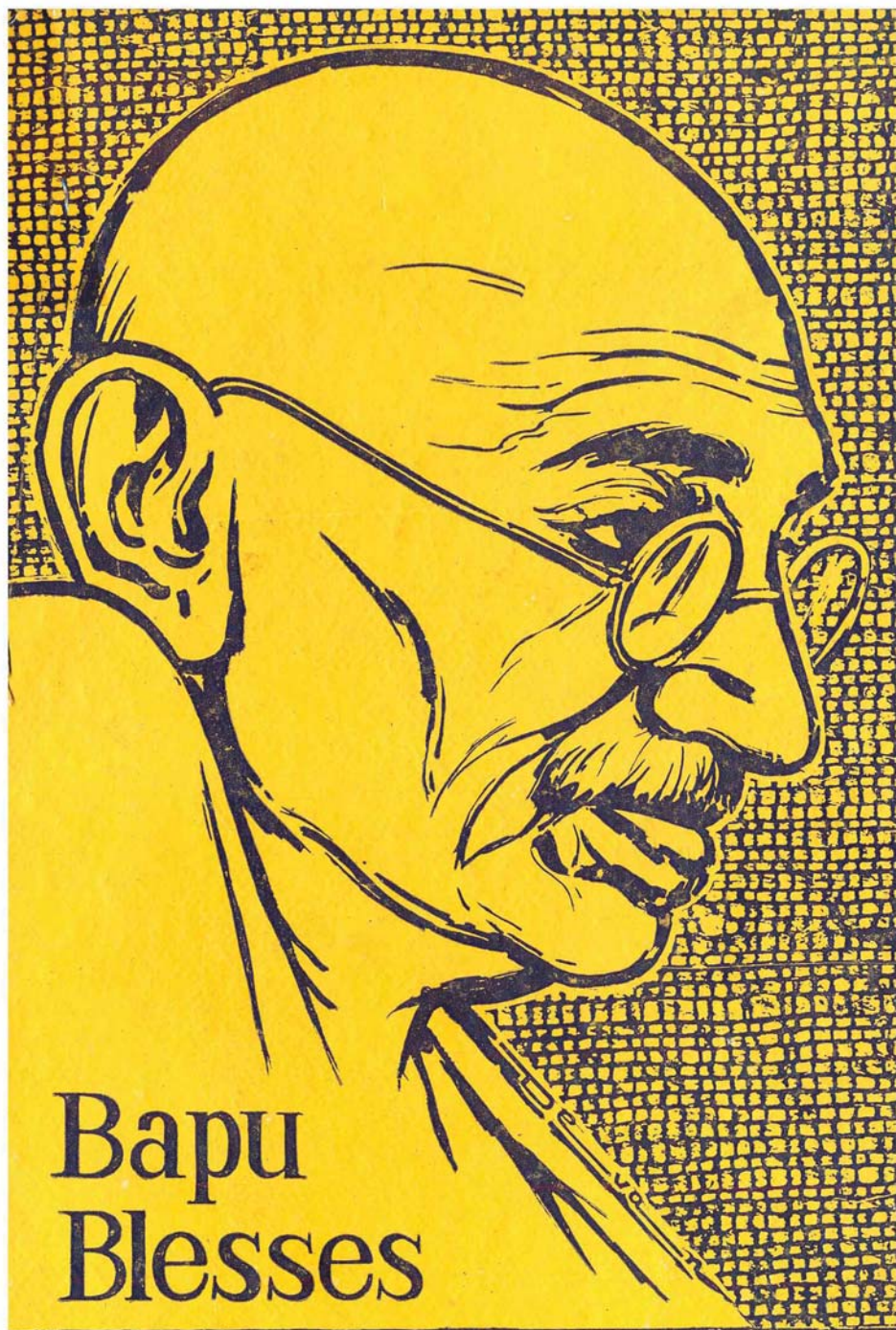
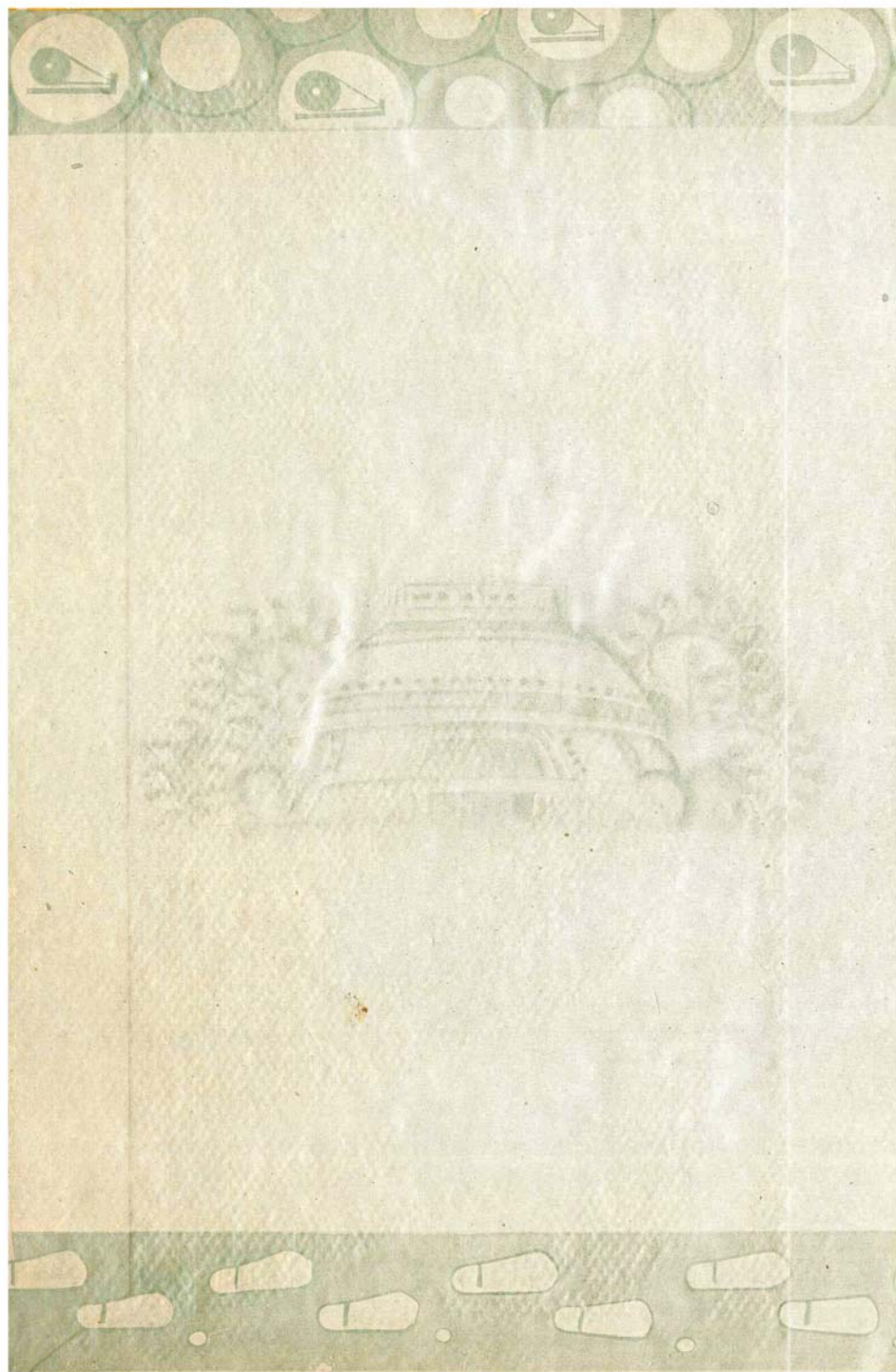
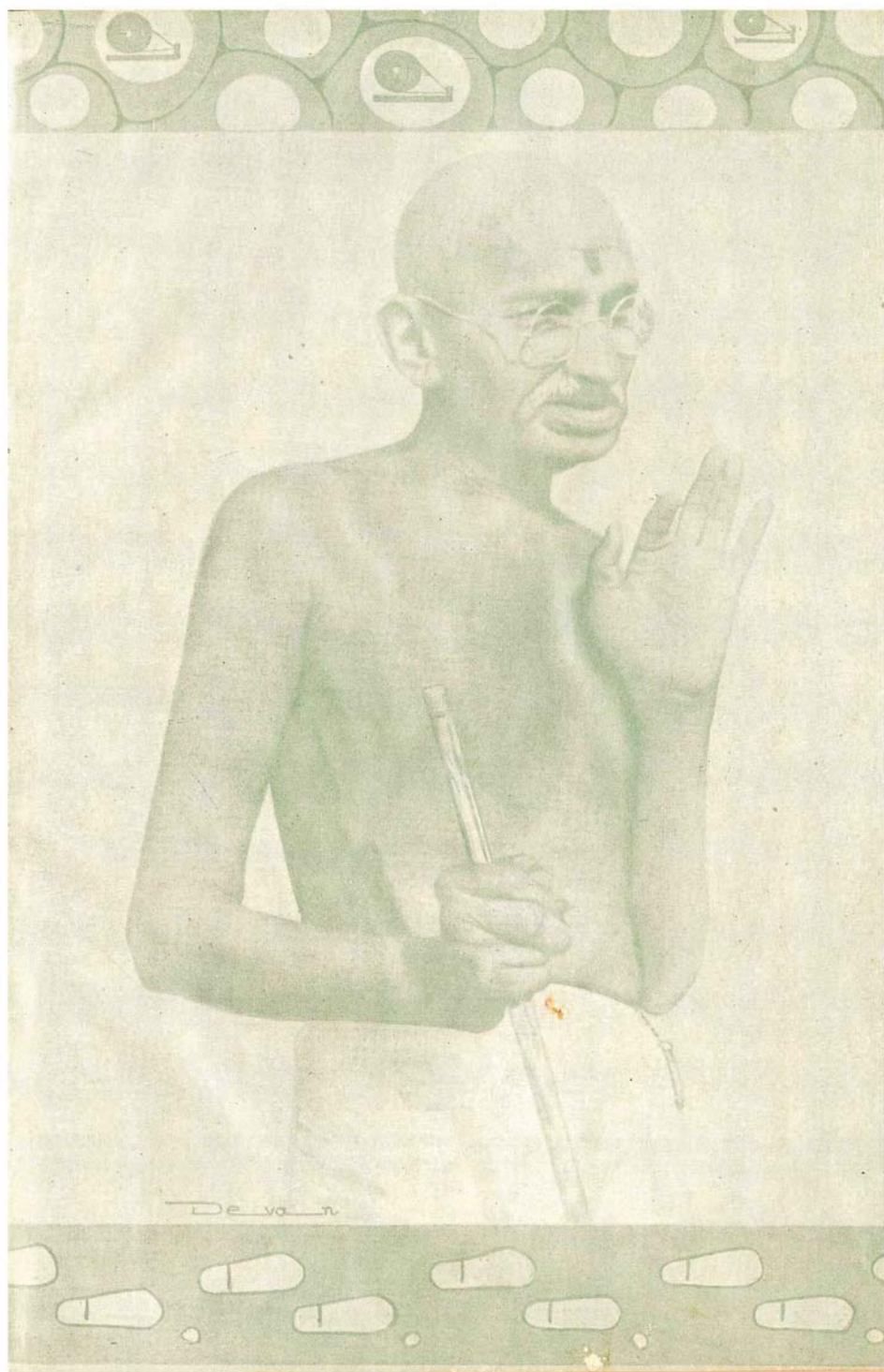




Bapu Blesses

by N.G.Ranga





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BAPU BLESSES

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BY

N. G. RANGA

with an introduction by

Shri C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

THE INDIAN PEASANT INSTITUTE

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To
BHARATI DEVI

"Others have thought, I myself have thought, the things that Gandhi thought, sometimes even before he ever put them down for others to read. But the power that enabled him to do what he thought came from Above. So it is I consider him one who had held a commission from God, an avataar."

Oct. 28, 1956.

RAJAJI

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Rajaji's Introduction

Shree Jayanti 1969

Whether we are following Mahatma Gandhi's advice on various matters or not, it is an undeniable fact that our people in India consider him the wisest of men our country produced. Let us therefore read Acharya Ranga's book which gives a faithful account of some of his talks with the man we all worship. What emerges from a conversation is a product of two minds although it may appear often to be a unilateral thought. N. G. Ranga is one of our exceptional men, men whose whole concern is the happiness of our people and not one's own advantage. This small book is therefore worth a great deal and I have great pleasure in commending it to the general reader.

C. Rajagopalachari

*“.....a man who wants to be good
and do good in all circumstances
must not hold power.”*

GANDHIJI.

Preface

These notes are mostly reminiscences of my talks and observations with Bapu over a period from 1925 upto the week of his martyrdom (Jan. 30, 1948).

I was so full of Bapu, so much more so than usual during that last week of his earthly existence and martyrdom. I tried to find some solace and inspiration by jotting down in brief notes of memories of my intimate contacts with him. Sometimes I used to be overwhelmed, that I could not proceed with even that process of making abbreviated notations which used to break the sequence and also the trance-like proximity of his invisible presence. So I had to skip over many an event or a chance exchange of observations.

All these years and more so, during these centenary months I was trying to put together some of these notes, fill up the gaps and give some intelligible shape for some of those reminiscences, indicated by these notes. I found these notes in a piecemeal fashion as I was searching my disjointed records. I am stringing some of them together in this small brochure.

Everyone of these tete-a-tetes needs, so much of background material or deep knowledge of the Gandhian literature or close study of contemporary Indian political and social life and happenings, to be appreciated fully in all their significance and social atmosphere.

I did my best to present the talks, as close to accuracy as could be possible through my prayerful attempts to stretch my memory back to those scenes and recapture the atmosphere, nuances of my experiences of those meetings, talks, flashes of observations, in and around the presence of Bapu.

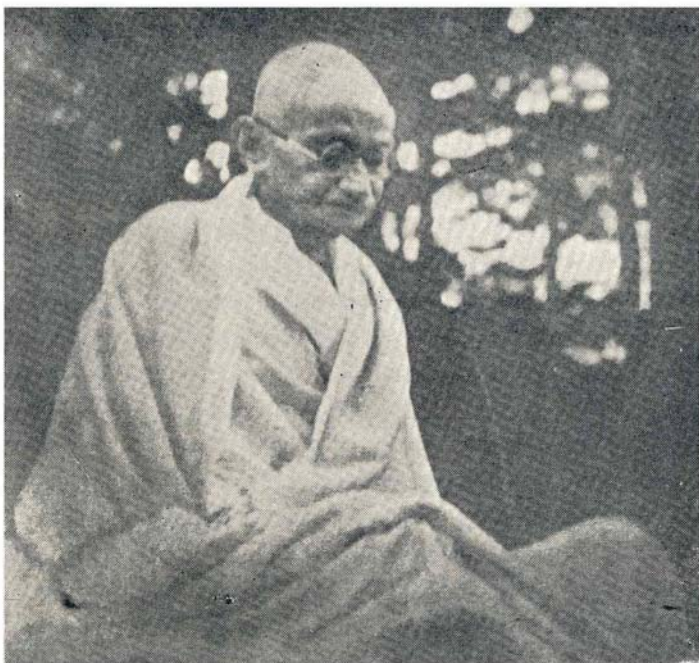
If any expressions or attitudes appear to be attributed inappropriately, then the fault is mine and Bapu's personality as a whole, as it emerges from all the other records is not to be treated as in anyway weakened or coloured wrongly by these reminiscences.

This book indicates how Bapu used to advise, guide, help and build his followers in their efforts to serve the suffering people. We used to benefit from his filial care and caution according to our capacities. But just as the sun shines on every drop of the water captured and contained by each pond irrespective of its size, so also Bapuji showered his love on all of us. All those who had the good fortune to come into intimate contact with Bapu, reflect a bit of his thoughts and divine smiles bestowed on them, when they are at their best. Millions of our people had gained so much by his persence and movements among them during that wonderful half a century of his active, soul-stirring work. So they feel themselves blessed. People who did not enjoy these special favours have also come to be ennobled by their study and contemplation of Bapu's personality, activity, thoughts and preaching. The greatest of these Eekalavyas sprang up from the roots of Africa on the soil of the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King, had met with the same end as Bapu, at a much younger age.

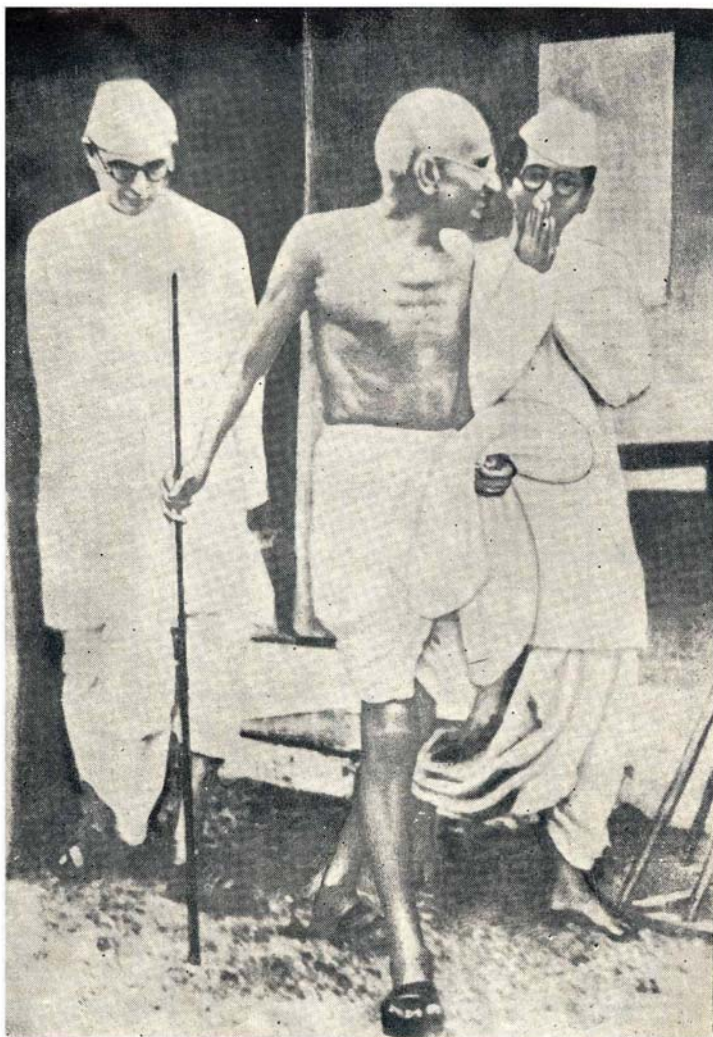
I venture to publish this garland as only a small part of the homage that I and my co-workers have been offering in our hearts during this quarter of a century, in the hope that it would induce the coming generation to march in the foot-prints of Bapu.

