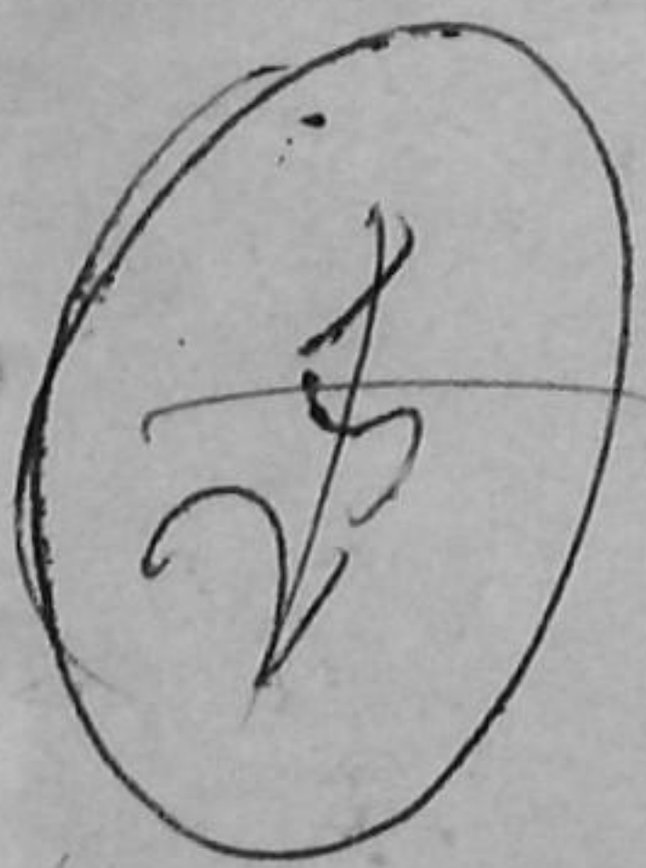
# HINDU DHARMA

M. K. GANDHI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD

G.L.39
G.L.37

# HINDU DHARMA

M. K. GANDHI

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD

First Edition, 5,000 Copies, August, 1950

*Rupees Four*

Printed and Published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai,
Navajivan Press, Kalupur, Ahmedabad

# PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Except on one occasion when he passingly thought of changing the religion of his birth and entering the Christian fold, Gandhiji passionately clung to Hinduism as a child clings to its mother. He always claimed to be a Hindu, and described himself as a *Sanatani* Hindu. Apart from Gandhiji's own claim and in spite of the fact that almost the whole of orthodox Hindu opinion was at one time deadly opposed to him because he uncompromisingly championed the cause of the untouchables, barring a few who, out of their blind fanaticism and a narrow view of the broad and catholic Hindu faith and culture, would refuse to see, it is widely recognized in India and abroad that Gandhiji is the greatest Hindu of the modern age. Indeed, it may be said without fear of contradiction that he earned this great name, because he did not quit the faith of his forefathers, but boldly stood for its essential truth and was therefore able to serve Hindu society and protect it from violence and disruption by his programme of self-purification for the touchable Hindus through the service of the Harijans.

But it has also to be recognized that if Gandhiji was a great Hindu it was because all through his life he strove to be a zealous seeker of truth as he saw it. His relentless search, pursuit and practice of Truth which he called God made him what he claimed to be — a *Sanatani* Hindu. He minded the eternal verities of the faith of his birth, which are generally speaking the common heritage of man from all the chief religions of the world.

Gandhiji therefore never attempted to give a codified form to the Hindu faith. In fact he recognized that Hinduism had developed into a queer but ever evolving mixture of beliefs, practices and traditions. He also

recognized that in the process of evolution many excrescences like untouchability, animal sacrifices to gods, etc., had, during the passage of time, clung to Hinduism and that the faith had to be rid of all of them if it was to survive and thrive. That according to him is in short the work for those that profess that faith at present. In fact, he believed that every religion, in the course of its history, gets enmeshed into such excrescences, and therefore all who belong to those religions must continually work and assiduously strive to remove them from their respective faiths. Thus only can religion as it is given to us by history be turned into a living prescription for a good and noble life for man, and mankind can save itself from the fanaticism of a fratricidal war of religions which disfigures the history of man on this earth.

Therefore, if Gandhiji did not give a codified view of Hinduism like the ancient authors of the *Smritis*, it is all the more necessary that what he has said on and about Hinduism, its various practices, traditions, blemishes and its essentials should be more welcome to us. This is made available by this book in a handy form to all its followers and to all who care to study religion in its true meaning as the way to a good and noble life. Fortunately for us, as was his method and practice, whenever querries were addressed to him and doubts raised, Gandhiji gave full and satisfactory answers to them either in speech or writing. The replies and answers cover a large field and hardly leave unanswered any question on Hindu religion, practice, tradition, belief, and ideals in all fields of life and social relationships.

As has been very aptly noted by the able editor of this collection of Gandhiji's writings and words on *Hindu Dharma*, Gandhiji's being shot dead by a Hindu specially calls for a book of this kind, so that the world may have in a book form all that Gandhiji had to say about the faith which he loved so deeply and passionately and for which he lived and died.

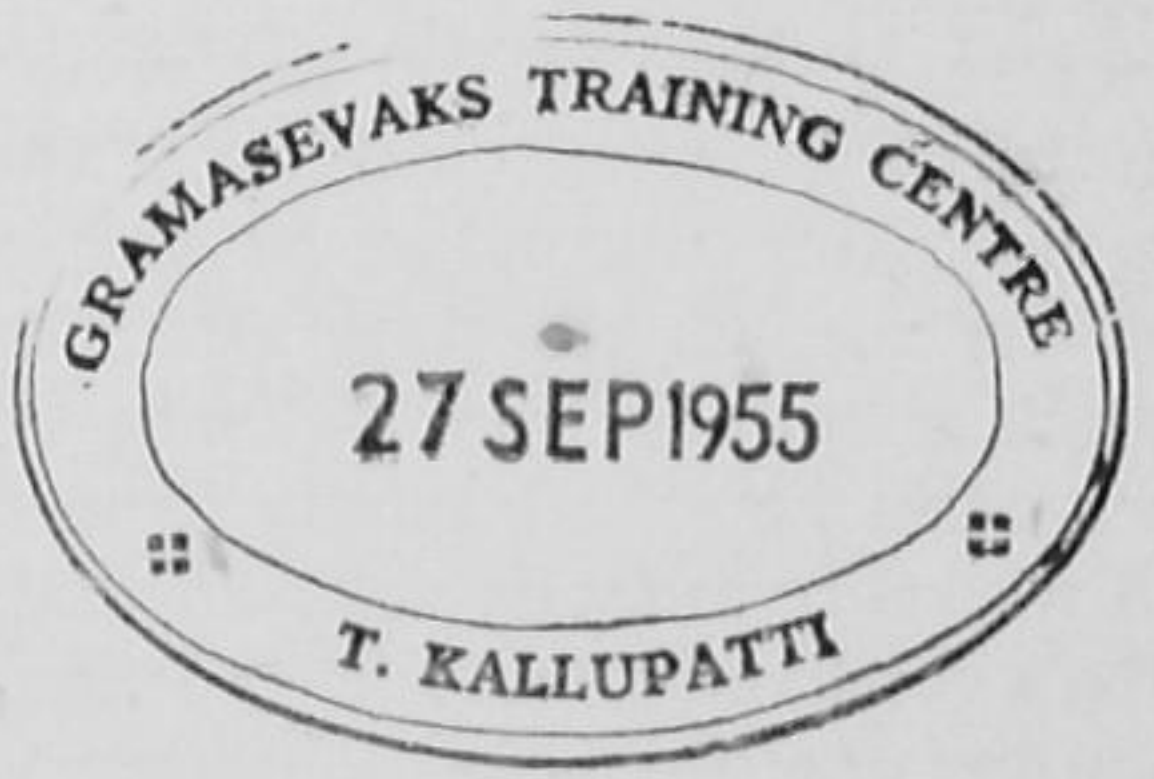
Hence this collection. In it is brought together under one cover all that Gandhiji said regarding *Hindu*

G·L·37



*Dharma*. The editor has also taken pains to collect the writings which range over a fairly large period, under such suitable heads as may be useful to a general reader and to a serious student as well. We hope the collection will be welcome as much to the one as to the other.

August 1, 1950



## EDITOR'S NOTE

On the 30th of January, 1948, Gandhiji was shot dead by a Hindu, who believed that if Hinduism and Hindu culture were to be saved Gandhiji had to be sacrificed. This fact in itself calls for a book of this kind, which seeks to give in Gandhiji's own words his views in regard to Hinduism.

Not only so, Gandhiji was born, brought up and lived his entire life a Hindu. He called himself a *Sanatanist* or orthodox Hindu, who based his beliefs on the ancient Hindu scriptures. He drew freely, it is true, from other religions also. But the main source of his religious life came undoubtedly from the religion of his forefathers. Hinduism was his life-breath, the very marrow of his bones, and he clung to it through all his tempestuous career as a child to its mother's arms. He looked to the *Bhagawadgita* for inspiration and guidance, called it his mother, and moulded his life on the *Gita* ideal of the *karmayogin* who did his duty irrespective of pleasure and pain, or the *sthitaprajna* who subdued his passions in selfless pursuit of the Divine. So much was this true of him that one may rightly say that his life was nothing but the *Gita* ideal in action. Next to the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* formed his meat and drink.

He tried to put into practice the Hindu ideal of *advaita* or unity without difference, and so regarded all men, without distinction of race, caste or creed, as one. Not only men, but also all living beings as symbolized by the cow were according to Hinduism to be treated with sympathy and fellow-feeling. This, accordingly, formed an essential part of Gandhiji's teaching and practice. Then again he believed, as Hinduism always taught, that all religions were equally ways of reaching God, and therefore to be looked upon with friendliness and respect. He lived a life of renunciation, austerity and self-control, so

characteristic of Hinduism. *Ramanama* remained for him a never-failing remedy for all ills, and he died with the name of Rama on his lips.

If Gandhiji was thus in life as in death essentially a Hindu and sought to put into practice the fundamental teachings of Hinduism, why, it may be asked, did a section of Hindus think of him as an enemy of Hinduism and encompass his murder ? The answer to this is to be found in the history of religions. Religion, pure and undefiled, as it is in the mouths of the great seers and prophets, degenerates in course of time, and becomes lost in the dry sands of dead tradition and ritual. The devotee clings to the outer forms of religion and becomes fanatic in their observance, making true religion null and void. When religion has thus degenerated, and righteousness has consequently given place to unrighteousness, a great prophet appears, even as the *Gita* tells us, to call people back to true religion. This is what appears to have happened in Hinduism in the person of Gandhiji. The prophet, however, is not liked by the orthodox — the high priest, the scribe and the Pharisee — who seek how they may slay him. They crucified Christ two thousand years ago, and shot Gandhiji in our own day.

Even like the prophets of old, Gandhiji feared none but God. He condemned uncompromisingly the evils that had crept into Hinduism and sought to remove them. He exhorted Hindus to live up to the best teachings of their religion, and called on all to pursue truth, morality, and love and service of fellow-beings. He would not allow the scriptures to stifle man's conscience. His ultimate appeal was always to the still small voice within, even if its verdict was in conflict with the *shastras*, so long as it was in conformity with truth and non-violence. His religion was, therefore, a religion of freedom and growth, not of bondage to tradition and authority, and therefore of stagnation and decay. In him we have a great prophet similar to the Buddha, Muhammad or Christ. His teachings come from the depths of his being. They were the outpourings of a soul in living touch with its Maker. He

spoke with authority and conviction — an authority which came from a realization that he spoke the word of God. No Hindu, no student of Hinduism, indeed no individual whatever his religion, can afford to ignore his teachings, as they have a universal appeal. If Hinduism has a future it is Hinduism, as presented by Gandhiji, that has it in certain and abundant measure. Gandhiji's Hinduism is the Hinduism of old in all its pristine purity, reborn and practised under modern conditions. Hindu doctrines and terminology, which at times appear to us of today as strange, outmoded and unintelligible, disclose new meaning and value as interpreted by Gandhiji. In him Hinduism speaks to modern man in his own language.

It has not been easy to do justice to Gandhiji's teachings in regard to Hinduism, for he left practically no aspect of Hindu life or conduct untouched by his searching survey and criticism, and had much to say regarding each of them. All that could be done here was to give just sufficient extracts from his writings and speeches to convey a fairly comprehensive and adequate picture of his teachings. He dealt, for example, with caste, untouchability, fasts, *brahmacharya*, temple-worship, priests, image-worship, vegetarianism, non-violence, prayer, God, incarnations, *Ramanama*, cow-worship, sacrifice, the *shastras*, faith, the *Gita*, attitude to other religions, child marriage, women and so on. We have sought to group his teachings under such topics so that the reader may have all his thoughts on a particular subject together and gain an uninterrupted presentation of it. Except for slight editing and omissions, the texts as found in the originals have been faithfully preserved, and only occasionally titles of articles have been altered to suit the abridged matter.

Bombay, April, 1949 **Bharatan Kumarappa**

## NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS

*Abhyasa* — repetition ; practice ; study
*Adhikara* — qualification or authority to do a certain thing
*Adikarnatakas* — aborigines of Karnataka
*Adi Shankar* — the first Shankaracharya
*Advaita* — non-duality or identity of the soul with *Brahman*
*Advaitism* — doctrine of non-duality
*Advaitist* — a believer in non-duality
*Agiari* — a place of fire-worship of the Parsees
*Ahimsaist* — a believer in non-violence
*Akhada* — a gymnasium
*Ananda* — joy
*Anekantavadi* — a beliver in many doctrines, a sceptic (especially Jain)
*Anugita* — a religious discourse between Krishna and Arjuna reported to have taken place after the *Bhagwadgita*
*Aparigraha* — non-possession
*Ashrama* — one of the four stages of life according to Hinduism : student, house-holder, hermit and ascetic ; a hermitage
*Ashwamedha Yajna* — a horse-sacrifice
*Asteya* — non-stealing
*Atman* — a soul
*Avarna* — caste-less ; an untouchable
*Avatara* — an incarnation
*Bhagawata* — a Hindu mythological book depicting the life of Krishna
*Bhakta* — a devotee
*Bhakti* — devotion
*Bhaktiyoga* — the path of devotion
*Brahmacharya* — celibacy ; continence
*Chandala* — an outcaste ; a member of a Hindu low caste

*Charkha* — a spinning wheel
*Chit* — knowledge
*Darshana* — sight ; view
*Dasanudasa* — a servant of a servant
*Dharma* — religion ; duty
*Dharmakshetra* — a land of religion
*Dharmashala* — a caravanserai
*Dvaitism* — doctrine of duality
*Dwadashakshara Mantra* — a sacred text containing twelve letters used for repetition and meditation
*Gayatri* — a vedic *mantra* used for repetition and meditation
*Gopala* — a cow-herd
*Goshala* — a cow-stall ; a dairy
*Guru* — a teacher ; a religious preceptor
*Ishopanishad* — an *upanishad* of that name which is one of the most important Hindu sacred philosophical writings
*Itihasa* — history
*Janmashtami* — the birth-day of Lord Krishna
*Japa* — repetition
*Jnani* — a man of knowledge
*Jnanayoga* — the path of knowledge
*Kalma* — a Muslim formula of prayer
*Kamadhenu* — the cow of plenty, supposed to fulfil all desires
*Karma* — action
*Karmayoga* — the path of action
*Karmayogi* — a follower of the path of action
*Kanabi* — the name of one of the agricultural classes
*Katha-kirtan* — narration of scriptural stories often in accompaniment with music
*Langoti* — a loin-cloth
*Lingayat* — name of a Shaiva sect
*Mahabharata* — name of a Hindu Epic
*Mahajan* — elders of a caste or guild
*Mahayajna* — a great sacrifice
*Mandir* — a temple

*Mantra* — a sacred text used for repetition and meditation
*Manusmriti* — ancient Hindu law-book written by Manu
*Moksha* — emancipation ; freedom from birth
*Mosque* — a Muslim place of worship
*Muni* — a sage
*Namaz* — daily Muslim prayer
*Padmanabhadasa* — servant of Padmanabha or Vishnu (i. e. God)
*Pariah* — an outcaste
*Pinjrapole* — an institution for sheltering crippled and aged animals including cows
*Pitriloka* — the world of the manes
*Puranas* — books of Hindu mythology
*Rajasuya Yajna* — a great sacrifice performed by a universal monarch at the time of his coronation as a mark of his undisputed sovereignty
*Ramanama* — name of Rama (i. e. God)
*Ramayana* — name of a Hindu Epic
*Rishi* — a seer
*Sanatana* — ancient ; eternal
*Sanatani* — a follower of the orthodox Hindu religion
*Sandhya* — a morning and evening prayer of a *brahmana*
*Sannyasa* — renunciation
*Sannyasi* — one who renounces the world
*Sat* — truth ; that which exists
*Satya* — truth
*Satyagraha* — clinging to truth ; civil or non-violent disobedience
*Satyagrahi* — a follower of *satyagraha*
*Savarna* — a member of one of the first three classes of Hindus
*Shastra* — a scripture
*Shastri* — one versed in Hindu scriptures
*Shivalingam* — Shiva, worshipped in the form of an idol of a special form
*Shraddha* — a rite or ceremony performed in honour of the departed spirits of dead relatives
*Shrawaka* — a member of Jain or Buddhist laity
*Shruti* — the *Vedas*

*Shuddhi* — purification ; conversion, especially reconversion, to Hinduism
*Shwapaka* — one who eats the flesh of a dog ; an outcaste
*Smriti* — a code of laws ; a law-book
*Sthitaprajna* — a man of steady mind
*Syadvada* — an assertion of probability (in philosiphy) ; a form of scepticism (especially Jain)
*Syadvadi* — a believer in *Syadvada*
*Tabligh* — religious propaganda and conversion
*Tapas* — penance ; religious austerity
*Tapasya* — see *tapas*
*Tilak* — a mark made on the forehead with sandal-wood paste
*Tulsi* — the holy basil worshipped specially by Hindu women
*Upanishads* — ancient philosophical writings of the Hindus
*Vairagya* — aversion to the world ; passionlessness
*Vaishnava* — a devotee of Vishnu
*Vajapeya Yajna* — name of a sacrifice
*Varna* — a class ; a caste
*Varnadharma* — duty enjoined by caste rules
*Vedas* — scriptures of the Hindus
*Vedic* — belonging to the *Vedas*
*Vishada* — depression
*Yajna* — a sacrifice
*Yajnopavita* — the sacred thread worn by the members of Hindu upper classes
*Yogi* — one practising religious discipline ; an ascetic

