled in the forests. Later, the wisdom of Gita was declared on the field of battle. Our Brahma Vidya today must be spelled out in the field of labour; labour itself, labour of the body, is to be understood as worship. I and my companions worked for several years on an experiment in complete self-support, working as long as was required, for eight or nine hours a day. That too was an experiment in Brahma Vidya. Now however the experiment should take another form. If the work is properly planned each individual should, I believe, be able to earn a good livelihood by productive labour for three or three and a half hours a day. I therefore advised the sisters in the Ashram to give that amount of time to physical labour and be satisfied with whatever degree of self-support it produced. They should regard all kinds of work as of equal value. That is not how society today regards work, but we should take that position, and so help to change society.

Most of the residents in Brahma Vidya Mandir are sisters, but there are a few brothers also. All share the work of cooking, scavenging and general cleanliness. The sisters run a small press, which prints and publishes books on spiritual subjects. They also publish a Hindi monthly, Maitri, and a Kannada periodical which is printed in Nagari script. There is thus a triple programme: (1) community sadhana; (2) physical labour; (3) meditation, study and devotion in which all these share together. These are the chief features of the Ashram. Brahma Vidya Mandir is situated on a small hillock. In the course of cultivation about thirty stone images were unearthed, and duly set up. They are of Rama, Krishna, Mahadev, Buddha, Mahavir and others, and thus include Jain, Buddhist, Vaishnavite and Shaivite images. These sculptures are 1400 years old, dating from the time when the Vakatakas ruled here after the fall of the Gupta dynasty. Among them is a very beautiful statue of Ganga, the river goddess; she is standing on a crocodile, and the inscription below, 'Bhagavati Ganga', is in the Brahmi script. At present the Devanagari script is in use, but at that time the Brahmi script was used. It is on the basis of evidence like this that archaeologists estimate that the figures are 1400 years old.

In other words they pre-date the time of Shankara- charya by two hundred years. The Prophet Muhammed was born about 1300 years ago, and by then they were already in existence or in process of creation. God's grace has been shown forth in many ways in this place, so that in the language of devotion it could be said that this place is itself a divinity, alive with the life of the spirit. I have described Brahma Vidya Mandir as a place where one may either attain the highest or the Supreme Vision, or find one's whole effort gone for nothing. There is no other institution where there is such an element of risk. In other places we may hope perhaps for ten lakhs, but if we do not get it we can at least be sure of ten thousand. Here, it is a case of all or nothing—infinity, or zero ! We cannot offer any lesser odds. People may try to warn me off, but I can only say that I am constrained to do this thing, even if all I get is zero. I am not interested in half measures; I must have the Infinite or nothing.

3. Prasthan Ashram, Pathankot, Punjab

When I re-entered Punjab after my travels in Kashmir, the idea of Prasthan Ashram came into my mind. Pakistan, Kashmir and Punjab are all close to Pathankot. It is a prasthan, a starting point, for all three. It can be a centre for Shanti-sena and for education; it can also be of some service to those labourers who are forced by hunger to come down from Kashmir during the winter. The Ashram can at least make friends with them and stand by them in their troubles. Then in the district of Gurdaspur there is a large number of Christians, so that in Pathankot one may keep in touch with all three religious groups, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. In this way, to work for unity from Pathankot would be a great service to the country. With such thoughts as these I set up the Ashram at Pathankot in October 1959.

4. Visarjan Ashram, Indore, Madhya Pradesh

I was about to complete nine years of travel, and had visited all the States of India except Assam. It struck me that up to then the Sarvodaya movement had been concentrating its efforts mainly in the villages, keeping their needs in mind; it was time now to do some work in the cities. In this context my eyes turned towards Indore. Indore is a meeting point with links with four States, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and it is the land of the much revered Ahilyabai. Recently Indore had become the headquarters of the Kasturba Trust set up in the name of Mother Kasturba,⁴ and I felt it would be a suitable place to develop 'woman power'. It is an industrial city, but nevertheless the people have a gentle disposition, and are not much given to quarrels and disputes. The climate too is pleasant. For all these reasons I chose Indore for a 'city campaign' and part of the strategy was to set up the Visarjan Ashram there on 15th August 1960.

There is a little river nearby, where the Visarjan (immersion) of Gandhiji's ashes had taken place. In my talk at the inauguration I said: 'The purpose of this Ashram is to perform a visarjan, a submergence of out-dated values, and along with it a vi-sarjan, a re-emergence, of those living values which are

suiting to the new age. Study will be undertaken here, and the eleven vows observed with purity of mind and humility. An experiment in non-violent living will be reverently carried on. It will try to awaken the citizens' feelings of compassion and mutual love and make them aware of the power of the soul, so that the spirit of equality and helpfulness begins to grow and they accept the ideal of unity in the midst of differences. The Ashram will be maintained by its own labour and with public support also, and I hope that the citizens of Indore will interest themselves in its activities and welfare.'

5. Maitri Ashram, North Lakhimpur, Assam

This is the age of science. Its message is: 'Peoples of the world, unite'. But the old forms of political, social and religious life have become so firmly fixed in human minds that they stand in the way of that unity, and human society today is more divided than it ever was before.

In these conditions I felt it was imperative that a Maitri Ashram, a centre of friendship, should be opened in a border state. During the last days of my journey through Assam I was also reflecting on how the foundations of Sarvodaya might be strengthened there. The Ashram is the result of my reflections. Women are a force in Assam. Men of course are active everywhere, and Assam is no exception, otherwise who would have worked for gramdan in the villages there? Nevertheless, as compared with other parts of India, Assam appears to afford good scope for the development of women's strength, and for this reason also I felt a need for such an Ashram in that State.

'Let this place,' I said, 'be an open book, displaying true feeling and the grace of detachment. Let the public see in it that women too can penetrate to the depths, can conduct researches into social development and change the kind of sociology which has held the field up to now. This is something the world has not yet seen. Women have become warriors, statesmen, devotees and writers, but in spite of all these achievements it does not appear that they have ever put forward any principles for the guidance of society, still less got them accepted. Now, however, the time has come. The world has lost faith in

violence, and if the path of non-violence is not made plain, it will lose its way. The road of non-violence is not made plain; it will lose its way. The road of non-violence must now be constructed, and for that task some fundamental thinking has to be done.'

At the opening of Maitri Ashram on 5th March 1962 I said: 'Whatever rules, purposes and programmes may be introduced here are all covered by this word maitri, friendship. The only rule is friendship, the only purpose is friendship, the only programme is friendship. This is a place of friendship.' In these days however, friendship in the ordinary sense of the word does not count for much, for the problems of society go very deep. Our friendship, maitri, must find expression in the solution of those problems. Our top political leaders speak the ordinary language of friendship, saying that there should be no armies and no wars, but none of them sees clearly the means by which this may be achieved, and so the world has got itself into a vicious circle. The true spirit of maitri must show it a way out.

This Ashram must therefore be a place where spiritual and scientific knowledge work together in harmony, and that will demand a strenuous discipline of the body and intellect alike. There will have to be a study of various languages and religions; Sarvodaya and other ideologies will have to be studied and taught, and the necessary books prepared. The gramdan movement in the neighbourhood must be helped, and the Ashram must take up any necessary work which the organizers of the movement are unable to do.

North Lakhimpur lies in the extreme (north-east) corner of India. I chose a place for the Ashram which is very near the airport, so that it might keep in touch with the outside world and become a place of international friendship. International camps and seminars have been held there and international topics discussed. When it was opened in 1962 no one guessed that a year later a Friendship March would start from Delhi, going to Beijing. When the marchers reached the frontiers of Assam the way forward was blocked, and Maitri Ashram became their temporary home. This could only have happened by the grace of God and I took it as a divine blessing on the Ashram.

6. Vallabha Niketan, Bangalore

Vallabha Niketan was founded in 1965 in memory of Vallabhaswami.⁵ His was a pure soul. I have met many men of great intelligence, but I have not met many who could compare with Vallabhaswami in purity of spirit. Any memorial to him should reflect his own special qualities. It should therefore be a place for study, and should offer people a retreat for meditation and reflection, where they may find peace of mind. The atmosphere should be one of high-souled friendliness, and with this in view, four things need to be kept in mind: a quiet environment, service of a non-controversial nature, a spiritual outlook, and an atmosphere of peace, devotion and affection. Let people come, stay for a while, and return home with peace of mind renewed—that is the purpose for which Vallabha Niketan has been started.

'Be Your Own Light'

I do not run Ashrams now as I did in earlier days. Then, my companions worked under my command, and whatever I said was immediately carried out. If I gave orders that from tomorrow onwards no salt was to be used, by tomorrow the salt had disappeared. There was not a murmur of dissent. If I said that from tomorrow we should eat only one kind of food at one meal, so it would be. Experiments in diet, and in eight-hour days of agriculture or of spinning were all carried out under my orders. That was what I was like in those days. But I began to notice how this regime limited personal development, both in Gandhiji's Ashram and in my own. This led me to the conclusion that in any Ashram I might found in future there should be no director. This train of thought also led me to coin the phrase *ganasevakatva* ('shared servanthood') in connection with the Sarvodaya movement. I used it then with reference to the whole group of Sarvodaya workers, but it certainly applies to Ashrams as well. For the same reason I no longer answer the letters I receive, except with this one piece of advice: Be your own light.

18. Karma and Vikarma¹

There is no spiritual power in the outward observance of natural duties without the inward attentiveness of the mind. Mind and action must be at one. An act of service in which the mind is not involved merely generates self-regarding pride. It becomes genuine service only when hand and heart are involved together, and for that a cleansing of the mind is needed. The Gita uses the word vikarma (specific action on a higher plane) to denote acts which are undertaken to purify the mind, by which selfish desires are gradually overcome and spiritual power is increased. As the Gita-Pravachan says, where duties are carried out with vikarma, there at once is power released.

There is a place in the life of the spiritual aspirant for the disinterested performance of duty, as there is also a place for reflection and for study. But the most important place must be given to worship. The more we devote ourselves to the practice of worship, the more deeply we shall enter, step by step, into the secret of linking our every action with God.