Many other talks that I had with Bapu were presented in my book *Fight for Freedom*. I have taken the liberty of presenting in this book extracts from 'Swarajya-Annual'. Mahatma Gandhi—Last Phase, Vol. II, by Pyarelal and Mahatma—Vol. 6 edited by Tendulkar. My thanks are due to those publishers for allowing me this liberty.

N. G. RANGA.



When Bapu once sat down for prayer he was transformed into a celestial being.



Mahadev Desai, Mahatma Gandhi and Ranga

1. | Bapu Blesses

DR. Ansari was elected the president for the Madras session of the Indian National Congress in 1927. Srinivasa Ayyangar was the effective boss and had been the president during the preceding year. Mahatma Gandhi was content to concentrate on constructive programme and Rajaji was his right-hand man in that direction. He was keen on strengthening Gandhiji from behind as the parliamentarians were impatient to force themselves before him.

The Khadi exhibition was the principal show of that session. There was a controversy whether machine-made goods should be allowed to be exhibited. I did not like the ban on handloom cloth, woven out of mill-yarn.

Gandhiji opened the attractive Khadi exhibition. Mrs. Ranga and myself met him and had a short talk about the place of cottage industries in our national economy. I told Gandhiji about the fate of all other artisans, employed in other cottage industries, who use so many machine-made products as some of their factors of production. He admitted that would be a real difficulty. He said that became necessary to make people concentrate on hand spun Khaddar and I was not happy with the ban on handloom products.

Bapu : But there are so many other exhibitions for them.

Ranga : No sir, all other exhibitions are organised by those interested in large scale industries and their manufactures.

Bapu : They are called Swadeshi !

Ranga : They are Swadeshi mostly for manufacturers. Who would look after the artisans and popularise their products ; especially handloom weavers ?

Some one : Why not the weavers take to Khadi weaving?

Ranga : There is not enough Khadi yarn for even one per cent of our weavers. Gobichettipalayam can't provide enough yarn to even one handloom centre.

Then Bapu congratulated me on having been appointed as professor. Turning to Bharati Devi,—

Bapu : Are you happy now ?

He asked me if the constructive programme is popular with my students. I said it was too early to say anything. But judging from the attitude of the students with whom I had been in touch, during the past two years in the students movement, more and more are coming to be attracted to it, in its broadest sense.

Bapu : What do you mean, in its broadest sense ?

Ranga : They think their participation in student's parliaments, associations, wearing Khadi and other handloom cloth, even mill-cloth, using Swadeshi products, organising night schools, adult educational centres etc., is also a part of constructive work.

Bapu : So they use my phrases in their own way and to suit their conveniences.

Gandhiji laughed and became serious so quickly.

Bapu : Do you agree with them ?

What was I to say ? I recovered from my surprise.

Ranga : I think, they are not wrong ?

Gandhiji smiled.

Bapu : You are already a professor. So you do not want to disown your students.

Ranga : Sir, we must look at constructive work in a practical manner and win the cooperation of the rising generation.

Bapu : What about politics ? I learn that you are the chief force behind the All India Students' Conference.

BAPU BLESSES

Ranga: Students favour complete independence. They do not understand the practical difficulties in the way. But they wish to be guided by you.

Gandhiji informed me that he was glad to learn from Dr. Cousins that my influence over Madras students was very constructive and they would certainly heed my advice.

Bapu : What about Srinivasa Ayyangar and Satyamurti ?

Ranga : They are also using their influence constructively.

He asked me, what I was going to do, after becoming professor. I told him that I would continue my contacts. I was not quite sure if students would appreciate that. Anyhow, I was assured by college authorities that I could carry on my public activities. So, I asked Bapu's advice, If I should remain in the Congress Committees.

Bapu : I am glad you have gained this right to be in public life. But you should not exercise that so fully. It is better you are not active in Congress Committees. Look at me. I am a Congressman but I am not in Congress politics. Concentrate on constructive work. Why should you be keen on political controversies ?

Ranga: I am not too keen on Congress politics. Surely, if students put questions about contemporary political developments, when I meet them in political science classes, should I not be free to express my views ?

Gandhiji waited for a while.

Bapu : Certainly you should. I suppose you could express your views in a scholarly manner.

He could see I had something to say and so hastened to add,—

Bapu : I know, you have to steer clear of the local politics between Justice Party and our warlike Congress

BAPU BLESSES

legislators evidently he had Satyamurti, the dynamic parliamentarian in mind and that may be somewhat difficult. But you are an Oxford Union debater. You can manage to hold your own.

Ranga: I obtained freedom to seek election into legislatures

Bapu: Oh, you want to follow Ayyangar, not Rajaji.

Ranga: No, sir, I want to protect our peasants against the oppression of zamindars, money-lenders and British administration.

Bapu: Well, you are impatient to help people. It may not be too bad. There is the Swarajya Party to welcome your work. Would you not continue your economic studies? I read your paper on Khadi economics. It is good. I want you to go on working on those lines. Would your college work give you much scope for it?

I reassured him on that score and outlined how I proposed to study and survey the social and economic conditions of different sections of our peasants, workers, villagers and also city workers. He appreciated my plans. His secretary indicated that it was getting time for him to attend to other engagements. We began to rise to take leave. He turned to Bharati Devi and blessing her,—

Bapu: I learn from Mrs. Cousins or Kamala Devi that you had been to England, studied Art at Oxford; yet, you are not so Westernised. I like your tilak on your forehead. Do help Ranga. May I adopt you both?

That is how he won the hearts of millions of national workers. Just by a smile, a nod of recognition, a word of good cheer, a touch of blessings, he used to entwine the patriotic youths with Mother India's causes. We did feel that day and ever after that BAPU BLESSES us in our new mission.

2. | Bapu Visits Our Home

BAPU came to our home, where I was born in the village Nidubrolu in 1929. My mother had the honour of presenting her purse to him for the Khadi Fund. It was a great occasion for us all in the village.

It was an evening. We were planning for that meeting for days. We were agog with an uplifting anticipation for hours, of the procession headed by the beloved leader. The moment came. He entered our street. His car was approaching us. Our youths were shouting the beloved slogan MAHATMA GANDHI-KI-JAI. We too joined from our end of the street. So quickly came his car. My mother, my brothers, my wife and myself were waiting at our door with flower garlands. He came and my mother turned to me and asked me by a look and slight smile what to do? How to fulfill the moment? I never found her in greater joy. She displayed a sense of awe, love and faith. She garlanded Bapu deliberately and with great devotion; asked me and my wife to offer ours. Quickly she placed the purse in his outstretched hand and offered her Pranam. Bapu had already received my letter and so turning to me,—

Bapu : My Oxford champion, this is your home! I got your letter. I read your paper on Khadi.. Thank you.

Ranga : She is my mother. I owe everything to her.

Bapu looked at my mother for a good few seconds, smiled broadly and blessed us and turning to her;

Bapu : You must be proud of Ranga. Would you give him up to me. I think he would join me. Please do not be angry.

My mother did not fully comprehend what all he meant. She only thought that the Mahatma took note

BAPU BLESSES

of her son. Then Bapu turned to Bharati Devi and smiled while receiving her homage.

Bharati Devi : We have come from Madras for your darshan.

Bapu : Why ? I am always in your home.

Bharati Devi : This is our home, not that in Madras.

My mother was quite happy. She became proud of her son and her daughter-in-law, because she could see that the Mahatma knew us so well. The procession was on the move. We could not delay it any longer. Bapu was however keen on exchanging a few words with me.

Bapu : So, you are also a villager. My economist should be a villager.

Ranga : I am also a peasant Mahatmaji.

Bapu : That is another good point. So my Oxford champion of Khadi is a villager and a peasant. What more do I want ?

Some one : Sir, he is also professor of economics.

Bapu : That I know. He is also true villager and a peasant. He is a true Khadderite, I am so glad.

I sent him again a copy of my thesis on the economics of Khaddar, which had been submitted to Oxford University and published in the Indian Economic Journal, as soon as I learnt that he was going to tour Andhra in connection with the Khadi fund. In that thesis, I was able to demonstrate, among so many arguments justifying Khadi as an economic proposition, how it would be of great economic advantage to our nation, besides deriving so many imponderable social benefits, to encourage our women folk, old people and so many of our other under-employed or unemployed people to work on the production of Khadi, and such other cottage industries, rather than allow them to remain unemployed. I was also able to prove how, during famines and in times of drought it would be

BAPU VISITS OUR HOME

beneficial to the unfortunate victims and profitable to national economy to welcome the millions of the affected people—peasants and workers, their women and even children—to the famine relief works and produce Khadi yarn and other cottage industrial products instead of forcing the already emaciated people to work on the hard and demoralising work of breaking stones and making roads in the dreadful heat. Hand spinning and weaving, would enable the state to pay them full wages, instead of doling out only half wages and gruel rations.

Gandhiji approved that approach of mine, when I outlined it in my talks with him at Delhi in 1925. So, he was pleased to learn from my talks with him again in Madras in 1927 and now through my printed thesis that I was serving his cause from my academic platform.

Sitarama Sastri of Vinayasram, leading exponent of Khadi philosophy was very much impressed with Bapu's appreciation of my thesis and began, ever since, to count me as one of the 'inner-circle' of the constructive workers who were always treated as the core of Gandhian Congress.

Bharati Devi also received Bapu's blessings.

Bapu : How is our artist ? Have you painted any pictures for me ?

Bharati Devi : I will stitch your picture on my purse to you, when you come next time to our village.

Bapu : (Raised his fore finger and observed) So you demand me to come again. Alright, God willing, I will come.

My mother felt proud of her daughter-in-law who could thus make our Mahatma promise to come to us again.

3. | Agony and Prayer

I have begun to realise the need for prayers much more poignantly and fervently when Gandhiji went on his historic fact to save Harijans for the Hindu fold and thus prevent the British move to split Hindus also ; that was in 1932.

I used to take part in prayers previously too ; in Europe and whenever I took part in our social and religious functions. But I did not develop much conscious faith in prayers. Though to believe in God was like the marrow of our bones, I was opposed to idol worship and not much dependent upon my faith in God to carry on my worldly activity. When I come to think of it, I used to be immature in ridiculing the faith of our village folk in their offerings to (their) Gods, and the Great Incarnations of God, said to be sanctifying such famous places of pilgrimage, as Tirupathi, Srirangam, Rameswaram, Varanasi, Kurukshetra and the like.

When I found myself, along with all other political prisoners so completely helpless to do anything to save Mahatma Gandhi, the universally beloved national leader. I realised that prayer was the only means. If at all anything could be a real means, it is prayer and prayer alone is within our reach, which we could utilise, as prisoners, to invoke whatever divine force, though invisible intangible and unapproachable, to reinforce our wishes for his welfare. What had appeared to be impossible became possible and the obstinate and powerful British Government agreed to change its plans for Harijans and Gandhiji was saved. I felt that prayer was indeed a powerful means as well as a weapon, capable of yielding worldly results. Slowly my faith in prayer went on growing. It became a settled fact of my life and matter of belief, when Gandhiji was once again saved from the

jaws of death in 1943 when he tempted death again so inexorably, as a protest against the British Government, dominated as it was by Churchill, the die-hard protagonist of Imperialism. I was again then in Damoh jail as a detainee.

Bharati Devi and myself took part in Bapu's prayer meetings in Harijan and Bhangi colonies, Sevagram, Wardha, Vinayaram and Madras. We used to say to ourselves how we felt uplifted, our minds cleansed and our hearts strengthened.

I was so much inspired when I saw him in prayer, after my return from England in 1946. It was in the Bhangi Colony, Delhi. There were thousands sitting in front of him in prayerful mood. There was that frail man, with just a thin white Khadi cloth covering his chest. As he sat there with his eyes closed, his thin but long hands keeping time so quietly with the singing of 'RAGHUPATI RAGHAVA RAJA RAM' he reminded me of what we had imagined over decades as to how the Pandavas must have prayed in their forest abodes during their years of Aranyavas, hoping against hope to regain their lost kingdom.

All Europe expected him to triumph over British Imperialism. But Jinnah was wielding his terrible 'veto' and even the British Labour Cabinet and Congress Working Committee were feeling frustrated; yet Bapu worked in full faith in our success. Thousands of worshippers put their faith in him. I placed myself entirely at his disposal and took prayer as Chakrayudha (invincible weapon of Vishnu) and believed that Gandhiji would win and through him, India would win. What was it in him that frightened Jinnah, the most impeccable force of negation of all that Gandhiji stood for. Jinnah repeatedly complained against Bapu's use of prayers and prayer time to preach his gospel of Swatantra and Swarajya, because he knew its power at once visible and irresistible ennobling and disciplining.

BAPU BLESSES

I greeted him, as he was returning from the prayer pedestal. He placed his hand on my shoulder and exchanged pleasant greetings on the success of my mission in England and France. As he was getting ready to go into the adjacent green ground he indicated that I should accompany him. During the walk in that pleasant green at evening dusk, Bapu expressed the hope that very soon, we might be able to concentrate all our energies on constructive work.

Bapu : Are you happy that you are now the President of the Provincial Congress ?

Ranga : I thought that it is only an opportunity to do some service, but it is also a position which invites too much opposition and too many rivals.

Bapu : I am sorry, it has come to you at this difficult juncture. At any time, it is a painful responsibility.

I asked for Bapu's support. We talked about the Madras Ministry and how I was to deal with it and how I should try to promote constructive programme and ensure good administration etc.

Bapu : You have to deal with two very seasoned leaders Prakasam and Pattabhi. They may not be reconciled to your election, in your absence. I suppose Prakasam may support you. What about Pattabhi ?

I expressed the hope that if Bapu would support me, I might be able to evoke the cooperation from both of them.

Bapu : How are you so sure. Prakasam may not make it too easy; Pattabhi may not be too helpful.

Ranga : With your blessings.

Bapu : Say with our prayers.

Ranga : That is exactly how I was praying, when you invoked God into our midst.

Bapu : That is the right approach. I see you have ripened. You have waited long enough. You deserve God's blessings.

AGONY AND PRAYER

Such was Bapu's faith in prayers. Such indeed was the spiritual means through which he used to embolden his followers to undertake the responsibilities.

II

A few days before his martyrdom, I joined the evening prayers. There was much whispering that some communal fanatics were mad enough to think of harming Bapu.

As I sat in the fourth or fifth row of the congregation—I was loathe to push myself to the front row, except whenever I was specially asked in advance to be so seated by anyone who had already been active in that direction—and looked at that saintly worshipper in snow-white clothes, I could not imagine how anyone, however hard he might be would touch him in an unkind manner. I felt that even the Gods would themselves approach him gently in order to bless him. Yet, was he so helpless? Did he measure upto only three feet height as he sat there? No. I felt that he was reaching the blue skies; his head was touching the very aura of the heaven and his shoulders were extending towards the poles and his bronze visage was as beautiful as the approaching evening twilight.

It was that Bapu who had aroused our masses, awakened their public spirit and entwined their minds with the national consciousness. Who could ever be so dead to the spirit of the awakened India as to think of killing his person?

Lo and behold, the next two or three days, witnessed what was so utterly unimaginable; there were evil-doers, black-forces, prowling around him to deprive the world of his presence.

III

I met him on the lawn of Birla Bhawan. He was seated in an easy chair. He had a Burmese-bamboo-reed hat on his head. His chest was bare. His legs were

BAPU BLESSES

stretched to catch the sun. He had a few papers in his lap. His eye-lids seemed to be heavy. He was noticeably tired. Age seemed to sit heavily on his curving shoulders. I was shocked. He greeted me with a smile with such an incline of his head as if to express sympathy for us. A sense of impending calamity flashed through my unbelieving mind.

Bapu : Ranga, you are now in the Working Committee. You must learn to live and work at such close quarters with these leaders. Are you getting ready ?

Ranga : What fears do I have when you are with us ? Have you not noted that whenever I made a new move or criticised their proposal or reacted to any of their criticisms, I was first looking at you ?

Bapu : What for ? I couldn't guide you by my silence.

Ranga : I think I have learnt enough of you to read a bit of your silent message even by shyly looking at you.

Bapu : How are you so confident ?

Ranga : I don't know, how I am able to elicit your advice or warning or approval, merely by looking at you. I suppose it is my prayerful contemplation of what you mean to us ; that helps me.

Bapu : Sardar would help you, provided you learn to help yourself by working with Jawaharlal.

Ranga : I would try. It needs two to develop cooperation.

Bapu : You have to overcome the inexplicable unco-operative reaction of Jawaharlal. Could it be due to your own unwillingness to cooperate with him. Examine your own feelings and cleanse your heart.

Ranga : I only oppose him over controls. I don't like his arbitrary ways or his attitude to peasants.

Bapu : Ranga, I am no longer anxious to be in your midst. I am feeling tired. I can't blink these fires of peoples' sufferings. These killings and all these sabre-rattlings are wounding me. I am bleeding all over.