# CONTENTS

## SECTION ONE: HINDUISM (GENERAL)


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | PUBLISHERS' NOTE | iii |
| | EDITOR'S NOTE | vii |
| | NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS | xi |
| 1 | GANDHISM | 3 |
| 2 | WHAT IS HINDUISM ? | 4 |
| 3 | HINDUISM ALL-INCLUSIVE | 4 |
| 4 | WHY I AM A HINDU | 5 |
| 5 | SANATANA HINDUISM | 7 |
| 6 | SANATANA HINDU | 10 |
| 7 | THE RELIGION OF SERVICE | 11 |
| 8 | HINDUISM NOT A MATTER OF OUTWARD OBSERVANCES | 13 |
| 9 | MY MISSION | 14 |
| 10 | ARYA SAMAJ | 15 |
| 11 | CONVERSION MOVEMENT IN HINDUISM | 16 |
| 12 | WHAT MAY HINDUS DO ? | 17 |
| 13 | ORGANIZATION FOR PROTECTING HINDUS | 19 |
| 14 | KRISHNA AND THE MAHABHARATA | 19 |
| 15 | HINDUISM AS EVER GROWING | 20 |
| 16 | THE AUTHORITY OF RELIGIOUS BOOKS | 23 |
| 17 | WHAT IS HINDUISM ? | 24 |
| 18 | TULSIDAS | 24 |
| 19 | HINDUISM AND OBSCENITY | 27 |
| 20 | COMMUNICATIONS WITH SPIRITS | 28 |
| 21 | TRUE SHRADDHA | 29 |
| 22 | DIVALI HOLIDAYS | 31 |
| 23 | DUTY OF CEYLON HINDUS | 32 |
| 24 | HELPFUL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND READINGS | 37 |
| 25 | EQUALITY IN HINDUISM | 38 |
| 26 | THE CHIEF VALUE OF HINDUISM | 39 |
| 27 | THE GOLDEN KEY | 40 |
| 28 | THE HARIPAD SPEECH | 43 |
| 29 | FROM THE KOTTAYAM SPEECH | 46 |
| 30 | LIVING UP TO 125 | 48 |
| 31 | YAJNA OR SACRIFICE | 49 |
| 32 | PRAYER DISCOURSES | 52 |
| 33 | WHAT HINDUISM HAS DONE FOR US | 54 |
| 34 | NATIONHOOD THROUGH HINDUISM | 56 |
| 35 | INDIAN CIVILIZATION | 57 |
| 36 | THE LOIN-CLOTH | 59 |

**SECTION TWO: GOD**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 37 | GOD | 61 |
| 38 | ADVAITISM AND GOD | 62 |
| 39 | GOD IS | 64 |
| 40 | TRUTH AND GOD | 66 |
| 41 | MEANING OF GOD | 69 |
| 42 | FINDING GOD | 70 |

**SECTION THREE: TEMPLE-WORSHIP**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 43 | APPROACH TEMPLES IN FAITH | 71 |
| 44 | TEMPLES NECESSARY | 72 |
| 45 | IDOL-WORSHIP | 73 |
| 46 | TEMPLE-WORSHIP | 73 |
| 47 | GOD AND GODS | 74 |
| 48 | "A TEMPLE TO GANDHIJI" | 77 |
| 49 | TREE-WORSHIP | 78 |
| 50 | TEMPLE-WORSHIP | 80 |
| 51 | ARE TEMPLES NECESSARY? | 82 |
| 52 | A MODEL TEMPLE | 85 |
| 53 | TEMPLE REFORM | 88 |
| 54 | TEMPLE-WORSHIP | 89 |
| 55 | PRIESTS AND UPANAYANAM | 90 |
| 56 | TRAINING SCHOOLS IN TEMPLES | 92 |
| 57 | ANIMAL SACRIFICES | 93 |
| 58 | TEMPLE PRIESTS AND ANIMAL SACRIFICE | 94 |
| 59 | ANIMAL SACRIFICE | 96 |
| 60 | AS OTHERS SEE US | 97 |

**SECTION FOUR: FASTS AND PRAYER**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 61 | FASTING AND PRAYER | 102 |
| 62 | FASTS | 103 |
| 63 | HIS WILL BE DONE | 105 |
| 64 | FAST FOR PURIFICATION | 106 |
| 65 | ALL ABOUT THE FAST | 107 |
| 66 | WAS IT COERCIVE? | 111 |
| 67 | A PURIFICATORY CHAIN OF FASTS | 115 |
| 68 | PRAYER | 116 |
| 69 | WHAT IS PRAYER? | 118 |
| 70 | THE ETERNAL DUEL | 120 |
| 71 | A DISCOURSE ON PRAYER | 122 |
| 72 | WHY PRAY? | 125 |
| 73 | A DIALOGUE WITH A BUDDHIST | 126 |
| 74 | IS NOT SERVICE WORSHIP? | 127 |
| 75 | QUESTION-BOX | 128 |
| 76 | RAMANAMA, THE INFALLIBLE REMEDY | 129 |
| 77 | TOWARDS REALIZATION | 130 |
| 78 | IS RAMANAMA ANOTHER NAME FOR CHARMS? | 132 |
| 79 | RAMA | 133 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 80 | WHO IS RAMA ? | 133 |
| 81 | RAMA THE SON OF DASHARATHA | 134 |
| 82 | SILENCE DURING PRAYER | 136 |
| | **SECTION FIVE: BRAHMACHARYA** | |
| 83 | BRAHMACHARYA OR SELF-CONTROL | 137 |
| 84 | BIRTH-CONTROL | 142 |
| 85 | STEPS TO BRAHMACHARYA | 143 |
| 86 | BRAHMACHARYA | 144 |
| 87 | WALLS OF PROTECTION | 146 |
| 88 | BRAHMACHARYA IN RELATION TO GOD | 148 |
| | **SECTION SIX: THE GITA** | |
| 89 | GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE | 150 |
| 90 | KRISHNA AND THE GITA | 157 |
| 91 | THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA | 158 |
| 92 | DISCOURSES ON THE GITA | 165 |
| 93 | GITA RECITERS | 170 |
| 94 | THE GITA IDEAL | 171 |
| 95 | NOTHING WITHOUT GRACE | 172 |
| 96 | GOD OF LOVE, NOT WAR | 174 |
| 97 | THE GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE | 175 |
| 98 | TEACHING OF HINDUISM | 177 |
| 99 | THE TEACHING OF THE GITA | 178 |
| 100 | CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE GITA | 180 |
| 101 | GITA JAYANTI | 181 |
| | **SECTION SEVEN: NON-VIOLENCE** | |
| 102 | THE DOCTRINE OF THE SWORD | 183 |
| 103 | SOCIAL BOYCOTT | 184 |
| 104 | NON-VIOLENCE | 186 |
| 105 | HINDUISM AND NON-VIOLENCE | 187 |
| 106 | THE HIGHEST BRAVERY | 189 |
| 107 | PURITY ESSENTIAL FOR NON-VIOLENCE | 190 |
| 108 | VEGETARIANISM | 190 |
| 109 | VEGETARIANISM | 191 |
| 110 | IS THIS HUMANITY ? | 193 |
| 111 | IS THIS HUMANITY ? | 196 |
| 112 | IS THIS HUMANITY ? | 201 |
| 113 | IS THIS HUMANITY ? | 203 |
| 114 | IS THIS HUMANITY ? | 205 |
| 115 | THE GREATEST GOOD OF ALL | 207 |
| 116 | "HAPPY DESPATCH" ? | 210 |
| 117 | AHIMSA AGAIN | 211 |
| 118 | TORTURE OF BULLOCKS | 214 |
| 119 | THE FIERY ORDEAL | 215 |
| | I WHEN KILLING MAY BE AHIMSA | 215 |
| | II WHEN KILLING IS HIMSA | 219 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 120 | THE TANGLE OF AHIMSA | 222 |
| 121 | A CONUNDRUM | 225 |
| 122 | JAIN AHIMSA ? | 227 |
| 123 | MORE ABOUT AHIMSA | 233 |
| 124 | SOME POSERS IN AHIMSA | 236 |
| 125 | AHIMSA AND VEGETARIANISM | 240 |
| 126 | EATING NON-VEGETARIAN FOOD | 241 |
| 127 | NON-KILLING OF ANIMALS | 242 |
| 128 | HOW TO SPREAD VEGETARIANISM | 242 |
| 129 | HINDUISM AND NON-VIOLENCE | 243 |
| 130 | HINDUS TO EXPIATE | 244 |

**SECTION EIGHT: ASHRAM VOWS**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 131 | ASHRAM VOWS | | 246 |
| | I TRUTH | 247 | |
| | II AHIMSA OR LOVE | 249 | |
| | III BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY | 251 | |
| | IV NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY | 254 | |

**SECTION NINE: EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 132 | "HINDU" AND "HINDUISM" | 257 |
| 133 | NO CONVERSION PERMISSIBLE | 258 |
| 134 | EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS | 259 |
| 135 | EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS | 261 |
| 136 | ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TO HINDUISM | 262 |
| 137 | EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS | 263 |
| 138 | EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS | 264 |
| 139 | CRIME OF READING THE BIBLE | 266 |
| 140 | A CATHOLIC FATHER'S FEARS | 268 |
| 141 | MESSAGE TO BUDDHISTS | 270 |
| 142 | MUSIC BEFORE MOSQUES | 273 |
| 143 | PARTIALITY FOR MUSSULMANS | 274 |
| 144 | ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS | 275 |
| 145 | HINDU PANI AND MUSLIM PANI | 276 |
| 146 | HINDUISM AND THE QURAN | 277 |
| 147 | HINDUS *v.* MUSLIMS | 278 |
| 148 | A TRUE HINDU | 280 |
| 149 | HINDUS DEMORALIZED BY AHIMSA | 280 |
| 150 | A HINDU'S DUTY TOWARDS A MUSLIM | 281 |
| 151 | A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING | 282 |
| 152 | SCRIPTURES AND IDOLS | 283 |
| 153 | ACT OF UNGODLINESS | 284 |

**SECTION TEN: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 154 | RELIGIOUS EDUCATION | 285 |
| 155 | THE PRIVILEGE OF THE SHUDRAS | 286 |
| 156 | RELIGIOUS EDUCATION | 287 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 157 | HINDU STUDENTS AND THE GITA | 289 |
| 158 | STUDENTS AND THE GITA | 291 |
| 159 | THE GITA IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS | 293 |
| 160 | THE STATE AND RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION | 294 |
| 161 | IMMORTAL MALAVIYAJI | 295 |
| | **SECTION ELEVEN: COW PROTECTION** | |
| 162 | SAVE THE COW | 297 |
| 163 | COW PROTECTION | 297 |
| 164 | WHAT COW PROTECTION INVOLVES | 299 |
| 165 | COW PROTECTION | 300 |
| 166 | COW PROTECTION | 303 |
| 167 | MUSLIMS AND COW PROTECTION | 305 |
| 168 | BEEF | 308 |
| 169 | THE COW MOTHER | 309 |
| 170 | THE BULLOCK'S FESTIVAL | 310 |
| 171 | HOW TO SAVE THE COW ? | 312 |
| | **SECTION TWELVE: UNTOUCHABILITY** | |
| 172 | UNTOUCHABILITY NOT A PART OF HINDUISM | 314 |
| 173 | CONTRARY TO SPIRIT OF HINDUISM | 315 |
| 174 | UNTOUCHABILITY | 315 |
| 175 | UNTOUCHABILITY AND THE VEDAS | 316 |
| 176 | DR. AMBEDKAR'S INDICTMENT | 317 |
| 177 | FOR HINDUS ONLY | 319 |
| 178 | HOW TO FRATERNIZE THE HARIJANS | 319 |
| 179 | UNTOUCHABILITY AND INTERDINING | 320 |
| 180 | CASTE *v.* CLASS | 322 |
| 181 | TEMPLE-ENTRY | 324 |
| 182 | WHY TEMPLE-ENTRY LEGISLATION ? | 327 |
| 183 | THE WRONG WAY | 328 |
| 184 | GURUVAYUR SPEECH | 330 |
| 185 | RIGHT OF MINORITY | 332 |
| 186 | TEMPLE-ENTRY | 334 |
| 187 | AN EXAMPLE FOR HINDU PRINCES | 335 |
| 188 | THE PANDALAI SPEECH | 337 |
| 189 | THE VITHOBA TEMPLE | 341 |
| 190 | FROM THE VAIKOM SPEECH | 342 |
| 191 | A TALK TO EZHAVAS IN TRAVANCORE | 343 |
| 192 | THE INWARDNESS OF THE MOVEMENT | 344 |
| 193 | THE WIDER MESSAGE | 345 |
| 194 | WHY NOT SIMPLE 'HINDU' ? | 346 |
| 195 | TRUE INWARDNESS | 348 |
| 196 | WHOSE IS THE HUMILIATION ? | 351 |
| 197 | UNTOUCHABILITY AND CONVERSION | 352 |
| 198 | LIMITATION OF REFORMERS | 353 |
| 199 | ON HARIJAN RECONVERSIONS | 356 |
| 200 | THE SACRED THREAD | 356 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 201 | DR. AMBEDKAR AND CASTE | 357 |
| | **SECTION THIRTEEN : VARNA DHARMA** | |
| 202 | VARNASHRAMA | 360 |
| 203 | VARNA AND ASHRAMA | 362 |
| 204 | THE LAW OF VARNA | 365 |
| 205 | VARNASHRAMA AND INTERDINING | 374 |
| 206 | VARNASHRAMA | 376 |
| 207 | VARNA DHARMA | 377 |
| 208 | THE LAW OF VARNA AND ASHRAMA | 378 |
| 209 | VARNA | 381 |
| 210 | VARNASHRAMA OR VARNASANKARA ? | 382 |
| 211 | WOMEN AND VARNA | 385 |
| 212 | AN AMERICAN CLERGYMAN'S QUESTIONS | 387 |
| | **SECTION FOURTEEN : BRAHMANA–NON-BRAHMANA** | |
| 213 | BRAHMANA–NON-BRAHMANA | 389 |
| 214 | THE MUCH-MALIGNED BRAHMANA | 391 |
| 215 | ANTI-BRAHMANISM | 393 |
| 216 | BRAHMANA MINORITY | 394 |
| | **SECTION FIFTEEN : WIDOWHOOD, MARRIAGE AND WOMEN** | |
| 217 | ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD | 396 |
| 218 | GIRL WIDOWS | 397 |
| 219 | CURSE OF CHILD MARRIAGE | 398 |
| 220 | DEFENDING CHILD MARRIAGE | 399 |
| 221 | TOUGH QUESTIONS | 404 |
| 222 | REMARRIAGE OF CHILD WIDOWS | 406 |
| 223 | CORRESPONDENCE | 408 |
| 224 | WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS | 410 |
| 225 | BRAHMANISM OR ANIMALISM | 411 |
| 226 | "AN INDIGNANT PROTEST" | 413 |
| 227 | A YOUNG MAN'S DILEMMA | 415 |
| 228 | SIMPLIFYING MARRIAGE | 417 |
| 229 | INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES | 418 |
| 230 | INVIDIOUS AND UNFAIR | 419 |
| 231 | THE HINDU WIFE | 420 |
| 232 | TEAR DOWN THE PURDAH | 423 |
| 233 | DEVADASIS | 425 |
| 234 | THE DEVADASI | 426 |
| 235 | POSITION OF WOMEN | 428 |
| 236 | WOMAN IN THE SMRITIS | 430 |
| 237 | ABDUCTED WOMEN | 432 |
| | INDEX | 433 |

# HINDU DHARMA

HINDU DHARMA

# SECTION ONE: HINDUISM (GENERAL)

## 1

## GANDHISM

**[Addressing the members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Savli Gandhiji said :]**

There is no such thing as 'Gandhism', and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. There is, therefore, no question of my leaving any code like the *Code of Manu*. There can be no comparison between that great lawgiver and me. The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do. In doing so I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence. By instinct I have been truthful, but not non-violent. As a Jain *muni* once rightly said I was not so much a votary of *ahimsa* as I was of truth, and I put the latter in the first place and the former in the second. For, as he put it, I was capable of sacrificing non-violence for the sake of truth. In fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence. Our scriptures have declared that there is no *dharma* (law) higher than Truth. But non-violence they say is the highest duty. The word *dharma* in my opinion has different connotations as used in the two aphorisms.

Well, all my philosophy, if it may be called by that pretentious name, is contained in what I have said. You will not call it 'Gandhism'; there is no *ism* about it. And no elaborate literature or propaganda is needed about it.

*Harijan*, 28-3-'36

## 2

## WHAT IS HINDUISM?

It is the good fortune or the misfortune of Hinduism that it has no official creed. In order therefore to protect myself against any misunderstanding I have said Truth and Non-violence is my creed. If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after Truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe even in God and still he may call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth and if today it has become moribund, inactive, irresponsive to growth, it is because we are fatigued; and as soon as the fatigue is over, Hinduism will burst forth upon the world with a brilliance perhaps unknown before. Of course, therefore, Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions. Its creed is all-embracing.

*Young India*, 24-4-'24

## 3

## HINDUISM ALL INCLUSIVE

In my opinion the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all-embracing inclusiveness. What the divine author of the *Mahabharata* said of his great creation is equally true of Hinduism. What of substance is contained in any other religion is always to be found in Hinduism. And what is not contained in it is insubstantial or unnecessary.

*Young India*, 17-9-'25

## 4

# WHY I AM A HINDU

An American friend who subscribes herself as a life-long friend of India writes :

> "As Hinduism is one of the prominent religions of the East, and as you have made a study of Christianity and Hinduism, and on the basis of that study have announced that you are a Hindu, I beg leave to ask of you if you will do me the favour to give me your reasons for that choice. Hindus and Christians alike realize that man's chief need is to know God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Believing that Christ was a revelation of God, Christians of America have sent to India thousands of their sons and daughters to tell the people of India about Christ. Will you in return kindly give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make a comparison of Hinduism with the teachings of Christ ? I will be deeply grateful for this favour."

I have ventured at several missionary meetings to tell English and American missionaries that if they could have refrained from 'telling' India about Christ and had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India instead of suspecting them would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence. Holding this view, I can 'tell' American friends nothing about Hinduism by way of 'return'. I do not believe in people telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.

Nor do I consider myself fit to interpret Hinduism except through my own life. And if I may not interpret Hinduism through my written word, I may not compare it with Christianity. The only thing it is possible for me therefore to do is to say as briefly as I can, why I am a Hindu.

Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained a Hindu. I

should reject it, if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me inasmuch as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. (I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism.) Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness, of all life. The great belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief. Finally the discovery of the law of *varnashrama* is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search for truth. I must not burden this article with definitions of the essentials sketched here, except to say that the present ideas of cow-worship and *varnashrama* are a caricature of what in my opinion the originals are. In this all too brief a sketch I have mentioned what occurs to me to be the outstanding features of Hinduism that keep me in its fold.

*Young India*, 20-10-'27

5

# SANATANA HINDUISM

I have asserted my claim to being a *Sanatani* Hindu, and yet there are things which are commonly done in the name of Hinduism, which I disregard. I have no desire to be called a *Sanatani* Hindu or any other if I am not such. It is therefore necessary for me once for all distinctly to give my meaning of *Sanatana* Hinduism. The word *Sanatana* I use in its natural sense.

I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, because,

(1) I believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *avataras* and rebirth ;

(2) I believe in the *varnashrama dharma* in a sense, in my opinion, strictly *Vedic* but not in its present popular and crude sense ;

(3) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular ;

(4) I do not disbelieve in idol-worship.

The reader will note that I have purposely refrained from using the word divine origin in reference to the *Vedas* or any other scriptures. For I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the *Vedas*. I believe the Bible, the Quran, and the Zend Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the *Vedas*. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. I do most emphatically repudiate the claim (if they advance any such) of the present *Shankaracharyas* and *shastris* to give a correct interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. On the contrary I believe that our

present knowledge of these books is in a most chaotic state. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism, that no one truly knows the *shastras* who has not attained perfection in Innocence (*ahimsa*), Truth (*satya*) and Self-control (*brahmacharya*) and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth. I believe in the institution of *gurus*, but in this age millions must go without a *guru*, because it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning. But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism, as of every great religion, are unchangeable, and easily understood. Every Hindu believes in God and His oneness, in rebirth and salvation.