Prayer

It was only after I entered Gandhiji's Satyagraha Ashram that I had any experience of community prayer. Before that I had never joined with others in prayer, nor had I had any fixed time for individual prayer. It came naturally to me to recite or sing when I was in a devotional mood, but to sit with others, or even to set apart a regular time for private prayer, was not my nature. In my childhood I was taught the sandhya² but I did not perform it. I refused to repeat words whose meaning I did not understand. This is not to say that I lacked the spirit of devotion, even then. But with Gandhiji there was regular daily prayer. The experience of sitting together with so many worthy people gradually had its effect on me. This effect, I think, was not so much due to the prayers themselves as to the fellowship of devotion which we shared.

People used to ask Bapu what they should do if they found it difficult to concentrate, or felt sleepy during the prayer. In that case, Bapu suggested, they should stand for prayer instead of sitting. These questioners were honest people, and every day three or four of them would stand during the prayers. But of course concentration cannot be achieved merely by standing ! Bapu began to teach us how to pray, just as one might teach children how to read, using illustrations from his own life. This was a new experience for me, such as I had never had before.

In Bapu's time a number of passages were included in the prayer, many of which I knew. I would never myself have chosen some of these verses, or considered them suitable, but still I joined reverently in the recital, unattractive though I found them. Later there was a proposal that these verses should be omitted, but after discussion with Bapu they were kept, on the ground that we should not change what was already in use.

When I was imprisoned, I ceased to use these verses in my morning prayer, and recited instead my own prose translation of the Ishavasya Upanishad, which was much in my thoughts at the time; a number of other people used to join me. But I kept unchanged the verses of the Gita which had been chosen for the evening prayer, as I was very fond of them. This change in the morning prayer was made while Bapu was still alive, and after I was released from jail I went on using the Ishavasya in the Paunar Ashram.

I do not like the queer notion that unity can be brought had by accepting a single form of prayer. Unity is some- thing which must spring from within. I do not want to make any particular verses obligatory in the prayer . So when I was working among the Meos we recited verses from the Koran, and used an Urdu translation of the Gita and Urdu hymns. It seems to me to be best to use whatever the people around me can understand most easily.

In Bapu's time we also used prayers drawn from all religious traditions. That is all right when people of different religions and languages are meeting together, but all the same it is a kind of khichadi, a mixed grill. The main idea therein is not so much to please God as to please our fellows. Still, if we think

that a human being is also a manifestation of God, the practice cannot be called wrong.

Thinking this over I came to the conclusion that for community prayer silent prayer is the best form. It can satisfy all kinds of people, and deeper and deeper meaning may be found in it, as I can testify from my own experience. During the early days of my bhodan pilgrimage we included in the evening public prayer the Gita's verses about 'the man of steadfast wisdom'. But in Andhra I began to use silent prayer instead. This silent community prayer is of very great value. The idea has been with me for a long time that all should come together to pray in the quietness of mind; this thought is maturing slowly and as my experience increases, so does my confidence and courage.

Silence, Conquest of Sleep and Dreams

The fact is that I have been practising silence for a very long time. At first I did so as a spiritual discipline, in order to keep my mind entirely free for meditation. So far as I remember, I took a vow of silence in 1927, for personal reasons; I decided to keep silence after the evening prayer for two months. When the time expired I continued it, and made it a permanent rule—but only for the days when I was in the Ashram; I did not observe it when I went outside. Then when I was in Dhulia jail I thought about the matter a great deal, and resolved to observe silence every day, whether I was in the Ashram or not. There was no outward material reason behind this decision. My reasons for keeping silence were not 'practical' ones. The chief reason for it is in the eighth chapter of the Gita, which speaks of the importance of turning one's mind to God in the last hours of life. That is only possible if we have done so throughout life, it is the fruit of lifelong practice. I felt therefore that the last scene of the drama, the last hours of life, should be rehearsed daily. One cannot foresee when or how the end will come, but the life of each day ends in sleep, and this daily experience is a little foretaste of death. So if we play out the final scene at the end of each day, before we sleep, we shall have victory in our hands in the last hours of life when they come. So, I thought, let me

come to each day's sleep, each day's little death, in holy contemplation of God.

When I took this decision I had to consider a number of points, about service and about meetings. In Wardha public meetings started at nine in the evening and went on till midnight. I had to attend them, but I stuck to my decision and made it known that after the evening prayers I should keep silence. From the very first day the silence brought a remarkable experience of peace. I stopped talking, and began reading, reading the spiritual classics and then reflecting and meditating on them. The peace of mind this gave me was a new experience, a truly amazing experience. It gave me a grasp of the science of ideas, how they grow and develop. They are like seeds sown in a field and buried in the soil, growing unseen below the surface until three or four days later the shoots appear above the ground. So, when the thoughts of one who practises prayer, meditation and reflection are buried in the soil of sleep, it may happen that they bring forth solutions to problems which have eluded the thinker during waking hours. Thought may also develop in this way during deep samadhi, but sleep may be even more fruitful. I have found in experience that when one falls asleep after prayer with no other thought in mind, the qualities of silence, meditation and spiritual reflection are nourished in that sleep. 'Sleep is a state of samadhi', says Shankaracharya. In this way my experience of silence was gradually firmly established.

I am specially interested in the power to control sleep and dreams. The things we do during the day should be so done that they do not affect our sleep or lead to dreams. The things we dream about are the things we like or dislike; the loves and hates of our waking hours are mirrored in our dreams. When I was a boy my father had a friend who was good at chess; he used to invite me to play a game with him, and I often went. I enjoy a game of chess, because there is no element of chance in it and the two sides start equal. Besides, as Saint Tulsidas pointed out, the wooden chess-men stand for all human society, though in fact they are nothing but wood. The game has this element of illusion, it also requires complete concentration, and the outcome

depends not on luck but on intelligence—so off I went to play. Then one night I dreamed about playing chess, so when I got up next morning I resolved to give it up for a time. If something so affects the mind that we dream about it, we ought to cut it out.

Meditation

People meditate in various ways. Some see God as Mother, some as Father, some as Guru, divine teacher. It has been my habit to think of God as Mother; friendship too has had a special place in my life, and so has reverence for the Guru, so that the thought of God as Guru is also natural to me. In 1964, however, I began to realize that all these modes of thought impose limitations, and I gave them up. I was down with typhoid at the time and was meditating a lot during my illness—for the first few days I was completely absorbed, and it was then that I left behind these three limiting forms of mental imagery. But old habits die hard, and when I read of God the Mother or God the Guru, tears still fill my eyes. Yet, however pure my emotion may be, these tears themselves are a sign of limitation.

These limitations themselves may nevertheless be helpful for meditation. We gain nothing by abandoning them merely because we recognize their limits; they are in some measure necessary for the human mind. Visible images and statues are also of help in meditating on the attributes of God and inspiring us to shape our lives by them. I have used such images in this way in my own meditation.

In my youth, I used to meditate on the statue of the Lord Buddha at Baroda. Even as a child, I was familiar with the hymns of the saints of Maharashtra, and so became devoted to Vithoba. I meditated on the image of Vithoba, and as I did so it came to me that Vithoba represents the fourth stage in social evolution. In the first stage everyone has his own stick and beats whomsoever he pleases. In the second stage they all give up their sticks and agree to abide by the verdict of a Judge and entrust the sticks—the power to punish—to the government. A third stage will be reached when even the government

relinquishes its weapons, surrenders them all to the Lord, and leaves Him to use His divine weapons to protect the righteous and punish the wicked. The fourth stage will come when God Himself forsakes His weapons and no longer punishes but forgives. The Lord Vishnu, seen in human form as Vithoba, bears no weapons in his hands. In short, even when we use an image for our meditation we do so in order to reflect on and imbibe the good qualities it represents.

There is an image of the goddess Ganga opposite my room here in the Brahmavidya Mandir, and I used it for meditation morning and evening. Then it occurred to me that there was compassion in her eyes, joy in her face, kindness in her bosom, strength in her trunk. There stood before me, in that image of stone, a picture of all those virtues in one. I used the statue of Bharata-Rama for meditation in the same way.

However, I do not wish to have pictures in my room, and I prefer mental images to material ones, for mental imagery sets up no barriers. Meditation on Jesus, for example, is meditation on the supreme revelation of love. Jesus offered himself in sacrifice for his people, and through him I meditate on the love of God and the Supreme Sacrifice.

I also regard sanitation work as a means of meditation. Cleanliness for me has a spiritual aspect, so I use it in this way. When I settled in Brahmavidya Mandir in 1970 I began regular cleaning work and found that as I worked I was inwardly close to the experience of meditation and even of samadhi. That is why I regard my sanitation work as a work of meditation. Meditation is often thought of as a withdrawal of the mind from external objects. Why withdraw? I ask. Only, be aware of what is happening. If the mind roams here and there, follow it, and just notice, like a mere onlooker, where it goes.

Transcending Mind

When I was about thirty years old I had a marvellous experience which I can never put into words, but from then on my mind has been, as it were, 'out of

mind'. When I sit down to meditate it seems that my mind disappears, naturally and without effort, and I alone am there. To put it more accurately, the 'I' denotes particularity; that particularity has gone, nothing remains but the infinite sky.

For me concentration needs no effort, it comes of itself. What does demand an effort is to attend to several matters at the same time. My surface mind is as it were closed down, and I only open it when I need to talk; and even while I am talking I am really standing outside the conversation. I am like a swimmer who remains on the surface of the water; he does not sink in—if he did, he would drown ! In the same way I walk and talk, laugh and work, on the surface. I don't sink in.

Through a little opening in the wall of my room I can see the labourers working on the well. Sometimes I watch them, or watch other things, just for fun—but none of this makes any real impact on my mind.

Honouring the Good

When I was a boy, we were keen observers of other people's good and bad points; we would discuss this man's failings and that man's failings. We had no difficulty in discovering faults, of course, for everyone has some fault or other. But we did not see our own defects; we were so endlessly occupied with other people that we paid no attention to ourselves ! Then I read what the saints had written. Saint Tukaram says: 'Why should I look for faults in other people? Am I lacking in faults myself?' That was a new idea for me to think about. Then Bapu used to say that we should use a magnifying glass to inspect other people's good qualities and our own defects. I asked him once how far that was consistent with truth. 'It is a matter of scale,' he replied. 'When you read a map you accept two inches as being really fifty miles, not just two inches. It is the same here. A person's good points may appear very small, but by magnifying them you get the right scale.' People usually tend to rate other people's virtues low, and measure their own defects in the same way. By suggesting the scale, Bapu gave me an intelligent answer to an intelligent

question. So I adopted his suggestion and have kept up the practice. Later another thought occurred to me—that what appear to be my defects are not really mine, they belong not to me but to my body. That being so, why talk about them? And it follows that other people's faults are not really theirs, they will perish with the ashes of their bodies.