AGONY AND PRAYER

I told him that all of us were suffering and going through inexpressible agony at the thought of his responsive misery.

Bapu : Yours feelings-our colleagues responses-are like soft, soothing breezes. But my heart is on fire. Nothing seems to quench these fires. Every life lost, every anguished heart seared during these unkind days seems to be tearing my heart springs.

I recollected Ramakrishna Paramahansa's response on his body to every beating given to the buffalo, as he was going for his morning dip in Ganges at Kalighat.

Bapu : I find these are all snakes of fires. Oh, I want to close my eyes. I can't prevent my eyes from closing ; yet, they don't close, because some unseen shocks, unheard of beatings seem to make my eye-lids so dry and heavy.

I felt great anguish at heart.

Ranga : Bapu, prayer is our only solace and wafting feather of mercy.

Bapu : I want to sleep and sleep. But I can't sleep I seem to be awake, while asleep. I feel like sinking into the bosom of Dharti Mata. (Mother Earth).

I could not bear that burden of Bapu's grief. I dared not tarry any longer and force him, through my presence to talk. So I touched his knees ; he placed his hand on my head and I moved away slowly and silently to leave him in peace with his prayers.

A few days later—that looked like hours—Bapu was assassinated by an agent of evil forces in our society. Thus did Bapu gain the sleep and peace that he so much wanted to atone for our sins !

BAPU made appreciative references to my work in favour of Harijans, and hearing from Thakkar Bapa how the tour of Harijan Seva Dal in 1933 through Guntur district had galvanised the social atmosphere in rural areas. He wondered if the inter caste dining, introduced by me would alienate the caste Hindus and harden their attitude against his all India anti-untouchability campaign. I assured Bapu that it would be only by taking the bull by its horns, we could shock the caste Hindus as to the revolutionary limits to which we were prepared to take the Harijan uplift programme and thus force them to welcome anti-untouchability as the least of the concessions they could make without losing face. Bapu conceded that possibility. He however asked me to watch the reactions for every one of our moves. I told him that even Desoddharaka Nageswara Rao joined us in the Inter-caste Santarpan (Free feeding) organised by us in the 100% Harijan village, Tallapalem, to which he had walked for three miles from my village Nidubrolu in 1933 and Harijans were the cooks, servers and also co-partners as diners.

Bapu: He is indeed a Desoddharaka. I congratulate you on winning his powerful support.

Ranga: One of my kisan caste Hindu friends, Gutta Chalamayya of Pedapuliparru of Repalle Taluk had given his sister in marriage to an educated Harijan.

Bapu: What! you have achieved that also. Ultimately the Hindu society has to move in that direction. How wonderful your followers are! They have scaled the Hindu Everest.

Bapu : That may be. It needed you and your Harijan tour to strengthen that family's resolve. Did their parents and womenfolk agree ?

Ranga : Yes, Bapu, they were quite happy. The use of your name is enough of a talisman to remove all fears and our satyagrahis are ready to defy all caste taboos.

Five years later, one of our colleagues, the late Gudavalli Ramabrahmam produced a highly popular film 'Malapilla' (Harijan Girl), in which a Brahmin youth married a Harijan girl, while his other film 'Rytu Bidda' (Ryot's son) came to be banned because of the protests of landlords (zamindars). This film Malapilla was welcomed everywhere, so great was the revolutionary change even in rural people's minds and public opinion wrought by half a century of propaganda by the Brahmoos, Arya Samajists, Self-Respectors, Veeresalingam, Ramaswami Chowdari, Desoddharaka, Bapu and our Harijan Seva Dal.

Bapu asked me years later, (1947) if the temples and wells, which were thrown open during his two fasts continued to be open to Harijans. He felt so happy on being assured that many more were welcoming Harijans.

Ranga : Bapu, you will be glad to know that the famous Balaji temple of Lord Venkateswara was stormed by a special train load of Harijans of Pakala and Chittoor. Harijan Leader B. S. Murthi and Kisan Leader N. V. Naidu were in the vanguard.

Bapu : What ! you believe in storming the Lord ?

Ranga : Centuries ago, only one Bhakta Nandanar prayed for temple entry. Now Harijan masses ask it and the Hindu society throws open the gates of God for all Harijans in a stormy manner.

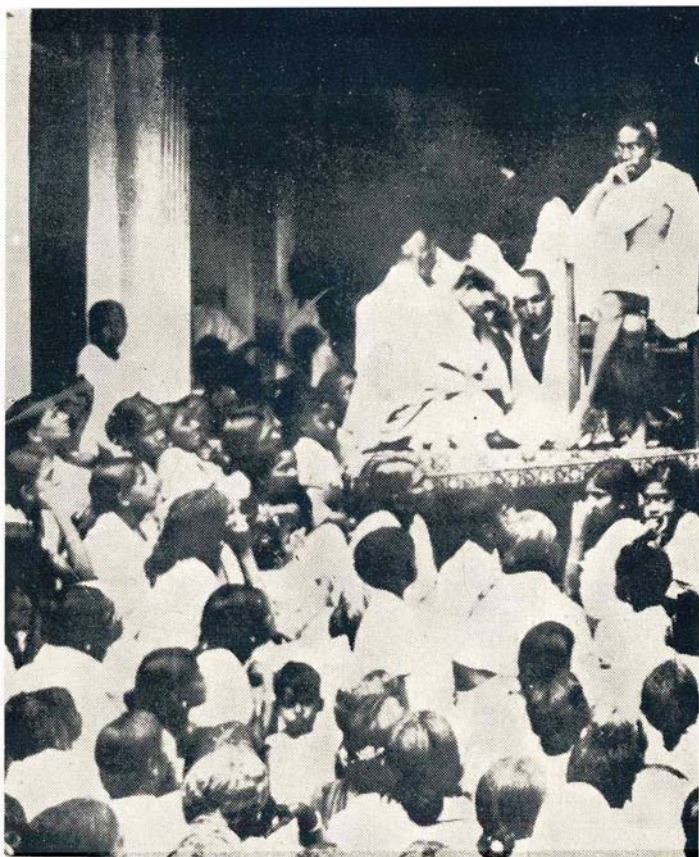
Bapu : The Andhras are good people. They have always loved me. They led in Pedanandipad. Now they lead in this bigger struggle.

Individual Satyagraha Poona AICC 1933

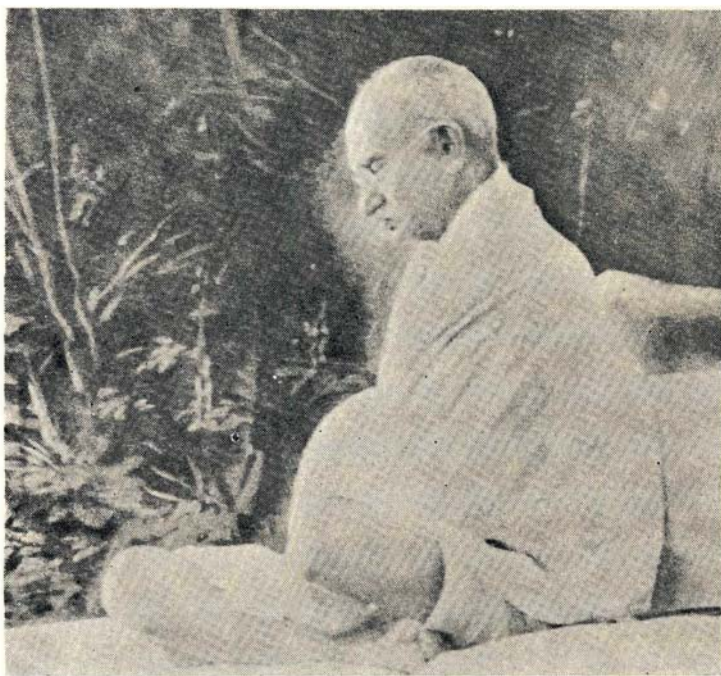
THE second phase of the mass Satyagraha came to an end with the decision of the Poona Conference of the AICC members who met in an informal manner, to continue the national struggle on the basis of Individual Satyagraha.

Purushotham Trikam Das came to the fore, during those discussions, as the boldest critic of the orientation given by Bapu by coming to concentrate on Harijan uplift, instead of continuing the struggle on purely political lines. He was the spokesman of the growing minority of Congress youths who were piqued by Gandhiji's statement that he would have to suspend mass Satyagraha, because of so many defects in the Congress including the failure of some of his closest colleagues to observe political ethics and Ashramite discipline. I supported the conclusion that it was time for stopping the satyagraha campaign. I held that the priority given by Bapu to the Harijan uplift movement was thoroughly justified and pleaded for concentration of all energies of all Congressmen upon that campaign because, without raising the social status of one tenth of our Hindu population, we could not hope to win real mass support for Swaraj demand.

When I snatched a few minutes of Bapu's time, before that session was over, he expressed satisfaction with my stand. He wondered why I too have joined others in their comparative indifference to internal personal morale and collective discipline of Congress people. I told him that I was too busy in organising the peasants in Andhra, Tamilnad and Malabar and anti-land revenue anti-zamindari movements. I was also busy in conducting the Enquiry into the conditions of the peasants the zamindari (feudal) areas. So I told him with regret that I could not offer individual Satyagraha.



Mahatma Gandhi addressing a Ladies' Gathering at Vijayawada.
Both Ranga (on dais) and Mrs. Ranga (among ladies) are seated



'I felt that he was reaching the blue skies ; his head was touching the very aura of the heaven and his shoulders were extending towards the poles and his bronze visage was as beautiful as the approaching evening twilight'. (Bapu Blesses Page 11)

Bapu : Are you convinced that these movements are urgent ? After all these problems are always with us.

Ranga : Bapu, I am in the thick of these agitations. We have already organised peasant weeks to agitate for land revenue suspensions and moratorium for agricultural debts. The enquiry into the zamindari ryots' conditions is only half finished.

Bapu : I am giving permission to constructive workers, engaged in Hindi and Khadi work, not to go to jail. So do you want me to treat this work also as similarly constructive ?

Ranga : Bapu, workers who work among Harijans also should be freed from this obligation.

Bapu : I agree with you. But see that those who seek such exemption from this task would work sincerely in these constructive movements.

I pleaded against Bapu seeking to go to jail again and asked him to undertake an all India tour. I told him how we all felt so much inspired, while we were in jails, by the successful fast he had undertaken to strengthen Harijans' place in Hindu society. He told me then that he appreciated my speech, particularly my passionate reference to the historic significance of the Poona Pact, as being the banning of untouchability—as a stigma removed from Hinduism. I am glad that I dissented from the then critics of Bapu and hailed his new lead as the inauguration of the long awaited social revolution. So, when I assured Bapu that I would concentrate as much on Harijan uplift as on peasant movement, he was pleased.

6. | Parliamentaryism Congress Socialism

THE Patna Session of 1934 was held, in the same informal way as Poona session of AICC members ; but this time to give yet another turn to the national movement. Individual Satyagraha got into a dead end. People's mind began to turn towards legislatures as more fertile spheres for fighting the British authorities.

By that time, the sub-committee appointed by some of us to prepare the ground for organising a Socialist wing within the Congress, in order to give a more prominent place for struggles on the economic front submitted its proposals for a Socialist wing and also its economic programme. So, many of us met in a Congress Socialist Conference.

Unfortunately, a queer twist was given to our deliberations, which was but the over-flow of the 1922-30 controversy between pro-changers favouring council-entry and no-changers sticking to the earlier slogan of Council boycott. I was disappointed by this because I hoped that such a gathering would concentrate upon the demands of peasants for redressal of their grievances in both the zamindari and ryotwari areas and of industrial workers for humane conditions in their factories etc. Instead, I found so many highly sophisticated, urban centred socialists from Bombay, Calcutta, Patna, Poona, Banaras and Lahore, stressing upon their ideological differences with Gandhiji and doling out Marxist dialectics with their European accents. To make matters worse, they began to whisper that Jawaharlal was opposed to Assembly entry and if we cared for his approach, as indicated in his book *WHITHER INDIA*, we should oppose the new policy which was being proposed by Dr. Ansari, Bhulabhai and Satyamurti, whom they dubbed as reactionaries.

I did not wish to isolate myself from these friends—many of them had been my friends in Calcutta jail and also in the kisan movement—and at the same time I did not want to abandon my loyalty to Mahatma. So, I met Gandhiji with my problems and asked him if there was such a fundamental difference between him and Jawaharlal. He said that Jawaharlal was working with him, though he had his socialist views. Then I asked him if Jawaharlal was opposed to the change proposed by the AICC in favour of Assembly entry.

Bapu : What is your view ?

Ranga : I am in favour of Congress challenging the British at the polls and Congressmen going into Assemblies.

Bapu : Why do you want us in Assemblies ?

Ranga : I am convinced that it is high time we go into Assemblies and prevent the landlords, merchants, industrialists from cooperating with the British in passing so many laws against our peasants, workers and artisans.

Bapu : How can you get majorities ? What laws can you pass in favour of the masses ?

Ranga : True, we may not have majorities since there are so many nominated people. But we can certainly prevent many anti-people bills being passed. Moreover, people are groaning from so many economic burdens, like too high taxes, high interest rates on rural debts, and zamindari oppression.

Bapu : Do you feel sure that your legislators would work for the benefit of the people and many of them would not go over to the enemy ?

Ranga : More good could be done to the people and even if some would defect most Congress legislators would work for the good of the people.

Bapu : Why are you so keen on these legislatures ? We tried them before ; even Motilalji was tired of them.

BAPU BLESSES

I referred to the extra ordinary sufferings caused to the people by the world economic depression and how millions of kisans were losing their holdings, because of the terrible slump in land values. Agricultural prices fell by more than 50%. So, I felt sure Congress legislators could help them at that juncture. If after a few years, this experiment failed, we could try another.

Ranga: Bapu, you have called your life An Experiment with Truth. What else was Poona decision?

Bapu: But you are with socialists. Why do you not go with them?

Ranga: Bapu, I am a Gandhian socialist. My socialism is for peasants. It is not Marxism. So long as I have your approval or you do not object, I would like to strengthen this experiment.

Bapu: You are extracting my assent. You want to make me a socialist. I am not yet clear if I should become a socialist. I suppose Jawahar would be glad if I become one.

Ranga: I only want your benediction.

Meetings in Harijan Colony 1935-1936

ALL of us, the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly met Gandhiji in the Harijan Colony on a cold afternoon. It was so distant a place. Bharati Devi and myself reached it by tonga after nearly an hour's drive along a road through more or less a waste-land once we passed the University area. The colony was itself a lonely and uninspiring place. Many members grumbled why Bapu should have chosen that un-earthly place for his stay, when he could have so comfortably stayed in the Birla Bhavan. I asked them how could he then justify his total identification with the Daridranarayan and the un-privileged Harijans. They were not mollified.

Bapu came into our midst. He greeted us by his benign but knowing smile and made a bee-line to where the women were congregated on the fringe of the durrie, recognised Bharati Devi and brought so many of them into the front-line. He sat down in a chair, covered as he was by the warm, heavy shawl.

Bhulabhai asked him to give us his message. Bapu looked at us for a minute. Then he expressed his satisfaction at our election. He felt sorry that we failed to elect Sherwani as speaker. He hoped that we might make ourselves useful to the national struggle.

Bapu : Please remember, you have come here to carry on our struggle. So do not think of settling down to mere Legislative work. Assembly is one of the forts in which you have to defeat the British. I know so many of you have been used to vigorous work in rural areas. You may find the work in Assembly dull and often un-edifying. I advise you to go on visiting the neighbouring villages, study their problems and try to develop social organisations to help them.

BAPU BLESSES

Please remember always that the nation has sent you here to espouse its cause.

After his talk was over, I and Bharati Devi met him for a few minutes. He blessed her so affectionately. He advised her to be careful about the cold weather of Delhi and then remembering her stay in England ;

Bapu : Ah, you were used to much greater cold. Ranga, I am glad you have come here. Vallabhai told me that you are already working hard for the people of Gujarat and Rayalaseema, who are famine struck. I know you are competent for such work. But be careful to work in cooperation with Bhulabhai. He is a good man but a bit impatient. He is a great Bombay lawyer.

Ranga : I am working in close cooperation with Giri.

Bapu : He is a good man. He works for labour ; yours can be a good team.

II

Bapu came again after an year and stayed in the same Harijan Colony. I met him in a special interview. On the previous visit, Thakkar Bapa was the master of ceremonies ; this time Prof. Malkani was there. He met me in 1933 in Bapu's Andhra tour, when he acted as his secretary.

This time, Bapu had many points to touch in our talks. He referred with satisfaction to my successful work in the Assembly in persuading the Finance Minister to extend the benefits of the Gandhi Irwin pact to the coastal people who were manufacturing salt for their domestic use and local trade.

Bapu : Very few recognised the practical use and benefits of the Pact as you have done. Now lakhs of poor peasants will derive benefit from that Pact.

Then he bent his head in a pensive mood.

Bapu : How is it, Bhulabhai is upset with you ?

MEETINGS IN HARIJAN COLONY

Ranga : Did he say that I am not effective or eloquent in the Assembly ?

Bapu : No, he says you are one of the good members, able and persuasive, but a bit too passionate.

Ranga : Then what is wrong with me sir ?

Bapu : He said that you are creating a separate group within the party. He is afraid, it might weaken discipline.

Ranga : Bapu, is it a crime to organise peasant group of legislators to concentrate specially upon peasants' problems ?

Bapu : You should be patient and persuade the whole party to take up the cause of peasants.

Ranga : But, Bapu, that is not so easy. Take tax proposals for instance, Bhulabhai and others are too keen on asking for tax reliefs for the rich people, industrialists and urban folk. But I am keen on asking for reduction in indirect taxes.

Bapu : Why not you ask for tax reliefs for both ?