I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults. I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath the *Gita* was my solace. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. There is an interest which I take in them and which I take in no other. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism. I have said I do not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.

It is clear from the foregoing, that Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary

religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary imperceptible character. Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or *dharma*, and so it lives at peace with all the religions.

That being my conception of Hinduism, I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day. I should be ashamed to think that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism. Yet it is practised by Hindus in many parts of India. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to Kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism. Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name, Hinduism, was given to the religion of the people of Hindustan by foreigners. There was no doubt at one time sacrifice of animals offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me, that when cow-protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those who persisted in eating beef were excommunicated. The civil strife must have been fierce. Social boycott was applied not only to the recalcitrants, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin in good intentions hardened into usage, and even verses crept into our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom, nor get it, if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has

become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21

## 6

## SANATANA HINDU

[To a correspondent who criticized his interpretation of Hinduism Gandhiji wrote :]

I am not a literalist. Therefore I try to understand the *spirit* of the various scriptures of the world. I apply the test of Truth and *Ahimsa* laid down by these very scriptures for interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with that test, and I appropriate all that is consistent with it. The story of a *shudra* having been punished by Ramachandra for daring to learn the *Vedas* I reject as an interpolation. And in any event, I worship Rama, the perfect being of my conception, not a historical person facts about whose life may vary with the progress of new historical discoveries and researches. Tulsidas had nothing to do with the Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his *Ramayana* would be fit for the scrap heap. As a spiritual experience, his book is almost unrivalled at least for me. And then, too, I do not swear by every word that is to be found in so many editions published as the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas. It is the spirit running through the book that holds me spellbound. I cannot myself subscribe to the prohibition against *shudras* learning the *Vedas*. Indeed, in my opinion, at the present moment, we are all predominantly *shudras*, so long as we are serfs. Knowledge cannot be the prerogative of any class or section. But I can conceive the impossibility of people assimilating higher or subtler truths unless they have undergone preliminary training, even as those who have not made preliminary preparations are quite unfit to breathe the rarefied atmosphere in high altitudes, or

those who have no preliminary training in simple mathematics are unfit to understand or assimilate higher geometry or algebra. Lastly, I believe in certain healthy conventions. There is a convention surrounding the recitation of the *Gayatri*. The convention is that it should be recited only at stated times and after ablutions performed in the prescribed manner. As I believe in those conventions, and as I am not able always to conform to them, for years past I have followed the later Saints, and therefore have satisfied myself with the *Dwadashakshara Mantra* of the *Bhagawata* or the still simpler formula of Tulsidas and a few selections from the *Gita* and other works, and a few *bhajanas* in *Prakrit*. These are my daily spiritual food — my *Gayatri*. They give me all the peace and solace I need from day to day.

*Young India*, 27-8-'25

## 7

## THE RELIGION OF SERVICE

I want to see the spinning wheel everywhere, because I see pauperism everywhere. Not until and unless we have fed and clothed the skeletons of India, will religion have any meaning for them. They are living the cattle-life today, and we are responsible for it. The spinning wheel is therefore a penance for us. Religion is service of the helpless. God manifests Himself to us in the form of the helpless and the stricken. But we in spite of our forehead marks take no notice of them i.e. of God. God is and is not in the *Vedas*. He who reads the spirit of the *Vedas* sees God therein. He who clings to the letter of the *Vedas* is a *vedia* — a literalist. Narasinha Mehta does indeed sing the praise of the rosary, and the praise is well-merited where it is given. But the same Narasinha has sung :

> 'Of what avail is the *tilaka* and the *tulsi*, of what avail is the rosary and the muttering of the Name, what

avail is the grammatical interpretation of the *Veda*, what avail is the mastery of the letters? All these are devices to fill the belly and nothing worth without their helping to a realization of the *Parabrahma*.'

The Mussulman does count the beads of his *tasbih*, and the Christian of the rosary. But both would think themselves fallen from religion if their *tasbih* and rosary prevented them from running to the succour of one who, for instance, was lying stricken with a snake-bite. Mere knowledge of the *Vedas* cannot make our *brahmanas* spiritual preceptors. If it did, Max Muller would have become one. The *brahmana* who has understood the religion of today will certainly give *Vedic* learning a secondary place and propagate the religion of the spinning wheel, relieve the hunger of the millions of his starving countrymen and only then, and not until then, lose himself in *Vedic* studies.

I have certainly regarded spinning superior to the practice of denominational religions. But that does not mean that the latter should be given up. I only mean that a *dharma* which has to be observed by the followers of all religions transcends them, and hence I say that a *brahmana* is a better *brahmana*, a Mussulman a better Mussulman, a *Vaishnava* a better *Vaishnava*, if he turns the wheel in the spirit of service.

If it was possible for me to turn the wheel in my bed, and if I felt that it would help me in concentrating my mind on God, I would certainly leave the rosary aside and turn the wheel. If I am strong enough to turn the wheel, and I have to make a choice between counting beads or turning the wheel, I would certainly decide in favour of the wheel, making it my rosary, so long as I found poverty and starvation stalking the land. I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of Rama will become a hindrance. When I have realized that Rama transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name. The spinning wheel, the rosary and the *Ramanama* are all the same to me. They subserve the same end, they teach me

the religion of service. I cannot practise *ahimsa* without practising the religion of service, and I cannot find the truth without practising the religion of *ahimsa*. And there is no religion other than truth. Truth is Rama, Narayana, *Ishwara*, *Khuda*, Allah, God. As Narasinha says, 'The different shapes into which gold is beaten gives rise to different names and forms ; but ultimately it is all gold.'

*Young India*, 14-8-'24

## 8

## HINDUISM NOT A MATTER OF OUTWARD OBSERVANCES

In the name of religion we Hindus have made a fetish of outward observances, and have degraded religion by making it simply a question of eating and drinking. Brahmanism owes its unrivalled position to its self-abnegation, its inward purity, its severe austerity, — all these illumined by knowledge. Hindus are doomed if they attach undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. Placed as we are in the midst of trials and temptations from within, and touched and polluted as we are by all the most untouchable and the vilest thought currents, let us not, in our arrogance, exaggerate the influence of contact with people whom we often ignorantly and more often arrogantly consider to be our inferiors. Before the Throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched by but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God. Bad and stimulating or dirty foods we must avoid as we must avoid bad contact. But let us not give these observances a place out of all proportion to their importance. We dare not use abstinence from certain foods as a cover for fraud, hypocrisy, and worse vices. We dare not refuse to serve a fallen or

a dirty brother lest his contact should injure our spiritual growth.

*Young India*, 5-1-'22

## 9

## MY MISSION

I do not consider myself worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the race of prophets. I am a humble seeker after truth. I am impatient to realize myself, to attain *moksha* in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh. Thus considered, my service may be regarded as purely selfish. I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is *moksha*. To attain my end it is not necessary for me to seek the shelter of a cave. I carry one about me, if I would but know it. A cave-dweller can build castles in the air whereas a dweller in a palace like Janak has no castles to build. The cave-dweller who hovers round the world on the wings of thought has no peace. A Janak though living in the midst of 'pomp and circumstance' may have peace that passeth understanding. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and therethrough of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the *Gita* I want to live at peace with both friend and foe. Though therefore a Mussulman or a Christian or a Hindu may despise me and hate me, I want to love him and serve him even as I would love my wife or son though they hate me. So my patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.

*Young India*, 3-4-'24

## 10

## ARYA SAMAJ

I have profound respect for Dayananda Saraswati. I think that he has rendered great service to Hinduism. His bravery was unquestioned. But he made his Hinduism narrow. I have read the *Satyarthaprakash*, the Arya Samaj Bible. Friends sent me three copies of it whilst I was resting in the Yeravda Jail. I have not read a more disappointing book from a reformer so great. He has claimed to stand for truth and nothing less. But he has unconsciously misrepresented Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism itself. One having even a cursory acquaintance with these faiths could easily discover the errors into which the great reformer was betrayed. He has tried to make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal of faiths on the face of the earth. And an iconoclast though he was, he has succeeded in enthroning idolatry in the subtlest form. For he has idolized the letter of the *Vedas* and tried to prove the existence in the *Vedas* of everything known to science. The Arya Samaj flourishes in my humble opinion not because of the inherent merit of the teachings of the *Satyarthaprakash*, but because of the great and lofty character of the founder. Wherever you find Arya Samajists there is life and energy. But having a narrow outlook and a pugnacious habit they either quarrel with people of other denominations and failing them, with one another. Shraddhanandaji has a fair share of that spirit. But in spite of all these drawbacks, I do not regard him as past praying for. It is possible that this sketch of the Arya Samaj and the Swamiji will anger them. Needless to say, I mean no offence. I love the Samajists for I have many co-workers from among them. And I learnt to love the Swamiji, even while I was in South Africa. And though I know him better now, I love him no less. It is my love that has spoken.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24

## 11

## CONVERSION MOVEMENT IN HINDUISM

In my opinion there is no such thing as proselytism in Hinduism as it is understood in Christianity or to a lesser extent in Islam. The Arya Samaj has, I think, copied the Christians in planning its propaganda. The modern method does not appeal to me. It has done more harm than good. Though regarded as a matter of the heart purely and one between the Maker and oneself, it has degenerated into an appeal to the selfish instinct. The Arya Samaj preacher is never so happy as when he is reviling other religions. My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality. The real *shuddhi* movement should consist in each one trying to arrive at perfection in his or her own faith. In such a plan character would be the only test. What is the use of crossing from one compartment to another, if it does not mean a moral rise ? What is the meaning of my trying to convert to the service of God (for that must be the implication of *shuddhi* or *tabligh*) when those who are in my fold are every day denying God by their actions ? 'Physician, heal thyself' is more true in matters religious than mundane. But these are my views. If the Arya Samajists think that they have a call from their conscience, they have a perfect right to conduct the movement. Such a burning call recognizes no time limit, no checks of experience. If Hindu-Muslim unity is endangered because an Arya Samaj preacher or a Mussulman preacher preaches his faith in obedience to a call from within, that unity is only skin-deep. Why should we be ruffled by such movements ? Only they must be genuine. If the Malkanas wanted to return to the Hindu fold, they had a perfect right to do so whenever they liked. But no propaganda can be allowed which reviles other religions.

For that would be negation of toleration. The best way of dealing with such propaganda is to publicly condemn it.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24

## 12

## WHAT MAY HINDUS DO ?

Though the majority of the Mussulmans of India and the Hindus belong to the same 'stock', the religious environment has made them different. I believe and I have noticed too that thought transforms man's features as well as character. The Sikhs are the most recent illustration of the fact. The Mussulman being generally in a minority has as a class developed into a bully. Moreover, being heir to fresh traditions he exhibits the virility of a comparatively new system of life. Though in my opinion non-violence has a predominant place in the Quran, the thirteen hundred years of imperialistic expansion has made the Mussulmans fighters as a body. They are therefore aggressive. Bullying is the natural excrescence of an aggressive spirit. The Hindu has an ages-old civilization. He is essentially non-violent. His civilization has passed through the experiences that the two recent ones are still passing through. If Hinduism was ever imperialistic in the modern sense of the term, it has outlived its imperialism and has either deliberately or as a matter of course given it up. Predominance of the non-violent spirit has restricted the use of arms to a small minority which must always be subordinate to a civil power highly spiritual, learned and selfless. The Hindus as a body are therefore not equipped for fighting. But not having retained their spiritual training, they have forgotten the use of an effective substitute for arms, and not knowing their use nor having an aptitude for them, they have become docile to the point of timidity or cowardice. This vice is therefore a natural excrescence of gentleness. Holding this view,

I do not think that the Hindu exclusiveness, bad as it undoubtedly is, has much to do with the Hindu timidity. Hence also my disbelief in *akhadas* as a means of self-defence. I prize them for physical culture but, for self-defence, I would restore the spiritual culture. The best and most lasting self-defence is self-purification. I refuse to be lifted off my feet because of the scares that haunt us today. If Hindus would but believe in themselves and work in accordance with their traditions, they will have no reason to fear bullying. The moment they recommence the real spiritual training the Mussulman will respond. He cannot help it. If I can get together a band of young Hindus with faith in themselves and therefore faith in the Mussulmans, the band will become a shield for the weaker ones. They (the young Hindus) will teach how to die without killing. I know no other way. When our ancestors saw affliction surrounding them, they went in for *tapasya* — purification. They realized the helplessness of the flesh and in their helplessness they prayed till they compelled the Maker to obey their call. 'O yes,' says my Hindu friend, 'but then God sent some one to wield arms.' I am not concerned with denying the truth of the retort. All I say to the friend is that as a Hindu he may not ignore the cause and secure the result. It will be time to fight when we have done enough *tapasya*. Are we purified enough ? I ask. Have we even done willing penance for the sin of untouchability, let alone the personal purity of individuals ? Are our religious preceptors all that they should be ? We are beating the air whilst we simply concentrate our attention upon picking holes in the Mussulman conduct.

*Young India*, 19-6-'24

13

## ORGANIZATION FOR PROTECTING HINDUS

*Q.* Are not the Hindus justified in organizing themselves, not for any aggressive action against Moslems or others, but for safeguarding their religious rights and stamping out such evils as kidnapping etc. as also for the physical, social, moral and material advancement of the Hindu community ?

*A.* I do not suppose anybody can possibly object to the organization such as the question mentions. I certainly do not object.

*Young India*, 29-10-'25

14

## KRISHNA AND THE MAHABHARATA

Whilst I have dealt with the *gurus* as historical personages about whose existence we have trustworthy records, I have no knowledge that the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the *Gita* and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the *Mahabharata* is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the *Mahabharata* is authentic and that the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate. But to me, the *Mahabharata* is a profoundly

religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think for the time being that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the *Mahabharata* as we have it now as a faultless copy of the original. On the contrary I consider that it has undergone many emendations.

*Young India, 1-10-'25*

## 15

## HINDUISM AS EVER GROWING

Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to the laws of Nature. One and indivisible at the root it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the seasons affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. It is and is not based on scriptures. It does not derive its authority from one book. The *Gita* is universally accepted, but even then it only shows the way. It has hardly any effect on custom. Hinduism is like the Ganga pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganga it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Whenever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The *shastras* are ever growing. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Smritis*, the *Puranas*, and the *Itihasas* did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these

were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal-sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time we used to eat beef, shall we also do so now? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child-marriage? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Everyday we add to our knowledge of the power of *Atman*, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety? The *Vedas* represent the truth, they are infinite. But who has known them in their entirety? What goes today by the name of the *Vedas* are not even a millionth part of the real *Veda* — the Book of Knowledge. And who knows the entire meaning of even the few books that we have? Rather than wade through these infinite complications, our sages taught us to learn one thing: 'As with the Self, so with the Universe'. It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving — not only ceaseless but pure, and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of *yamas* * and *niyamas* — the *cardinal* and *casual* virtues.

---

* *Yamas*, the cardinal virtues, according to *Yogashastra*, are *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Aparigraha* (non-possession). The *Niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority, *Shaucha* (bodily purity), *Santosha* (contentment), *Tapa* (forbearance), *Swadhyaya* (study of scriptures), *Ishwarapranidhana* (resignation to the will of God). — M. D.

This practice is not possible without God's grace which presupposes Faith and Devotion. This is why Tulsidas sang of the glory of *Ramanama*, that is why the author of the *Bhagawata* taught the *Dwadashakshara Mantra (Om Namo Bhagawate Vasudevaya)*. To my mind he is a *Sanatani* Hindu who can repeat this *mantra* from the heart. All else is a bottomless pit, as the sage Akho * has said.

Europeans study our manners and customs. But theirs is the study of a critic not the study of a devotee. Their 'study' cannot teach me religion.

Hinduism does not consist in eating and non-eating. Its kernel consists in right conduct, in correct observance of truth and non-violence. Many a man eating meat, but observing the cardinal virtues of compassion and truth, and living in the fear of God, is a better Hindu than a hypocrite who abstains from meat. And he whose eyes are opened to the truth of the violence in beef-eating or meat-eating and who has therefore rejected them, who loves 'both man and bird and beast' is worthy of our adoration. He has seen and known God; he is His best devotee. He is the teacher of mankind.

Hinduism and all other religions are being weighed in the balance. Eternal truth is one. God also is one. Let every one of us steer clear of conflicting creeds and customs and follow the straight path of truth. Only then shall we be true Hindus. Many styling themselves *sanatanis* stalk the earth. Who knows how few of them will be chosen by God? God's grace shall descend on those who do His will and wait upon Him, not on those who simply mutter 'Rama Rama'.

*Young India*, 8-4-'26

---

* A poet-seer of Gujarat.

## 16

## THE AUTHORITY OF RELIGIOUS BOOKS

The stories told in the *Puranas* are some of them most dangerous, if we do not know their bearing on the present conditions. The *shastras* would be death-traps if we were to regulate our conduct according to every detail given in them or according to that of the characters therein described. They help us only to define and argue out fundamental principles. If some well-known character in religious books sinned against God or man, is that a warrant for our repeating the sin ? It is enough for us to be told, once for all, that Truth is the only thing that matters in the world, that Truth is God. It is irrelevant to be told that even Yudhishthira was betrayed into an untruth. It is more relevant for us to know that when he spoke an untruth, he had to suffer for it that very moment and that his great name in no way protected him from punishment. Similarly, it is irrelevant for us to be told that Adishankara avoided a *chandala*. It is enough for us to know that a religion that teaches us to treat all that lives as we treat ourselves, cannot possibly countenance the inhuman treatment of a single creature, let alone a whole class of perfectly innocent human beings. Moreover we have not even all the facts before us to judge what Adishankara did or did not do. Still less, do we know the meaning of the word *chandala* where it occurs. It has admittedly many meanings, one of which is a sinner. But if all sinners are to be regarded as untouchables, it is very much to be feared that we should all, not excluding the Pandit * himself, be under the ban of untouchability. That untouchability is an old institution, nobody has ever denied. But, if it is an evil, it cannot be defended on the ground of its antiquity.

*Young India*, 29-7-'26

---

* This article from which this excerpt is made was written in answer to a plea for untouchability made by a Pandit from the South.

## 17

## WHAT IS HINDUISM ?

Hinduism is not a codified religion. We have in Hinduism hundreds and thousands of books whose names even we do not know, which go under the short name of *shastras*. Now when we want to find out whether a thing is good or bad, I do not go to a particular book, but I look to the sum total of the effect of Hinduism. In Hinduism we have got an admirable foot-rule to measure every *shastra* and every rule of conduct, and that is truth. Whatever falls from truth should be rejected, no matter where it comes from ; therefore the burden lies on the shoulders of that person who upholds a practice which is inconsistent with truth ; so that if a man wants to defend, for instance, untouchability, he has to show that it is consistent with truth. Unless he shows that, all the authorities that he may cite in support of it are to me irrelevant.