A long time ago, in 1918, I was wandering about Maharashtra on foot, and fell in with a traveller from north India who accompanied me for four days and then went away towards the south. He was a great soul, and we talked over many things. I asked him a question: 'Why did God put virtues and defects in all the human beings?' He replied: 'It's this way. God, you see, is selfish. If He were to make men perfect and faultless, they would feel no need ever to call God to mind. So God plays this game deliberately to get Himself remembered!' This idea appealed to me very much. The gist of it is that a human being who was without faults would also be without humility.

We should therefore give our attention only to what is good, for good is God. This is something new that I have discovered, crazy creature that I am ! My idea is that we should pay no attention either to others' faults or to our own. Innumerable faults there undoubtedly are, but along with them there are bound to be at least one or two good points. God has not created a single person without them; everyone partakes in some measure of His goodness. On the other hand, however great a man may be, he is never totally free from faults. God has given us all our share of evil and of good. The good is a window, the evil is a wall. The poorest man has a door in his house by which one may enter. The good is that door, which gives us entrance to the human heart. If we try to enter through the wall, the only result is a crack on the head ! Ever since I realized this I have been drawing attention to the good, including the good in myself ! People criticize me, say that I am proud and always singing my own praises. What is to be done? How can I not praise the soul, the spirit within? We should look for the good always, in others and in ourselves, and 'sing the goodness of the Lord', like Mirabai. Goodness alone is real. We should not waste our breath on the things that will perish with the body. I have

therefore added a twelfth item to (Gandhiji's) eleven vows—not to speak ill of others. That is included of course in the vow of non-violence, but I felt the need to emphasize it by giving it an independent place.

The Nurture of Affection

I have put this in the form of a maxim: Snehena sahajivanam—human beings should live together in mutual affection. This is my chief rule of life. It means that when I get hold of people I don't let them go, and they on their part don't leave me, don't go away. (But it is possible to feel proud even of this, and so some people have left me.)

After I left home, my two younger brothers did the same; within two or three years they too left home and joined me, and they too remained celibate. That was the fruit of our mutual affection. A number of my Baroda friends, such as Gopalrao Kale, Raghunath Dhotre, Babaji Moghe and Bagaram also left home and joined me, and stayed with me all their lives. Later when I went to Sabarmati some students there were attracted to me. One of them was Vallabhaswami; he came to me when he was thirteen years old, and when he died at the age of fifty-eight he had been with me for forty-five years without a break. Could any father or son do more? After that I came to Wardha, Valunjkar joined me there in 1924 and has been with me ever since. Then came Bhau, Dattoba and others, to be followed in 1946 by Ranjit, Rambhau, Giridhar; some of them are still with me, others stayed to the end of their lives.

When I came to Paramdhan in 1938 I started the slogan: Learn to spin ! Some boys came to me from Paunar village. They had been earning six pice an hour as labourers. I wanted them to earn more than that by spinning, so I sat with them the whole day, seven or eight hours at a stretch, to help them to persevere. Ever since then those boys have been working here with faith and devotion. Later, when the Brahma Vidya Mandir was started, girls from every part of the country came to join it.

The result is that I count among my friends some whom I have known, like Balkoba and Shivaji, for over seventy years, and others who came to me only twelve or thirteen years ago. And I owe all these friends to my maxim: Live affectionately together.

So what do I aim at now?

The Pandava brothers set out for Heaven but one by one they fell down and died in the way until Yudhishtira was left alone with a dog. When the dog was not allowed to enter, Yudhishtira refused to go into Heaven without him. That is my position exactly. I am not prepared to enter Vaikunth, and take my seat in the court of the Lord, if it means leaving my comrades behind. I want their company. Whatever comes, good or bad, I must share it with them. When I was in Bengal, visiting the place where Shri Ramakrishna had his first experience of samadhi, my message then was that the days of individual samadhi were over, and that our need now is for 'collective samadhi.' That phrase 'collective samadhi' was new then, it came to me on that day. This is what I am after—an experience of spiritual striving in community, samadhi in community, liberation in community.

Nowadays I remember my friends daily, naming each of them. This is my Vishnusahasranama.³ I think first of those in all parts of India who are now in old age; the aged come first because without their blessing there can be no human welfare. This is something which needs to be more fully understood. It was the aged who once gave us younger people their service, and for that reason we need specially to seek their blessing. After the aged I call to mind my present fellow-workers, State by State, and name them one by one. All this adds up to a thousand names. And why should I undertake all this business? What do I gain by it? I do it because of my maxim that we should live affectionately together.

The Mastery of Diet

I have always been engaged in some experiment or other in matters of diet. This is bound to happen with people who are curious about spiritual growth, since the body is an image of the soul and should be treated as such. Just as the Sun is an embodiment of light, so the physical body is a manifestation of the divine spirit. When one looks at the image, one should think of the god it represents.

When I was a child I was very careless about food. I had no regular meal-times; when I felt hungry I would ask my mother for something, and eat whatever she gave me. As a boy I roamed about till late at night and then had a very late supper. That was how it was until I came to Bapu. In his Ashram meal-times were fixed and regular, and I began to realize the benefits of regular meals. I felt ready to eat when the time came, and I found that this regularity was good for both body and mind.

Although I was so careless about food as a boy, I did not like karela (bitter gourd) and I never ate it. Mother used to say: 'Vinya, you talk a lot about control of the palate, but you won't eat karela!' I used to answer that control did not mean overcoming all my dislikes. But after I entered Bapu's Ashram I resolved from the first that I would overcome my dislikes. In those days Bapu himself used to serve at meals. One day the vegetable was karela. When Bapu himself was serving, how could I refuse it? So I took it, and as I did not like it, I ate it first to get rid of it. Bapu noticed that I had no vegetable left, and served me some more. I still said nothing, and ate that too. Bapu then thought that I must be fond of it, and gave me a third helping ! It was clear that I should have to give up my dislike of karela.

As a child born in Konkan I was very fond of curd-rice, which we used to get every day. When I came to Bapu I found that people were expected to give up alcoholic drinks, and other things to which they were addicted. It seemed to me that we had no right to ask other people to give up these habits unless we first gave up something ourselves. So I gave up my curd-rice, because that was what I liked best.

I gave up taking sugar in 1908 when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I resolved not to eat foreign sugar until India got her independence, and I made it a vow. But a little later I began to suspect that the sugar served to me as Indian sugar was not always really so, as was claimed. So I gave up sugar altogether and did not eat it again until independence came in 1947. A similar thing happened about salt. That too is an old story, going back to 1917-18 when I was touring Maharashtra on foot. Ten or twelve of us went to visit Torangarh fort. We had expected to be able to buy food-stuffs there, but nothing except rice could had. We cooked it, and were ready to eat. 'At least let us have salt,' we thought, but even salt was not available, and we had to eat the rice without it, so we did not really satisfy our hunger. This brought to mind the rishis and munis who used to try giving up one or other of the usual ingredients of food so as to be able to do without them. We too, I thought, should be able to bridle our palate; we should not allow it to run away with us like a bolting horse ! I realized that giving up salt was a valuable discipline and I resolved to take it only once a day. After some time I found that it was not difficult to do without it altogether, and I gave it up permanently. In these experiments with diet, I always keep four aspects in mind: first, the spiritual benefit; second, bodily health; third, the principle of swadeshi—is the food available locally?; fourth, the economic aspect, the cost. A thing might rank high in one way and low in another; if there has to be a choice between these four aspects I should choose in the order I have given above. But I do not like any division. When they are all integrated we have a true and complete spiritual perspective and at the same time a true and complete swadeshi perspective and a true and complete economic perspective.

It is my experience that someone who lives under the open sky needs fewer calories in food. During my bhoodan pilgrimage my diet contained only 1200 or 1300 calories; the doctors were astonished that I could do so much on so few calories. I used to tell them that I lived chiefly on the open sky; that is my number one article of food. Number two is fresh air, number three is sunshine. Number four is water, plenty of water, a little at a time but frequently. Water

gives one great vitality. Solid food comes last, it is the least important. The most important is to live under the open sky.

The first thing is to be content with the food; contentment is the key to health. My plan is twofold: first, let the food be tasty; second, let it be eaten with no thought of its taste. Everybody would approve of the first half of that, but not of the second. But I also notice that some people who like the second do not approve of the first ! Real contentment comes from keeping both the parts together.

Conquest of Fear

When the Gita describes the divine virtues it gives the first place to fearlessness, since no virtue can develop without it. Other virtues have no value without truth, but truth itself depends on fearlessness. Truth and non-violence cannot be practised without it.

For human beings the greatest fear is the fear of death—the mere word makes them tremble. If that fear can be conquered all is conquered. But there are many kinds of little fears which also have to be overcome.

The cure for all fears is to take the name of God, before which nothing can stand. But we ourselves must also make some effort to overcome our fears. At Baroda I used to go for walks, and once I came to a railway bridge that had to be crossed. I felt very frightened, for the bridge was thirty or forty feet high and the only way to cross was to step from one sleeper to the next. But at last, step by step, I got across. After that, I made crossing the bridge a part of my daily routine, and after a month or so the fear was gone. Later, after I had joined the Ashram, Kakasaheb Kalelkar and I went to Abu. We were returning across a railway bridge when a train began to overtake us. Kakasaheb had already got across, but I was some distance behind. My eyes were weak, but I had no glasses. It was evening, growing dark, and I could not see the sleepers, but I knew that they were laid at regular intervals. So I measured my steps accordingly and ran on with the name of God on my lips. The engine, I knew,

was getting very near. I could not see Kakasaheb, but I heard him shout: 'Jump to the left !' I jumped. The next moment the train reached the spot where I had stood.³ My practice in crossing the bridge at Baroda stood me in good stead then. If I had panicked, it would have been the end of me. Fears of this kind can be got rid of by physical means, but what counts for most is the remembrance of God.