Ranga : That is not possible; it is necessary to tax the rich so much more to relieve the poor from tax burdens.

Bapu : Ranga, you must learn to look at all sections of people from a national and cooperative manner.

Ranga : Sir, when anyhow some taxes have to be paid. I must ask for tax reliefs first for the poor.

Bapu : I agree. But do you find the British ever reducing any taxes. On the other hand, they go on piling up more and more burdens.

Ranga : That is true ; in all such occasions, may I not ask that peasants and workers should be spared ?

Bapu : You must.

Bhulabhai did not like the formation of peasant group. He must have mentioned that matter to Sardar and Bapu. So Gandhiji asked me to think about it again. He however softened that blow by conveying to me Sardar's satisfaction with my work in the Assembly for Gujarat peasants.

III

ON another visit in 1936, he referred to Bhulabhai's request that I should be in charge of the party office in Delhi and his offer to meet my expenses and asked me why I did not agree. I told him that I was carrying on my work as one of the secretaries of the party, but I did not wish to accept allowances and thus limit my freedom of movements.

Bapu was visibly upset.

Bapu: I will be the last person to fetter your freedom. But I know you can't afford to stay in Delhi. How is it wrong if you allow the party to meet your expenses?

Ranga: Bapu, when I resigned from the professorship in Madras, I did not think of accepting any other wholetime responsibility. Thanks to your blessings. I have been getting allowances from Assembly and so I am relieved of most of my financial worries. Please do not worry on my account.

Bapu: But you have to maintain two establishments. You have also to find money for your tours.

Gandhiji could see that I was not feeling quite comfortable under this scrutiny.

Bapu: Ranga, please do not misunderstand Bhulabhai. He admires you. If you do not want party to meet your expenses.....

Ranga: Bapu, money has no use for me or Bharati Devi once our ordinary expenses are covered and this Assembly keeps us above want.

Gandhiji concluded this talk by placing his hand on my shoulder.

Bapu: Remember, you can always drop a line to me, whenever you want anything urgently.

Ranga: Thank you, Bapu, your faith in us is God's great gift.

THOSE were summer months of 1938. Mahatma Gandhi began to respond to the appeals of the people of the Indian Princes' Dominions for his moral support. It was natural for the freedom lovers among those states people, who were otherwise slumbering or stupefied under the double over-lordship of their Princes and the British over their heads, to become impatient with the absence of any freedom movement in their areas. They became exasperated, when they found that the people in the neighbouring British Provinces were granted Provincial autonomy and the Congress ministries were already formed to enjoy a taste of Swaraj and economic freedoms. So they started their Praja Parishads and commenced their agitation for political freedom under the aegis of the Rajas and Maharajas.

Bapu advised them at first to wait for a while ; let Congress gain good enough experience in using political power at the Provincial level in State Governments and then achieve sufficient leverage with the British, so that he could persuade the British and Princes, from a position of power, to concede similar political rights to their people.

Would people of the Princely states be patient, when their neighbours are free? The freedom lovers in Princely states rushed into action. Despite Bapu's pre-occupation with so many problems created by so many of us, his colleagues and the allies of the British in the autonomous states, Bapu began to respond to the S.O.S. calls of the States Peoples' Parishads, when the Princes began to unleash their cruel repressive forces. Towns were aglow with the fires of freedom and repressive forces of Princes responded by adding

fuel to those fires by heeding the British advices to suppress the agitators. Bapu found that he should intervene and help those sufferers. Then on, week after week, messages, exhortations, advices and cautions from Bapu, began to come in the columns of the Harijan, to sustain the States - peoples' movements. How else could he keep faith with his people, he argued with the British, when they were asking for the extension of reforms and freedoms, similar to those which the British had allowed the people of autonomous provinces to enjoy and enlarge.

There arose a debate as to how deep was the urge for freedom in the awakened Princely states. How wide-spread was the popular movement and how cruel was the repressive campaign? The British and Princes claimed that the kisans, including Harijans and Girijans were content with their loyalty to the Princes and the agitation was confined only to small sections of narrow urban circles and job-hunters.

I met Bapu a number of times, during those months and talked to him about the peoples' movements in the autonomous states and the Princely states. I spoke to him in detail about the sufferings of the kisans in Hyderabad, Bikaner, Alwar, Rajasthan, Travancore and Orissa states. He asked me whether I had visited any of them and studied the conditions in any depth. I told him about my detailed survey of economic and general conditions of peasantry of Nizam's Dominions so long ago as 1925 and how I conducted a summer session of the Peasant Institute in Tunikipadu in 1938 for the benefit of Hyderabad kisan youths. I narrated my experience of the conditions of some of the Orissa states. He also knew that I was then conducting a survey of the social and economic conditions of kisans in some of the Rajasthan States, with the help of a Bikaner advocate Shri Saraf. So he asked me to go to the Orissa states and study the people's movements

PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE IN PRINCELY STATES

and submit a report. He had also deputed Thakkar Bapa to make his own independent studies about the feelings and conditions of Adivasis, Harijans and others.

I visited a number of Orissa states, when their people were going through the bitterest phase of official repression and the masses were reacting almost madly to the police firing. A British Resident was killed, some British officers were ambushed and the local State Police were overwhelmed in a few tiny states like Rangpur. So the British utilised those unfortunate happenings as just the needed excuse for pouring in their British and Indian forces and suppressing the people and imposing a veritable police Raj, bordering on Martial law. I braved all the terrible risks involved in piercing through that Jhulum Raj.

During one of those tours, S. N. Dwivedi, who is now the leader of the P. S. P. in Parliament accompanied me. In another, the late Sarangadhar Das, joined me. In a third Pabitra Mohun Pradhan, the present Deputy Chief Ministry of Orissa was with me. We saw how brutal was the repression, imposed upon the peasants. While their leaders were only lathi-charged or caned or put into jails, the rank and file of their kisan followers were stripped almost naked caned on the backs and left for dead. So many of them had lacerated backs and other limbs, with little or no modern medical ministrations when we saw them. There were so many heart-rending scenes of the carnage indulged in by the forces of the Princes. I gave a full and graphic report of what all I saw and pleaded for Bapu's whole hearted support for those suffering people.

Thakkar Bapa's report corroborated my report. So Bapu was able to make up his mind to join issue with the British for neglecting their humanitarian duties, as paramount power, to protect the Princely states people from inhuman repression.

BAPU BLESSES

Bapu : Your work among the states peoples is so constructive. Your report is as objective and truthful as that of the non political veteran Thakkar Bapa. It is so tragic that these princes should be allowing these atrocities. They swear by Shrirama. So many of them trace their race from Shrirama; yet, these horrors.

I referred to their fears of the British, lest they should be dethroned.

Bapu : They cannot be removed from their Gaddis if they abstain from such horrors.

Ranga : The Rajas are not yet ready to give up their arbitrary powers. They have become vengeful because their people whom they expected to be so loyal have turned against them.

Bapu : The Maharaja of Mysore has gained the peoples' affections. Even there we had the Viduraswatham firings. I am not asking for anything more than responsible Governments.

I mentioned the paramountcy of the British.

Bapu : Yes, we must defeat British power. Then the Princes would welcome their peoples' partnership.

Bapu relied anyhow, so much upon our reports and publicly referred to them, in support of his demand that the British should permit or persuade the Princes to stop their repressive programmes and concede many of their economic and political demands for freedom.

It would have pleased the Mahatma, if he had been present, on a later happening in 1966. The late Maharaja of Dhenkenal, whose state I visited in 1938, during its worst phase of repression and exhorted its people to go ahead with their demand for self-governance under the aegis of the Prince, was accompanying me in my tour of his former state in 1966 after the Swatantra Party's State Convention. I had to address

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public meetings and a number of the earlier freedom struggle veterans were also present. The Maharaja was sportsman-like-enough to translate my speeches, while I was referring to the earlier peoples' fights against the Princely Order. He behaved in the true Gandhian manner, translated what all I said about the earlier Raj. He expressed his satisfaction and said, 'Thanks to Gandhiji, the Princely Order was gone in a non-violent manner.'

Alas, contrary to our expectations, the subsequent Congress Raj heaped heavier tax burdens, corrupt administration and clamped controls upon the people. Anyhow, both the people and Princes are grateful to Gandhiji and all those who worked with him for their freedom, even though the Princes were followed by worse rulers, because they have got self-government. So, to-day (1-5-1969) the same people are able to replace the Congress Raj by the Swatantra Raj with a coalition of a Prince and peasant as Chief and Deputy Chief Ministers.

1937 to '39 were difficult years in my relations with Bapu. He was the god father of the Congress ministries and I was very much dissatisfied with them. The Chief Ministers (who were then known Prime Ministers) were reporting bitterly against the activities of the Kisan Congress, especially in Bihar and U.P. and seeking the intervention of Bapu. I met Bapu a number of times and had to stand in the dock, as it were before him for all the intemperate statements of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and the loaded challenges from Indulal Yagnik, demanding the dismissal of Congress ministries. The communists who were trying to exploit the growing disenchantment of kisan with Congress ministries were exploiting the anti-ministerial tempo of both the Swami and Indulal. I had quite a job in helping the Kisan Congress to remain somewhere in the sphere of cooperation with the Congress. No wonder, Sardar Patel was all fury against me. Jawaharlal was too much upset and Bapu found it almost impossible to restrain Working Committee from taking extreme steps against us. Indulal once observed, in one of his frank moments that I was their shield against Sevagram.

On one of those occasions, Bapu asked me why I was bent upon embarrassing Congress ministries. I asked him to give me some credit for having publicly appreciated Rajaji's initiative, in declaring moratorium on agricultural debts, for the first time in India. Then I asked him how it was wrong of me to have criticised his subsequent withdrawal of that moratorium and thus discouraged other ministries to extend the same protection to peasants.

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Bapu : He was advised that moratorium would invite some constitutional troubles. So he has introduced the Debt Relief Bill.

Ranga : I have supported that sir. What is more, the Ryots Association applauded Rajaji's discovery of the principle of Damdupat, whereby no debtor need pay anything more than twice the original amount borrowed, so that all excesses would automatically get cancelled.

Bapu : Then you have raised such a controversy over his proposal for sales tax. You made no allowance to his objective ; to utilise the proceeds to make good the losses caused by prohibition in Salem.

Ranga : I agreed with prohibition. I did not like the sales tax imposition. Where would be the guarantee that this tax would be utilised for this specific purpose. What is more, I do not want any more such taxes to be imposed upon our agriculturists.

Bapu : Rajaji assured me that it would not affect peasants.

Ranga : He also assured merchants that it would not have to be paid by them.

Then Bapu agreed to enquire into the matter. Eventually Rajaji exempted many agricultural products from sales tax. As I had feared, in course of time, sales tax rose from one pice to ten and sometimes twenty pisa per rupee and it proved to be a cumulative one. Prohibition followed its own career.

II

Bapu : What about the peasant marches in Bihar and U.P?

Ranga : What was wrong with them ?

Bapu : The ministers feel they are so demoralising.

Ranga : To whom ?

Bapu : To the Congress and the people at large.

Ranga : I do not agree. These marches were conceived by me after the example of the Dandi march

and I found a great means to awaken the dormant kisans, help them to get into some disciplined collective activity and thus make them effective.

Bapu : These marches are creating a sense of revolt against our Congress and that would weaken Swaraj, when achieved.

Ranga : Swaraj is long way off. We have to deal with the British and the peasants who are drilled in these marches will help us in our Swaraj struggle.

Bapu : You have begun to think, like communists, in terms of drills. Swami Sahajanand has been popularising the cult of Danda ! Where would it lead to ? And you have not condemned it.

Ranga : Mahadevbhai had been carrying on his tirade against Swamiji's Danda cult. So, where is the need for my intervention.

Bapu reminded me of the Times of India's comment that my support for Bihar marches is just as emphatic, though not as acerbatic as that of Swami. I pleaded that peasants had to protect themselves against zamindars' Jhulum.

Bapu : Not by Danda.

Ranga : When do you find our kisans without Dandas ? Yet how seldom do they use it to protect their rights ?

Bapu : What about your own Andhra peasant march ?

Ranga : Did Rajaji complain against it ? He did not ban it. He did not even criticise it.

Bapu : You are right. Rajaji said it was a non-violent march. We have heard of it. He found their charter reasonable and capable of action in a non-violent way though many of the leaders were communists. Why did you not lead it ?

Ranga : He congratulated me. I wish other ministries were as reasonable. I wanted to demonstrate that

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the Kisan Congress can pursue non-violent agitation even if there are communists in it. How I wish other Congress Chief Ministers would act as Rajaji did!

Bapu : How are you sure, peasants would not resort to violence, when, as you say, in so many places, communists are behind these marches?

Ranga : In that case, I would be the first one to condemn any such violent actions, if and when they are indulged in.

Bapu : Do you think you can control them?

Ranga : I would do my best. Anyhow, the march of kisans towards emancipation from the exploitation of Talukdars cannot be stopped just as our march towards Swaraj can't be stopped by the British.

Bapu : Are you sure you are helping our national movement by these marches?

I answered in the affirmative but sought his moral support to my efforts to lead them in a constructive direction.

Bapu : I think the Congress ministries are doing good work for our people. They strengthen our non-violent struggle for Swaraj. So I would advise you not to weaken them.

Ranga : I agree with you. At the same time, I request you to guide the ministers to try to meet peoples' mind more than half way.

Bapu : What about this Communist school, which had to be banned? I learn you associated yourself with it. Is not your Peasant Institute enough for your activity?

Ranga : I did not want the Peasant Institute to be mixed up with their demonstration and so, I left their school, before they wanted to defy the ban. But

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where was the need for that ban at all? I certainly condemned the severe lathi-charge. The police had no need to interfere. All that brought bad name for the ministry.

Bapu : Will there be any more peasant marches ?

Ranga : Yes Bapu.

Bapu : What for ?

Ranga : To protect peasants from illegal evictions from the hereditary holdings.

Bapu : Why not they go to courts ?

Ranga : Peasants are too poor. Court proceedings take a long time and too expensive.

Bapu : So you justify such breaches of law *en masse* ?

Ranga : No Bapu, it is not the peasants who break the law. It is the landlords who take law into their own hands.

10. | God's Man

I went to Sevagram, as per Bapu's wish, to attend the Nayee Talimi Conference in 1945. My good old friend and veteran poet, novelist, philosopher and freedom fighter the late Unnava Lakshmi Narayana also came to meet Bapu. I was anxious to persuade Gandhiji to give a date for inaugurating the next session of Bharat Kisan Sammelan. Unnava was keen on discussing some philosophical problems with Bapu. I knew that he was a great Vaishnavite Bhakta. Desabhakta told me also that Unnava was practising some esoteric form of Yoga. I asked Unnava what he was going to ask Bapu to tell him, in addition to what he had already known about God. Unnava became serious and said humbly,—

Unnava : Ranga, I am only a seeker, Bapu is a seer. He knows what I do not know.

I realised that it was too serious a topic for any more probing by me. He expressed his happiness that his confidence in me placed so long ago as in 1923 when we started our talks about social revolution has come to be shared by Bapu also and then observed,—

Unnava : You are specially fortunate Ranga, Bapu has such a good idea of you. He said to me that you are a good and true servant of the people.

I felt so happy. I met Unnava on his return from his talks with Bapu during that bright morning. His face was so radiant as if he has had a Sakshatkar (face to face) of God and his approach towards me had a special spring and his hands' swing showed an elan of its own. I felt so elated that my noble elder was fully satisfied. He did not wait for any query from me

before he embraced me with his long hands and told me clearly but whisperingly in my ears,—

Unnava : He knows, he has seen ; he has tread on the ways known to us also Ranga. He is God's Man.

I returned his embrace and confessed that I have always felt the same about him.

Unnava : Ranga, did you ever get angry with him ?
I did. Have you ever been disappointed in him ? I did. Yet I believe in him.

I know that several people who knew so much about Yoga looked upon Unnava as their Bhagawan. Bharati Devi and my niece Laxmi Devi always had great faith in him. Even Desabhakta himself believed that Unnava was a fully blossomed Yogi despite his periods of tempestuous furies. I found such a veteran in so great a sense of exaltation which would do credit to a youthful devotee of Chaitanya Maha Prabhu. I felt very humble, indeed, in his presence suffused with moral and Yogic fervour, because I was there to see Bapu only about the mundane issues of kisans, Congress, Swaraj movements and constructive legislative programmes.

When, at last, my turn came, I went to Bapu with great trepidation because I was conscious but anew of his political eminence and moral pre-eminence. Bapu asked me if I had met my friend Unnava.

Ranga : Yes Bapu.

Bapu : What a good man ! He is a Sadhu. Have you known him for long ?

Ranga : I have known him since 1923. Bapu, he has presented you to Andhras through a beautiful character in his famous novel called 'Malapalli.'

Bapu : Did he describe me as a foolish blunderer, that I am.

Ranga : No. Through his Ramadas, the Harijan Bhakta and a Hindu patriarch, he has pictured you, through his eloquent phrases and devotional conversations, as a good devotee and an affectionate father. You shine as Bhishma, you preach as Krishna and you sing as Ramadas. You are a real Sthithaprajna.

Bapu : Then he must be a creative writer. Am I as good as that Ramadas, I wonder. Yes, Unnava is a great Sadhak. He is a Karmayogi.

Ranga : He is more. He is a sincere patriot and selfless Yagnik.

Bapu : What ? You are not mixing up your metaphor.

I know his reference was to my friendship with Indulal Yagnik, who was anathema to Sardar.

Bapu : Yes, Unnava and myself have many things in common.

Ranga : So you are also practising Mantra and Tantra. Desabhakta once told me that Unnava was an esoteric practitioner.

Bapu : No Ranga, I wish I had those powers to mesmerise these British ! Why, I can't even make your party in Assembly accept my advice regarding these talks with the British and Muslim League.