*Young India*, 29-9-'27

## 18

## TULSIDAS

Several friends on various occasions have addressed to me criticisms regarding my attitude towards the *Tulsi-Ramayana*. The substance of their criticisms is as follows :

> "You have described the *Ramayana* as the best of books, but we have never been able to reconcile ourselves with your view. Do not you see how Tulsidas has disparaged womankind, defended Rama's unchivalrous ambuscade on Vali, praised Vibhishan for betrayal of his country, and described Rama as an *avatara* in spite of his gross injustice to Sita ? What beauty do you find in a book like this ? Or do you think that the poetic beauty of the book compensates for everything else ? If it is so then we venture to suggest that you have no qualifications for the task."

I admit that if we take the criticisms of every point individually they will be found difficult to refute and the

whole of the *Ramayana* can, in this manner, be easily condemned. But that can be said of almost everything and everybody. There is a story related about a celebrated artist that in order to answer his critics he put his picture in a show window and invited visitors to indicate their opinion by marking the spot they did not like. The result was that there was hardly any portion that was not covered by the critics' marks. As a matter of fact, however, the picture was a masterpiece of art. Indeed even the *Vedas*, the Bible and the Quran have not been exempt from condemnation. In order to arrive at a proper estimate of a book it must be judged as a whole. So much for external criticism. The internal test of a book consists in finding out what effect it has produced on the majority of its readers. Judged by either method the position of the *Ramayana* as a book *par excellence* remains unassailable. This, however, does not mean that it is absolutely faultless. But it is claimed on behalf of the *Ramayana* that it has given peace to millions, has given faith to those who had it not, and is even today serving as a healing balm to thousands who are burnt by the fire of unbelief. Every page of it is overflowing with devotion. It is a veritable mine of spiritual experience.

It is true that the *Ramayana* is sometimes used by evil-minded persons to support their evil practices. But that is no proof of evil in the *Ramayana*. I admit that Tulsidas has, unintentionally as I think, done injustice to womankind. In this, as in several other respects also, he has failed to rise above the prevailing notions of his age. In other words Tulsidas was not a reformer ; he was only a prince among devotees. The faults of the *Ramayana* are less a reflection on Tulsidas than a reflection on the age in which he lived.

What should be the attitude of the reformer regarding the position of women or towards Tulsidas under such circumstances ? Can he derive no help whatever from Tulsidas? The reply is emphatically ' he can '. In spite of disparaging remarks about women in the *Ramayana*

it should not be forgotten that in it Tulsidas has presented to the world his matchless picture of Sita. Where would Rama be without Sita? We find a host of other ennobling figures like Kausalya, Sumitra etc. in the *Ramayana*. We bow our head in reverence before the faith and devotion of Shabari and Ahalya. Ravana was a monster but Mandodari was a *sati*. In my opinion these instances go to prove that Tulsidas was no reviler of women by conviction. On the contrary, so far as his convictions went, he had only reverence for them. So much for Tulsidas's attitude towards women.

In the matter of the killing of Vali, however, there is room for two opinions. In Vibhishan I can find no fault. Vibhishan offered Satyagraha against his brother. His example teaches us that it is a travesty of patriotism to sympathize with or try to conceal the faults of one's rulers or country, and to oppose them is the truest patriotism. By helping Rama Vibhishan rendered the truest service to his country. The treatment of Sita by Rama does not denote heartlessness. It is a proof of a duel between kingly duty and a husband's love for wife.

To the sceptics who feel honest doubts in connection with the *Ramayana*, I would suggest that they should not accept anybody's interpretations mechanically. They should leave out such portions about which they feel doubtful. Nothing contrary to truth and *ahimsa* need be condoned. It would be sheer perversity to argue that because in our opinion Rama practised deception, we too may do likewise. The proper thing to do would be to believe that Rama was incapable of practising deception. As the *Gita* says, 'There is nothing in the world that is entirely free from fault.' Let us, therefore, like the fabled swan who rejects the water and takes only the milk, learn to treasure only the good and reject the evil in everything. Nothing and no one is perfect but God.

*Young India*, 31-10-'29

## 19

# HINDUISM AND OBSCENITY

She (Miss Mayo in her book *Mother India*) says that the Vaishnava mark has an obscene meaning. I am a born Vaishnavite. I have perfect recollection of my visits to Vaishnava temples. Mine were orthodox people. I used to have the mark myself as a child, but neither I nor any one else in our family ever knew that this harmless and rather elegant-looking mark had any obscene significance at all. I asked a party of Vaishnavites in Madras where this article is being written. They knew nothing about the alleged obscene significance. I do not therefore suggest that it never had such significance. But I do suggest that millions are unaware of the obscenity of many practices which we have hitherto innocently indulged in. It was in a missionary book that I first learnt that *shivalingam* had any obscene significance at all, and even now when I see a *shivalingam* neither the shape nor the association in which I see it suggests any obscenity. It was again in a missionary book that I learnt that the temples in Orissa were disfigured with obscene statues. When I went to Puri it was not without an effort that I was able to see those things. But I do know that the thousands who flock to the temple know nothing about the obscenity surrounding these figures. The people are unprepared and the figures do not obtrude themselves upon your gaze.

*Young India*, 15-9-'27

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

## 20

# COMMUNICATIONS WITH SPIRITS

[In reply to a correspondent Gandhiji wrote :]

I never receive communications from the spirits of the dead. I have no evidence warranting a disbelief in the possibility of such communications. But I do strongly disapprove of the practice of holding or attempting to hold such communications. They are often deceptive and are products of imagination. The practice is harmful both to the medium and the spirits, assuming the possibility of such communications. It attracts and ties to the earth the spirit so invoked, whereas its effort should be to detach itself from the earth, and rise higher. A spirit is not necessarily purer because it is disembodied. It takes with it most of the frailties to which it was liable when on earth. Information or advice therefore given by it need not be true or sound. That the spirit likes communications with those on earth is no matter for pleasure. On the contrary it should be weaned from such unlawful attachment. So much for the harm done to the spirits.

As for the medium, it is a matter of positive knowledge with me that all those within my experience have been deranged or weak-brained and disabled for practical work whilst they were holding, or thought they were holding, such communications. I can recall no friend of mine who having held such communication had benefitted in any way.

*Young India*, 12-9-'29

21

## TRUE SHRADDHA

A friend sends from Rangoon rupees twenty-five as donation for the propaganda of the spinning wheel, and writes :

> "My father died on the 18th April 1927 at Tanjore (S. India) while I was there on a short leave. When I was confronted with the question of 'Sixteenth-Day Ceremony', a slavish, meaningless imitation of *shraddha*, I resolutely refused to abide by the desire of my relatives, simply because I have no belief in it *as it prevails today*. I do not believe in a departed soul waiting in *pitriloka* or some such other unseen places for water or rice-balls. Nor can I see any reason to attach any importance to the rites performed by a mercenary priest and in a language which is Greek both to me and the officiating priest. In short the whole affair seems to be a hoax designed to be practised on the religious susceptibilities of the people. But I can believe in *shraddha* as a thing offered in piety and devotion with a charitable intention. From a commonsense point of view the main principle and the original purpose of this ceremony ought to be charity. As you say in *Young India* dated 24-2-'27, 'Only two classes of people are entitled to charity and none else — the *brahmana* who possesses nothing and whose business it is to spread holy learning, and the cripple and the blind.' Our great immortal sage Thiruvalluvar has said: 'A *brahmana* is that *sannyasi* who has an overflowing love towards all living creatures.' Because I could not conceive of a man who has a better claim than you and more charitable purpose than that of the spinning wheel, I have sent you this amount. There is also another way of commemorating the memory of one's own parents. The same sage Thiruvalluvar has again said: 'The gratitude of a son to his father must consist in the son conducting himself in the world in such a way as to excite from the world the approbation that his father must have performed a great *tapasya* to beget this son.' I may add that I have this ideal at my heart."

I have omitted from the letter several personal references. Though I have performed *shraddha* ceremonies myself in my youth, I have not been able to understand their religious usefulness. This letter is not the first of its kind I have received. But not being able to understand

the hidden meaning, if any, of the practices which are almost universal in Hinduism, I have hitherto refrained from dealing with them in these pages. The rule that the correspondent has chosen has however appealed to me. We do very often meekly submit to many conventional ceremonies although we may have no faith in them, and although they may have no meaning for us. Submission to convention in trivial matters in which there is no danger of deceiving others or oneself is often desirable and even necessary. But submission in matters of religion, especially where there is a positive repugnance from within and a danger of deceiving our neighbours and ourselves, cannot but be debasing. There are today many religious ceremonies which, whatever meaning and importance they might have had in ages gone by, have neither importance nor meaning for the rising generation. There can be no doubt that it is necessary for this generation to strike out an original path by giving a new form and even meaning to many old ceremonies. The idea of keeping green and of respecting the memory of one's parents is not to be given up. But it is hardly necessary on that account to retain the old conventions and forms, which have lost their reality and therefore ceased to have any influence on us. I therefore commend the example of the correspondent to those who are anxious to do only that which is right, and free themselves from self-deception.

*Young India*, 1-8-'27

## 22

## DIVALI HOLIDAYS

A correspondent invites me to warn those who care against turning during the forthcoming Divali holidays good money into fireworks, bad sweets and unhygienic illuminations. I heartily respond. If I had my way I should have people to do house cleaning and heart cleaning, and provide innocent and instructive amusements for children during these days. Fireworks I know are the delight of the children, but they are so because we the elders have habituated them to fireworks. I have not known the untutored African children wanting or appreciating fireworks. They have dances instead. What can be better or healthier for children than sports and picnics to which they will take not bazar-made sweets of doubtful value but fresh and dried fruit? Children both rich and poor may also be trained to do house cleaning and white-washing themselves. It will be something if they are coaxed to recognize the dignity of labour if only during holidays to begin with. But the point I wish to emphasize is that at least a part, if not the whole, of the money saved by doing away with fireworks etc. should be given to the cause of *khadi*, or if that is anathema, then to any other cause in which the poorest are served. There cannot be greater joy to men and women and young and old than that they think of and associate the poorest of the land with them in their holidays.

*Young India*, 25-10-'28

23

# DUTY OF CEYLON HINDUS *

## My Credentials

I must speak to you Hindus as a Hindu. And it gives me the greatest pleasure to have been invited to do so. As you know, though my claim has not been accepted by those who call themselves orthodox Hindus I persist in calling myself an orthodox Hindu. But by making that claim I, a votary of Truth, must not mislead you in any way whatsoever. If orthodox Hinduism consists in dining or not dining with this man or that, and touching this man and not touching that man, or in quarrelling with Mussulmans and Christians, then I am certainly not an orthodox Hindu. But if orthodox Hinduism can mean an incessant search after what Hinduism possibly can be, if orthodox Hinduism can mean an incessant striving to live Hinduism to the best of one's lights, then I do claim to be an orthodox Hindu. I am also an orthodox Hindu in the sense in which the author of the *Mahabharata*, the great Vyasa, would have it. He has said somewhere in the *Mahabharata* to this effect : Put Truth in one scale and all sacrifices whatever in the other, that scale which contains Truth will outweigh the one that contains all the sacrifices put together, not excluding *Rajasuya* and *Ashvamedha yajna*. And if the *Mahabharata* may be accepted as the fifth *Veda*, then I can claim to be an orthodox Hindu, because every moment of the twenty-four hours of my life I am endeavouring to follow truth counting no cost as too great.

## Live Broadened Hinduism

Having thus registered my claim in the presence of this audience, I now wish to tell you as an orthodox Hindu what in my humble opinion your duty is in Jaffna and

* Gandhiji's speech at a meeting of the Hindus of Jaffna.

in Ceylon. First of all, I want to speak to you about your duty towards the predominant population in this island. And I wish to suggest to you that they are your co-religionists. They will, if they choose to, repudiate the claim. For they will say that Buddhism is not Hinduism and they will be partly right. Many Hindus certainly repudiate the claim of Buddhism to be part and parcel of Hinduism. On the contrary they delight in saying that they successfully drove Buddhism out of India. But I tell you that they did nothing of the kind. Buddha himself was a Hindu. He endeavoured to reform Hinduism. And he succeeded in his attempt to a very great extent, and what Hinduism did at that time was to assimilate and absorb all that was good and best in the teachings of the Buddha. And on that account I venture to say that Hinduism became broadened, and having assimilated the best of Buddhism, it is true that Hinduism drove out from India what might be termed excrescences that had gathered round the teachings of Gautama. And the way in which you can demonstrate this to the Buddhists of Ceylon is by living the broadened Hinduism in their midst. The one thing that the Buddha showed India was that God was not a God who can be appeased by sacrificing innocent animals. On the contrary, he held that those who sacrificed animals in the hope of pleasing God were guilty of a double sin. So if you will be true to Hinduism, you will take care that you will not defile a single temple of yours by indulging in animal sacrifices. I am prepared to declare against the whole of Hindu India that it is wrong, sinful, and criminal to sacrifice a single animal for the purpose of gaining any end whatsoever, or for the purpose of propitiating God.

### Varna Gives Life, Caste Kills

The second thing that Gautama taught was that all that caste means today — as it meant in his time also — was wholly wrong. That is to say, he abolished every distinction of superiority and inferiority that was even in his time eating into the vitals of Hinduism. But he did

not abolish *varnashrama dharma*. *Varna-dharma* is not caste. As I have said in so many speeches in South India, and as I have written fairly exhaustively on *varna-dharma* in *Young India*, I hold that there is nothing in common between caste and *varna*. Whilst *varna* gives life, caste kills it, and untouchability is the hatefulest expression of caste. You will therefore banish untouchability from your midst. I make bold to say that there is no warrant whatsoever in Hinduism for untouchability as it is practised today. If therefore you want to live your Hinduism in its purity in the midst of Buddhist countrymen, you will take care that you will not consider a single human being as an untouchable. Unfortunately the Buddhists in Ceylon have themselves borrowed this curse from the Hindus. They who should never have had this institution of caste have caste in their midst. For heaven's sake forget that some are high and others are low; remember that you are all Hindus — brothers in arms.

## Purify Temples

I have a letter from a Jaffna Hindu telling me that there are some temples in this place where you have dances by women of ill fame on certain occasions. If that information is correct, then let me tell you that you are converting temples of God into dens of prostitution. A temple to be a house of worship, to be a temple of God, has got to conform to certain well-defined limitations. A prostitute has as much right to go to a house of worship as a saint. But she exercises that right when she enters the temple to purify herself. But when the trustees of a temple admit a prostitute under cover of religion or under cover of embellishing the worship of God, then they convert a house of God into one of prostitution. And if anybody, no matter how high he may be, comes to you and seeks to justify the admission of women of ill fame into your temples for dancing or any such purpose, reject him and agree to the proposal that I have made to you. If you want to be good Hindus, if you want to worship God, and if you are wise, you will fling the doors of all your temples

open to the so-called untouchables. God makes no distinction between His worshippers. He accepts the worship of these untouchables just as well and as much as that of the so-called touchables, provided it comes from the bottom of the heart.

## Make Advances to Other Faiths

There are still certain things that demand your attention. You have to live at the present moment in a world which has Christians and Mussulmans, great communities owning great faiths. In Jaffna you have a very small Mussulman population hardly two or three per cent. The Christian population is ten per cent. But you have to live your life in the midst of these whether they are two per cent or twenty per cent. And if I know Hinduism aright, Hinduism is nothing if it is not tolerant and generous to every other faith. And since they are also as much inhabitants of this peninsula and this island as you it is your duty to regard them as your brothers. Unless you do so, you will never evolve the truly national spirit that is necessary, and therefore you will not evolve the necessary Hindu and the humanitarian spirit. You have a right to control the education of your own children and I am glad that you have got your own Board of Education. I would like you to strengthen that Board in the right spirit as much as you can, but that should mean no jar whatsoever with the rival institutions of the Christian missionaries. If you have got an ably manned staff of educationists and provide the necessary facilities for the Hindu children, naturally all the Hindu children will come to your institutions. And I can see no reason whatsoever for mutual jealousies in the matter of education as I understand there is somewhat. I was delighted to find that only up to recent times, Hindus, Christians, and Mussulmans were living in absolute friendship. A jar has been created only recently as between the Christians and yourselves. And seeing that you are in a vast majority, it is up to you to make advances and settle all your disputes. And if you will get rid of the wretched caste-spirit which

has crept into Hinduism, you will find that all the difficulties will disappear.

### Encourage Sanskrit Studies

And remember that since you are in a very vast majority, the responsibility rests on your shoulders to make Jaffna, and through Jaffna, Ceylon also perfectly dry. Hinduism does not permit you drink. And if the Board of Education will do its duty, you will encourage Sanskrit study in your schools. I regard the education of any Hindu child as incomplete unless he has some knowledge of Sanskrit. And so far as I have been able to see we have in Hinduism no book so compact and so acceptable all round as the *Bhagawadgita*. If you will therefore saturate your children and yourselves with the spirit of Hinduism, you will endeavour to understand the spirit of the teachings of the *Gita*. You should also cultivate a common knowledge of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Lastly I know no solution of the many difficulties that face the whole of the human family except the two things that I am saying everywhere. Speak the truth and remain non-violent also at any cost. I know as certainly as I know that I am sitting in front of you and speaking to you, that if I could but persuade you to understand the spirit of these two things and act up to them, every one of our difficulties will disappear like straw before wind, and God will descend from His Great White Throne and live in your midst and He will say 'You Hindus have done well.'

*Young India*, 15-12-'27

## 24

# HELPFUL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND READINGS

[Gandhiji's conversation with Mr. Basil Mathews who was curious to know if Gandhiji followed any spiritual practices and what special reading he had found helpful :]

*Gandhiji* : I am a stranger to *yogic* practices. The practice I follow is a practice I learnt in my childhood from my nurse. I was afraid of ghosts. She used to say to me : 'There are no ghosts, but if you are afraid, repeat *Ramanama*.' What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge thing in my mental firmament. It is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus and a Muslim from the name of Allah. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being.

About helpful readings, we have regular readings of the *Bhagawadgita* and we have now reached a stage when we finish the *Gita* every week by having readings of appointed chapters every morning. Then we have hymns from the various saints of India, and we therein include hymns from the Christian hymn-book. As Khansaheb is with us, we have readings from the Quran also. We believe in the equality of all religions. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the New Testament and the Quran. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagawadgita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me — everything in the Epistles of Paul for instance,—nor everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore there is no question of selection.

*Mr. Mathews*: You are really a Protestant.

*Gandhiji*: I do not know what I am or am not, Mr. Hodge will call me a Presbyterian!

*Mr. Mathews*: Where do you find the seat of authority?

*Gandhiji*: It lies here (pointing to his breast). I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Mathew may give one version of one text, and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place, e. g. the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason 'yet we are seven', I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect, 'Yet there is God'.

*Harijan*, 5-12-'36

## 25

## EQUALITY IN HINDUISM

In the purest type of Hinduism a *brahmana*, an ant, an elephant and a dog-eater (*shwapacha*) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy today stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy, but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish

equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men.

*Harijan*, 28-3-'36

## 26

## THE CHIEF VALUE OF HINDUISM

An American professor in Comparative Theology on a visit to India to study Indian religions intelligently, asked Gandhiji to tell her in a nutshell the chief value of Hinduism, as she had been told "that Gandhiji was the life and soul of Hinduism." "It is hardly wise," she said, "to rest content to teach what you can out of books. One must meet the true representatives of these living religions."