I had another similar experience when I was in jail. I had been put in solitary confinement in a small cell about eight feet by nine, where I observed silence at night. One night I was getting ready for bed when I saw a snake under my cot. I could not get out, as the room was locked from outside, and as I was under a vow of silence I could not call anyone. I wondered what to do. It did not seem right to break my vow in order to call for help, and it also occurred to me that this snake was after all my guest. How could I drive out a guest? I decided that we should both stay, and went to bed. The only change I made was not to put out the lantern, as I usually did, so that if I got up in the night I should not step on my guest. Usually I was asleep within two minutes of lying down; that night I took a little longer, perhaps two and a half or three minutes. I had a sound sleep, untroubled by dreams, and when I woke in the morning the snake had disappeared.

To sum up: There is no better cure for fear than the name of God, but fearlessness can also be developed by practice.

Bread Labour

I am fully convinced that the vow of bodily labour alone can be the basis of the religious, political, economic and social ideas and life in the coming age. I do not say 'bodily labour', what I say is the 'vow of bodily labour'. The difference is not difficult to grasp. Even today the common man does bodily labour, but he does not do it voluntarily and out of conviction; he does it because of helplessness. The vow of bodily labour is something altogether different. The Gita says: No sin is committed when the action is performed by the body alone. I understand that it implies detached action. But even then—in fact,

because I realize that implication—I hold that the saying can be taken as one enjoining bodily labour. Needs of the body should be taken care of by the body. Intellect will then be free to look inwards and detached actions could be done collectively.

Faith in action means bodily labour, and through bodily labour the worship of God. Bodily labour should be undertaken as a way of worship, and the labour and the worship should be one. If we don't believe in physical labour we stand to lose, first materially and then spiritually. If we have no feeling of worship in our labour we also lose, first spiritually and then materially. For an action to be complete, both aspects need to be kept in mind.

On this basis I have thought out a plan to cover all the twenty four hours of the day. Eight of them will be spent in sleep or rest, which everyone needs. I carried out many experiments on sleep. For some days I slept only two hours out of the twenty-four, then I slept for four hours, and so on up to ten hours a day. I also tried sleeping out in the rain with a blanket over me. After many such experiments I came to the conclusion that a normally healthy person needs eight hours' rest, not more. So eight hours will go in sleep.

Of the remaining sixteen hours, five will go for bathing, eating and other physical needs. Two hours will be given to spiritual activities like prayer, reading spiritual writings, worshipful spinning or other forms of worshipful work. One hour will be kept free to complete anything left undone.⁴ These activities together make a total of eight hours.

The remaining eight hours will be given to public work, or to use humble language, to earning one's living. It makes no difference which terms we use. God has given us all stomachs for a very great purpose. To fill our stomachs by honest work, and keep our bodies in health, is a spiritual activity, a spiritual calling. The work we do for a living provides our daily bread and at the same time is of service to others. An activity which deprives others of their bread is not work but thievery. But any peasant who farms, and any teacher who teaches, with sincerity and honesty, and without exploiting anyone, is doing a public service.

People often asked me during my bhoodan travels why I was so keen to go on foot. 'I have a number of reasons,' I would say, 'but one of them is this: I want to do a bit of physical labour to earn my bread. People give me my meals, and I on my part walk five or ten miles to earn them.' That was all I could do while on pilgrimage, but before that I had been following this principle of bread labour for thirty years. I worked normally for eight hours, and sometimes more. Of course I worked as a teacher, but spent hours working in the fields, irrigating the crops, grinding grain, scavenging, spinning, weaving and so on. As I said, this had gone on for thirty years at a stretch.

In 1950, on the day of Gandhiji's birth according to the Hindu calendar, I spoke with reference to our experiment in Kanchan-mukti (living without money). 'Up to now I have lived on alms, like a monk, and I expect to continue to do so. But from now on I shall accept no alms except gifts of physical labour, and I plan to spend as much time as possible in physical labour myself.' I marked the occasion by a three-day fast. I had decided on this while I was in jail in 1945; I had been thinking about it for a long time before that, but it was only during that jail sentence that I took a definite decision. I did not however act on it immediately I was released; there is a time for everything, and one must wait for the right moment. In 1950 I felt the time had come, and I chose this auspicious day, Gandhiji's birthday, to put it into practice.

This continuous physical labour has increased my intellectual powers, it has not lessened them. I do not mean to suggest that excessive labour, day and night, would sharpen anyone's wits. There is a limit to everything, and when the limit is passed there can be no development. I simply wish to say that the intellect develops well when a good deal of physical labour is carried on side by side with intellectual activity.

This has been my own experience. My memory was fairly good when I was a boy, that is to say it was somewhat above the average, but at the age of sixty or sixty-two it is far better than it was then. I do not forget anything that is worth remembering.⁵ If I find something in a book that appeals to me, I remember the exact words. There may be several reasons why this is so, but

there is no doubt that one reason is the part that bodily labour has played in my life. Nai Talim is built on the acceptance of a great principle: that of earning one's living by bodily labour.⁶

Individual and Community

Community life helps in the right ordering of individual life. After I came to Bapu, I got up as soon as the bell rang, and I never missed the prayer. If there had been no community prayer, I should not have succeeded in ordering my personal life as I did.

In fact we should not divide life into community and individual sections. Until we bring them together there will always be tension. Our individual actions should be social, our social actions individual. There should be no wall to divide us from society.

As for me, I regard even eating and sleeping as a duty I owe to society. I don't distinguish between private and social action, I look upon all my actions as part of my service to society. To go to bed at a regular time, to sleep soundly, to get up at the right time, all these things are part of my social duty. I do not calculate that so much time has been given to society and so much to my personal affairs. All my actions, during the whole twenty-four hours, are my contribution to society—that is my experience.

There can be no doubt that one who has had little contact with ordinary people has lost a great opportunity for direct knowledge of God. For God reveals Himself in three ways—in common humanity, in the vastness of nature, in the spirit within the heart. These three together form the complete revelation of the Supreme.

19. The Open Vision¹

‘Do you feel as sure of God,’ someone once asked me, ‘as you do of the lamp in front of you?’ ‘I am sure, quite sure of God,’ I replied, ‘but as for the lamp, I am not nearly so sure whether it really exists or not !’ This exchange, which is recorded in my Vichar-pothi, took place thirty years ago, in 1928. On a number of occasions I have had what appears to me to be a direct Vision of God. I owe it partly perhaps to the attitudes I inherited in my family, and partly to my reverence for certain holy books. But my faith rests not so much on these things as on the fact of experience. Other living creatures in all their variety, and the human beings I see around me, are so many forms in which He wills to appear.

What is this direct, Open Vision?—one may ask.

One thing about it is that it should appeal to reason—that is the foundation. If something is unreasonable the question of vision does not arise. First, the thing must be acceptable to reason; secondly, after that, comes the experience. Reason tests it—this is knowledge; the experience follows—that is vision through knowledge. We may take, for example, the personal experience of compassion. Reason must first recognize that the world is full of compassion, that compassion is essential to the world plan. If my mother had not had compassion on me, I could not have received what I needed for my growth. The intellect must understand the need for compassion and recognize that it is present in the creation. Only then comes the experience of compassion. To feel in oneself the compassion that a mother has for her child, that is direct knowledge of compassion.

The Vision Direct of Compassion

The compassion I feel is not for individuals but for society. I am so hard-hearted that if someone falls ill I don’t feel it in the least; but if I felt no compassion for the whole community, my life would come to an end. It is my

basic principle that if you want equal compassion for all, you must not allow individuals to make special claims—otherwise there will be envy and hatred, which are found not only among kings but also among those who keep company with the great. I, therefore believe that as compassion expands to embrace the whole creation, love will no longer leap like waves in shallow water, but become ever deeper. Waters that run deep are still. As the sky pervades all, it turns into a void.

Companions from the Past

The direct experience of the virtue of compassion is a comparatively small matter. There are other, more comprehensive forms of open vision in which we may have fellowship with many who have lived before us. The voices of men of former days fill the air around us, but they are heard only by those who have the power to receive their words. When can we hear the distant sounds on the radio?—only when we possess a radio set. Without it one can hear nothing, even though, as science has proved, the air around us is full of sound. In the same way we may hear the voices of those who have gone before us, provided we have the right radio set.

I often speak of my still-continuing talks with Bapu. When he was alive I had to walk five miles to meet him; it took me two hours, and I had to make an effort. Now, I simply close my eyes and am with him that very second. I can ask him questions and get his answers with no trouble at all. Then, he was confined within a body; now, he is free. He is everywhere, there is nothing to bind him. I am still bound, but so long as I am in the body I shall continue to get inspiration from him.

In the same way I have often described how on my pilgrimage I felt that the Lord Rama was going before me, so also the five Pandavas, the Lord Buddha, the Lord Mahavir, Shankar, Ramanuja, Kabir, Namadev....they all lead, and I follow. They are with me, I am not alone. I never feel lonely; I feel them to be with me all the time.

I remember also one incident when I was camping at Bettiah in Bihar. I dreamed that someone of very gracious appearance was sitting talking to me about Vinayanjali. He asked me about the meaning of two of the hymns and requested me to explain some points to him, which I did. He listened with great attention and from time to time nodded his head in agreement. After a while it came to me that the man who was visiting me was no other than Saint Tulsidas himself—and I woke up. I began thinking about this dream, and realized that the day was that of Tulsidas' death—a day which I was in the habit of commemorating every year by reading his Ramayana or his Vinayapatrika. But this time I had forgotten, so Tulsidas himself came and talked to me in my dream. Since that day those hymns of his have had a new meaning for me.

On another occasion Manoharji (Manohar Diwan) had asked me a question and in reply I had commented on one of the verses of Jnaneshwari. When I was asleep that night Saint Jnanadeva came and talked with me. 'Vinya,' he said, 'you have understood me rightly. One phrase which I used is based on a line in the Upanishad. But I used the word buddhi (intellect) where the Upanishad used manas (mind). I did not make this change lightly. In the Upanishad manas includes buddhi; in Jnaneshwari buddhi includes manas. You will understand why I used this word buddhi if you think about what manas means in the Upanishad.' That was all, but I went on thinking about it for half an hour.

Face to Face with God

On April 18, 1951, in Pochampalli in Telangana, the Harijans asked for land and were given one hundred acres. That night I could not sleep for more than three or four hours—what was this that had happened? I believe in God; I also believe in arithmetic. I began calculating; if one were to ask for land for all the landless of India, it would take fifty million acres to satisfy their needs. Could so much land be had for the asking? Then I had a direct talk with God, just as I might talk face to face with another human being. 'If you hesitate,' He said, 'if you fear this task, you must give up your faith in non-violence and stop

claiming to be non-violent. Have faith; ask, and ask again.’ He said one thing more: ‘He who put hunger into the child’s stomach also put milk into the mother’s breasts. He does not leave His work half done.’ This set all my doubts at rest; the very next day I began asking for land.