Ranga : I could not enter into the realms of philosophy, Yogic seances and communions, as I was spoiled by my Western education.

Bapu : Ranga, don't you believe in God ?

Ranga : I do.

Bapu : Do you not yearn to know more about God, as I do. I wish I had more time and training.

Ranga : What need have I to go so far beyond my depths when I had such a good, genuine guide to lead me and shield me ?

Bapu : Who is your shield ?

BAPU BLESSES

I looked at him, in such a way as to imply that he was my guide and shield.

Bapu : So, are you satisfied ?

Ranga: No.

Bapu : Why ?

Ranga: Because my guide is a hot tempered one ; my shield fails me often.

That made him laugh. The very next moment, he became very serious and pitifully humble.

Bapu : Then you should not choose a human being. You must rely on God alone.

Ranga: It is beyond my consciousness to visualise and embrace that God who knows, sees, embraces and communes with. Our Rishis have advised us to seek and find a Guru to guide us in these spheres. I have found my Guru ; Unnava has confirmed it.

Bapu : How do you know that I know Him. I see Him ? True, I try to commune and embrace Him. But He is too elusive. Sometimes I wonder if I knew Him at all in all his splendour and fullness.

I said I was grateful to Unnava and also to my fates for having brought Unnava, who was himself a Sadhak and saint to see him that morning, so that I could talk to him about these innermost experiences of Bapu. I assured him that I am now more confident than ever before that there is God and there are some saints, within even my range of mundane activity who knew God.

Ranga: Unnava's testimony inspired me this morning Bapu.

Bapu : So many distinguished scientists and researchers doubt the existence of God. I am content with what our Rishis have told us.

Ranga : Even Einstein puts his faith in God. I put my faith in you. Our Rishis, both of the past and

GOD'S MAN

the present, are doing more to protect humanity and raise human values. My Rishi has persuaded thirty crores of people to discard their thousands of years old faith and practice of untouchability, through his tapas. Unnava's Malapalli is a Samidha in this great Yajna that you are carrying on.

Then we were brought down to mundane level by Kurshid Ben's warning of time. Bapu asked me to meet him again.

Kurshid Ben : When ? Not today, there is no time.

Bapu : Find sometime. Ranga is a busy man. He must go to Delhi.

Ranga : No, no. Bapu, I will be here tomorrow. I will be meeting you in the conference also. I will come again, on my return from Delhi to—

Bapu : To my daughter—Bharati.

I laughed and said in parting,—

Ranga : So, my God on earth can be pleasant sometimes.

Bapu : Why, sometimes; you are always welcome to me.

11. Lucknow Congress

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU presided over the Lucknow Congress in 1936. The second session of the kisan workers also met there a couple of days in advance. A full-dress debate took place in the AICC over the question of acceptance of ministerial responsibilities within the ambit of Federal scheme adumbrated by the new Government of India Act, passed in the wake of the Round Table Conferences. Jawaharlal opposed acceptance of office; the outgoing President Rajendra Prasad favoured it. The Congress Socialists, led by the eloquent Achyut Patwardhan supported Jawaharlal and the old guard rallied to the side of Rajen Babu.

I met Bapu to obtain his blessings for my efforts to organise the All India Kisan Congress. He asked me why I persisted in those moves despite Sardar's opposition. I told him that while the Congress could concentrate on political issues, there is need for Kisan Congress to work for peasants.

Bapu: Surely Congress has been speaking for kisans. What about the Karachi Charter?

I drew his attention to the moves of jagirdars and zamindars to organise themselves against tenancy legislation.

Ranga: Kisans have to be organised to protect themselves.

Bapu: Sardar says the Congress can protect peasants. He must know because he had led the Bardoli peasants to success.

I pointed out how the money lenders were oppressing peasants in all parts of India; and how the economic depression has placed them at the mercy of Sahukars and how while the Congress leaders were in

LUCKNOW CONGRESS

jails, kisans were completely helpless. Hence the kisan organisation was necessary to help peasants.

Bapu : If you say, it is a must I am unable to disagree.

As I was beginning to feel happy, Bapu returned to this subject,—

Bapu : Sardar complained that you are associating yourself with some objectionable people?

Ranga : How I could be the chooser, when good Congress leaders would not help me?

That made Bapu laugh.

II

I met him again after the great debate on office-acceptance was over. He asked me if I agreed with the decision. I said I wanted Congress ministries to come to grips with peasants' problems.

Bapu : So you have no objection to Congress ministries.

Ranga : I am only keen on what they would do for kisans.

Bapu : Ranga, you are obsessed with kisans. No wonder. Sardar is both angry and happy with you.

Ranga : Why he should have such mixed feelings for me?

Bapu : It seems you told him in Madras or somewhere, that you are first a kisan and next a Congressman.

Ranga : That is true ; what about him sir ? Is he not a peasant ?

Bapu : Oh, Sardar, he is a Congressman first, Ranga. What would be the first thing you want from Congress ministries ?

I listed moratorium on agricultural debts, scaling them down in accordance with the fall in prices, reduction of rents in zamindari areas, abolition of land revenue and cancellation of hereditary debts of Harijans.

Bapu : Stop, stop, you have already worked out such a catalogue ! So you favour office acceptance.

Ranga : I am not a member of the AICC now, as the state leaders were opposed to me.

Bapu : Why should anyone oppose you !

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU was chosen, for the third time, as the President of the Congress, when it met in Faizpur in Maharashtra in 1936 winter. The All India Kisan Congress also met there during the same period. I was chosen as its president by an overwhelming majority. A huge march of peasants reached the place to strengthen the Kisan Congress. In welcoming Jawaharlal to address it, I assured him that just as the rivers flow into the ocean, Kisan Congress also makes its contribution to the national cause, in the same way as Trade Union Congress. Jawaharlal did not appear to be happy over our debut as an additional political force. So, he showed his temper in an unreasonable manner in the AICC when I tried to speak on behalf of the peasantry. So, I protested against his dictatorial ways. When I met Bapu after that breeze between us, he joked with me,—

Bapu : So, the youngest president is quarrelling with the younger president.

Ranga : The youngest brother is only testing the strength of affection felt by the elder and more favoured brother.

Bapu : What is it, I hear? That you are going to demand a special pledge of loyalty from Congress candidates towards your kisans! How can there be two pledges?

I explained, that the promise I asked from kisan candidates of the Congress was only that they would try to present kisan point of view before the Congress Party decides upon any important issue, affecting the vital interests of the kisans.

Bapu: That is exactly what kisan-minded legislators are expected to do.

Ranga: Most people would not do that, unless they are bound by such a definite promise as I was suggesting.

Bapu: Why do you say that?

I referred to my experience of the Swaraj legislators and the current legislators at Delhi.

Bapu: Have you talked about this to Sardar?

I kept silent.

Bapu: I advise you to do that. Otherwise you are asking for trouble. Then, he referred to the election of a large number of communist, socialist, even well known Trade Union leaders to the executive of the Kisan Congress. He warned me against such combinations. How I wish I had heeded Bapu's advice? Then I do not know enough about the background of many of my new friends, nor was Sardar willing to help me. It did not take long, before I discovered that both Sardar and Jawaharlal, abandoned their neutral attitude towards communists and fellow travellers and began their offensive against not only the Trade Union Congress but also the Kisan Congress.

Peasants' Pledge Bapu's Neutrality

UNHAPPY events followed in clock-like precision, just as Bapu warned. We issued the peasants' pledge. We said that the Congress candidates were free to accept it or not. We only wanted them to pledge to be true to kisan interests, subject to their overall final obligation to obey the Congress Party's ultimate decision. This is exactly the political line that the peasants' lobby in the Congress is trying to do in parliament ever since 1967. But in that 1936 general election, Sardar Patel read so much more into it than it sought to portend. He was also advised by the local Congress bosses of different states that candidates bound by such a pledge would not be so fully and easily amenable to their discipline and bossism. So, Sardar issued his Ukase, so arbitrarily against it. I had to make my choice; whether to run the gauntlet with Sardar just at the critical juncture and brave the accusation of weakening or confusing the national front. So I hastened to withdraw it and protest against the arbitrariness of Sardar's action and attitude.

A few days later, I met Bapu, when he travelled through Andhra on his way to Nandi hills. He was so sympathetic and expressed his satisfaction over my generous action.

Bapu: I know how it must have hurt you. You are young and so proud. But you have risen to the occasion! I am glad you have shown your independence of your doubtful associates.

I asked him if he thought that Sardar was justified in his dictatorial procedure and actions. He did not give any direct reply. He was content to observe,—

Bapu: Ranga, life is a thorny rose bush. I warned you to have Sardar on your side.

PEASANTS' PLEDGE - BAPU'S NEUTRALITY

Ranga: Surely, this is not the right way, for Sardar and Jawaharlal to develop mass contacts or to build self-respecting leadership for kisans.

Bapu: Be content with your right action. This good beginning would slowly influence others.

Ranga: This is not democracy. It is not even a family. You have to make them also act in a humane manner.

I followed him on his whirlwind motor journey from my village to Vinayasram and back again. He was so full of affection during that day, just to assuage my feelings. He gave the impression to the pressmen how I was so much in his confidence despite all the controversies that arose between me and the great leaders.

14. | Why Jawaharlal - Your Heir?

THE Bombay session of the AICC decided upon the 'Quit India' demand. Gandhiji's speech was vibrant with emotion and determination. His desperate earnestness to rouse the people to 'do or die' was reminiscent of his 1930 declaration that he would either achieve Swaraj or his body would be floating on the Arabian sea. As I saw him on that dias, with his bare chest, legs crossed and left hand restless and his words pouring forth in volcanic heat, we felt ourselves transformed, minute after minute during that long, long multi-faced appeal, argument, threat and humble justification in favour of our national stand against Imperialism.

Soon after that, some of us had only a few minutes each with him and enjoyed brief exchanges, more by way of drawing some very personal inspiration than of discussion. I had the good luck of being asked by him to say a word. Did he favour me like that because of his desire to assuage my feelings which were ruffled by his unkind and unmerited display of temper over my defiance of the internment order served on me in 1940? Had it anything to do, in part, with my well-known close association with Subhas Babu, before he escaped from the clutches of British authorities and reached Berlin by way of Moscow?

I told Bapu that as I watched him, making that historic speech, I thought I was seeing the incarnation of grand old Bhishma, with his chest as wide as Vindhyachal and his head as high as the snowy Kailas and felt that every one of us has been transformed into an Arjun.

WHY JAWAHARLAL - YOUR HEIR

He felt that I had something more to say but hesitant to express it. He was so much pleased by what I had already said and encouraged me to speak further. So, I ventured to ask him,—

Ranga: Why did you name your heir? Where is the need?

Bapu: But all you young people have been clamouring for a heir. Why are you not happy? Ah I think, I know!

Ranga: I am not thinking of him. I only feel that if at all there is to be a heir, he can be either Sardar or Rajaji.

Bapu: Why not Jawaharlal? So many have been complaining that I favour them too much. Even your friends have been so bitter against them!

Ranga: No, Bapu ... If we must have a fighter, it is Sardar, if a great thinker, it can be Rajaji.

Bapu: Don't you see, Rajaji is too close to me, Sardar is my own. The country should be assured of Jawahar's dynamic participation.

Ranga: So, you have made the wrong choice. We will have neither a fighter nor a thinker. I am sorry, Bapu, it is my misfortune to disagree even at this crucial moment.

I had in my mind, the popular criticism of Nehru as being too much like Hamlet. I was also unhappy over his role in Tripuri *vis-a-vis* Subhas Babu. We all felt that his heart was not in the 'Quit India' resolution. What a contrast? While Bapu would not name Rajaji as his heir because he was closely related, Jawahar put his sister in the Cabinet, despite his anti-ministerialism.

I was hoping to have another chance to ask Bapu for his advice as to the type and direction of kisan's participation in the national struggle. I wanted to insure myself against the repetition of 1940 mis-understanding. Alas, Bapu was spirited away before the next

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dawn. I was witness to two days of Bombay's guerrilla fight with the British forces. I got wind of the so called secret circular, indicating the lines of struggle. I went underground, like many. I got in touch with Sucheta group in Bombay, Aruna group in Delhi and Achyut Patwardhan's in the West.

It was only when I was captured the second time detained in Vellore, that I came to know the sabotage and guerrilla struggles were not contemplated or countenanced by Bapu. By then that programme was fizzling out.

Corruption Creeping into Congress Ministerialism-Desabhakta's Protest

WHILE Gandhiji was engaged in the historic peace mission in Naokhali in Bengal, Prakasam was in the throes of ministerial crisis created by Kala Venkatarao and Kamaraj Nadar, just because some members of their group who were aspirants for ministership had not been accommodated by Prakasam.

Prakasam outlined rather in haste, his programme for the implementation of a number of important items in the constructive programme of Gandhiji, which had also been popularised by the Congress for the previous three decades. Prakasam's ministry set apart one crore each for Khadi, Village development and Harijan uplift campaigns. He also announced the decision of his ministry, in response to the demand made by Rajaji in a public campaign, to take urgent steps to implement the prohibition programme.

Just when the inauguration of all these campaigns were being hailed by the public, Venkatarao and Nadar tabled their vote of no-confidence in Prakasam's ministry, without levelling any specific charge. So I opposed their undemocratic move and the Andhra State Congress, of which I was then the President, denounced that move as being calculated to undermine people's faith in the Congress. So, the P. C. C. called upon Andhra Congress M.L.A.s not to support that no-confidence motion. But they defied that directive and unseated Prakasam's ministry, because they felt sure that the All India Congress leaders would not take any action against them. Prakasam's appeal was not heeded by the Delhi leaders. Sardar Patel who was opposed to Prakasam did not strengthen our P. C. C.

and was on the otherhand interested in giving umbrage to the dissidents. Desabhakta Konda Venkatappayya and myself warned, in vain, the Working Committee that its failure to castigate the dissidents' undemocratic action would encourage unashamed office-hunting, indiscipline and thus pave the way for the instability of all Congress ministries. Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar succeeded Prakasam and the Congress Working Committee put its stamp of approval. The new ministry shelved Prakasam's constructive schemes, despite all our protests and the Working Committee was silent spectator of the negation of Gandhian programme. No wonder, the new ministers felt emboldened to exploit their power for the special benefit of their group within the Congress and some of those industrialists and businessmen who had helped them in their vote gathering campaign against Prakasam. Thus arose such scandals as those of tile factory in Guntur, textile factory in Arcot. Several Congressmen were able to grab many licenses and permits; others obtained loans on inadequate securities and for questionable purposes.

Gandhiji received many complaints even when he was in Bengal. Many people met him after his return to Delhi. Desabhakta wrote a detailed letter, listing a number of complaints and demanding Bapu's intervention to prevent further demoralisation of Congress ministry. Bapu mentioned to some of the Andhra kisan leaders who were able to meet him, why I had kept silent, while such things were happening.

They told him that my hands had been weakened by Sardar's support to the dissident Congress M.L.A.s of Andhra and he did not wish to complain so soon after the new ministry was installed, lest he should be accused of partiality. Bapu said that it was no justification for my silence, when wrong things were happening. When they came to me, they urged me to write to Bapu about the latest developments.

CORRUPTION CREEPING INTO CONGRESS MINISTERIALISM

Bapu was worried over the post Independence communal violence and the large-scale migration of minorities to and fro from the newly sundered parts of Mother India of pre Swaraj era. All his energy and spiritual powers were devoted to the cooling of the passions and tempers of the victims of partition and healing the wounds caused by that holocaust. How could I expect him to pay much attention to these power-politics? When I had the chance of meeting Bapu after prayers and exchanging a few words, he asked me why I had not met him and was maintaining much strange silence.

Ranga: What is the use of worrying you. For months we could not get a word of support from you, while these things were happening and the Working Committee blessed the new rulers.

Bapu: How could I spare time for ministerial affairs with all these communal fires burning away our hearts.

Ranga: That is why I am also silent. I know how your heart is bleeding over these communal horrors. So, I did not wish to add to your sufferings.

Bapu: Have you also seen Desabhakta's charge-sheet?
I indicated my knowledge of it.

Bapu: Then you agree with those complaints! You could have written to me.

So, I felt bound to send my detailed report by the same night. That further strengthened his fears that some serious blight had come to eat into the vitals of the Congress in South India. Hence his reference to that Venkata Rao *cum* Kamaraj brand of new Congressism.

16. Gandhiji on Andhra Complaints*

A Letter in the second week of December, 1947, from a top-ranking Andhra leader†, universally respected for his self-sacrifice, courage and integrity and affectionately nick-named during the early days of non-cooperation by the people as 'the Gandhi of the South', revealed a shocking state of affairs. 'I, old, decrepit, with a broken leg slowly limping on crutches within the walls of my house have no axe to grind', wrote this veteran of many a Satyagraha fight, to bring home to Gandhiji 'the moral degradation into which the men in Congress circles have fallen'.

Several of the M.L.A.s and M.L.C.s are following the policy 'make hay while the sunshines', making money by the use of influence in the criminal courts ... The district collectors and other revenue officials do not feel free in the discharge of their duties on account of the frequent interference by the M.L.A.s and M.L.C.s. A strict and honest officer cannot hold his position. The factions in the Congress circles and the weakness of the ministers have been creating a rebellious spirit amongst the people at large. The people have begun to say that the British Government was much better and they are even cursing the Congress.

Commented Gandhiji on receiving the letter: 'Our moral standards are going down at such a rate that I can now see why our Satyagraha fights in the past lacked the real content and were reduced to mere passive resistance of the weak'. The only chance of saving the Congress was in having as a Congress President one

* An extract from Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase - by Pyarelal, Vol. II, page 676.