Replying to her Gandhiji said: "The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that ALL life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e. all life coming from the One Universal Source, call it Allah, God or *Parameshwara*. There is in Hinduism a scripture called *Vishnusahasranama* which simply means 'one thousand names of God'. These one thousand names do not mean that God is limited to those names, but that He has as many names as you can possibly give Him. You may give Him as many names as you like, provided it is one God without a second, whose name you are invoking. That also means that He is nameless too.

"This unity of ALL life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not to human beings alone but says that it is possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible, save through the human form, but that does not make man the Lord of creation. It makes him the servant of God's creation. Now when we talk of brotherhood of man, we stop there, and feel that all other life is there for man to exploit for his own purposes. But

Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatsoever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to your wants. That, you will see, is the antithesis of the position of the modern civilization which says: 'Increase your wants.' Those who hold that belief think that increase of wants means an increase of knowledge whereby you understand the Infinite better. On the contrary Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to the ultimate identity with the Universal Self."

*Harijan*, 26-12-'36

## 27

## THE GOLDEN KEY

For the first time at the public meeting in Quilon Gandhiji summed up the credal belief of Hinduism in an *Upanishadic mantra*, and thereafter at every meeting gave lucid and simple commentaries on the numerous implications of that all-comprehensive *mantra*. The pure exposition without much of a commentary was given on the previous day at Quilon and is reproduced below:

"Let me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world? What is it in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries? Did they see untouchability in Hinduism and still enthuse over it? In the midst of my struggle against untouchability I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we John 3.16 of the Bible. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the

most matter-of-fact among them ? Some have said, and not without good reason, the *Gayatri* answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the *Gayatri mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then as you are aware I have, for years past, been swearing by the *Bhagawadgita*, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *kamadhenu*, my guide, my ' open sesame ', on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful study before the *kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

" But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad.* I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the *Upanishads* and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the *Ishopanishad* were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

" Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किं च जगत्यां जगत् । It means, as I would translate, all this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them : तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा: । I divide these into two and translate them thus : Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means the same thing, though : Enjoy what He gives you. Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part, मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्। which means : Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession. All the other *mantras* of that ancient *Upanishad* are a commentary or an attempt to give

us the full meaning of the first *mantra*. As I read the *mantra* in the light of the *Gita* or the *Gita* in the light of the *mantra* I find that the *Gita* is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the socialist and the communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true — and I hold it to be true — you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this, that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the Universe ? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought : Do not covet anybody's possession. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter."

It is this *mantra* that Gandhiji described at another meeting as the golden key for the solution of all the difficulties and doubts that may assail one's heart.

"Remember that one verse of the *Ishopanishad* and forget all about the other scriptures. You can of course

drown yourselves and be suffocated in the ocean of scriptures. They are good for the learned if they will be humble and wise, but for the ordinary man in the street nothing but this *mantra* is necessary to carry him across the ocean :

'God the Ruler pervades all there is in this Universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him, and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possession.' "

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37

## 28

## THE HARIPAD SPEECH *

### Renunciation Essential

At this meeting I would love to detain you for a few minutes on the message of Hinduism I gave to the meeting in Quilon last night. I ventured at that meeting to say that the whole of Hinduism could be summed up in the first verse of the *Ishopanishad*.

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किं च जगत्यां जगत्

तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ।

Those who know a little bit of Sanskrit will find that there is nothing abstruse there that you find in other *Vedic mantras*, and its meaning is simply this : All that there is in this Universe, great or small, including the tiniest atom, is pervaded by God, known as Creator or Lord. *Isha* means the Ruler, and He who is the Creator naturally by very right becomes the Ruler too. And here in this verse the seer has chosen no other epithet for the Deity but that of the Ruler, and he has excepted nothing from His jurisdiction. He says everything that we see is pervaded by the Deity, and from that naturally the other parts of the *mantra* follow. Thus he says, 'Renounce

* Full text of speech delivered by Gandhiji at Haripad in Travancore on 17-1-1937.

everything,' i. e. everything that is on this Universe, the whole of the Universe, and not only this tiny globe of ours, renounce it. He asks us to renounce it as we are such insignificant atoms that if we had any idea of possession it would seem ludicrous. And then, says the *rishi*, the reward of the renunciation is मुंजीथाः, i. e. enjoyment of all you need. But there is a meaning in the word translated 'enjoy', which may as well be translated as 'use', 'eat' etc. It signifies, therefore, that you may not take more than necessary for your growth. Hence this enjoyment or use is limited by two conditions. One is the act of renunciation or, as the author of the *Bhagawata* would say, enjoy in the spirit of कृष्णार्पणमस्तु सर्वम् (or offering all to God). And every day in the morning every one who believes in the *Bhagawata Dharma* has to dedicate his thoughts, words and deeds to Krishna, and not until he has performed that daily act of renunciation or dedication has he the right of touching anything or drinking even a cup of water. And when a man has performed that act of renunciation and dedication, he derives from that act the right of eating, drinking, clothing and housing himself to the extent necessary for his daily life. Therefore take it as you like, either in the sense that the enjoyment or use is the reward of renunciation, or that the renunciation is the condition of enjoyment, renunciation is essential for our very existence, for our soul. And as if that condition given in the *mantra* was incomplete, the *rishi* hastened to complete it by adding: 'Do not covet what belongs to another.' Now I suggest to you that the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world is contained in this *mantra*, and it excludes everything contrary to it. According to the canons of interpretation, anything that is inconsistent with *Shruti* — and *Ishopanishad* is a *Shruti* — is to be rejected altogether.

## Temples Purified

Now I should like to apply this *mantra* to present-day conditions. If all that there is in the Universe is pervaded by God, that is to say, if the *brahmana* and the *bhangi*,

the learned man and the scavenger, the Ezhava and the pariah, no matter what caste they belong to — if all these are pervaded by Lord God, in the light of this *mantra*, there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal, equal because all are the creatures of that Creator. And this is not a philosophical thing to be dished out to *brahmanas* or *kshatriyas*, but it enunciates an eternal truth which admits of no reduction, no palliation. Therefore the Maharajah himself and the Maharani are not one whit superior to the lowliest being in Travancore. We are all creatures and servants of one God. If the Maharajah is the first among equals, as he is, he is so not by right of overlordship, but by right of service. And therefore how nice, how noble it is that every Maharajah is called *Padmanabhadas*! * Therefore when I told you that the Maharajah or the Maharani were not one whit superior to any one of us, I told you what was the actual truth accepted by their Highnesses themselves. And if that is so, how can anyone here dare to arrogate superiority to himself or herself over any other human being? I tell you, therefore, that if this *mantra* holds good, if there is any man or woman here who believes that the temples are defiled by those called *avarnas*, that person I declare would be guilty of a grave sin. I tell you that the Proclamation † has purified our temples of the taint that had attached to them.

I would like the *mantra* I have recited to be enshrined in the hearts of all our men and women and children, and if this contains, as I hold, the essence of Hinduism, it should be inscribed on the portals of every temple. Don't you then think that we should be belying that *mantra* at every step if we excluded anyone from those temples? Therefore if you will prove yourself deserving of the gracious Proclamation and if you will be loyal to yourselves and to those who preside over your destinies, you will carry out the letter and spirit of this Proclamation.

---

* Servant of Vishnu, the all-pervading God.

† Temple Entry Proclamation.

From the date of the Proclamation the Travancore temples, which as I once said were not abodes of God, have become abodes of God, since no one who used to be regarded as untouchable is any more to be excluded from them. I therefore hope and pray that throughout Travancore there may be no man or woman who will abstain from going to the temples for the reason that they have been opened to those who were regarded as *pariahs* of society.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37

## 29

## FROM THE KOTTAYAM SPEECH

[Speaking again on the *Ishopanishad mantra* to a Christian audience in Kottayam, Gandhiji said :]

The *mantra* describes God as the Creator, the Ruler, and the Lord. The seer to whom this *mantra* or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. But he went further and said : 'Since God pervades everything nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed, unchallengeable Master of everything you possess.' And so when a person who calls himself a Hindu goes through the process of regeneration or a second birth, as Christians would call it, he has to perform a dedication or renunciation of all that he has in ignorance called his own property. And then when he has performed this act of dedication or renunciation, he is told that he will win a reward in the shape of God taking good care of what he will require for food, clothing or housing. Therefore the condition of enjoyment or use of the necessaries of life is their dedication or renunciation. And that dedication or renunciation has got to be done from day to day, lest we may in this busy world forget the central fact of life. And to crown all, the seer says : 'Covet not anybody's riches.' I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short *mantra*

is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being — whether they have reference to this world or to the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this *mantra*. Looking back upon all the little I have read of the scriptures — it is precious little I confess — I feel that everything good in all the scriptures is derived from this *mantra*. If it is universal brotherhood — not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living beings — I find it in this *mantra*. If it is unshakable faith in the Lord and Master — and all the adjectives you can think of — I find it in this *mantra*. If it is the idea of complete surrender to God and of the faith that He will supply all that I need, then again I say I find it in this *mantra*. Since He pervades every fibre of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists. This *mantra* tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God, and if my life and that of all who believe in this *mantra* has to be a life of perfect dedication, it follows that it will have to be a life of continual service of our fellow creatures.

This, I say, is my faith and should be the faith of all who call themselves Hindus. And I venture to suggest to my Christian and Mussulman friends that they will find nothing more in their scriptures if they will search them.

I do not wish to hide from you the fact that I am not unaware of many superstitions that go under the name of Hinduism. I am most painfully conscious of all the superstitions that are to be found masquerading as Hinduism, and I have no hesitation to call a spade a spade. I have not hesitated to describe untouchability as the greatest of these superstitions. But in spite of them all, I remain a Hindu. For I do not believe that these superstitions form part of Hinduism. The very canons of interpretation laid down by Hinduism teach me that whatever is inconsistent with the truth I have expounded to

you and which is hidden in the *mantra* I have named, must be summarily rejected as not belonging to Hinduism.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37

## 30

## LIVING UP TO 125

I have not talked about wishing to live up to the age of 125 years without thought. It has a deep significance. The basis for my wish is the third *mantra* from *Ishopanishad* which, literally rendered, means that a man should desire to live for 100 years while serving with detachment. One commentary says that 100 really means 125.

Be that as it may, the meaning of 'hundred' is not necessary for my argument. My sole purpose is to indicate the condition necessary for the realization of the desire. It is service in a spirit of detachment, which means complete independence of the fruit of action. Without it one should not desire to live for 125 years. That is how I interpret the text. I have not the slightest doubt that without attaining that state of detachment, it is impossible to live to be 125 years old. Living to that age must never mean a mere life like unto death, like that of an animated corpse, a burden on one's relations and society. In such circumstances one's supreme duty would be to pray to God for early release and not for prolongation of life anyhow.

The human body is meant solely for service, never for indulgence. The secret of happy life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death. Therefore, every one has a right and should desire to live 125 years *while performing service without an eye on result*. Such life must be wholly and solely dedicated to service. Renunciation made for the sake of such service is an ineffable joy of which none can deprive one, because that nectar springs from within and sustains life. In this

there can be no room for worry or impatience. Without this joy, long life is impossible and would not be worth while even if possible.

Examination of the possibility of prolonging life to 125 years by outward means is outside the scope of this argument.

*Harijan*, 24-2-'46

## 31
## YAJNA OR SACRIFICE

*Yajna* means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life. Therefore, and also from the standpoint of *ahimsa*, it is not a *yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the *Vedas*. It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in *Vedic* scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of *Vedic* society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*.

Again a primary sacrifice must be an act, which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not therefore, be a *yajna*, much less a *mahayajna*, to wish or to do ill to any one else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the *Gita* teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *yajna* promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *yajna* in this sense, and therefore the *Gita*, after having dealt with true wisdom in the second chapter,

takes up in the third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body, therefore, has been given us, only in order that we may serve all creation with it. And, therefore, says the *Gita*, he who eats without offering *yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *yajna*. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bondslave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the universe. What we receive must be called a gift ; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity ; on the contrary, it is natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God," — this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten any one. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large.

* * *

Again, not only the good, but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to

G.L.37



hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.

Some object, that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for the householder. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will therefore not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to answer to it. No doubt such sacrificers obtain their livelihood by their work. But livelihood is not their objective, but only a by-product of their vocation. A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying. Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immortality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude to life. One man will enjoy theatrical scenery, another the ever new scenes which unfold themselves in the sky. Joy, therefore, is a matter of individual and national education. We shall relish things which we have been taught to relish as children. And illustrations can be easily cited of different national tastes.

Again, many sacrificers imagine that they are free to receive from the people everything they need, and many things they do not need, because they are rendering disinterested service. Directly this idea sways a man, he ceases to be a servant, and becomes a tyrant over the people.

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

Again, one dare not be negligent in service, or be behindhand with it. He, who thinks that one must be diligent only in one's personal business, and unpaid public business may be done in any way and at any time one chooses, has still to learn the very rudiments of the science of sacrifice. Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

*From Yeravda Mandir*, chap. xiv-xv

## 32
## PRAYER DISCOURSES

### Maya

Joy or what men call happiness may be, as it really is, a dream in a fleeting and transitory world, where everything is like a dissolving phantasmagoria. But we cannot dismiss the suffering of our fellow creatures as unreal and thereby provide a moral alibi for ourselves. Even dreams are true while they last, and to the sufferer his suffering is a grim reality. Anyway, whether the world be real or unreal, we have certain duties in life which must be faced, understood and duly performed while we are in this world.

### The Dignity of Poverty

The second day's discourse turned on the 'dignity of poverty'. In the song that had been sung it was said

that God is the friend of the poor. Poverty, remarked Gandhiji, had a dignity in our country. The poor man was not ashamed of his poverty. He preferred his hut to the rich man's palace. He even took pride in it. Though poor in material goods, he was not poor in spirit. Contentment was his treasure. He might as well say to himself, 'Since we cannot all become rich and own palaces, let us at least pull down the palaces of the rich and bring them down to our level.' That could bring no happiness or peace either to the poor or anyone else, and God would certainly be not the friend and helper of the poor of such description. Poverty, in the sense of inequality of material possessions was there in every part of the world. That was perhaps in a certain measure inevitable, for all men are not equal either in their talents or the measure of their needs. Even in America which was fabulously rich and where Mammon had taken the place of God, there were many poor. In India, however, there was a particular type of man who delighted in having as few needs as possible. He carried with him only a little flour and a pinch of salt and chillies tied in his napkin. He had a *lota* and a string to draw water from the well. He needed nothing else. He walked on foot covering 10-12 miles a day. He made the dough in his napkin, collected a few twigs to make a fire and baked his dough on the embers. It was called *bati*. Its relish did not lie in itself but in the appetite that honest toil and contentment of mind give. Such a man had God as his companion and friend and felt richer than any king or emperor. God was not the friend of those who inwardly coveted other's riches. Everyone could copy that example and enjoy ineffable peace and happiness himself and radiate it to others. On the other hand, if one hankered after riches, one had to resort to exploitation, by whatever name it might be called. Even then the crores could not become millionaires. True happiness lay in contentment and companionship with God only.

*Harijan*, 21-7-'46

## 33

## WHAT HINDUISM HAS DONE FOR US

What we see today is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man in the measure that he comes near God becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines, so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilizations. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say, 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dungheaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

Among its many contributions the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me

cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. The freedom of Hinduism from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says, 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then take its contribution in men : Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

Then there is the contribution of the four *ashramas*, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India every boy had to go through the first *ashrama*. What a grand conception it was ! Today our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

Today *varnashramadharma* and Hinduism are misrepresented and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27

## 34

## NATIONHOOD THROUGH HINDUISM

The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us.

I do not wish to suggest that because we were one nation we had no differences, but it is submitted that our leading men travelled throughout India either on foot or in bullock-carts. They learned one another's languages and there was no aloofness between them. What do you think could have been the intention of those far-seeing ancestors of ours who established Setubandha (Rameshwar) in the South, Jagannath in the East and Hardwar in the North as places of pilgrimage? You will admit they were no fools. They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganga in their own homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world.

*Hind Swaraj*, chap. ix

# INDIAN CIVILIZATION

## Freedom through Restraint

I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate ; the might of the Pharaohs was broken ; Japan has become westernized ; of China nothing can be said ; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India and she remains steady. This is her beauty ; it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.

Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions.

We notice that the mind is a restless bird ; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will

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

*Hind Swaraj*, chap. xiii

## 36

## THE LOIN-CLOTH

A critic has fallen foul of my remark made before the meeting of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce at Delhi that Indian civilization must not be allowed to be wiped out by the inroads from the West. The critic has confused Indian civilization with the loin-cloth and then condemned it.

Mr. Churchill has been kind enough gratuitously to advertise my loin-cloth to the whole world. It has therefore become the fashion to laugh at it as the said critic has done. Let me then explain what it means.

In 1921 on the way to Madura I saw in our compartment crowds bedecked in foreign fineries. I entered into conversation with some of them and pleaded for *khadi*. They shook their heads as they said, "We are too poor to buy *khadi* and it is so dear." I realized the substratum of truth behind the remark. I had my vest, cap, and full *dhoti* on. When these uttered only partial truth, the millions of compulsorily naked men, save for their *langoti* four inches wide and nearly as many feet long, gave through their bare limbs the naked truth. What effective answer could I give them, if it was not to divest myself of every inch of clothing I decently could, and thus to a still greater extent, bring myself in line with the ill-clad masses? And this I did the very next morning after the Madura meeting.

Here then there is no question of loin-cloth civilization. The adoption of the loin-cloth was for me a sheer necessity. But in so far as the loin-cloth also spells simplicity, let it represent Indian civilization. It is a mingling of the cultures represented by the different faiths and influenced by the geographic and other environment in which the cultures have met. Thus Islamic culture is not the same in Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and India but it is itself influenced by the conditions of the respective

countries. Indian culture is therefore Indian. It is neither Hindu, Islamic nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all and essentially Eastern. I had in mind that culture. And every one who calls himself or herself an Indian is bound to treasure that culture, be its trustee and resist any attack upon it.

European civilization is no doubt suited for the Europeans, but it will mean ruin for India if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and assimilate whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us, as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it. The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is such an evil, and I make bold to say that the Europeans themselves will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves. It may be that my reading is wrong, but I know that for India to run after the Golden Fleece is to court certain death. Let us engrave on our hearts the motto of a Western philosopher 'Plain living and high thinking'. Today it is certain that the millions cannot have high living and we the few who profess to do the thinking for the masses run the risk, in a vain search after high living, of missing high thinking.

*Young India*, 30-4-'31

## SECTION TWO : GOD

### 37

### GOD

To me God is Truth and Love ; God is ethics and morality ; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply Is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. One may banish the word 'God' from the Congress but one has no power to banish the Thing itself. What is a solemn affirmation, if it is not the same thing as in the name of God ? And surely conscience is but a poor and laborious paraphrase of the simple combination of three letters called God. He cannot cease to be because hideous immoralities or inhuman brutalities are committed in His name. He is long suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible. He is the most exacting personage in the world and the world to come. He metes out the same measure to us as we mete out to our neighbours — men and brutes. With Him ignorance is no excuse. And withal He is ever forgiving for He always gives us the chance to repent. He is the greatest democrat the world knows, for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own

choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known, for He often dashes the cup from our lips and under cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself at our expense. Therefore it is that Hinduism calls it all His sport — *Lila*, or calls it all an illusion — *Maya*. We are *not*, He alone Is. And if we will be, we must eternally sing His praise and do His will. Let us dance to the tune of His *bansi* — flute, and all would be well.