An Experience in Nirvikalpa Samadhi

While I was at Chandil during my bhoodan pilgrimage, I went down with malignant malaria. I was in high fever, and became so weak that no one expected me to live. I was quite prepared either to live or die, and I cannot say that I would have been at all sorry if the Lord had taken me away. One day—December 17, 1952—I felt as if the time for my departure had come. I was in high fever, but I asked those present to raise me into a sitting position. No sooner had they done so that I became directly absorbed in contemplation. I may have remained in that state of total absorption for perhaps twenty-five minutes or half an hour. Although I had practised meditation a great deal, I had never before known such bliss, such open vision, as I did then. It was illimitable boundless bliss, peace beyond all comprehension. I felt that I stood in the very presence of God and saw Him face to face. You may call it imagination, illusion, what you please. Shankaracharya called the whole world an illusion, so as this experience of mine was not outside the world, you may call it an illusion too. After half an hour I became conscious once more of my surroundings, and left that new world of mine. It was an experience of what the shastras call nirvikalpa samadhi, an experience in which the knower, the known and the knowing become one.

My body broke into perspiration, my fever left me, and I was ready to live. He who sustains the world, He it is who sustains me. If He had called me away I would have been ready; I was equally ready to be cured. I felt that many of my physical and mental ills would disappear and I should become stronger mentally. I was weaker than before and had less physical energy. Mentally however I found myself so full of energy that I felt, in the words of a Vedic hymn, that I could swing the whole world to and fro as I willed.

Becoming the Lord's mount

During my travels in Monghyr district (Bihar) I camped at a village named Ulao, where the meeting was held in the temple of Shiva. Usually the Shiva temple itself is underground, and the meeting hall is above it. At Ulao however, in contrast, the meeting hall was below and the temple above it. My seat in the hall was just under the Shivalinga. As I sat there it was as though the Lord Shiva Himself was using me as His vehicle; I had become His mount, His bull Nandi. Then it dawned on me that the phrase Adhirudha samadhi-yoga might have another meaning. Up till then I had taken it to mean a samadhi, a transcendental experience, mounted on yoga; now I saw it was meaning a samadhi which is a mount, or a vehicle, for yoga, the ultimate union. Before that I used to rebuke our workers in rather harsh and arrogant terms. After that event I changed my style as can be seen by a careful study of my talks from the point of view of their inward spirit.

In the Arms of God

On August 22, 1957, just two days before I left Kerala for Karnataka, I was sleeping under a mosquito-net. Suddenly I felt a sharp sting; I thought it was a scorpion, and got up and shook out the bedding. A centipede fell out. The sting gave me such intense pain that I could not sit still, I had to keep walking to and fro. Something like five hours must have passed, all the while in this intolerable pain. Then at last I lay down again, and my tears overflowed. Vallabhaswami (who was one of those with me) thought that my tears were due to the pain. 'I am not in pain,' I said. 'All of you go to sleep.'

What had happened was this: All this time I had been inwardly repeating to myself a Sanskrit prayer: 'O God, give me devotion, cleanse my mind of faults, may it be without sin. O thou who dwellest in the hearts of all, this is the desire of my heart, I have no other. O God, I am speaking the truth.' But in fact, while I repeated these words, I had another desire—I longed that

the pain of the sting should subside ! I was saying satyam vadami (I am speaking the truth) but really it was jhutham vadami (telling a lie). What a display of egoism ! At last I cried aloud in my mind: 'How long are you going to torment me?' And suddenly, all the pain was gone, completely gone, and I felt myself held as in a close embrace. That was when my tears overflowed, and within two minutes I was asleep. I experienced God then in His quality of mercy.

An Open Vision

As I travelled through Maharashtra I came to Pandharpur. Those who were in charge of the temple of Vithoba invited me for darshan of the image. My companions were people of all castes and religions and we all had the darshan together. I shall never to the end of my life forget what I saw that day, it is so deeply imprinted on my heart. It is hard to find words for what I experienced then as I stood at the feet of Vithoba, the tears flowing freely from my eyes. I looked at the image, and saw no stone sculpture there, but the very God Himself. Beside me there stood those I had revered, some from boyhood, saints like Ramanuja, Nammalvar, Jnanadev, Chaitanya, Kabir, Tulsidas and many more. I bowed before the image, looking at its feet, and saw all those dear to me, all those who had nurtured me, mother, father, guru, and drank my fill of joy.

For my part, I think of God as an ocean of consciousness, in which the waves rise and fall, the billows mount up and are broken, and merge once more into the whole. New waves arise, new waves fall back to be absorbed again. Each individual soul, one wave in the ocean of God, emerges from it to play on the surface for one, two, three lifetimes and then is absorbed, and so set free. Among individual souls there is no high or low; all are different manifestations of His will.

PART FOUR:
Freed from the Yoke
(1970-1982)

‘May the Lord the Giver of fearlessness, grant His servant to become as nothing, so that his name Vinya—‘without’—may have its true meaning. May his longings be wholly fulfilled, may the soul become one with God, may it rest in the Lord in bliss.’

Abhanga-Vrate¹ (*the closing words*)



At Brahmavidya Mandir, Pavnar
“Bodily labour should be undertaken as a way of worship.”

20. On the Road to Freedom

I came here (to Brahma Vidya Mandir, Paunar) in 1970, and I spend a lot of time here in cleaning my surroundings. People ask me why I give so much time to this work, and I tell them what Saint Jnaneshwar said: 'He who stands one moment at the door of the Lord attains four kinds of freedom.' The Lord Rama (in the form of the statue of Bharata-Rama) has come to our courtyard; while cleaning it I feel the joy of His presence, and at the same time I have got the four kinds of freedom.

The first is freedom from outward activity. After being occupied in works of service from 1916 to 1966 I entered on the inward path, and from then on I am in fact free from outward action. It is true that for three or four years I had to give some attention to the great work of Bihar-Dan, which involved some outward activity, but by now (October 1970) that too has come to an end. The second is freedom from books. From now on I shall do no more book-writing. The third is freedom from study. What do I read? Nothing ! The fourth is freedom from teaching. I began teaching in 1911, teaching my school friends and class-mates. Later on I taught the people in the Ashram. I have been teaching for about sixty years, but now that also is finished.

As for my continued cleaning work, there was an additional reason: I looked to it as a way of meditation. If instead of a broom I had picked up a rosary and started telling my beads, no one would have said that I was wasting my time ! Picking up rubbish acts for me like a rosary—with every straw picked up there is a remembrance of the Name. There is no thinking involved, it is pure contemplation. A man who cannot tolerate rubbish around him will not tolerate rubbish inside him either, and will feel a strong urge to get rid of it.

That is a spiritual urge. Very soon however I shall take leave even of this work. In the same way, (in July 1972) I stopped signing copies of Gita-Pravachan ('Talks on the Gita') and other books. I have been popularizing it for forty years—1932-72—and I have now no wish to go on doing so. In addition, (in 1976) I took some further steps, which I announced on the holy Christmas Day,

December 25. 'From today on,' I said, 'I will not share in the management of any institution, nor act as adviser to any, even to those which I myself have founded. The second thing is that whatever talks I have will be with individuals at an individual level, and I have already said what subjects I am ready to discuss—science and spirituality. Science is going ahead by leaps and bounds, and I no longer try to keep up with it except as it relates to physical health. As for spirituality, I do not mean by this any philosophical analysis of such terms as Brahma (the Supreme), maya (illusion) or jiva (individual soul); I mean that which can loosen the tangled knots in the mind and make it pure. Anyone who wishes to exchange thoughts on these two subjects may come. And just one thing more, these talks will not be held in private.'

Kshetra-Sannyasa (Renunciation of Travel)

(On November 2, 1969) I came from my travels through my homeland (India), to my special home in Wardha, and spent seven days in Sevagram. I decided to plan ahead for seven days only, not more. The idea was to keep my mind fresh, and at the same time alert. And who knows, by planning for seven days at a time I might well stay in the same place for a whole year !

(So from Sevagram I moved on to Gopuri, and then) on June 7 (1970), I came to Brahmavidya Mandir. On that date, four years earlier, I had laid all my work of service at Babu's feet, obtained my 'discharge', and entered upon the path of inwardness. On that day therefore I decided to go to the Brahmavidya Mandir. 'I don't wish to tie myself down,' I said to the sisters. 'Over in Bihar the Naxalites² are uttering threats against the Sarvodaya workers, and Jayaprakashji has therefore given up the few days' rest which he had planned to take, and is going from village to village to help them. It is impossible for me to close my mind to these things.'

But although I kept an open mind, I remained where I was. I was ready to consider leaving if some happening somewhere in India should demand it, but otherwise I felt strongly that I should stay, and concentrate on strengthening

Brahmavidya Mandir. The work of the Mandir was being carried on by mutual consultation and agreement among all its members, and so it would continue.

Apart from that, I thought, I would be ready to answer those who came to me individually with their questions and opened their hearts to me. A month or two later (on October 6, 1970) I announced that I was going to become a sthanakavasi, a dweller in one place only. This sthanakavas is a practice among the Jains. Just as they renounce possessions, so also they renounce place. I proposed to begin it on the following day, October 7. One should certainly regard every day as holy, but October 7 has a special importance for me, for it was on that date forty years ago that I began to write the Gitai. On that date therefore I entered my 'detention camp'. The Jains call it sthanakavas, the Hindus call it kshetra-sannyasa, the modern word is 'detention camp'. When a man halts in one place like this, it makes it easy for everyone to find him. This is not my own decision, it is an inward call which I regard as a command. I hope that my friends will come to see me sometimes, for friendship's sake or even for a game of chess !

Entering More Deeply into the Inward Life

This idea of kshetra-sannyasa, of confining oneself to one single place, is certainly an old one. People practised it for the sake of meditation and the welfare of the soul. My purpose however is not that; I seek to realize a deeper inward power for the sake of the welfare of society. This welfare cannot be achieved by outward activities alone. The more deeply inward the action becomes, the more is achieved. Now the time has come to practise this deeper inward action. I entered on this inward path five years ago, but circumstances then compelled me to use the outward path also; it was needful to carry forward the work of Bihar-dan to a certain point. Now that the local people have taken it up, and Jayaprakashji has staked his life on it, I have settled down here in the middle of India.