† He was no other than Desabhakta Konda Venkatappayya, once an acting President of the Congress.

who would act with firmness and impartiality in the midst of the growing welter of confusion. For that the Congress organisation would need to be beyond the pulls and strains of power politics. Otherwise it would disintegrate. Rather than that fate should overtake it, it was much better to dissolve it. 'The letter from Andhra today is to me a sure sign of the decay and decline of the Congress. If all that is said there in is true, does it not show that we are fit only to be slaves?'

At his evening prayer gathering, on the 12th Dec. 1947 he warned: 'Let the people of.....Provinces measure the words of this self-sacrificing servant of India. As he rightly says, the corruption described by him is no monopoly of Andhra.....Let us beware'.

II

THE anti-imperialist conference was held in Nagpur in 1939. Subhas Chandra Bose presided over it. We were all in high spirits, since we thought our analysis that the war was bound to come had proved correct. So we began to demand that the Congress ministries should resign, if the national demand for Swaraj was not accepted. At the same time I was busy, asking the Congress chief ministers to oppose the imposition of controls on food grain prices and introduction of compulsory procurement from peasants. They agreed to support our kisan demands.

When I conveyed this good news to Bapu, he asked me how I could reconcile these moves with the other demand for the resignation of our ministries. I said that so long as they continue to function, let them press for these kisan demands. If, however, the over-all national demand is negated, like everything else, these kisan demands would also have to be sacrificed. He was not satisfied with our clamour for the resignation of Congress ministries. He felt that it was because they could render some effective help to our suffering masses

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that Subhas Babu worked so hard and successfully to help Congress to get into ministry in Assam. Bapu reminded me how I was not opposed to ministry formation in 1936-'37, as I felt confident of the need of our peasants for relief from the earlier Jagirdari ministries.

I replied that on the whole, the Congress ministries have reached the limits of doing any substantial good to our peasants and workers and nothing more could be expected of them, in view of the special demands of the war. To win National Independence is a more urgent need of the hour.

Bapu : That is, you want to take advantage of this crisis ?

Ranga : Why not ?

Bapu : Not when your enemy is in such mortal peril.

Ranga : When else would he yield to our just demand ; so long as he has been too powerful, he has never harkened to justice.

Bapu reminded me of Wedgewood Ben's far-sighted and generous offers.

Ranga : We have also witnessed how they went back upon their offers and how they tried to suppress our movement.

Bapu : You are arguing in Subhas manner. Have you made sure that your demand for resignation of our ministries is not due to your prejudices against our ministries ?

Ranga : I entertained no prejudices against any ministers ; on the other hand, I had been one of the few who had congratulated them, whenever their actions were thought to be beneficial to the people.

Bapu : What about your colleagues ; for instance, in Bihar, and U.P. ?

Ranga : I can't disguise the fact that I do feel this ministerialism has weakened our morale ; as for

GANDHIJI ON ANDHRA COMPLAINTS

instance, the Khare and Nariman episodes and Mrs. Pandit's appointment?

Bapu : What about Vijayalakshmi?

Ranga : Did not Panditji oppose acceptance of ministries? Then why did he get his sister appointed as minister? Is that not highly opportunistic? Do not such selfish activities at the highest level lead to demoralisation? Have not our ministers fallen too easily for the lures of office and patronage?

17. Mischief of Controls and Permits

BAPU became the focal point for all those public workers who were dissatisfied with the newly installed Swaraj Government, which was for sometime a coalition between the Congress and Muslim League and later on a Congress-dominated leadership. Many of our kisan leaders used to meet him, soon after prayers, on other occasions, and at chance encounters to pour forth the troubles of kisans caused by the controls which were being continued, sometimes, with greater vigour during Nehru's regime.

Bapu was very unhappy that even after becoming free, the Swaraj Government was extending the tentacles of food controls over kisans. I used to appeal to him, by correspondence, personal talks and during discussions in the Working Committee, to liberate our kisans from compulsory procurement and police persecution. He was in complete agreement with me and asked Rajen Babu to examine my proposals for economic prices for food-grains, exemption of the small holders from compulsory procurement, release of head-loaders who were agricultural workers from police persecution or decontrol in full or in part. Rajen Babu and Jawaharlal used to confront us with the objections raised by the Food Ministry. Bapu once laughed and observed, - 'Ranga is my expert and he is a kisan. Why not we accept his advice'.

Ranga : Sir, unfortunately, I have not obtained the certificate of their secretaries as an expert.

Bapu : You could have become the Food Minister.

Rajen Babu : Why not now ?

His prayer speeches of those sad times testify how unhappy he was that the food controls made our kisan

masses feel that Swaraj had not come to them, though Jawaharlal was made the Swaraj Prime Minister. Bapu used to reinforce my pleas raised in Parliament, my arguments advanced in Working Committee and his own persuasive words, in favour of kisans, by his public pleadings, with so much anguish during his prayers, and thus strengthen our demand for decontrol. When we organised an All-India De-Control Day, Jawaharlal complained to him that I was undermining the Cabinet's prestige. Fortunately, Sardar was not opposed to me or to the withdrawal of controls. Bapu said that he preferred kisans' freedom to Cabinet's prestige. When all his prayers and our kisans' agitation failed to persuade Jawaharlal to give up controls, he saw no other go than to offer to fast to carry conviction to the cabinet. That was too much for Rajendra Prasad and so he asked Jawaharlal to let him withdraw controls or from the cabinet. It was at that stage, Jawaharlal felt great dissatisfaction with me and complained bitterly that I was responsible for all that trouble and agreed, in exasperation, to let decontrol come. Such was the spiritual power and political pressure that Bapu used to marshal, in order to help our masses as against the Nehru Cabinet.

Whenver I had the opportunity of meeting him, he used to refer to those complaints and tell me that he agreed with my plea for their removal. Once I bitterly complained that I could not assure the people that the Congress rule was any better than the British rule.

Bapu : Do you also feel like that ?

Ranga : Yes, Bapu, I am inclined to start Satyagraha.

Bapu : Oh, you want to leave me out ?

Ranga : I only want you not to object.

II

DURING the next regular interview, Bapu referred to the complaints received against me from Jawaharlal.

BAPU BLESSES

I asked him how there could be any complaints against me, when I am not enforcing controls.

Bapu: It seems you have declared an All-India De-Control Day. They think it is a challenge to them.

I informed Bapu that it was observed in many places by lakhs of kisans and the demonstrations were completely peaceful.

Bapu: That is exactly why he is upset. If kisans had been violent, then the police could have suppressed it.

Ranga: This success is due to non violence. Our kisans felt that I had your blessings.

Bapu : Jawahar says he has asked you to join him in this harder task of governing and help him to feed the people without the aid of these controls. Why did you not agree ?

Ranga: He should know the reason.

Bapu said that he had assured Jawaharlal that 'Ranga would prefer to be outside the ring to protect the kisans from your bureaucratic pundits.' But he observed that to organise such a protest on a national scale would be weakening the Government. I assured him that it would strengthen its hands, if only Jawaharlal would give up his passion for controls. Then Bapu asked me if I wanted to pitch my passion for kisans against his passion for controls ?

Ranga: His passion for power and control over peasants!

Bapu : No wonder the Madras minister told Jawaharlal that he might have to arrest you.

Ranga: I would be happier in jail.

He asked me to heed Rajen Babu's advice. I knew what it might be. So I told that I would not like to

MISCHIEF OF CONTROLS AND PERMITS

place myself under the control of Jawaharlal. It is easier to resist his controls from outside than to play with controls under his authority.

Bapu : I told Jawaharlal that only Ranga knows how to persuade kisans to give up their surplus food grains. It was on his advice, Prakasam introduced the special bonuses for additional supplies of rice by kisans and Madras was thus able to overcome its food famine, without compulsory procurement.

Ranga : Sardar also agreed with me that the food controls are unnecessary.

Bapu : I know, he told me that Rajen Babu would like you to undertake this responsibility.

I assured him that I was content to remain at his elbow, and help Rajen Babu to implement his de-control policy. I had so much to do in the P.C.C. and Working Committee.

Bapu : It is good you are not fascinated by their power.

18. Gandhiji on Controls*

THE concluding portion of Gandhiji's speech in the All-India Congress Committee, in November, 1947, referred to the question of controls. 'Control...is responsible for much of the corruption that is rampant today... If you do not abolish controls immediately, you will one day regret it. It makes people lazy and helpless.'.....

How I wish that the popular Ministers were humble enough to recognise the change that has come over the people. Their (the people's) initiative should not be strangled by the controls. They should be allowed to be self-reliant. Democracy should not result in making them helpless.

Control gives rise to fraud, suppression of truth, intensification of the black market and to artificial scarcity. Above all, it unmans the people and deprives them of initiative, it undoes the teaching of self-help they have been learning for a generation...This is a tragedy next only, if indeed not equal, to the fratricide...and the insane exchange of population, resulting in...death, starvation and want of proper residence and clothing for the coming inclement weather. The second is certainly more spectacular. We dare not forget the first because it is not spectacular.....

Must the voice of the people be drowned by the noise of the pundits, who claim to know all about the virtue of controls? Would that our ministers who are drawn from the people and are of the people listened to the voice of the people rather than of the controllers of the red-tape, which they know did them infinite harm when they were in the wilderness. The pundits then ruled with a vengeance. Must they do even now?†

* From 'Mahatma Gandhi - The Last Phase' Vol. II by Pyarelal, Pp. 653-654.

† This criticism on controls by Bapu was in response to the complaints during the first period of Nehru's Government.

THE Communal holocaust in the Gangetic plains inflicted death and mutilation on thousands of people. Their property was looted and destroyed. Many more were uprooted from their ancestral homes. There came a veritable period of mob-fury, mass violence and fratricide.

Bapu was prevailed upon to go to Delhi, after the success of his epic fast in Calcutta. When I met him he congratulated South India for its spirit of communal harmony. Then he asked me for the reasons for our civilised behaviour. I told him that we never had such communal trouble. Our Muslims were never so aggressive and we had never any need to think of ourselves as Hindus in danger.

Bapu : In Bihar, there was always harmony. Even there people have gone mad.

Ranga : Sir, the League propaganda has never been so virulent in the South.

Bapu : In these areas also, Hindus are in great majority ; yet, they have suddenly erupted in such fury ?

I referred to the prevalence of communal bitterness in those parts.

Bapu : I am glad, there is no complaint against the Congress in Southern States, your P.C.C. has some Moulanas also. Have you ever tried to study what was happening in and around Delhi.

Ranga : I visited a few villages in Haryana and spent some time in Kurukshetra and Indraprastha camps and I was feeling so miserable. If I had not gone through those

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places, I could never have believed that our otherwise peaceful people were capable of such blood-curdling horrors.

I could realise how much Bapu must have suffered when he was going through the scenes of communal violence in Bengal.

Bapu : I had been warning against sinful developments if we would not cleanse our hearts from communal rancour. Calcutta is peaceful. Bihar is coming to normal. This city frightens me. Can Sardar control it?

Ranga : He alone could control it ; his presence is a great stabilising factor.

He placed his hand on my head and blessed me.

I was most struck by Bapu's wonderful role in the Working Committee. He would watch everything that happened ; he would look at everyone at some stage or the other, with a smile, or a nod or a definite encouragement, without even uttering a word. He could attend to his usual daily work, without being affected by our discussions. Now and then he would slightly raise his eyes and look at some speaker and rest his kindly attention upon him for a minute or even less time. Otherwise, he would go on, as if we were not there at all. But nothing escaped him. He would sometimes be glancing at a bunch of press-cuttings, so carefully gathered by his loyal secretaries ; at other times, he would be doing his Urdu or Bengali exercises. Now and then, he would write letters and even read important documents. Once I found him in deep study of an important and latest book.

His food would come early in the evening and before prayer time. To see him eating is a great privilege. He would eat with relish. Often I used to wonder whether that food was necessary at all for him. Sometimes, I would be attached by the romantic feeling that Bapu was not merely a man. Then what else was he ? Indeed, I used to be in prayerful mood and wish that Bapu should enjoy his food. But did he enjoy it or eat it only to live and gain energy ? How artistic he was even in eating ! He made almost a fetish of cleanliness and art of eating. With his shaking fingers, he would hold the earthen basin of hot milk or soup and drink spoonful in such a firm and yet delicate manner. He was never impatient about eating but he never tarried over it. It was indeed a pleasant ceremony with him.

II

ALMOST by intuition he would know that a member was very earnest about his points ; he would hasten to look at him, encourage him by his kind attention and sympathy and even strengthen him by a word. It was my good fortune to deserve often such affectionate attentions from him. Could any mother be more soft, considerate and anxious about her child's attempts to make its points than Bapu had been over his junior partners in the Working Committee. He used to come to my rescue whenever I could not carry my point with Jawaharlal or Sardar and then I was convinced that I was in the right. Thus he used to help Prafulla Babu and also Kripalani. I had a talisman with him. Whenever I was in a corner or I felt too strongly about my point of view or wanted strength in my tussle with Jawaharlal and his vigorous advocacy or objections, I used to call Bapu to evince greater interest and even to look at me and if possible, indeed, to say a word or two in my favour.

Now and then, Dr. Pattabhi would offer some cryptic, epigrammatic, observations, raising either surprise or laughter and Bapu used to enjoy them as much as anyone of us. One such observation of Dr. Pattabhi made one of our leaders remark ' Your observation creates more darkness instead of throwing any light on our discussions '.

Bapu used to sit up, as if he was ready for a battle, whenever he wanted to make an important contribution. He would set aside his other implements, accompaniments and even pillows. He would cover himself fully and then, would look at us fully for a few seconds. And the Committee would bring itself into full attention ;

everyone would pick his ears and stretch his neck, and rivet his eyes on Bapu, as if he was a God. No wonder, all the time we were in hushed tones. Harsh as might be some of our thoughts, rasping our reactions and even uncomfortable and unhappy as we would grow at some unexpectedly unreasonable attitude of a leader, we would always be at pains to be on our good behaviour and in our best moods and countenances, because none of us wanted Bapu to see us in our moods of discontent.

But did we ever surrender our judgement to him? Did he expect it of us? Never. On the other hand he would encourage us to exercise our democratic rights and duties to the fullest degree. Careful as he was about his drafting of resolutions and expressing his thoughts, he never minded their radical re-drafting or re-shaping by us. Often he would say that the draft was only a rough one, intended to indicate the outline of his thoughts and ask us to examine every aspect of his ideas and every word of his draft. When some of our ideas or qualifications are likely to reshape the draft, he would then ask either Rajaji, Panditji or Pantji to re-draft the whole resolution in the light of the discussions. Rajaji's advice was always welcome to him. He was keen on searching for points of agreement with Jawaharlal. He displayed much consideration to Azad and much affection for many of us, who were juniors. Because he was so keen to accommodate our thoughts, we were also anxious to accept to the maximum extent, his fundamental ideas.

The great influence of his presence upon the general tenour of our discussions could always be observed, after he had left us for his evening prayers. The tempo of, not so much, our discussions as our voices, our expressions and our reactions, would rise noticeably and we would all begin to act as if we were different from ourselves in the presence of Gandhiji.

III

ALTHOUGH many of us were so close to him and so much in his immediate presence we were, never content and each of us tried to hanker after a few minutes for personal talk with him. Even a few expressions from him gave us—from the oldest to the latest recruit to the Committee—immense satisfaction.

He created that delightful feeling of intimacy while we were in his presence, yet, we used to feel ourselves so small from his great stature and spiritual eminence. Such was his ennobling influence on his colleagues in the National Movement.

21. | Jawaharlal vs. Congress President

ONE morning in early December I went to Bapu in response to his enquiry from some kisan leaders who met him on Nov. 27, 1947. He was so much obsessed with the communal troubles and the differences that arose between Jawaharlal and Sardar. He was also worried over the ascerbitic debate in the Working Committee as to the respective roles of the Committee and its President and the Cabinet and Prime Minister.

Bapu knew how I supported the President's claim to be consulted on every important issue, before the Cabinet took its decision. That did not please Jawaharlal. Sardar supported the Prime Minister by his silence. Several points were made by Jawaharlal in support of his contention that the Congress President could not be invited to the Cabinet meetings in view of their oath of secrecy. But when some of us pressed the other view why there could not be informal meetings of the Cabinet before the formal meetings, as used to be the practice during 1936-39 when the Congress wanted to avoid the interference of the Governors in their Cabinet discussions, he conceded that it could be done. That pleased both Sardar and Bapu. Of course that solution was never implemented. Kripalani resigned. Rajen Babu who was already a member of the Cabinet succeeded him and thereafter weak Presidents, who followed him could not assert their rights in this direction.

Bapu greeted me, in the light of those discussions.

Bapu : I am glad you are accepted.

Ranga : By whom sir ! By Sardar or Jawahar ?

I know Sardar is happy.

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Bapu : By Jawaharlal. You see, he has himself suggested your name for the Economic Programme Committee; he wanted you also on the Drafting Committee on our objectives.

Ranga: I wonder whether those Committees were desired by Sardar.

Bapu : Sardar did not have objection to them; he thought this is not yet the time. We want the controls to go. You want peasants also to be assured of protection. Jawahar is so keen on controlling industrialists and encouraging socialists. So you may be able to aid him by pleading the case of peasants.

II

I asked him why he said in the prayer meeting that under ideal conditions, Jawaharlal should be content to be secretary and kisan should be accepted as president and so on. I expressed the fear that Jawaharlal might misunderstand, in view of his differences with Sardar and with the Working Committee. I assured him that I was not for weakening his hands.

Bapu : He fears that the Working Committee may encroach upon the authority of the Cabinet.

Ranga: There should be no justification for that, since many of the top-ranking Cabinet ministers, besides himself and Sardar are in the Committee.

Bapu: He has in mind the recent discussions raised over Kripalani's letters. Anyhow he is satisfied that you are on these Committees. I also hope that you will learn to work with him.

I offered to do whatever he desired me. I sounded the caution that Jawaharlal, who became the Prime Minister because he was then the Congress President, seemed to be then proceeding to denigrate the same Presidentship, in favour of Prime Ministership. I gasped

for breath, as it were, as I recollected Bapu's declaration that Jawaharlal was his political heir.