*Young India*, 5-3-'25

## 38

## ADVAITISM AND GOD

[In answer to a friend's questions, Gandhiji wrote :]

I am an *advaitist* and yet I can support *dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has a something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *anekantavadi* or a *syadvadi*. But my *syadvada* is not the *syadvada* of the learned, it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussulman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his.

Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *anekantavada* is the result of the twin doctrine of *satya* and *ahimsa*.

I talk of God exactly as I believe Him to be. I believe Him to be creative as well as non-creative. This too is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of the manyness of reality. From the platform of the Jains I prove the non-creative aspect of God, and from that of Ramanuja the creative aspect. As a matter of fact we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the *Vedas* describe *Brahman* as 'not this', 'not this'. But if He or It is not this, He or It *is*. If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not, we are nowhere. And that is why all of us with one voice call one God differently as *Paramatma*, *Ishwara*, Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Allah, *Khuda*, Dada Hormuzda, Jehova, God, and an infinite variety of names. He is one and yet many ; He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say, 'God is, was and ever shall be.'

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one

of us disdain to bow to His will, He says : 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept my sway.' Of such a God let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.

*Young India*, 21-1-'26

## 39

## GOD IS

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

But it is impossible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why, and how he rules. And yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my tour last year in Mysore I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some god ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler I who am infinitely lesser than God, than they than their ruler, need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God the King of kings. Nevertheless I do feel as the poor villagers felt about Mysore that there is orderliness in the Universe, there is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law ; for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings, and thanks to the marvellous researches of Sir J. C. Bose, it can now be proved that even matter is life. That Law then which governs all life is God. Law and the Law-giver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver, because I know so little about It or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance

of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation ; whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

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

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

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

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

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

where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to Truth and Love.

I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be coequal with God. I am therefore humble enough to recognize evil as such. And I call God long suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil. He is the author of it and yet untouched by it.

I know too that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to become, the nearer I feel to be to God. How much more should I be, when my faith is not a mere apology as it is today but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as the snows on their peaks? Meanwhile I invite the correspondent to pray with Newman who sang from experience:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on:
The night is dark and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

*Young India*, 11-10-'28

## 40

## TRUTH AND GOD

[Replying to a question asked of him at a meeting in Switzerland on his way back from the Round Table Conference in London, Gandhiji said:]

You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe — and I think it is the truth — that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has

many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And so when I came to study Islam I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found too that love in the sense of *ahimsa* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and even atheists had not demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God — from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth I should say that Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I know that he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say "Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man, and so a God-fearing man." I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties

in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp.

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

'What then is Truth?'

A difficult question, (said Gandhiji), but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask, different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Every one should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through

several vows, as for instance, the vow of truth, the vow of *brahmacharya* (purity) — for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else —, the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for every one to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world, all that I can, in true humility, present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero. Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.

*Young India*, 31-12-'31

## 41

## MEANING OF GOD

A correspondent writes :

> "I am reading your *Gitabodh* these days and trying to understand it. I am puzzled by what Lord Krishna says in the 10th discourse : ' In dicer's play I am the conquering double eight. Nothing either good or evil, can take place in this world without my will.' Does God then permit evil ? If so, how can He punish the evil-doer ? Has God created the world for this purpose ? Is it impossible then for mankind to live in peace ? "

To say that God permits evil in this world may not be pleasing to the ear. But if He is held responsible for the good, it follows that He has to be responsible for the evil too. Did not God permit Ravana to exhibit unparalleled strength ? Perhaps the root cause of the perplexity arises from a lack of the real understanding of what God is. God is not a person. He transcends description. He

is the Law-maker, the Law and the Executor. No human being can well arrogate these powers to himself. If he did, he would be looked upon as an unadulterated dictator. They become only Him whom we worship as God. This is the reality, a clear understanding of which will answer the question raised by the correspondent.

The question whether it is impossible for mankind ever to be at peace with one another does not arise from the verse quoted. The world will live in peace only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so. No one can deny the possibility nor say when that will come to pass. Such questions are idle waste of time. To a good man, the whole world is good. By following this golden rule the correspondent can live in peace under all circumstances, believing that what is possible for him to be is also possible for others. To believe the contrary connotes pride and arrogance.

*Harijan*, 24-2-'46

## 42

## FINDING GOD

The *bhajan* of the evening said that man's highest endeavour lay in trying to find God, said Gandhiji. He could not be found in temples or idols or places of worship built by man's hands, nor could He be found by abstinences. God could be found only through love, not earthly, but divine. That love was lived by Mirabai who saw God in everything. He was all in all to her.

*Harijan*, 23-11-'47

## SECTION THREE : TEMPLE-WORSHIP

### 43

### APPROACH TEMPLES IN FAITH

[During the course of his speech delivered at Trivendrum in connection with Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation Celebrations, Gandhiji said :]

In the days of my youth I went to many temples with the faith and devotion with which my parents had fired me. But of late years I have not been visiting temples, and ever since I have been engaged in anti-untouchability work, I have refrained from going to temples unless they were open to every one called untouchable. So what I saw this morning at the temple dawned upon me with the same newness with which it must have dawned upon so many *avarna* Hindus who must have gone to the temple after the Proclamation. In imagination my mind travelled back to the pre-historic centuries when temples began to convey the message of God in stone and metal. I saw quite clearly that the priest who was interpreting each figure in his own choice Hindi did not want to tell me that each of those figures was God. But without giving me that particular interpretation he made me realize that these temples were so many bridges between the Unseen, Invisible and Indefinable God and ourselves who are infinitesimal drops in the Infinite Ocean. We the human family are not all philosophers. We are of the earth very earthy, and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other we want something which we can touch, something which we can see, something before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a stone building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others,

and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings. Then I ask you to approach these temples not as if they represented a body of superstitions. If you will approach these temples with faith in them, you will know that each time you visit them you will come away from them purified, and with your faith more and more in the living God.

*Harijan*, 23-1-'37

## 44

## TEMPLES NECESSARY

*Q.* Why do you want temple entry for Harijans? Are not temples the lowest thing in Hinduism?

*A.* I do not think so for one moment. Temples are to Hindus what churches are to Christians. In my opinion, we are all idolaters; that in Hinduism we have images of stone or metal inside temples makes to me no difference. Thousands of Hindus who visit temples in simple faith derive precisely the same spiritual benefit that Christians visiting churches in simple faith do. Deprive a Hindu of his temple, and you deprive him of the thing he generally prizes most in life. That superstition and even evil have grown round many Hindu temples is but too true. That, however, is an argument for temple reform, not for lowering their value for Harijans or any Hindu. It is my certain conviction that temples are an integral part of Hinduism.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33

45

## IDOL-WORSHIP

I am both an idolater and an iconoclast in what I conceive to be the true senses of the terms. I value the spirit behind idol-worship. It plays a most important part in the uplift of the human race. And I would like to possess the ability to defend with my life the thousands of holy temples which sanctify this land of ours.

I am an iconoclast in the sense that I break down the subtle form of idolatry in the shape of fanaticism that refuses to see any virtue in any other form of worshipping the Deity save one's own. This form of idolatry is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of a stone or a golden image.

*Young India*, 28-8-'24

46

## TEMPLE-WORSHIP

I do not regard the existence of a temple as a sin or superstition. Some form of common worship, and a common place of worship appear to be a human necessity. Whether the temples should contain images or not is a matter of temperament and taste. I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious, and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship as good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous, and therefore superstitious. And the worship of the image of Child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.

*Young India*, 5-11-'25

## GOD AND GODS

"If Hinduism become monotheistic," suggested the Father, "Christianity and Hinduism can serve India in co-operation."

"I would love to see the co-operation happen," said Gandhiji, "but it cannot if the present day Christian Missions persist in holding up Hinduism to ridicule and saying that no one can go to Heaven unless he renounces and denounces Hinduism. But I can conceive a good Christian, silently working away, and shedding the sweet aroma of his life on Hindu communities, like the rose which does not need any speech to spread its fragrance but spreads it because it must. Even so a truly spiritual life. Then surely there would be peace on earth and good will among men. But not so long as there is militant or 'muscular' Christianity. This is not to be found in the Bible, but you find it in Germany and other countries."

"But if Indians begin to believe in one God and give up idolatry, don't you think the whole difficulty will be solved?"

"Will the Christians be satisfied with it? Are they all united?"

"Of course all the Christian sects are not united," said the Catholic Father.

"Then you are asking only a theoretical question. And may I ask you, is there any amalgamation between Islam and Christianity, though both are said to believe in one God? If these two have not amalgamated, there is less hope of amalgamation of Christians and Hindus along the lines you suggest. I have my own solution, but in the first instance, I dispute the description that Hindus believe in many Gods and are idolaters. They do say there are many gods, but they also declare unmistakably that there is ONE GOD, the GOD of gods. It is, therefore, not proper to suggest that Hindus believe in many Gods.

They certainly believe in many worlds. Just as there is a world inhabited by men, and another by beasts, so also is there one inhabited by superior beings called gods whom we do not see but who nevertheless exist. The whole mischief is created by the English rendering of the word देव or देवता (*deva* or *devata*) for which you have not found a better term than 'God'. But God is *Ishwara, Devadhideva*, God of gods. So you see it is the word 'god' used to describe different divine beings that has given rise to such confusion. I believe that I am a thorough Hindu but I never believe in many gods. Never even in my childhood did I hold that belief, and no one ever taught me to do so.

**Idolatry**

"As for idol-worship, you cannot do without it in some form or other. Why does a Mussulman give his life for defending a mosque which he calls a house of God? And why does a Christian go to a church, and when he is required to take an oath he swears by the Bible? Not that I see any objection to it. And what is it if not idolatry to give untold riches for building mosques and tombs? And what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints — quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass?"

"But," objected the Catholic Father, "I keep my mother's photo and kiss it in veneration of her. But I do not worship it, nor do I worship saints. When I worship God, I acknowledge Him as Creator and greater than any human being."

"Even so, it is not the stone we worship, but it is God we worship in images of stone or metal however rude they may be."

"But villagers worship stones as God."

"No, I tell you they do not worship anything that is less than God. When you kneel before Virgin Mary and ask for her intercession, what do you do? You ask to establish contact with God through her. Even so a Hindu seeks to establish contact with God through a stone

image. I can understand your asking for the Virgin's intercession. Why are Mussulmans filled with awe and exultation when they enter a mosque? Why, is not the whole universe a mosque? And what about the magnificent canopy of heaven that spreads over you? Is it any less than a mosque? But I understand and sympathize with the Muslims. It is their way of approach to God. The Hindus have their own way of approach to the same Eternal Being. Our media of approach are different, but that does not make Him different."

"But the Catholics believe that God revealed to them the true way."

"But why do you say that the will of God is expressed only in one book called the Bible and not in others? Why do you circumscribe the power of God?"

"But Jesus proved that he had received the word of God through miracles."

"But that is Mahomed's claim too. If you accept Christian testimony you must accept Muslim testimony and Hindu testimony too."

"But Mahomed said he could not do miracles."

"No. He did not want to prove the existence of God by miracles. But he claimed to receive messages from God."

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37

## 48

## "A TEMPLE TO GANDHIJI"

Under this strange heading I read a newspaper cutting sent by a correspondent to the effect that a temple has been erected where my image is being worshipped. This I consider to be a gross form of idolatry. The person who erected the temple has wasted his resources by misusing them, the villagers who are drawn there are misled and I am being insulted in that the whole of my life has been caricatured in that temple. The meaning that I have given to worship is distorted. Worship of the *charkha* lies in plying it for a living or as a sacrifice for ushering in Swaraj. The *Gita* is worshipped not by parrot-like recitation but by following its teaching. Recitation is good and proper only as an aid to action according to its teaching. A man is worshipped only to the extent that he is followed, not in his weaknesses but in his strength. Hinduism is degraded when it is brought down to the level of the worship of the image of a living being. No man can be said to be good before his death. After death too he is good for the person who believes him to have possessed certain qualities attributed to him. As a matter of fact God alone knows a man's heart. Hence the safest thing is not to worship any person, living or dead, but to worship perfection which resides only in God known as Truth. The question then certainly arises as to whether possession of photographs is not a form of worship carrying no merit with it. I have said as much before now in my writings. Nevertheless I have tolerated the practice as it has become an innocent though a costly fashion. But this toleration will become ludicrous and harmful if I were to give directly or indirectly the slightest encouragement to the practice above described. It would be a welcome relief if the owner of the temple removed the image and converted the building into a spinning centre where the poor will card and spin for

wages, and others for sacrifice, and all will be wearers of khaddar. This will be the teaching of the *Gita* in action and true worship of it and me.

*Harijan*, 24-3-'46

## 49

## TREE-WORSHIP

A correspondent writes :

"It is a common enough sight in this country to see men and women offering worship to stocks and stones and trees, but I was surprised to find, that even educated women belonging to the families of enthusiastic social workers were not above this practice. Some of these sisters and friends defend the practice by saying, that since it is founded on pure reverence for the divine in nature and no false beliefs, it cannot be classed as superstition, and they cite the names of Satyavan and Savitri whose memory, they say, they commemorate in that way. The argument does not convince me. May I request you to throw some light on the matter ?"

I like this question. It raises the old, old question of image-worship. I am both a supporter and opponent of image-worship. When image-worship degenerates into idolatry and becomes encrusted with false beliefs and doctrines, it becomes a necessity to combat it as a gross social evil. On the other hand, image-worship in the sense of investing one's ideal with a concrete shape is inherent in man's nature, and even valuable as an aid to devotion. Thus we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see any harm in all this. On the contrary, endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise. Even so far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree-worship, I find in it a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were

with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God. Without vegetation our planet would not be able to support life even for a moment. In such a country especially, therefore, in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree-worship assumes a profound economic significance.

I therefore see no necessity for leading a crusade against tree-worship. It is true, that the poor simple-minded women who offer worship to trees have no reasoned understanding of the implications of their act. Possibly they would not be able to give any explanation as to why they perform it. They act in the purity and utter simplicity of their faith. Such faith is not a thing to be despised ; it is a great and powerful force that we should treasure.

Far different, however, is the case of vows and prayers which votaries offer before trees. The offering of vows and prayers for selfish ends, whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines, is a thing not to be encouraged. Making of selfish requests or offering of vows is not related to image-worship as effect and cause. A personal selfish prayer is bad whether made before an image or an unseen God.

Let no one, however, from this understand me to mean that I advocate tree-worship in general. I do not defend tree-worship because I consider it to be a necessary aid to devotion, but only because I recognize that God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe, and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence.

*Young India*, 26-9-'29

## 50

# TEMPLE-WORSHIP

An iconoclast schoolmaster asks the following three questions :

> "1. Is it necessary for a Hindu, following the life of Shri Ramachandra, also to go and see his image in the temple ? Is *darshan* better than action ?
>
> "2. If we bow our head or join our hands before a living person, he replies in return, but the image does not. Then what is the use of doing it ? What is the use of writing letters to one who never replies ?
>
> "3. The person, whose image a Hindu adores, might have committed some wrongs in his lifetime. Will not the adorer be harmed by copying those wrongs, which he is likely to copy if he worships his image ?"

Questions like these have been asked and answered often enough before now. But the temple entry question has revived them and they torment honest doubters like the correspondent, as if they had never been raised and answered before. I must do the best I can, though I doubt if doubters like the correspondent will be satisfied.

It is not necessary for any Hindu to go to a temple to worship (the image of) Ramachandra. But it is for him who cannot contemplate his Rama without looking at his image in a temple. It may be unfortunate, but it is true, that his Rama resides in that temple as nowhere else. I would not disturb that simple faith.

The sub-question in the first question is badly put. There is no question of comparison between the *darshan* and the deed. If there was, I would unhesitatingly say that the deed is better. But the function of *darshan* is to enable the deed to be done, to steady and purify the soul. Thus, *darshan* is not a substitute for right doing. It is an encouragement for it.

In asking the second question, the schoolmaster has missed the whole point of temple-worship. When I bow to a living person and he returns it, it is a mutual exchange

of courtesy and there is no particular merit about it. It may be a sign of good breeding. Temple-going is for the purification of the soul. The worshipper draws the best out of himself. In greeting a living being, he may draw the best out of the person greeted, if the greeting is selfless. A living being is more or less fallible like oneself. But in the temple, one worships the living God, perfect beyond imagination. Letters written to living persons often end in heart-breaking, even when they are answered, and there is no guarantee of their being always answered. Letters to God who, according to the devotee's imagination, resides in temples, require neither pen nor ink nor paper, not even speech. Mere mute worship constitutes the letter which brings its own unfailing answer. The whole function is a beautiful exercise of faith. Here there is no waste of effort, no heart-breaking, no danger of being misunderstood. The writer must try to understand the simple philosophy lying behind the worship in temples or mosques or churches. He will understand my meaning better if he will realize that I make no distinction between these different abodes of God. They are what faith has made them. They are an answer to man's craving somehow to reach the UNSEEN.

The third question shows, perhaps, that the correspondent has not taken the trouble of understanding the Hindu theory of incarnations. For the faithful Hindu, his Incarnation is without blemish. Krishna of the Hindu devotee is a perfect being. He is unconcerned with the harsh judgment of the critics. Millions of devotees of Krishna and Rama have had their lives transformed through their contemplation of God by these names. How this phenomenon happens I do not know. It is a mystery. I have not attempted to prove it. Though my reason and heart long ago realized the highest attribute and name of God as Truth, I recognize truth by the name of Rama. In the darkest hour of my trial, that one name has saved me and is still saving me. It may be the association of childhood, it may be the fascination that Tulsidas has wrought on me. But the potent fact is there, and as I

write these lines, my memory revives the scenes of my childhood when I used daily to visit the Ramji *Mandir* adjacent to my ancestral home. My Rama then resided there. He saved me from many fears and sins. It was no superstition for me. The custodian of the idol may have been a bad man. I know nothing against him. Misdeeds might have gone on in the temple. Again I know nothing of them. Therefore, they would not affect me. What was and is true of me is true of millions of Hindus. I want my Harijan brother, if he wishes, to share this temple-worship with the millions of his co-religionists, the so-called caste men. It is the latter's duty to throw open their temples to their Harijan brethren. Temple-worship supplies the felt spiritual want of the human race. It admits of reform. But it will live as long as man lives.

*Harijan*, 18-3-'33

## 51

## ARE TEMPLES NECESSARY ?

An American correspondent writes :

"My reading of the history of religion is that every great religious advance has been away from organized and formal religion. The great religious truths which the prophets of religion have apprehended and proclaimed have always been lost when their disciples have tried to localize them in priestcraft and temples. Truth is too universal to be confined and made sectarian. Therefore I consider temples, mosques and churches to be a prostitution of religion. In every nation we have witnessed the degradation of truth and righteousness in the temples ; and, in my opinion, in the very conception of organized religion this is certain to follow as a natural consequence. When religion is made a monopoly by the priesthood and temples become vested interests, the great mass of mankind becomes isolated from truth until some new prophets arise who break the bonds of orthodoxy and release the spirits of men from dependence upon the priests and temples.

"Buddha and Jesus, Chaitanya and Kabir realized and taught Truth, which is universal in its character and helpful to all men everywhere, but the isms which bear their names

are exclusive and divisive and, therefore, harmful to those who accept the priestly interpretations of these teachings. Religion loses its human character and deserves its reputation of being called an 'opiate'.