This deeper inwardness means that one contemplates this whole created universe and sees in it the image of the divine. It means to stand face to face

with humanity and lose oneself in the soul within. The individual who enters on this path will be reduced to nothing, to less than nothing; that is the test. It is inwardly experienced, and bears fruit in the individual life. For society it means the release of a power which, like the power of the atom, is inward and hidden, but whose effect is far greater than that of outward force. This inward energy is just as great as that of the atom, but it cannot be described in material terms.

The work which our friends have done recently, the collection of a Gram-Swaraj Fund³ has, I think, been done very well. Years ago a Swaraj Fund was collected in the name of Lokmanya Tilak when he was at the peak of his fame. That is not the case with me; my reputation is now at the lowest ebb ! There must be many people in the country who feel affection for me, but who regard my gramdan work as bogus. That is only what I expected. I said in Bihar that bhoodan is a cash transaction, something definite, so much received, so much given away. But gramdan work is not like that; as I said, it could have infinite results, or none whatever; there is no middle way. Today it looks like a zero. Jayaprakashji and others are trying to turn the zero into infinity, and I believe they will succeed, because that is the demand of the age.

But having settled down in one place I find that my mind is inclined towards silence. My body also has become very weak. People ask what I am thinking about nowadays, and I answer that I am not thinking at all, it is as if I had no mind at all. I take a morning walk and see the planet Venus shining before me, and the people going to and fro, and the trees. I am conscious of nothing, for much of the time, but a 'mindless' bliss. When I talk with people my intellect comes into play, but not my surface mind.

I have stopped thinking about the state of the country, and leave it in the hands of God. Nor do I keep particular individuals in mind; my thoughts are only of the Lord. But I do read the newspapers, and so have some idea of what is going on, especially just now (1971) the happenings in East Bengal.⁴ Apart from that I just sit here like a reference book, ready for any who may wish to consult me.

People ask me what I am planning to do next, and I tell them that today I have been engaged in meditation, but as for tomorrow, who can say? There was one thing I never accepted from Gandhiji, the writing of a daily diary. In this I had the blessing of the ancients; their words, 'abandon all attachment to the past, all anxiety for the future,' had a great influence on me; I neither remember the past nor trouble about the future. People tell me that I ought to write my autobiography. (The Hindi word is atma-katha, 'Story of the Self'.) But if I did, it would be only the story of the body, for it is not possible to write the story of the Self. In the preface I should have to say that there is no guarantee that what is written here is true, because I am 'Vinoba the Forgetful'. I have forgotten a great deal and I go on forgetting. I don't allow the past to become a burden on me.

I am however engaged in one experiment, and it has two sides; on the one hand to keep the world in my remembrance, on the other to send out my blessings by the channels of thought. Remembrance of the world implies remembrance of oneself. This is the basis of my experiment in abhidhyana, 'specific' meditation. I ask everyone of our workers to write to me once a month, but I do not answer their letters in writing. I read them, I reflect on them, I seek to unite the power of my own thought with whatever is good in them and so to strengthen it.

This intensive reflection, this meditation on specific people and their endeavours, bears fruit only if two conditions are fulfilled. On my part there should be complete freedom from egoism. On the part of my correspondent there should be, as it were, a radio receiving set, an open mind. Then the results will appear.

I am practising this intensive meditation on five specific themes, following the pattern of fivefold worship which Shankaracharya began, and which is called Shan-na-ra-ga-de. 'Shan' stands for Shankar, 'na' for Narayan, 'Ra' for Ravi, the Sun, 'Ga' for Ganapati or Ganesh, 'De' for Devi, Goddess. What then is my fivefold Shan-na-ga-de? My Shankar, who watches over the welfare of all, is Brahmaidya, for without that knowledge of the Supreme we shall never obtain

our true welfare. Those who regard our movement as merely economic and social are taking a completely one-sided view and have not understood it at all. The movement is spiritual, and founded on Brahmavidya. Spiritual disciplines such as meditation, prayer, self-examination and striving for inward purity must always be a vital part of it. Then comes Narayan, the god of human society; Narayan stands for gram-swarajya, village self-government, and that is my second theme. The Sun is the Shanti-sena, the Peace Army, my third theme. The sunbeams shine upon all, so let our Shanti-sena shed its light upon the whole of India. The fourth, Ganapati, is the god of Knowledge, so the Acharya-kul is a theme of my meditation. And the fifth, the Devi, is the Devanagari script. I am very deeply interested in what my fellow-workers have done and are doing about these five matters, and what their difficulties are.

With the Sarva Seva Sangh and my Fellow-workers

When these friends come to see me, I have begun to urge them to choose one district in every State where Gandhiji's constructive programme may be fully demonstrated. The idea goes back to 1916, when I was with Gandhiji in the Kochrab Ashram. He used to go for a walk every day and I would go with him. One day as we were walking he said to me: 'Look, Vinoba, there are 700,000 villages in India (at that time India had not been divided). We ought to have a worker in every one of them. He would depend on the people for his livelihood, and would guide them and work with them to build up the strength of the village. For 700,000 villages we need 700,000 workers.' That was Gandhiji's dream. So I say to my fellow-workers: 'If you stop thinking about politics, and take up the constructive programme with determination and faith, so that you are completely absorbed in it, it will benefit both yourselves and the whole world also.'

In India today there is much discontent, and many problems of various kinds. But whatever the circumstances, and whatever the reasons, there should be no resort to violence. Not only that, there should be no aggressive non-violent movement either, so long as complete understanding is lacking between

Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Otherwise the country will be in danger. There should be nothing but peaceful constructive work, by means of which a great deal can be done to relieve poverty and other sources of discontent. I keep on saying another thing also. Shankaradeva, the great saint of Assam, had a saying: 'Politics is the science of demons'. Let us therefore forget politics and think about the world as a whole. These days I think much about the world, and I have by me a map showing the nations of the world with details of their population, forms of government and so on. Let us then study world politics and at the same time keep ourselves aloof, like onlookers.

Otherwise we too shall be divided, like the politicians.

(In July 1974) I spent a week for the discussions of the Sarva Seva Sangh. Usually nothing affects my sleep, but on one of those days I felt a bit anxious lest the Sarva Seva Sangh should break up, and so I slept less than usual. My own aim and endeavour is always to bring people together in a union of hearts. Now it seemed to me that hearts were being divided, and that was not right. Differences of opinion there may be, but hearts must remain one. I therefore set to work as skilfully as I could to bring them together.

I set before them three principles—Truth, Non-violence, Self-restraint. Let us keep within these limits, I said. No matter what we do, we are always talking about Truth and non-violence, and to these two I added a third: Self-restraint, which is a very important thing. It means restraint of speech. One should refrain from talking ill of others; rather one should emphasize their good qualities. Everyone possesses some good quality, some element of truth. Let us look for that and so build unity, not break it down. The whole Sangh, with its four or five hundred workers, was in danger of breaking up. I gave them my proposals in writing: that they should accept any resolution which was passed unanimously, and work with united hearts within the limits set by Truth, Non-violence and Self-restraint. Within those limits, let all work in accordance with their own special interests.

There is another matter which I have been talking about repeatedly—that there are three kinds of power in the world, spiritual insight, science and faith.

Faith, or trust, is a very great power. Let us all trust one another. For my part, I trust everyone. I trust Jayaprakashji and Indiraji, and Hemavatinandan Bahuguna and S.M. Joshi and Vasantnao Naik.⁵ That seems strange, doesn't it? Joshi and Naik belong to opposite political parties, yet I trust them both. I trust Zulfikar Ali Bhutto⁶ also. You may call it a merit or a defect in me, but there it is. We must increase the power of trust in everyone. We should trust those who are opposed to us, trust them as much as they distrust us.

The Gift of Fasting

These days (December 1973) I have started fasting for a half day on the 11th of the month and for a half day on the 25th. These dates have meaning for me; the 11th is my birthday, the 25th the day on which I left home. Both days are good for reflection, and the two together make up a full day's fast with no bad effect on health.

My food costs about three rupees a day, so in this way I save three rupees a month, thirty-six rupees a year. I thought I would give this amount to the work of the Sarva Seva Sangh.⁷ It seemed to me that it would be a very big thing if every one of the workers, sympathizers and supporters of Sarvodaya ideas would fast once a month and give the amount saved each year to the Sarva Seva Sangh. Up to now we have been accepting all kinds of gifts for our work, and in that way we have worshipped the Sarva Brahma, the Supreme in all. Now let us worship the Vimala Brahma, the pure Supreme, with a pure offering. Fasting purifies; a gift derived from fasting is a pure gift.

One Year of Silence

(In December 1974) my mind was full of the idea of keeping silence for a time. The 25th was approaching. It was the holy eleventh day of the half-month of Magh in the Hindu calendar, the 'birthday' of the Gita, and also Christmas; I decided that beginning on that auspicious day I would keep silence for one year.

But should I not then complete the work which I had already planned? A spiritual decision does in fact entail breaking such commitments, it cannot wait until some work or other has been finished. To accept sannyasa means that such ties have to be broken, otherwise nothing is gained. So from December 25 I kept silence for a year.

Before entering the silence I told people that in one sense I had been observing silence even while speaking, and that now I should go on speaking even in my silence ! Silence is an active power. The Sun shines outside the door, but if the door is closed, the sunlight does not push its way in. This silence is not like that, it pushes, it presses forward.

This silence means not only no speaking, but also no writing. I shall write nothing but Rama-Hari, the Name of God. Even after I took kshetra-sannyasa I was involved in a few outward matters and in discussions about them, for these too seemed to me to be in the natural course of things. Then I began to think that though there was nothing wrong with these natural activities, the power of intensive inward meditation could only be released by entering more deeply into the inward life. So I decided that I should stop speaking and writing. God had already stopped my ears. I was sent two or three hearing aids, and I put them on and tried them, and found I could hear well. I used the hearing aid for ten or twelve days, but then I gave it up. Why should I use an aid to get back what God in his grace has taken from me? By God's grace I have already become one of those three (Chinese) monkeys,⁸ the one who is stopping his ears. Now I am going to become the second monkey who keeps his mouth shut. But I am not going to be the third monkey and keep my eyes closed, instead of that I shall stop using my hand, that is to say I shall do no more writing. I shall keep the use of my eyes, in order to read the letters of all those friends and fellow-workers who write to me regularly, and of those who write occasionally as they feel the need. I want to go on reading these letters and to give myself to intensive meditation about each one separately. The inward thoughts which the letters reveal can be influenced, the knotty problems loosened, by the power of this intense meditation. When I stop speaking, even those who do not

have 'receiving sets' will be reached by this power. The silence will be aggressive; it will push its way into the heart of the one who wrote. Some will ask, why one year only of silence? Why not more? The answer is that in such difficult spiritual matters one must be guided by experience. This is a small first step, a year only. I have not thought any further ahead. Experience will decide.