Bapu : Jawahar had many claims to become Prime Minister.

III

BAPU could not devote so much attention to the growing problem of political mal-adjustments between the leaders of the party and the Cabinet. The result was that Jawaharlal began to gain more and more power as against so many others like Kripalani who was concerned with the refugees and Cabinet's arbitrariness.

The differences that arose between Bapu and Jawaharlal on one side and Jawahar and Sardar on the other over the Indo-Pakistan disputes and the pro-Nehru role played by Mountbatten, together conspired to further weaken Bapu's hold over the Cabinet. For different reasons, both Jawahar and Sardar supported Cabinet's claim for independence from Working Committee and that began to weaken Bapu's influence over the Cabinet policies. All these and many other experiences seem to have persuaded Bapu to agree with some socialists to form their own party and others to range themselves into their respective political platforms. This is not the context in which I can venture to indicate many other such public issues on which he found Jawaharlal so obdurate, power-conscious as to refuse to accept his advice or take into his inner circles in and around the Cabinet many of the veteran and seasoned Gandhians.

In the light of later happenings, I find that I was justified in sounding that caution in the presence of Bapu. After all, the membership of the Working Committee was the highest national opportunity, coupled with moral power and organisational authority. When Congress Cabinets came, into existence it was on the tacit authority of the Committee that some became ministers,

while others who were close to Bapu, naturally felt that they had no need to be in the Cabinet to be effective and useful in deciding the matters of vital importance.

Jawaharlal differed from that approach. He made it impossible for Kripalani to function. When later Tandon again tried to assert the privacy of the Working Committee, he edged him out of the Presidentship. In exasperation, as it were, he himself donned the robes named a docile nominee as President. He preferred to let his own daughter occupy that position and thus finally denigrated the Presidentship and Working Committee *vis-a-vis* to the growing power of the Cabinet.

Unfortunately neither Bapu nor Sardar had enough time, energy or freedom from other national issues to out-line clear guide-lines or limits for the respective spheres and mutual cooperation between the Cabinet and the Working Committee. One of the important considerations which must have weighted with Bapu in making his Last Testament, asking for the liquidation of the Congress as the pre-eminent national platform and force and the freedom for all national workers, who had till then been working under its leadership to form their own political parties, must have been the cause of this dangerous trend in Jawahar's attitude and in the Cabinet's uncontrollable urge for monopoly of power to decide national issues.

It is also possible that his advice to some of us to join Jawaharlal's ministerial platform, when he was still keen on welcoming us or in need of our cooperation was based on his prescience as to the coming political portents.

I met Bapu early in 1925 in Delhi, after he broke his prolonged fast to achieve communal harmony. It was a sunny morning in winter on a terrace in Mohammed Ali's compound. That was my first tete-a-tete with that fabled leader of revolutionary India, whom I had come to venerate since 1917. Carl Heath of the Quakers wrote from London to Gandhiji about my desire to meet him. He had already known a little about my interest in the rural 'Comrade' of Mohammed Ali and the then nascent 'Hindustan Times.' I was then pleading for the acceptance of the political device of adult franchise, as an important solvent against untouchability and the social and political helplessness of our backward classes. What an inspiring experience it was for me to meet him, on my return from Oxford after five years of study of Economics. From that meeting began our communion in our service to our country and people. He had ever since been the load'star for me.

I found, to my utter disappointment, on returning from Oxford that Dr. Annie Besant was opposed to adult franchise and her Bill for Commonwealth of India constitution would confine votes to the propertied and educated classes only. I saw the advantages that the peoples of Western democracies derived by wielding their weapon of adult franchise. So, I hastened from Rameswaram to reach Delhi, to meet her and Gandhiji, Ali Brothers, Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpatrai, who were all then in Delhi and to plead with them for the adoption of adult franchise for helping the cause of our down-trodden masses.

My talks with Dr. Besant proved very discouraging. She asked me how I could expect the illiterate, socially

backward and otherwise suppressed masses of rural India to use votes in a sensible and responsible manner. She was afraid, our women, who were in much more pitiable condition would certainly have to wait longer than men for getting ready to use the vote properly.

Besant : Let us first emancipate our masses from illiteracy, untouchability and their faith in the inevitability of their degradation. Let us free our women from Purdah also. In South India we do not have this curse. Have you not seen these women in Delhi, going about in Purdah.

She was so majestic in her lovely robes and with that silvery head. I knew how she fought for our national freedom.

Ranga : Surely the weapon of vote would uplift them. You were a famous suffragist. So, I hope you would appreciate my idea.

Besant : Yes, I was a suffragist. I was also a socialist like you. But Indian masses are not yet ready to wield this vote as an effective weapon. Their vote will be either useless or they will not be allowed to use it; such is the experience of Negroes in America.

I expressed my disagreement with her attitude.

Besant : Let us move step by step. Let us remove untouchability first. Let us spread literacy among our people. In the meanwhile, let us progress towards Home Rule, through this Commonwealth Status and representative institutions based on educated franchise. That would be big enough progress.

Ranga : Already a good number of Swarajist M.L.A.s, have signed a draft resolution, to be introduced in the Central Assembly, favouring the introduction of adult suffrage in the elections to Councils and Assemblies.

Besant : Did Motilal Nehru agree to your proposals ?

Ranga : He is not opposed to it.

Besant : You may go on canvassing opinion for it, if you like. We have to wait for a long time before we can make the best use of it.

It was then I met Gandhiji. I told him all about my talks with Besant, Motilal, Malaviya and other leaders.

Bapu : Why do you want adult franchise ?

Ranga : Sir, once Panchamas also are given votes, all the Caste-Hindu candidates and their supporters have to go into their areas, try to please them by touching them, thus spiriting away the blight of untouchability and make them also feel that they are as valuable citizens as all others.

Bapu : I agree that it is possible. Would not the Caste-Hindus persecute them even more, if they do not vote for their favoured candidates ?

He thought aloud, - ‘ But then the rival candidates might be interested in protecting them.’ Turning to me,

Bapu : Would it be good to let the untouchables become the target for the rival parties and politics of caste-Hindus ?

Ranga : Mahatmaji, if rival parties and candidates, who have till now been completely ignoring their existence, would be obliged to canvass them and begin to treat them as fellow human beings, I strongly feel that untouchability would lose its deadly hold on these unfortunate people.

Bapu reacted favourably to this feeling. Then he asked me what reply I gave to Besant’s fear that illiterate people might come to be misled and they would not be able to make proper choice in the elections ? I replied, there is always that possibility. But to give them votes is the best way to force the legislators and legislatures and their Governments to do their best to eliminate illiteracy at the earliest. Gandhiji was all the time busy, spinning, while sunning himself and discussing with me.

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Bapu : I wonder why Mrs. Besant is opposed to giving the vote to every adult. She cannot be opposed to the poor people getting political power.

Ranga : She fought for votes for Women.

Bapu : I know that. It must be because our masses are not at all educated. They are not experienced in political life. But how can they gain experience when they do not take part in public life. How can there be any public life and politics, if they have no votes ? But you want me to agree to give votes for their women also. They are much more depressed.

Ranga : Sir, you want to emancipate women also. You are glad Sarojini Devi is your great colleague.

Bapu : Then, she is Sarojini, the Nightingale, the great orator.

Ranga : Can't we give them at least the vote, even if we deny them equal properties ?

Bapu : Yes, I think we ought to ask for votes for our Panchamas and also for women ; that may help to free them from their shackles.

Ranga : They want to impose property qualification, Sir ?

Bapu : Why property qualification ? I do not own any property any where. In that case, even I can't have a vote. Property does not make one any the wiser. It may even blind him to others' needs. Could it make him a mere responsible citizen ? I don't know.

I volunteered the information that in England they extended franchise by stages between 1834 and 1880, to cover all adult men and women were enfranchised only after the World War I.

Bapu : I know that. Then they were making experiments with their representative system. They have proved that adult franchise is possible, safe and can lead to social progress. So why not we adopt it when it has succeeded in England. I remember John Stuart Mill pleaded eloquently for votes for women also.

When I related this discussion to Motilal Nehru at the Western Court, he exclaimed,—‘I have always believed that Gandhiji is more progressive than British Liberals. It would be a sight for Gods, when our Rajas, Brahmins and your Chettis begin to go to untouchables and beg them for their votes.’ He had a chuckle in his mouth as he turned to T. C. Goswami, my Oxford friend and his Chief Whip in Assembly and felicitated him for having agreed to sponsor my proposal. He promised to keep our idea prominently in his mind.

I became a professor later on and the All-Party Committee was appointed with Motilal Nehru as its Chairman after the Madras Session of the Congress 1928-29. My thesis on ‘ADULT FRANCHISE’ was published and it was sent to Motilal. By that time, liberals like Sapru, Independent patriots like Jinnah began to look upon it as one of the solutions for our social reaction. I approached Gandhiji and Motilalji again to base the implementation of whatever constitution they would be drafting on ‘Adult Franchise’. Gandhiji assured me of his support. As sure as anything, Nehru Committee accepted adult franchise. This was in 1929. Since then the Indian public opinion continued to be unanimous over this matter. Thanks to Bapu’s blessings. Every attempt made ever since, to propound Constitutional reforms came to be based upon adult franchise, because Bapu made it one of his own basic political proposals for uplifting our masses.

How have our masses so far used this great power, placed in their hands? Can we say that they have gained much? Why has it not resulted in obliterating untouchability or liberating the depressed classes from so many of their social disabilities? On the other hand, so many of the unscrupulous politicians of all parties have managed to snatch away so many of the votes of the Harijans, backward classes, Adivasis and other under-privileged people on false pretexts under threat.

Even the much needed anti-illiteracy campaign has not come to be inaugurated. Many of us, who have devoted decades of our public life and risked so much so often in championing their causes have come to be defeated respectfully at the polls. Why? Many well-wishers of the masses ask me why Bapu gave votes to these unprepared peoples. But Bapu never dreamt that these electoral symbols would be resorted to by Congress in place of literacy campaign. I am however convinced that Bapu had the ultimate good of our masses at his heart, when he favoured adult franchise. We live in the hope that Bapu's hopes would come to be fulfilled in the not-distant future and our democracy will save our masses from both the social reactionaries and communists and such other disruptionists.

Even though our masses have not made use of their votes quite so sensibly, it cannot be denied that quite a number of good results have so far come to the wake of the actual grant of adult suffrage. Harijan quarters are frequented even much more by candidates, than other areas during and after the elections. A large number of Harijans have come to be returned by general constituencies for both Assemblies and Parliament. Most of the Harijans who had been brought or induced to come or came of their own accord to the polling stations during these twenty years at all levels of elections have been made to feel that there is no longer the cause of untouchability upon them or their fellow-Harijans. The Panchayat Raj has witnessed the emergence of hundreds of Harijans and other depressed people as Presidents of Panchayat Samithies. More places in polytechnics, technical colleges, higher cadres of services have come to be offered to their youths because of the leverage of votes for all adults.

23. Gandhism - Negativism - Socialism

THERE was a political season between 1936-44 when even Bapu began to wonder how far genuine patriots and social workers interested in the uplift of the masses could march and work in the socialist way. Since Karachi Congress of 1931, when Gandhiji declared that 'Gandhi might die, but Gandhism would not die' and the Charter on Fundamental Rights was outlined, most of us found much in common between the orthodox Gandhians and socialists of the British way. So, in 1933 many of us met in the Gokhale Hall in Poona, at the time of the informal meetings of the AICC and agreed to take tentative steps to form a socialist platform within the Congress to canvass the cause of kisans and workers, within the Congress. That move paved the way to the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in Patna in 1934. But when Jaiprakash Narain published his book entitled 'WHY SOCIALISM', I found myself in violent disagreement with his Marxist approach and his unrealistic and unrelenting opposition to almost every aspect of the constructive programme developed by Gandhiji and hailed by most of us in the kisan movement. So, I separated myself from that party, although I had been an avowed socialist, like the Italian and Dutch socialists who had their feet planted firmly among peasants and who wanted social revolution based on peasant economy and social democracy.

Jawaharlal considered himself as a socialist, principally of the continental type, though not of the hard-boiled Marxist persuasion. But he had no faith in peasantism or agrarian social democracy and to that extent, his reactions to us were not different from

those of Marxists. Thus from the beginning, he and C. S. P. leaders were able to work together, as they were kindred souls within the ambit of Marxist Socialism, whereas I and my kisan colleagues were happy to work within the orbit of Gandhism.

There were occasions, at Lucknow, Congress session (1936), and thereafter, when Bapu asked me how it was that I was not being accepted by Jawaharlal and others as a socialist. I was taken aback. I began to wonder why he put that question to me. Did he want me to join the C. S. P. ? Was he testing the depth of my faith in his way of life, since I had been associated with agrarian socialism ? Was Bapu himself drifting towards socialism of Nehru ?

There was much glamour, in the then political atmosphere, for such young public men like myself to sail with Jawaharlal and associate themselves with the C. S. P. who were his favourites. Yet, I was not prepared to abandon my faith in Gandhism of the Karachi Charter and Bardoli Satyagraha, as the sheet-anchor of peasantry and sail with the then popular wind of Nehruism and C. S. Pism. So, the following discussion took place between us :

Bapu : Do you want me to join the C. S. P. ? So many young people are joining it. You want the zamindars to go, so do they. Why have you parted company with them ?

Ranga : Are you not a genuine socialist ? What nobler programme can Indian socialists put forward than what you have been evolving for us in India ? Are not your present programmes, the Harijan uplift, anti-untouchability emancipation of women, labour welfare, and peasant protection, good enough socialist programmes ?

Bapu : They think these are all reactionary moves.

Ranga : Bapu, I have toured in many European countries, met many socialist leaders and observed the activities of several socialist parties, especially in Italy, France, Holland, and Denmark. I have studied their agrarian cooperation and socialist moves. I have kept company with our Congress Socialists also for some time, but I find that your programme is the best socialist approach to the problems of Indian masses. I find that the C.S.P. leaders are out of tune with Indian peasants and rural problems.

Gandhiji concluded that discussion by expressing his satisfaction with my views and encouraged me to carry on my work among peasants on non-violent lines. He wanted me to organise them in such a way that they would be brought more and more into the national struggle, as had happened in Bardoli.

I was not yet able to realise how C.S.P. was opposed to Gandhiji's conception and practice of non-violence and his approach to means. I cannot say that I did fully grasp then the importance of ensuring that the means we adopt in our pursuit of the ends would be as good and decent as the ends themselves. I felt, however, that Gandhiji was as hesitant as myself about the correctness of the C.S.P. approach to our mass movements. No-wonder Jawaharlal bypassed all of us who were engaged for long in the mass movements, when he had the opportunity to include in his Working Committee a few young leaders, as an experiment in coexistence between the sworn Gandhites and those who were attuned to his negativism voiced in his 'WHITHER INDIA'. We did not mind, being thus kept in the cold by both Jawaharlal and Sardar *i.e.* C.S.Pism and Congress establishment, because we enjoyed the warm comradeship of Bapu, which was indeed the real source of our inspiration. To our amusement, came the threatened revolt of the old guard of the Working Committee

by way of their letter of resignation as protest against Jawaharlal's campaign in favour of socialists and their ill-disguised contempt or lack of faith in non-violence of Gandhiji's practice (See 'BUCH OF LETTERS' by Jawaharlal Nehru). Bapu brought about some peace between them. But he was frank enough to some of us and explained how his was not their way.

Once again, after an interval of seven or eight years (1945-46), Bapu created an impression that he was prepared to consider himself as a socialist. By that time, so many Indian orthodox socialists had grown dis-illusioned with Marxism and dissociated themselves from communists. They marched a long way from 'WHY SOCIALISM' to 'GANDHISM RECONSIDERED AND SOCIALISM RE-CONSIDERED.' But peasant oriented Gandhians like myself were however prepared to place our faith even in the post Quit-India C.S.P. So, Bapu asked me why it was so.

Ranga : I have no objection to their leaders like Narendra Dev, Jaiprakash. I have considered myself as a socialist since 1922 but of the Brailsford, Cole and Gandhi persuasion. If you are a socialist then socialism, must have a reliable and sacred content with all your practical experiments and moral approach to the problems of our masses.

Bapu : Where do we differ? Do we differ from them in their present chastened moods and attitudes?

Ranga : Yes, Bapu, I think our differences are fundamental. It is true they too avow faith in democracy and also in Kisan Mazdoor Praja Raj. But can we be sure that they would be content to achieve socialist society through non-violence and for free peasantry also?

Bapu : Why do you say this?

Ranga : Recently I read an article by Jaiprakash in the English quarterly 'SOCIALIST WORLD' and he was at pains to prove there in, the socialists' loyalty to Marx conception of dictatorship of the Proletariat and to show that it is really not dictatorship but only an approximation to democracy since the toilers comprise of the overwhelming majority of the population.

Bapu : I am a non-violent socialist ; my socialism may not be theirs. I told them so. Did you not read my recent articles in the Harijan on socialism ?

Then, I think (was it Brij Kishen ?) his secretary showed those copies of the Harijan.

Ranga : Many of these socialists are keen on passing off as Marxists. They are at the same time claiming to be Gandhians of the brand of 'GANDHISM RE-CONSIDERED'. But Bapu, their centre of social gravity is in the city, ours in the village. They plan in terms of dictatorship of the Proletariat ; we in terms of the K. M. P. Raj or Ram Raj. To them peasantism or artisanism is outmoded economism ; to us, it is the warp of social economy. To them, property is anathema ; to us, it is the means assurance of economic independence, especially peasant holdings and artisan implements. To them, dictatorship has no terrors. To us, it is the negation of all ethical values and social freedoms. Their Gurus are in the West, our Guru is yourself. Their books spring from Marxism and Stalinism. Our books draw their inspiration from Bardoli, Champaran Satyagrahas and Ahmedabad labour fasts. They quote from Western socialist struggles. We quote your experiments with Truth and Indian freedom struggles.