"Therefore, I can see no advantage in gaining permission for the Harijans to enter the temples. I know that justice demands that they shall have the liberty even to do wrong. But if they are to learn the lessons of self-respect which will enable them to take an equal place with caste people in the development of the future of our civilization, I think they must learn an independence of all priests and temples. They must attain a self-realization, which is dependent upon inner rather than outer forces. In the process there is likely to be some extravagance of defiance and bitterness before they actually find themselves. When you said in Europe that you formerly considered that 'God is Truth', but now you realized that 'Truth is God', you struck a responsive chord in the hearts of all of us, whatever our traditions may have been. But when you become a defender of the faith of temple Hinduism, even though it be a purified type, we feel that you have lost your universal appeal, an appeal which I consider you to have made not as a Hindu, but as one of that large body of spiritual-minded Hindus who do not look to the temples for the spiritual sustenance of their lives. I do not believe that such men are outside the best traditions of Hinduism but are rather in the line of the creators of the religious spirit which has made the spirituality of India her greatest contribution to humanity.

"Nor do I believe that this higher Hinduism is too high for the Harijans, whose spiritual intuitions have never been dulled by our modern type of education. Buddha, Chaitanya and Kabir, all made a large appeal to this class, and the teachings of Jesus were most appreciated, not by the high and mighty, but by publicans and fishermen, who were outside the pale of respectable society. If you were to challenge the untouchables to keep as before outside the temples and refuse to accept an inferior status in society, by defying the caste leaders, and encourage them to develop their inner resources, I think you would have the support of just as large a community of Hindus as you have in your present programme."

This considered opinion representing a large body of people throughout the world deserves respectful consideration. Such an opinion, however, does not appear before me for the first time. I have had the privilege and opportunity of discussing this subject with many friends in the light it is presented. I can appreciate much of the

argument, but I venture to think that it is inconclusive, because it has omitted material facts. Some priests are bad. Temples, churches and mosques very often show corruption, more often deterioration. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to prove that all priests are bad or have been bad and that all churches, temples and mosques are hot-beds of corruption and superstition. Nor does the argument take note of this fundamental fact that no Faith has done without a habitation ; and I go further that in the very nature of things it cannot exist, so long as man remains as he is constituted. His very body has been rightly called the temple of the Holy Ghost, though innumerable such temples belie fact and are hot-beds of corruption used for dissoluteness. And I presume that it will be accepted as a conclusive answer to a sweeping suggestion that all bodies should be destroyed for the corruption of many, if it can be shown, as it can be, that there are some bodies which are proper temples of the Holy Ghost. The cause for the corruption of many bodies will have to be sought elsewhere. Temples of stone and mortar are nothing else than a natural extension of these human temples and though they were in their conception undoubtedly habitations of God like human temples, they have been subject to the same law of decay as the latter.

I know of no religion or sect that has done or is doing without its House of God, variously described as a temple, a mosque, a church, a synagogue or an *agiari.* Nor is it certain that any of the great reformers including Jesus destroyed or discarded temples altogether. All of them sought to banish corruption from temples as well as from society. Some of them, if not all, appear to have preached from temples. I have ceased to visit temples for years, but I do not regard myself on that account as a better person than before. My mother never missed going to the temple when she was in a fit state to go there. Probably her faith was far greater than mine, though I do not visit temples. There are millions whose faith is sustained through these temples, churches and mosques. They are not all blind followers of a superstition, nor are

they fanatics. Superstition and fanaticism are not their monopoly. These vices have their root in our hearts and minds.

My advocacy of temple-entry I hold to be perfectly consistent with the declaration which I often made in Europe that Truth is God. It is that belief which makes it possible, at the risk of losing friendships, popularity and prestige, to advocate temple-entry for Harijans. The Truth that I know, or I feel I know, demands that advocacy from me. Hinduism loses its right to make a universal appeal if it closes its temples to the Harijans.

That temples and temple-worship are in need of radical reform must be admitted. But all reform without temple-entry will be to tamper with the disease. I am aware that the American friend's objection is not based on the corruption or impurity of the temples. His objection is much more radical. He does not believe in them at all. I have endeavoured to show that his position is untenable in the light of facts which can be verified from everyday experience. To reject the necessity of temples is to reject the necessity of God, religion, and earthly existence.

*Harijan*, 11-3-'33

## 52

## A MODEL TEMPLE

It was impossible that side by side with the movement for temple-entry by Harijans there should not be a demand for temple reform. The modern Hindu temple is a hot-bed of superstition, as are more or less other 'Houses of God'. I published the other day a letter from an American friend, gently pleading with me not to have anything to do with the temple-entry movement.* A friend who is a devout follower of Islam has carried on a long correspondence with me, trying to do with me in

* See preceding chapter.

his own way what the American friend did in his own. There is undoubtedly a great deal of substance in what they have said. But I have not been able to subscribe to their corollary that the remedy for the abuse lies in the destruction of temples.

But by far the largest number of persons believe in the reform, not destruction, of temples. I mentioned only the other day an ambitious scheme set on foot for a model temple in Rajkot. Several correspondents have taken me to task for advocating temple-entry for Harijans without emphasizing the necessity of temple reform. There is no doubt that temple reform is necessary. But here, again, there is need for caution. Some of them think that it is possible to replace all the existing temples with new ones. I do not share that view. All temples will never be alike. They will always vary, as they have done in the past, with the varying human needs. What a reformer should be concerned with is a radical change more in the inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whited sepulchre. A mausoleum, however beautiful, is a tomb and not a mosque, and a bare plot of consecrated ground may be a real Temple of God.

Therefore the first desideratum is the priest. My ideal priest must be a man of God. He must be a true servant of the people. He should have the qualifications of a guide, friend and philosopher to those among whom he is officiating. He must be a whole-timer with the least possible needs and personal ties. He should be versed in the *shastras*. His whole concern will be to look after the welfare of his people. I have not drawn a fanciful picture. It is almost true to life. It is based on the recollections of my childhood. The priest I am recalling was looked up to by the prince and the people. They flocked round him for advice and guidance in the time of their need.

If the sceptic says such a priest is hard to find nowadays, he would be partly right. But I would ask the reformer to wait for building the temple of his ideal till he finds his priest.

Meanwhile let him cultivate in himself the virtues he will have in the priest of his imagination. Let him expect these from the priests of existing temples. In other words, by his gentle and correct conduct, let him infect his immediate surroundings with the need of the times and let him have faith that his thought, surcharged with his own correct conduct, will act more powerfully than the mightiest dynamo. Let him not be impatient to see the result in a day. A thought may take years of conduct to evolve the requisite power. What are years or generations in the life of a great reform?

Now, perhaps, the reader will follow my view of a model temple. I can present him with no architect's plan and specification. Time is not ripe for it. But that does not baffle me and it need not baffle the reformer. He can choose the site for his future temple. It must be as extensive as he can get it. It need not be in the heart of a village or a city. It should be easily accessible to the Harijans and the other poor and yet it must not be in insanitary surroundings. If possible, it should be higher than its surroundings. In any case, I would aim at making the plinth of the actual temple as high as possible. And on this site I should select my plot for daily worship. Round this will come into being a school, a dispensary, a library, secular and religious. The school may serve also as a meeting or debating hall. I should have a *dharmashala* or guest-house connected with the temple. Each one of these will be a separate institution and yet subordinate to the temple and may be built simultaneously or one after another as circumstances and funds may permit. The buildings may or may not be substantial. If labour is voluntary, as it well may be, with mud and straw a beginning may be made at once. But the temple is not yet built. The foundation was laid when the site was procured, the plot for the temple was selected

and the first prayer was offered. For the *Bhagawata* says, 'Wherever people meet and utter His name from their hearts, there God dwells, there is His temple.' The building, the deity, the consecration, is the province of the priest. When he is found, he will set about his task, but the temple began its existence from the time of the first prayer. And if it was the prayer of true men and women, its continuous progress was assured.

So much for the temple of the future. The reader who cares to study the Rajkot scheme will find that the outward form of my model temple materially corresponds to that in the scheme. Indeed, there is nothing new in my idea or the Rajkot scheme. The village temples of yore had almost all the adjuncts suggested by me.

But we must also deal with the existing temples. They can become real Houses of God today, if the worshippers will insist on the priests conforming to the ideal presented by me.

*Harijan*, 29-4-'33

## 53

## TEMPLE REFORM

Here I cannot do better than quote from a long letter from a Mussulman friend who believes in Hinduism as much as he believes in Islam :

> "You will soon be going to Travancore to celebrate the entry of Harijans into the temples thrown open to them. It is indeed a step forward. But what we need most is the restoration of the temples to their pristine purity and sanctity. The ideal lying behind temples is most holy. In the temples of ancient India resided great *rishis* who imparted divine wisdom. Today the priest sits there barring the way to those who need instruction and help to solve the problem of life. Alas ! the priests of all religions are more in need of instruction than the poor masses."

These words are true. Never was the need for temple reform more urgent than today. Fortunately in Travancore the vast majority of temples belong to the

State and are under special management. They are kept clean and often undergo improvement and addition. They are never empty. They supply a felt want. If the priests had better education and would be custodians of the spirituality of the people, the temples would be houses both of worship and spiritual instruction as they were before.

*Harijan*, 23-1-'37

## 54

## TEMPLE-WORSHIP

"I have not been a temple-goer," said Gandhiji to him, "but now that this liberty has come to me all of a sudden, I feel fascinated, and the divine stillness that surrounded the prayer meeting under the *ashwattha* tree in the temple-yard now stimulates me to find new ways and means for attracting people to temples. My temple-going is not an idle thing. It is a definitely sacred thing that has come to me in my life at an opportune moment."

"Would you say anything about the mode of worship?"

"I will not criticize it. The new thing has come upon me with a newness which humbles me. I refuse to look at it with the eye of a critic. One thing certainly I have noticed, viz. the want of intelligence and devoutness on the part of priests."

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37

---

[9] From a conversation with a temple trustee.

## 55

# PRIESTS AND UPANAYANAM

A Harijan *sevak* writes :

"You have stated in the *Harijan* No. 4 that reformers should learn to dispense with the outward form. Will you not dispense with the priest altogether ? The latter works only for money. Many priests to my knowledge do not even pronounce the *mantras* accurately ; still fewer know their meaning. They trade on the gullibility of the public. What merit can such officiating carry with it ? Such humbug is more rampant at places of pilgrimage than elsewhere. I am myself a *brahmana*. The *upanayanam* ceremony was performed upon me when I was 13 years old. At the end of the ceremony, the priest said I was a *shudra* up to the time that I was without the sacred thread, but that, having put on the sacred thread, I became a *brahmana*. I had to repeat this formula before my parents when I went to make obeisance to them. Here the idea given to me was that after having taken the sacred thread I had risen to a higher status. How do you reconcile this with your claim that there is no high-and-low status in Hinduism ?"

I have considerably abridged what is a long letter from this correspondent. What he says about the ignorance of many priests and the show that they make of learning is unfortunately only too true. The remedy for it is a general levelling up of the character of the people and the spread of the right stamp of education, including a workable knowledge of Sanskrit. I believe in the great power which Vivekananda used to ascribe to Sanskrit. We are unnecessarily frightened by the difficulty of learning Sanskrit. For a persevering student it is no more difficult than any of the other languages. I do not mean that we can easily gain a knowledge of Sanskrit that would enable us to understand the intricacies of ancient texts, but I do suggest that to gain a workable knowledge of Sanskrit, to acquire the correct pronunciation, so as to be able to know whether the priest is performing his task correctly or whether a *pandit* is misleading us, is not a difficult task, certainly not one-tenth as difficult as it is to acquire an equivalent knowledge of English. And

then it must not be forgotten that such a knowledge of Sanskrit gives one a master key to the knowledge of the majority of Indian languages, not excluding the Southern group.

But I must not stray away from my subject. Till this happy day arrives, we have to do the best we can with the tools at our disposal. And if we cannot get a trustworthy *brahmana* priest to officiate, the *Bhagawata* and the later saints have supplied us with an incredibly simple solution. At every ceremony, whether it is in connection with marriage, birth or death or any other religious function, the uttering of the Sacred Name from the heart is enough to ensure the presence and benediction of God at the ceremony. The fact is that God is there all the time, only we do not realize it. The recitation of the Sacred Name, hallowed by the practice of an unbroken line of Saints, wakes us from our ignorance and works as infallibly as an electric spark, and immediately makes the presence of God felt in our midst. I say this only for those who have faith. Those who have none should dismiss it from their minds altogether. For them, even the presence of the orthodox priest is a mere mechanical act, an ignorant obedience to custom. They derive no advantage, no merit from the act. An honest orthodox priest has a place in the Hindu family. He is fast losing it by his own folly. He may be safe if he sheds his laziness, his ignorance, and, what is worse, his dishonesty. The present movement is indirectly intended to effect that reform. Seeing that the movement is one of internal purification, we shall never achieve it, unless there is a general sweeping up of all that is evil. Who can make the real beginning, if not he who calls himself a *brahmana* ?

As for the *upanayanam* ceremony, though I have discarded it myself, it has, there is no doubt, a deep meaning. The sacred thread is a sign of new birth, a regeneration. Before the adoption of the thread, there is but one birth, that is the physical. The adoption of the thread is a sign of the second birth, that is the spiritual. It is

a sign of initiation of a new life of dedication to God. It is, therefore, a higher life in the sense of greater responsibility in relation to oneself, but it gives one no greater status in relation to his neighbour. Indeed, at the time of initiation, there ought to be a definite realization that from that date one becomes a servant of the poorest and the lowliest. And to my mind, the thought that all are *shudras* till the ceremony of initiation and dedication is a beautiful and ennobling thought. Unfortunately, these rites which were intended to emphasize human duties have been abused for the sake of exploitation and usurpation.

*Harijan*, 22-4-'33

## 56

## TRAINING SCHOOLS IN TEMPLES

The Thakoresaheb of Lathi is reported to have said in his address that as soon as he gets suitable priests and teachers he would like to open more temples and cover them with schools for all classes of children. I would suggest to him the same remedy I put before the authorities in Travancore. A small training school should be opened in Lathi for giving practical training in conducting services and schools in temples. There is no reason why both the offices should not be combined in one person. A school master has as much need to be pure in heart as a priest and vice versa. Nor need a priest be ignorant of the art of teaching. At the present moment the most deplorable thing is that the temple priests are as a rule ignorant men often devoid of character. The training course need not be long — not beyond six months. If the salary offered is attractive, the school should draw well-read youths of character beyond reproach.

*Harijan*, 29-5-'37

## 57

# ANIMAL SACRIFICES

The Secretary of the Youth League, Dharwad, writes:

"Though animal sacrifices in general were not in vogue in the district for a long time, the *brahmanas* took to it once in ten years or so under the guise of performing *yajnas* for propitiating the rain god. But since last year, the craze is becoming stronger. While there was a *yajna* last year in which only 4 innocent goats were sacrificed, this year they have gone up for a wholesale slaughter of nearly 24 goats. They performed what is called *Vajapeya yajna* as an act of great merit which was not performed for the last hundred years and sacrificed about 24 innocent animals. The fact seems to be that it had fallen into disrepute as an act of barbarism. And this cruel institution has been revived after hundreds of years by the so-called *brahmanas* of Dharwad, among whom are many who had taken prominent part during the non-co-operation days and who still parade their *khadi* dress and hawk it in your name. What was still more pitiful was that women and girls were made accustomed to sights of cruelty. The method of killing the goats was outrageous as it consisted in tightening their mouths and then pounding by fists till they were dead. This method of killing or torture which would be condemned as barbarous even by butchers is justified on the ground that the *shastras* require that bleating should not be heard!"

If what is stated in the letter is at all true it betrays a shocking state of things and an undoubted reversion to barbarism. It is a matter for deep sorrow and humiliation that there should be educated men enough in the country who believe that there are gods who can be appeased or conciliated by the sacrifice of animals, and if the manner of killing the innocent goats is correctly described by the Secretary of the Youth League of Dharwad, it is an inhuman act done in the name of religion. I should hope that there is exaggeration in the statement made by the Secretary. There is a similar letter from Bengal also in which the writer asks me to condemn the animal sacrifices that go on daily in the name of religion in that great province. If my condemnation of these sacrifices can save a single animal from slaughter it is there with all the force

I can command. But there seems to be just now the fashion to encourage such sacrifices and to justify them. A correspondent from Madras sends me papers containing accounts of such slaughter done by learned *brahmanas* in the Madras Presidency. I wish that Youth Leagues all over the country will rise in revolt against these sacrifices and cultivate public opinion so as to make them impossible. I have heard it argued that since the stopping of animal sacrifices people have lost the warlike spirit. There were animal sacrifices enough in Europe before Christianity. Europe does not seem to have lost its warlike spirit because of the stopping of degrading and debasing animal sacrifices. I am no worshipper of warlike spirit, but I know that warlike spirit is not to be cultivated by the slaughter in a terribly cruel manner, of helpless, innocent, unresisting dumb fellow creatures.

*Young India*, 21-11-'29

## 58

## TEMPLE PRIESTS AND ANIMAL SACRIFICE

The following is from a letter from Sibsagar, Assam :

"On the day we visited the temple there were crowds of worshippers clustering at the entrance — mostly tea-garden labourers and Miris. Scenes such as are to be met with in a bazar were going on in front of the temple. One devotee was offering a pair of pigeons, and the priests were demanding 2 annas as the price of the offering. Another devotee, who had a goat to offer, was being asked to pay 4 annas more, the rupee he had laid before the priests being insufficient to make his goat-offering acceptable to the deity. These simple, innocent holders of the Hindu faith had evidently fallen among thieves. They were squatting or kneeling outside the temple-door, their envious glances following those walking freely into it, their wonder-lit, sad eyes peering into the dark gloom inside in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of the image.

"I went away with a heavy heart from this scene of irreligion and deception. My mind revolted, and I made up my mind to give wide publicity to this crime as against God and humanity and leave no stone unturned to have the temple thrown open to Harijans."

When I was touring in Assam last year in the Harijan cause, I had understood that the tea-garden coolies were regarded as untouchables and that the Miris were also almost so regarded. Be that as it may, it is a serious question whether, where the priests exploit the superstition of the people and where innocent birds and animals are offered as sacrifice, it is right to agitate for the entry of Harijans to such a temple.

No doubt temple reform is a separate question. Entry of Harijans into temples cannot await reform. But I would draw the line at temples where animal sacrifices are offered. I would not touch these temples till animal sacrifices are stopped. Inward corruption in temples cannot affect the devotee who knows nothing about it. But with animal sacrifice every worshipper is intimately connected. For, he or she has to offer such sacrifice. And a Harijan admitted for the first time in such a temple would naturally be expected to bring some poor bird or animal as sacrifice. He may or may not be a meat-eater, but who will make himself responsible for the sin of teaching an unsophisticated Harijan that God expects His worshippers to propitiate Him with the blood of innocent dumb animals who have never sinned, who have no sense of sin? I wish that the leaders of Assam will purge the Dergaon temple of the stain of bloody sacrifice. Let no one retort that the beginning should be made, not with an unknown temple like that of Dergaon, but it should begin with the temple of Kali. Most reforms have had their origin in small beginnings. The citadel of Kali will fall by its own weight, if the minor temples wash themselves clean of innocent blood.