(Vinoba then remained silent until December 25, 1975)

Anushasana or Guidance (From Vinoba's first talk after breaking silence)

I would like to explain briefly what I mean by anushasana parva. The phrase is used in the Mahabharata, but it occurs earlier, in the Taittiriya Upanishad. In those ancient times it was the custom for a student to live with his teacher for twelve years, pursuing his studies. When the studies had been completed, and the student was about to return home, the teacher used to give him his final advice. In the Upanishad this is called anushasana, and it is something to be followed throughout one's life. From the teacher comes anushasana, from those in power comes shasana, the authority of government. If the world were to be guided by shasana it would never be at peace; problems would be unravelled only to become tangled again.

This is the kind of show which is going on today throughout the world. From A to Z, from Afghanistan to Zambia, there are more than three hundred governments, and they all have their alliances. Among those subject to their authority there is discontent everywhere, killing everywhere. If only the world would listen instead to the advice of its teachers, its acharyas, it would be at peace. An acharya, in the words of Guru Nanak, is one without fear or hatred; I would add to that, without political allegiance. Such teachers never become agitated or angered; they are able to think calmly and come to a conclusion on which they are all agreed. They may then put their proposals before the public; those who follow their guidance will be benefited and the world will be at peace. This is what anushasana means, the dispassionate advice of the true teacher, the acharya. A government which acted against the advice of such

fearless, impartial acharyas could rightly be challenged by satyagraha. I feel sure however that the Government of India would never act against the advice of its true teachers.

A Fast against the Slaughter of the Cow

One piece of work was initiated by me during the following year (1976). On April 25 a conference of the Maharashtra Acharyakul was held at Paunar. In my speech I laid great stress on the protection of the cow, and said that the acharyas should take the responsibility. A pamphlet was also published on the subject.

On May 17 Shri Shankararao Chavan, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, himself came to Paunar to meet me. During our talk I emphasized the need for a ban on cow-slaughter for the sake of the development of the country. I told him that unless this was done soon I would have to undertake a fast unto death. On May 29 I was talking with some workers about this, and I told them in plain words that if by September 11, there were no announcement of an all-India ban on cow-slaughter I would begin my fast on that day, which is my birthday. The date was still three and a half months away, so it gave the people concerned enough time to come to a decision.

This year (1976) is the centenary of my mother's birth, and I do not remember a single day when I have not recalled her. When I was a child she taught me that before taking my own meal I should first water the tulsi plant and then feed the cow, and she would not let me sit down to eat until these two duties had been done. Now she is saying to me: 'Vinya, you must do something for the cow; if the cow can be saved it will be a great benefit to India.' In India today thousands of cows are being slaughtered, and their flesh exported to foreign countries in order to earn dollars. In three months' time I shall complete my eighty-first year, and one cannot say how much longer I have to live. So I thought I might sacrifice these remaining days for the sake of the cow. If I died and the cow were saved, that would be good. Even if the cow were not saved I should still die happily, remembering God. I would have done

my duty, but the saving of the cow depends on the grace of God. In June the news of my intended fast was printed in Maitri. The police came and confiscated the whole issue and took all the copies away. What did I do? As they were carrying them off I stood up, clapped my hands and shouted Jai Jagat. Blessed were those who couldn't muster up courage to print the news! Two or three newspapers were bold enough to publish it, but the others were afraid, for if the papers were closed down where would they get their bread? It does not occur to us that in the times of Gautama Buddha, Mahavir, Jesus Christ and Shankara- charya there were no newspapers, yet their teachings spread abroad as no others have done.

Since the first of April I had cut down my daily intake of food to half the normal. I have several times related how my mother used to tell me that fate had fixed not the length of my life but the amount of food allotted to me. 'If you eat a little at a time, you will live longer.' The other reason for reducing my intake is that I am getting ready for the fast. It is much easier to go to a full fast from half-rations than from a full intake. From a full diet to a full fast would be a real 'high jump'!

I had declared that on August 11 there should be fasting and prayer throughout the country for the protection of the cow. After that, during the following month, there should be no more public propaganda. This is a kind of non-violent Satyagraha. Once during a discussion of non-violence, someone said that we should resort to 'non-violent resistance'. 'Not resistance,' I said. 'Let it be non-violent assistance in right thinking.' If all propaganda is stopped for a month it will have a very good effect. The government's mind will be set at rest, and it will be able to consider the matter calmly. (By the 8th of September) the question of ending cow-slaughter in India was very largely solved. On the 11th September I therefore began to take my full normal diet.

Although cow-slaughter was now banned in most places, there was a good deal still going on in West Bengal and in Kerala, and my heart was troubled. I therefore decided (in December 1978) that from January 1, 1979 I would begin

a partial fast. I knew however that such a partial fast would probably not help the cow much, so I also considered a complete fast. Only God can 'save' the cow, so I do not talk of saving her but only of serving her. I will serve her as far as I can and if need be at the cost of my own life. Afterwards I announced that I would begin a complete fast from the 22nd April.

When the fast began I did not say, as I usually do at the end of my talks, 'This is the end. Jai Jagat'. I said instead, 'This is the beginning. Jai Jagat.' (On April 26) however I received an assurance from the Prime Minister and the Congress leaders that they will make every effort to see that cow-slaughter is banned throughout India. I have said a number of times that trust is as necessary for the life of society as breath for the life of the body. Trust is the life-breath of society. So I trusted those who had given me their promise, and my fast fulfilled its purpose in five days. Here is the temple of Bharata-Rama, a name which (in Nagari script) has five letters, Bha-ra-ta-ra-ma. Five letters for the name, five days for the fast !

(On December 24, 1982) I announced that as bullocks are being slaughtered in the abattoir at Deonar (Mumbai) there should be satyagraha in Bombay for a total all-India ban on the slaughter of cows and bullocks of any age.⁹

Thoughts about Death

When I had reached my seventieth year in this body I noticed that my mind was no longer easily disturbed but remained effortlessly calm. If someone asked me a question I would give an answer, but that was all. It seemed to me that if I were to go on talking all the time, others would stop thinking for themselves. Rather than that, I had better 'die' while still alive. Vallabhaswami had died in December 1964, and one by one others were passing away and were no longer there to give advice. One day when I was talking with Jayaprakashji I said that the 'typhoon' which was then going on was my last battle. 'One fight more, the best and the last,' I quoted. 'Oh no,' he replied. 'It's not the last. We need you to fight a lot more battles. We are not ready to let you off so soon.' 'As if that lies in your hands !' I said. That is why I feel in my own mind that I should

'die' before my death. So should everyone. One should see one's own death with one's own eyes, as I myself long to do. So I thought, let me 'die' before my death, and see what happens to bhoodan. If anyone asks my advice I can give it; apart from that, let me be just an onlooker. So I told my friends that so long as I was there I would be a 'dictionary'. A dictionary is there to be used by those who want it; if they don't it just lies on the shelf. It has no urge to get up and wander about explaining the meanings of words. I would behave in the same way.

My companions ask me why I eat so little, and why I talk so often about fasting. The thing is, as I said in 'Talks on the Gita', that it is a good thing to keep death in mind. When I left home I had the idea of going to some solitary place to practise meditation and so on. Instead of which I went to Gandhiji, stayed with him, and worked under his orders. Now (1978) my only purpose is to wait for death. I feel I have done all that I had to do. Now I am free from all outward action, and the only thing that remains is to answer the questions of people like you, to give them ideas and explain things.

Being now freed from outward activity I am reflecting on death. So this could lead to deathlessness. My attitude is expressed in a verse in Manusmriti: 'Desire neither death nor life; wait for the time just as the servant waits for the master's orders.' I have no desire of my own, either for death or for life, but like the servant I wait for my master's command. I practise dying every day when I lie down to sleep. I say, do today, do at once, what you have to do when you die. Saint Tukaram says: 'My death has died and made me immortal. I saw my death with my own eyes, and it was an incomparable festival.' So every night I carry out the rehearsal of death. I say to God: 'If you take me away tonight I shall not be leaving any special work undone; I shall come to you filled with love. If tomorrow you give me birth once more, then whatever service I can do I will do, especially by the spoken word.' I die daily, and forget all that is past. If Gandhiji had remembered all the various events of his own life, he would not have said He Rama as he did, in his last moments. When death comes, it will come not to me but to my body. My real self will be

immortal, because I have given up the illusions which caused me to don the garment of the body. When I hear that someone has died, I regard it as good news. What else can it be, the news that someone has gone home? For in truth it is that world which is our home; in this world we are strangers. Our turn is about to come; only a few days remain. Let us pass them laughing and singing—like the wise devotees, as the Gita says.

Meanwhile, being still in this body, I am enjoying watching the 'play' of my own death, and trying to imagine what will happen after that. Who am I? Millions of people, and all die, not even the great escape from death. Only God and the universe remain. We come and we go, like the waves of the sea, some smaller, some bigger, some rising high and others not, but all of them merely waves.

It is September 11, 1981; I have completed eighty-six years of life. Let us reflect that this body is a thing of time, and in the end it will go; why should one have any interest in sticking to it? You are keeping a peaceful quiet today because it is my birthday. Let there be quietness and peace also on my deathday. I have nothing more to do now. I have written these words in my note book, 'My duty is done.'

So now, as I wait for my life to reach its destined end, I try to follow the advice of the poet who says: 'With every breath take the name of Rama; let no breath go waste.' I try to do that, to remember Rama-Hari at all times. All day long, whatever I am doing, eating or walking, it goes on, and when I lie down at night it goes on all the time. I fall asleep in the lap of God; if He should blot out my consciousness I shall die every happily with the name of Rama-Hari on my lips, I have no doubt about that. These things are constantly in my thoughts.