BAPU BLESSES

I went on arguing in an emotional, if hesitant manner. He was so patient. He kept on smiling approval. I felt that some unformed questions that arose in his mind found answers in my analysis.

Bapu : India must find her own way. You say rightly that the path of Karachi (Fundamental Rights) has to be broadened and strengthened. So long as we keep non-violent and moral means, we can help our masses. Let our people observe 'TRIKARANA SUDDHI' truthful harmony between thoughts, words and deeds.

Ranga : That is my Gandhian way Bapu, I will be content with your blessings.

Bapu : You have them in full.

24. In Memoriam*

WITH regard to work among the peasants and workers, Professor Ranga had a discussion with Gandhi.

Ranga: You say that the earth rightly belongs or should belong to the peasant. If the kisans are to have only land and not the effective political power, their position will be just as bad as in Soviet Russia, where the political power has been monopolized by the proletariat dictatorship, while the peasants were first allowed to gain some holdings and later were deprived of those holdings in the name of collectivization of land.

Bapu: I do not know what has happened in Soviet Russia. But I have no doubt that if we have democratic Swaraj, as it must be, if freedom is won through non-violence, the kisan must hold power in all its phases, including political power.

Ranga: Am I right in interpreting your statement that the land should not belong to the absentee landlord or the zamindar and that ultimately the zamindari system has to be abolished, of course, through non-violent means?

Bapu: Yes. But you should remember that I visualize a system of trusteeship regulated by the state. In other words, I do not want to antagonize the zamindars—and for that matter any class—without cause.

Ranga: When you say that a peasant has so to work as to make it impossible for the landlord to exploit him, does it include apart from the satyagrahic

* From 'Mahatma' Vol. 6, p.p. 376 to 379 (diary of Bapu 1944-1945) edited by Tendulkar. Only change made here is proper names are substituted, for question and answer.

campaigns the legislative administrative reforms that the peasants may oblige the state through the exercise of their franchise and minimize the powers of the landlords?

Bapu: Civil Disobedience and non-cooperation are designed for use, when people, the tiller of the soil, have no political power. But immediately they have political power, naturally their character will be ameliorated through legislative channels.

But the kisan might not have all that political power, you will perhaps say. My reply is that if swaraj is attained by the effort of the whole people, as it must be under non-violence, the kisans must come into their own and have the uppermost voice. But if it is not so and there is a sort of a workable compromise between the people and the Government on the basis of a limited franchise, the interests of the tiller of the soil will need close watching. If the legislature proves itself to be incapable of safeguarding the kisan's interests they will, of course, always have the sovereign remedy of civil disobedience and non-cooperation.

But as I said as early as 1932, in connection with Chirala Perala, ultimately, it is not the paper legislation nor brave words or fiery speeches, but the power of non-violent organization, discipline and sacrifice that constitutes the real bulwark of the people against injustice or oppression.

Ranga: You suggested that the existing kisan organizations should be reformed where necessary. I quite recognize the need for Congressmen, who have been working among the kisans, to reorient the general political attitude of the kisan class organizations so that they will recognize the need for a united political freedom. I am also convinced that the Congress provides for us all, especially for the peasants, the most effective weapon and leadership

to win freedom. But is there any harm if we organize the peasants into a Kisan Congress which accepts the political leadership of Congress?

Bapu : There may be gross self-deception in this presentation. When I said that the kisan sabhas should be reformed, I meant that up till now the kisan sabhas have been formed not to wrest power from the Government but to capture the Congress. That applies to the students and other organizations too.

Ranga : You are partially right. That was so in the past. But we have now completely abandoned the idea. We have adopted the word Congress not in a spirit of rivalry, but because we want to be identified with the Congress. We will have the double membership. Every member of the kisan Congress will also be enrolled as a member of the National Congress.

Bapu : Then why not run the Congress? Why set up an independent and parallel organization? Do you not see when the kisan sabhas are bonafide organizations they are the Congress? Today only a fraction of India's population is represented on the Congress register. The Congress aspires to represent the whole nation, even for those who are not on its register. When it becomes a fully national organization *de jure* as it is today by moral right, the bulk of its membership will naturally consist of the kisans and they will be in a position to dictate its policy.

Ranga : The trouble is that some of our Congress colleagues think we are ousting them from their legitimate position of power and privilege. They may not be prepared to welcome our existence or trust our bonafides. We want to avoid all conflicts within the Congress by willingly accepting the political leadership of the Congress. For, excluding our economic programme, we want to have separate class-conscious organization which will derive

power both for itself and the Congress from its contact with the masses. Unless we do that, others will come and confuse the kisans.

Bapu : But here you have involved yourself in a fallacy. You should work to make the Congress fully representative of the kisans. Unless we get down to this fundamental thing and work from the bottom upward, there will be no swaraj. Every Congressman must make up his mind to make the Congress an honest organization and, therefore, a kisan organization. As for the rights, they should follow as a natural corollary from the performance of service. Else there is only usurpation.

Ranga : You have tried for the last twenty-five years to rebuild the Congress organization and you know the result. I must confess we have not got confidence that we shall be able to so behave and act that the Congress will in the end become a kisan organization. Our fear is that by following your line of action in spite of ourselves, we shall allow ourselves to be exploited by the vested interests. The very fact that the Birlas and their like are today prepared to give you shelter and you accept it from them prevents radical reform. Therefore, though I shall feel the wrench, I shall feel unable to work on your lines.

Bapu : Then you admit that whilst you will work under the aegis of the Congress, you will at the same time run a parallel, independent organization. My mind runs in a straight line. I do not understand this zigzag course. This can only lead to trouble, when the Congress becomes an effective organization. I am thinking of millions of our downtrodden countrymen who do not know what to hope and what not to hope. A parallel organization will only further confuse their minds. It would be more logical to keep out of the Congress altogether.

IN MEMORIAM

Ranga : We enter the Congress, but we do not fight for position and power. Can you not treat us on the same footing as the Ahmedabad Labour Union?

Bapu : Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It will all depend on the spirit in which this is done. I have expressed my apprehension already. And now it is for you to remove it. You can model your organization after the Ahmedabad Labour Union. All the Labour Union members are on the Congress register. They are under the discipline of the Congress. Yet they are a power in the Congress and in the municipality. You should confine yourself to Andhra alone. All kisans should be automatically on your register. But the purpose of this enrolment should be educative, to make the kisans Congress-minded and politically conscious.

Ranga : The Bombay AICC resolution assures the masses that the power in the national Government and Swaraj India ought to belong to the toilers in the fields, in the factories and elsewhere. Can we say that the spirit of the resolution means that the Congress stands for the achievement of democratic Kisan-Mazdoor-Praja-Raj, after the attainment of Swaraj?

Bapu : Not only after, but before also. The Congress stands for democratic Kisan-Mazdoor-Praja-Raj.

25. | Eternal Bapu

KURSHID BEN informed me that Bapu wanted to clear certain points, after some Andhra Congress leaders had met him and discussed the ways and means of adjusting the relations between Kisan and Congress organisations. So I met Bapu in the winter of 1945 in Sevagram. I think I stayed at Magan Wadi with Seth J. Bajaj.

During our talks, Bapu asked me why I was not content with whatever the Congress was willing to undertake by way of constructive work to strengthen our fight for Swaraj.

Ranga : Bapu, you have yourself been broadening the ambit of constructive work. For instance, you have recently included in it, the work among students, youths, women and workers, in your latest note on constructive work. Surely the programme for constructive work is not to be restricted to what it was in 1920, when the Non-cooperation Movement held the field.

Bapu : That is true.

Ranga : Many of these Congress friends are stay-puts. When you found it necessary to encourage women to join the Swaraj Movement, you did not hesitate to extol the example of Annapurna, Kamla Devi, Sarojini Devi. You drew during the salt Satyagraha many thousands of women into the burning fires of struggle and sacrifice.

Bapu : But they say, that you are asking kisans to organise strikes in paddy and ground-nut markets.

Ranga : Is it wrong to protest against false weights, and illegal deductions from the sale prices ? I must be frank with you ; I have recently been organising

strikes of sugar-cane growers of U.P. and Bihar against the mill-owners.

Bapu: Do you think of all these innovations or do you add them on to your armoury, because your colleagues initiate them?

Ranga: It works both ways.

Bapu: So, there is truth in their complaint that in the name of constructive programme, Ranga goes his own way and says that it is Gandhian way?

Ranga: Yes, Bapu. They are content to do so little for the masses and say, they are loyal to Gandhism. I and my colleagues in the Kisan and Mazdoor fronts are never content with their Gandhism. We believe in marching along the Gandhian way. We want to go on broadening it. Do you put a ban on innovation in the ways of serving the masses?

Bapu: So, you do not want me to be dated?

Ranga: That is it, Bapu. Thank God, you are with us and we can come to you and discuss and obtain advice and guidance. Do you not want us to learn to be on our own? we may make mistakes in the process.

Bapu: Certainly you must exercise your initiative. But how do you avoid making grievous mistakes?

Ranga: I believe you are opposed to every type of exploitation of man by man, of people by institutions, of citizen by Governments. We will try to judge every move of our workers and people by that touchstone. Take these controls imposed by this British Government on food grains, that is, on their stores, movements, sales and consumption. Were they not responsible for Bengal famine? Do they not inhibit peasants' incentives to grow more?

Bapu: You have won your freedom.

Ranga: I want it, the better to serve your kisans, Daridranarayan.

BAPU BLESSES

Bapu : I was told that Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Indulal Yagnik wanted to talk to me about the Kisan Sabhas, I sent word that you know my mind and they had better see you.

Ranga : I am grateful to you, Bapu.

He was so happy and I felt that his radiant smile seemed to suffuse me. He touched me with his hand, while the other hand rested on the Charkha.

Glossary

Adivasis, first inhabitants, sometimes called aboriginees. They are very backward both economically and educationally.

Aranyavas, living in forest.

Arjun, mighty warrior and the middle brother of Pandavas of the Mahabharata.

Arya Samaj, revivalist movement of Hindus who believe in Vedas and Upanishads and not in the later developments in Hinduism.

Ashram, hermitage, a place for study and discipline of life.

Avataar, Incarnation of God.

Bardoli, a place in Gujarat, where in the 1921 Civil Disobedience Movement, the people carried on two successful Satyagraha campaigns or no tax campaigns under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The no tax campaign was against increment in land revenue by Settlement Revision Officers in Bardoli taluk—Struggle lasted for over six months. Peasants suffered heavily. Attachments, forfeitures arrests took place. Government ordered enquiry. Broomfield Committee gave finding that the peasants were in the right and that 22 percent increase in land revenue was 'Sheer loot'.

Bapu, father, Mahatma Gandhi is affectionately called by many as Bapu.

Bhangi, scavenger.

Bhagawan, God.

Bhakta, devotee.

Bharat Kisan Sammelan, Indian peasants' congregation.

Bhavana, thought, idea.

BAPU BLESSES

Bhishma, the oldest bachelor hero of the Mahabharata the leader of Kauravas, who fought against Pandavas.

Brahmoos, reformed Hindus who believe in one God and do not believe in idol worship.

Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, a great Vaishnava devotee of Bengal.

Chakrayudha, the discus of Lord Vishnu, the invincible weapon.

Dandi March, Civil disobedience march started on 12 March 1930- a 200 mile march from Ahmedabad to Dandi and April 6 fixed for breaking the salt law - Millions broke the law and courted jails. Salt depots at Dharaswa, Wadala Shiroda, Sanekatta were raided. The entire Indian Nation plunged into this Struggle. By March 1931, more than 95,000 jailed. Thousands suffered from lathi charges, firings in some places and no tax campaigns in some places. Gandhiji jailed in May. After negotiations for about a month Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on March 5, 1931. Ordinances with-drawn and salt law was loosened.

Damdapat, whereby no debtor need pay anything more than twice the original amount borrowed.

Daridranarayan, God in the form of indigent and poor.

Desabhakta devotee of the country.

Desoddharaka, benefactor of the country.

Dharti Mata, mother earth.

Eekalavya, in the Mahabharata, Eekalavya made a clay image of Drona, the teacher of archery to the princes and worshipped with his unshattered faith and became the greatest archer of the time.

Gaddis, thrones.

Ganges, one of the great and sacred rivers of India.

Girijans, inhabitants of hilly areas.

GLOSSARY

Gopichettypalayam, a hand spinning centre in Coimbatore Dt. in South India during early Non-Cooperation movement.

Guru, a preceptor, spiritual guide.

Harijan, a man of God, untouchable.

Hindus, those who practice Hinduism. Religion of majority of Indian people, based on vedas.

Indraprasta, capital of Pandavas the heros of epic Mahabharata. This was situated near Modern Delhi.

Jagirdar, a private person who is given an area of land usually a village or so by Government or a Raja or Maharaja as reward for service. In free India Jagirs were abolished.

Kalighat, the bank of river Ganges near Calcutta.

Kailas, the abode of Shiva.

Khaddar or Khadi, hand woven cloth from hand-spun yarn.

Khaddarite, one who wears khadder.

Karmayoga, Doctrine of detached action.

Karmayogi, One who practices Karmayoga.

Kisan, an agriculturist - a cultivator, tiller of the soil.

Kisan-Majdoor-Praja Raj or K. M. P. Raj, peasants' and workers' rule.

Krishna, is eighth Incarnation of Vishnu in the Mahabharata times.

Kurukshetra, a place near Delhi where the Mahabharata war was fought.

Lathi, stick.

Maharajas, rulers.

Mahatma, a great soul.

Malapilla, Harijan girl.

BAPU BLESSES

Malapalli, title of a Telugu Novel depicting contemporary life after the advent of Gandhi by Unnava Lakshminarayana. Literally Harijan Colony.

Mantra, sacred formula or incantation.

Moulana, a learned Muslim divine.

Nayee Talim, New education or basic education - In his own words Gandhiji explained that this education was no longer distracted within the limit of seven years from seven to fourteen but as an education for life through rural handicrafts.

Panchama, belonging to the fifth caste, an outcaste.

Panchayat, a village council of five elected members.

Pandavas, heroes of the epic Mahabharata, sons of Pandu, five in number.

Pedanandipad, a village in Guntur District.

Pranam, Obeisance.

Purdah, (literally) curtain; the custom of keeping women in seclusion under a veil.

Rajas, kings or rulers.

Ram Raj, kingdom of Rama ; beneficent rule.

Ramadas, devotee of Srirama.

Raghupati Raghava Rajaram, prayer song in Gandhi Ashram.

Rishi, a seer.

Ryot, an Indian peasant.

Rytu Bidda, peasant's son.

Sadhak, Aspirant who dedicates.

Sadhu, a virtuous man leading the life of an ascetic.

GLOSSARY

Sardar, a nobleman, a honorific term. Sardar is used in this look to indicate Shri Vallabhbhai Patel. The people of Bardoli called him their Sardar.

Santarpan, feast.

Sahukar, money lender.

Sakshatkar, physical revelation of God.

Satyagraha, in Gandhiji's own words: 'a force which is born of truth and love or nonviolence'; tenacious clinging to truth, nonviolent resistance.

Satyagrahi, one practising satyagraha.

Seva Dal, a volunteer corps for righteous service.

Sevagram, a village near Wardha. Mahatma Gandhi's ashram abode during the Indian political struggle with the British.

Shrirama, seventh Incarnation of Vishnu on earth.

Sthithaprajna, one who has steadfast heart and confirmed in holy meditation. In the second chapter of Bhagavad Gita one of the three great works of Hindus, Krishna teaches Arjun about Sthithaprajna. He is one, who knows bliss of soul in his soul. He is not dejected by sorrow nor elated by joy. He lives outside the stress of passion, fear and anger fixed in the bliss of lofty contemplation. As the tortoise can draw in his legs he can draw in his senses. And he is one who leaves his desires behind him - To obey the soul is his peaceful joy and sorrow melts into clear peace. His quiet mind is established in peace.

Swadeshi, goods manufactured in one's own country.

Swarajya, self-government.

Swatantra, freedom, independence.

Talukdar, landlord.

BAPU BLESSES

Tantra, mystic or magical formula for the attainment of supernatural powers.

Trikarana Suddhi, Purity of mind, speech and action.

Vedas, the oldest and most authoritative source books of Hindus.
These are four in number. They are believed to be revealed by God.

Viduraswatham, a village in Mysore State.

Vinayasram, an ashram in Andhra-Guntur District dedicated to Khadi work - The founder was Shri Sitarama Shastri.

Vindhyas, mountain range that separate Deccan from North of India.

Vidyarthi, student, one who craves for knowledge.

Vishnavite Bhakta, a devotee of Vishnu.

Vishnu, in the Hindu Trinity Vishnu is the God of protection and preservation. It is stated in Song Celestial that the Lord comes down to earth as an incarnation whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, to uphold the righteous and destroy the sin of sinners. Thus there are ten Avataars of Vishnu.

Viswamitra, a seer of the Hindu epics who created a new heaven between heaven and earth.

Wardha, a city in the central India, near which is situated Sevagram, the Ashram of Gandhiji.

Yoga, intense concentration on one subject.

Yogi, one who practices Yoga.

Yagnic, one who performs Yajna.

Yajna, religious sacrifice.

Zamindar, landlord.

ERRATA

Preface Second side	persence	read as	presence
Page 13 line 4	yours feelings	„	your feelings
Page 16 line 2	end with he decision	„	end with the decision
Page 16 line 2nd from below	peasants the zamindari	„	peasants in the zamindari
Page 22 line 11	struck	„	stricken
Page 27 para 2 line 5	Chief Ministry	„	Chief Minister
Page 70 line 7	privacy	„	primacy
Page 81 line 13 from below	to us it is the means	„	to us it means