Ramadas said that the mantra 'Shri Rama' is open to all. I too tell everyone that one should say 'Rama' as one breathes in the outside air and 'Hari' as one breathes it out. Along with the fresh outside air we take in Rama, and our inward being is filled with Him. Then, as we breathe out the air within us we perform also the haran, the removal of our sins, taking the name of Hari the

Remover. In this way I have told everyone that we should repeat 'Rama-Hari' as often as we can. This rhythm of breathing, in and out, continues as long as life remains. There is no need to pronounce the words; the consciousness is all that matters.

'One dies, another mourns,' says Saint Ramadas, 'and then in a moment the mourner too passes away.' Death comes to all, and the only problem is to remember the name of God when the time comes. To be able to do that one must practise it throughout life.

I have one very important thing to say: Forget me, but remember the Gitai.



The last journey

EPILOGUE

Narrative by Vinoba's Attendants

November 5, 1982: Baba¹ had slight fever all day, and at 8.15 in the evening had a good deal of discomfort, with heavy breathing and a rapid pulse. The doctors diagnosed a heart attack. Treatment was given and by the 7th the condition was definitely improved.

The following evening, November 8, Baba refused to take either water or medicine. Next morning he again refused to take water, medicine or food. He did not speak but whenever these things were brought he indicated his refusal. The medical bulletin ran: 'There was a definite and satisfactory improvement in health and every possibility of a full recovery; but because of the determination not to take food, medicine or water there is now grave danger.'

Although he was very tired, he would speak a word or two to anyone who came to his side. Some he remembered by their work, others by their names—a continuous flow of compassionate interest. On the 12th the doctors reported no deterioration in his condition and on the 14th: 'Weakness and tiredness notwithstanding, he is fully conscious and his face shines with a spiritual radiance.' That evening the pulse became so feeble and blood-pressure so low that the doctors agreed that the condition was critical, but an hour and a half later both blood-pressure and pulse were again normal, and temperature also. The doctors checked periodically till four in the morning; everything was completely normal and they finally left off, recognizing that this was an astonishing case.

At 7.30 that morning, the 15th, a French girl associate of the Ashram, who had arrived from France the previous night, began to press him earnestly to drink some water. He laughingly signed to her to drink it herself and then pointed with his finger to a small wooden board with 'Rama-Hari' written on it.

He was lying with his eyes closed, his face full of peace, his whole body clean and clear, the only movement that of breathing and of the feet keeping time

with the inward chant of 'Rama-Hari', which in the most difficult times had never been interrupted. Just at 9.30 a.m., quietly and easily, the breathing ceased.

As Vinoba had said so often, to so many gatherings, 'This is the end. Jai Jagat. My salutations to you all. Rama-Hari.'

APPENDIX

Who Is Vinoba?

M K Gandhi

(Introducing Vinoba, whom he has chosen to start the individual civil disobedience movement in October 1940, to the people of India and the world, in Harijan, 20-10-1949)

Who is Vinoba Bhave and why has he been selected? He is an undergraduate, having left college after my return to India in 1915. He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members. In order to better qualify himself, he took on a year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvelous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning which he has specialized as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher, he has been of the utmost assistance to Ashadevi (Aryanayakam) in her development of the scheme of education through handicrafts. Shri Vinoba has produced a textbook taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realize that spinning is the handicraft *par excellence* which lends itself to being effectively used for basic education. He has revolutionized *takli*-spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning, probably, he has no rival in all India.

He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best mind of Islam, he gave one year to the study of the Koran in the original. He

therefore learned Arabic. He found his study necessary for cultivating a living contact with the Muslims living in his neighbourhood.

He has an army of disciples and workers who would raise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers. Vinoba was for years director of the Mahila Ashram in Wardha. His devotion to the cause of *Daridranarayan* ('God revealed in the poor') took him first to a village near Wardha, and now he has gone still further and lives in Paunar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villages through the disciples he has trained.

He believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villages is impossible without the constructive programme of which *khadi* is the centre. He believes that the *charkha* (spinning wheel) is the most suitable outward symbol of nonviolence which has become an integral part of his life. He has taken an active part in the previous *satyagraha* campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the background is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform. And he thoroughly believes that nonviolent resistance is impossible without a heart-belief in the practice of constructive work.

A friend suggests that I should write a treatise on the science of Ahimsa. To write such a treatise is beyond my power. I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain, and what I understand, according to my lights, I do....In the event of my inability the correspondent has suggested three names in order of preference for this task: Shri Vinoba, Shri Kishorlal Mashruwala, Shri Kaka Kalelkar. The first named could do so but I know that he will not. Every hour of his is scheduled for his work and he would regard it as sacrilege to take a single moment therefrom for writing a shastra. I would agree with him. The world does not hunger for shastras. What it craves and will always crave is sincere action. He who can appease this hunger will not waste his time in elaborating a shastra.

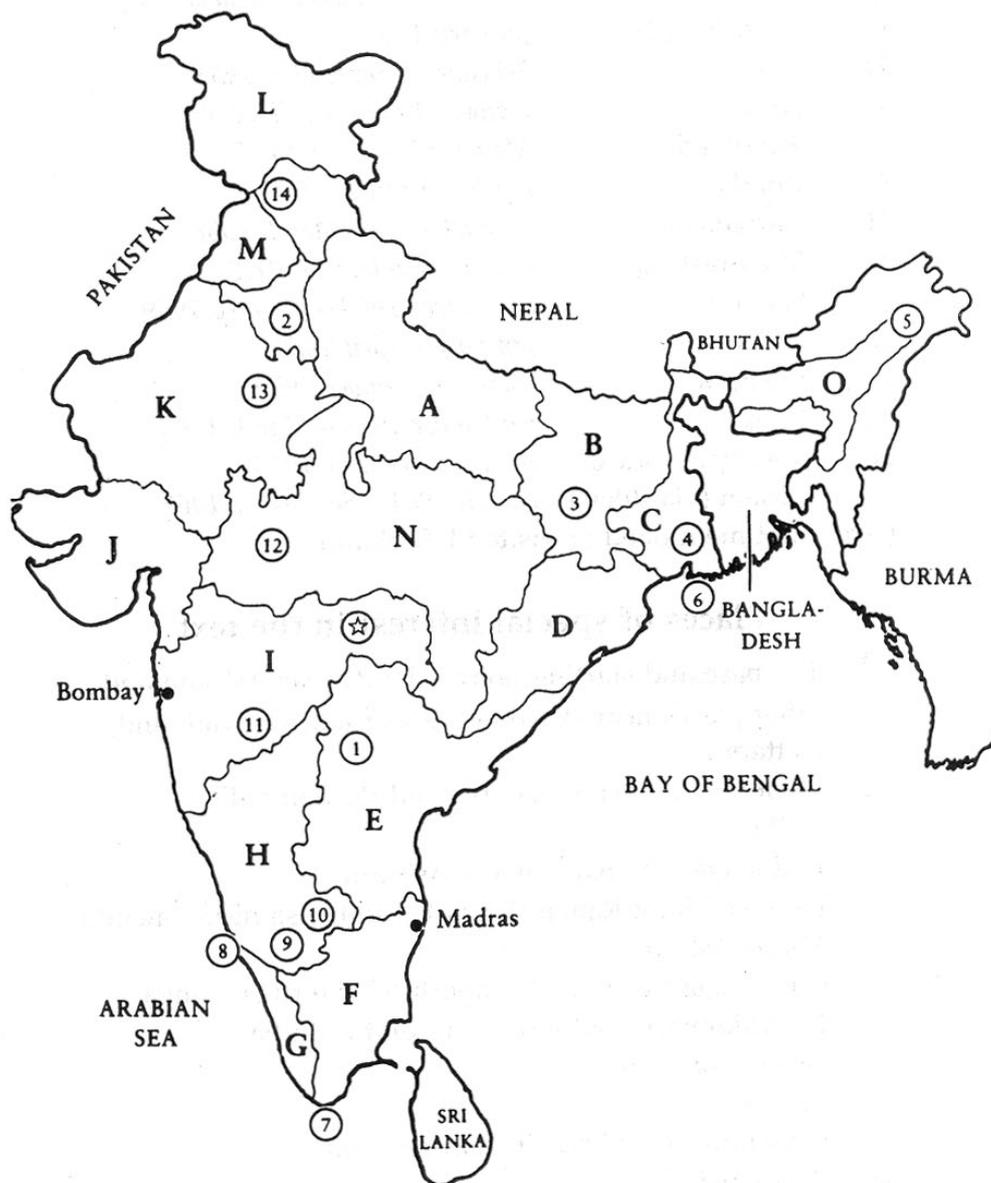
M. K. Gandhi

Map

Map of Vinoba's Bhoodan Pilgrimage and places of special interest in the text.

MAP

of Vinoba's *Bhoodan* Pilgrimage
and places of special interest in the text



Scale: 1" = 400 miles approx.

The Bhoodan Pilgrimage

A	Uttar Pradesh	November 1951–September 1952
B	Bihar	September 1952–December 1954
C	West Bengal	January 1955
D	Orissa	February–September 1955
E	Andhra	October 1955–April 1956
F	Tamilnadu	May 1956–April 1957
G	Kerala	April–August 1957
H	Karnataka	August 1957–March 1958
I	Maharashtra	March–September 1958
J	Gujarat	September 1958–January 1959
K	Rajasthan	January–April 1959
L	Kashmir	May–September 1959
M	Punjab	September 1959–March 1960
N	Madhya Pradesh	April–December 1960
O	Assam (via Bihar)	March 1961–September 1962

(Areas not mentioned or visited left blank)

Places Of Special Interest In The Text

* The base and starting point: The Paunar Ashram and other places near Wardha—Sevagram, Nalwadi and Dattapur.

- 1 Hyderabad: Telangana area and Pochampalli
- 2 Delhi
- 3 Bodhgaya: The Samanvaya Ashram
- 4 Home of Saint Ramakrishna Paramhansa near Calcutta
- 5 Maitri Ashram
- 6 Gangasagar: One of the mouths of the river Ganga
- 7 Kanyakumari, southernmost point of India
- 8 Guruvayur temple
- 9 Melkote
- 10 Bangalore: Vallabha Niketan Ashram
- 11 Pandharpur
- 12 Indore: Visarjan Ashram
- 13 Ajmer: the Dargah
- 14 Pathankot: Prasthan (Frontier) Ashram