*Harijan*, 5-4-'35

59

## ANIMAL SACRIFICE

A correspondent writes :

"The Harijans of Mysore regularly offer animal sacrifice in the temples there. In the Krishnarajanagar Taluka, pilgrimages to chosen areas take place annually for this purpose. One such took place from January 3rd to 25th this year, in which three or four goats were sacrificed daily.

"Another takes place every Saturday in the month of Shravan. In this not only Harijans but priests, the self-styled custodians of the Hindu religion, also take part. The participants indulge in drink too on these occasions.

"The most painful thing is that beef is eaten. It is a matter of utmost shame, too, for every Hindu that the killing of the animals takes place right in front of the temple — the house of God."

If what the writer says is true, it is indeed, in one sense, a matter of shame for every Hindu. But no sin can be wiped out by mere condemnation by word of mouth. Nor does the guilt of the whole body absolve the individual from his duty. Therefore, in my opinion, the responsibility of working for the reform rests, in the first instance, on the correspondent, secondly on the people of the place where the animal sacrifices are held, then on the Ruler of the State and his people, and after them in turn on Karnatak, Madras Presidency and the whole of India. Only if all, in their respective places, take up the work systematically — and systematic work can only succeed if run on the basis of non-violence — can the evil that has been handed down through the ages be wiped out of existence.

Therefore, it is the correspondent who must make the beginning. I have written enough previously as to how the work of reform should be undertaken.

*Harijan*, 23-6-'46

## 60

## AS OTHERS SEE US

Here is a letter which has been lying on my file for some time :

"Your attitude towards religious conversion and particularly the hope you entertain for the Depressed Classes within the fold of Hinduism, overlooks the prevalent practices of Hinduism as it exists in India today. It is impossible not to acknowledge the beauty and the sublimity of Hinduism expounded by Vivekananda and Sir S. Radhakrishnan. But is that the Hinduism that is taught to the masses of India or practised by the heads of Hindu religion ? What are the millions of the poor Indian people —starving millions as you call them—living in seven *lakhs* of villages seeking ? Their first need is proper food, shelter and clothing so that they may be raised above the level of animals. Are the Depressed Classes anxious for temple entry ?

"Any religion is judged by its fruits. Here is a contrast. Take the case of the Christian religion, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. The funds that are collected from the rich and poor are carefully accounted for and repaid in the form of medical and educational service. Religious worship is open to all alike. The number of schools, colleges, dispensaries, hospitals and orphanages admirably served by their religious institutions bear eloquent testimony to the quality of faith that is in them. It is not the theology and philosophy which they possess but the self-sacrificing service which they render in abundant measure towards all that is a contrast to the service rendered by the temples and *muths*. What are the uses of the wealth of temples and *muths* ? Are not these weapons of superstition and oppression ? The heads of these *muths* live princely lives with vast endowments, and when they care to stir out there is a huge retinue of palanquins, cars, elephants, camels and a host of disciples, descending on unhappy villages and towns, like locusts, for further collections. Their disciples who are priests are spread like spies throughout the districts, to collect money from the followers of various faiths, Madhvas, Lingayats, Shaivaits and so forth, under pain of excommunication or ostracism. I am informed that there are regular lawyers to collect dues and serve the interests of these religious heads, *swamis* and *gurus*. This state of affairs is an oppression worse than Popery in its worst days. Not merely the accumulated wealth and the annual collections, which in all these *muths* must amount to several crores, are

never properly accounted for, but this gigantic system of ghastly exploitation continues to be supported by the most intellectual leaders of the people as if Hindu society will break up by questioning it. This is practical Hinduism. Why should there be any surprise that the Depressed Classes alone should revolt against a system which denies equal rights to worship the Deity but keeps them also in perpetual social excommunication ? Why is it that no one ventures to question the priestly oppression, this draining away annually the wealth of the people without any service whatever ? While the millions are hungry, ignorant and illiterate, even a small proportion of the wealth of the *muths* and the temples is not turned to relieve human misery. Hinduism is so spiritual that it will not do it. Are the Hindu gods so ravenous that they require such an annual collection with complete indifference to those who give it ? I doubt !

" While the produce of the land is steadily drained away as land revenue on the one side by the State and religious extortion on the other, is it any wonder millions are underfed and poverty-stricken ? Is it any relief to them to be told to work harder and more systematically in their leisure months after the harvest ? What is taken in money and kind should return to them in the form of service they most need. If the poor unfortunate masses of India are not supported by the wealth of the Hindu *muths* to shake off their illiteracy, ignorance, hookworm, malaria, leprosy, diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera and plague — physical ills which they cannot at present get over without relief — they will never be capable of bringing greater intelligence to bear upon the resources of Nature. It is exploitation by religious heads that has crushed the people, and the moneylender and the State combined have finished the process. It is not more work and harder work, and the variety of cottage industries that these half-dead, half-living masses require, but more vocational schools and dispensaries, maternity and child-welfare centres and better food. They have paid for it in full and have been cheated out of the services they ought to get from religion and the State. When will the children of the villages have the light of morning in their eyes ? In the process of evolution, to think that all that is dross in Hinduism will drop off like surface excrescence is as much as hoping that all that is vile in the present Government will also do the same by just wishing for it. If the State is not moved very easily by your Herculean endeavours, Hinduism requires a far more drastic purge as it has been established some thousands of years longer than this alien Government. I would rather love the State that renders services of all sorts for the revenue collected than this religion which does nothing.

"Bishops and priests of the Christian religion, in spite of the fierce criticism levelled against them in this land and every other country, render humanitarian service unequalled by any other class of human beings who follow any other faith or no faith, and are approachable to all people. Christian missions, far from being wealthy, have become poorer and lost all their western supporters who today acknowledge the greatness of Hinduism and challenge them to go forth and serve their fellowmen with their own money. If the humanitarian service of the Christian heads are acknowledged, it is far better to give to them some of the resources that are now misused so that with their honest and excellent organization they may expand their humane service which the masses sorely need. What has Hinduism done for the villages, the most depressing, morbid places under the sun? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Government officials require *batta* to visit these places, and no wonder. One would welcome cheerfully the mechanical civilization of the West, but even that under Hindu hands becomes as vile as Bombay *chawls*. Any one with open unprejudiced eyes can see it. You have no objection to accept missionary humanitarian service, and yet will not consider what form of service Hinduism renders with its accumulated wealth in temples and *muths*. When these religious institutions serve the poor regardless of caste, creed or community, instead of exploiting their abysmal superstition, Hinduism will really begin to live."

It is good to see ourselves as others see us. Try as we may, we are never able to know ourselves fully as we are, especially the evil side of us. This we can do only if we are not angry with our critics but will take in good part whatever they might have to say. Anyway I propose to examine the foregoing criticism as dispassionately as I can. The grave limitations of Hinduism as it is seen today in practice must be admitted. Many *muths* and their administration are undoubtedly a disgrace to Hinduism. The money that is poured into some of them does not return to the worshippers in the form of service. This state of things must be ended or mended.

Humanitarian work done by Christian missions must also be admitted.

But these admissions of mine must not be interpreted to mean endorsement of the deductions of the writer. Economic and educational relief is required by most poor

Indians in common with the Harijans. But the latter suffer from special disabilities. It is not a question of what disabilities they resent. It is the duty of the so-called superior Hindus to break the chains that bind the Harijans even though they may hug them. The admission by the writer of the sublimity of Hinduism as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan should have led to his discovery of its percolation down to the masses. I make bold to say that in spite of the crudeness which one sees among the villagers, class considered, in all that is good in human nature they compare favourably with any villagers in the world. This testimony is borne out by the majority of travellers who from the time of Huen Tsang down to the present times have recorded their impressions. The innate culture that the villages of India show, the art which one sees in the homes of the poor, the restraint with which the villagers conduct themselves, are surely due to the religion that has bound them together from time immemorial.

In his zeal to belittle Hinduism, the writer ignores the broad fact that Hinduism has produced a race of reformers who have successfully combated prejudices, superstitions and abuses. Without any drum-beating, Hinduism has devised a system of relief of the poor which has been the envy of many foreign admirers. I myself feel that it leaves much to be desired. It has its evil side. But from the philanthropic standpoint it has wholly justified itself. It is not the Indian habit to advertise charities through printed reports and the like. But he who runs may see the free kitchens and free medical relief given along indigenous lines.

The writer belittles village work. It betrays gross ignorance. If the *muths* and the revenue offices were extinguished and free schools were opened, the people would not be cured of their inertia. *Muths* must be reformed, the revenue system must be overhauled, free primary schools must be established in every village. But starvation will not disappear because people pay no revenue and *muths* are destroyed and schools spring up in every village. The

greatest education in the villages consists in the villagers being taught or induced to work methodically and profitably all the year round whether it be on the land or at industries connected with the villages.

Lastly, my correspondent seems to resent acceptance by us of humanitarian services by missionaries. Will he have an agitation led against these missionary institutions? Why should they have non-Christian aid? They are established with the view of weaning Indians from their ancestral faith even as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan. Let them isolate the institutions from the double purpose. It will be time enough then to expect non-Christian aid. The critic must be aware of the fact that even as it is some of these institutions do get non-Christian aid. My point is that there should be no complaint if they do not receive such aid so long as they have an aim which is repugnant to the non-Christian sentiment.

*Harijan*, 6-3-'37

# SECTION FOUR : FASTS AND PRAYER

61

## FASTING AND PRAYER

[While appealing to people to fast and pray during the National Week, Gandhiji wrote :]

This is a hoary institution. A genuine fast cleanses body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. A sincere prayer can work wonders. It is an intense longing of the soul for its even greater purity. Purity thus gained when it is utilized for a noble purpose becomes a prayer. The mundane use of the *Gayatri*, its repetition for healing the sick, illustrates the meaning we have given to prayer. When the same *Gayatri japa* is performed with a humble and concentrated mind in an intelligent manner in times of national difficulties and calamities, it becomes a most potent instrument for warding off danger. There can be no greater mistake than to suppose that the recitation of the *Gayatri*, the *namaz* or the Christian prayer are superstitions fit to be practised by the ignorant and the credulous. Fasting and prayer therefore are a most powerful process of purification and that which purifies necessarily enables us the better to do our duty and to attain our goal. If therefore fasting and prayer seem at times not to answer, it is not because there is nothing in them but because the right spirit is not behind them.

A man who fasts and gambles away the whole of the day as do so many on *Janmashtami* day, naturally, not only obtains no result from the fast in the shape of greater purity but such a dissolute fast leaves him on the contrary degraded. A fast to be true must be accompanied by a

readiness to receive pure thoughts and determination to resist all Satan's temptations. Similarly a prayer to be true has to be intelligible and definite. One has to identify oneself with it. Counting beads with the name of Allah on one's lips whilst the mind wanders in all directions is worse than useless. We therefore hope that the coming week of dedication to national fasting and prayer will become a universal reality and not merely a formal observation.

*Young India*, 24-3-'20

## 62

## FASTS

[With reference to a letter from C. F. Andrews expressing moral repulsion amongst Christians in England against 'fasting unto death', Gandhiji wrote :]

Although the *Sanatanists* swear at me for the fast, and Hindu co-workers may deplore it, they know that fasting is an integral part of even the present day Hinduism. They cannot long affect to be horrified at it. Hindu religious literature is replete with instances of fasting, and thousands of Hindus fast even today on the slightest pretext. It is the one thing that does the least harm. There is no doubt that, like everything that is good, fasts are abused. That is inevitable. One cannot forbear to do good, because sometimes evil is done under its cover.

My real difficulty is with my Christian Protestant friends, of whom I have so many and whose friendship I value beyond measure. Let me confess to them that, though from my very first contact with them I have known their dislike for fasts, I have never been able to understand it.

Mortification of the flesh has been held all the world over as a condition of spiritual progress. There is no prayer without fasting, taking fasting in its widest sense. A complete fast is a complete and literal denial of self. It is the truest prayer. " Take my life and let it be always,

only, all for Thee" is not, should not be, a mere lip or figurative expression. It has to be a wreckless and joyous giving without the least reservation. Abstention from food and even water is but the mere beginning, the least part of the surrender.

Whilst I was putting together my thoughts for this article, a pamphlet written by Christians came into my hands wherein was a chapter on the necessity of example rather than precept. In this occurs a quotation from the 3rd Chapter of Jonah. The prophet had foretold that Nineveh, the great city, was to be destroyed on the fortieth day of his entering it.

> "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sack-cloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and the nobles saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sack-cloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?' And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Thus this was a 'fast unto death'. But every fast unto death is not suicide. This fast of the king and the people of Nineveh was a great and humble prayer to God for deliverance. It was to be either deliverance or death. Even so was my fast, if I may compare it to the Biblical fast. This chapter from the book of Jonah reads like an incident in the *Ramayana*.

It is only proper that friends should know my fundamental position. I have a profound belief in the method of the fast, both private and public. It may come again any day without any warning even to me. If it comes, I shall welcome it as a great privilege and a joy.

*Harijan*, 15-4-'33

## 63

# HIS WILL BE DONE

[With reference to friends who tried to dissuade him from his fast, Gandhiji wrote :]

My claim to hear the voice of God is no new claim. Unfortunately there is no way that I know of proving the claim except through results. God will not be God if He allowed Himself to be an object of proof by His creatures. But He does give His willing slave the power to pass through the fieriest of ordeals. I have been a willing slave to this most exacting Master for more than half a century. His voice has been increasingly audible as years have rolled by. He has never forsaken me even in my darkest hour. He has saved me often against myself and left me not a vestige of independence. The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy.

I, therefore, feel confident that in the end these kindest of friends will recognize the correctness of the action I am about to take. And this whether I die or live. God's ways are inscrutable. And who knows that He may not want my death during the fast to be more fruitful of beneficial results than my life ? Surely it is highly depressing to think that a man's ability to serve dies with the dissolution of the body which for the moment he is inhabiting. Who doubts that the spirits of Ramakrishna and Dayananda, Vivekananda and Ramatirth are today working in our midst ? It may be that they are more potent today than when they were in our midst in the flesh. It is not true that ' the good that men do is oft buried with them.' We burn the evil that men do with their mortal remains. We treasure the memory of the good they do, and distance only magnifies it.

And why should exaggerated importance be given to the services of one single person, however good or able he may be ? The cause of the Harijans is God's cause. He will throw up men and women as they may be required to do His will.

*Harijan*, 6-5-'33

64

## FAST FOR PURIFICATION

A tempest has been raging within me for some days. I have been struggling against it. On the eve of the 'Harijan Day' the voice became insistent, and said "Why don't you do it?" I resisted it. But the resistance was vain. And the resolution was made to go on an unconditional and irrevocable fast for twenty-one days, commencing from Monday noon the 8th May and ending on Monday noon the 29th May.

As I look back upon the immediate past, many are the causes too sacred to mention that must have precipitated the fast. But they are all connected with the great Harijan cause. The fast is against nobody in particular and against everybody who wants to participate in the joy of it, without for the time being having to fast himself or herself. But it is particularly against myself. It is a heart-prayer for the purification of self and associates, for greater vigilance and watchfulness. But nobody who appreciates the step about to be taken is to join me. Any such fast will be a torture of themselves and of me.

Let this fast, however, be a preparation for many such fasts to be taken by purer and more deserving persons than myself. During all these months since September last, I have been studying the correspondence and literature and holding prolonged discussions with men and women, learned and ignorant, Harijans and non-Harijans. The evil is far greater than even I had thought it to be. It will not be eradicated by money, external organization and even political power for Harijans, though all these three are necessary. But to be effective, they must follow or at least accompany inward wealth, inward organization, and inward power, in other words, self-purification. This can only come by fasting and prayer. We may not approach the God of Truth in the arrogance of strength, but in the meekness of the weak and the helpless.

But the mere fast of the body is nothing without the will behind it. It must be a genuine confession of the inner fast, an irrepressible longing to express truth and nothing but truth. Therefore, those only are privileged to fast for the cause of truth who have worked for it and who have love in them even for opponents, who are free from animal passion and who have abjured earthly possessions and ambition. No one, therefore, may undertake, without previous preparation and discipline, the fast I have foreshadowed.

Let there be no misunderstanding about the impending fast. I have no desire to die. I want to live for the cause, though I hope I am equally prepared to die for it. But I need for me and my fellow-workers greater purity, greater application and dedication. I want more workers of unassailable purity. Shocking cases of impurity have come under my notice. I would like my fast to be an urgent appeal to such people to leave the cause alone.

I know that many of my *Sanatanist* friends and others think that the movement is a deep political game. How I wish this fast would convince them that it is purely religious.

*Harijan*, 6-5-'33

## 65

## ALL ABOUT THE FAST

The first question that has puzzled many is about the Voice of God. What was it? What did I hear? Was there any person I saw? If not, how was the Voice conveyed to me? These are pertinent questions.

For me the Voice of God, of Conscience, of Truth or the Inner Voice or 'the still small Voice' mean one and the same thing. I saw no form. I have never tried, for I have always believed God to be without form. But what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the

time I heard the Voice. The hearing of the Voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm. The determination was made accordingly, the date and the hour of the fast were fixed. Joy came over me. This was between 11 and 12 midnight. I felt refreshed and began to write the note about it which the reader must have seen.

Could I give any further evidence that it was truly the Voice that I heard and that it was not an echo of my own heated imagination ? I have no further evidence to convince the sceptic. He is free to say that it was all self-delusion or hallucination. It may well have been so. I can offer no proof to the contrary. But I can say this — that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true Voice of God.

But some think that God Himself is a creation of our own imagination. If that view holds good, then nothing is real, everything is of our own imagination. Even so, whilst my imagination dominates me, I can only act under its spell. Realest things are only relatively so. For me the Voice was more real than my own existence. It has never failed me, and for that matter, any one else.

And every one who wills can hear the Voice. It is within every one. But like everything else, it requires previous and definite preparation.

The second question that has puzzled many is whether a fast in which an army of doctors watch and guide the fasting person, as they undoubtedly and with extraordinary care and attention watched and guided me, when he is coddled in various other ways as I was, could be described as a fast in answer to the call of the Inner Voice. Put thus, the objection seems valid. It would undoubtedly have been more in keeping with the high claim made for the fast, if it had been unattended with all the extraordinary, external aids that it was my good fortune or misfortune to receive.

But I do not repent of having gratefully accepted the generous help that kind friends extended to me. I was battling against death. I accepted all the help that came to me as God-sent, when it did not in any way affect my vow.

As I think over the past, I am not sorry for having taken the fast. Though I suffered bodily pain and discomfort, there was indescribable peace within. I have enjoyed peace during all my fasts but never so much as in this. Perhaps, the reason was that there was nothing to look forward to. In the previous fasts there was some tangible expectation. In this there was nothing tangible to expect. There was undoubtedly faith that it must lead to purification of self and others and that workers would know that true Harijan service was impossible without inward purity. This, however, is a result that could not be measured or known in a tangible manner. I had, therefore, withdrawn within myself.

The fast was an uninterrupted twenty-one days' prayer whose effect I can feel even now. I know now more fully than ever that there is no prayer without fasting, be the latter ever so little. And this fasting relates not merely to the palate, but all the senses and organs. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or a preparation for it. It is a yearning of the soul to merge in the divine essence. My last fast was intended to be such a preparation. How far I have succeeded, how far I am in tune with the Infinite, I do not know. But I do know that the fast has made the passion for such a state intenser than ever.

Looking back upon the fast, I feel it to have been as necessary as I felt it was when I entered upon it. It had resulted in some revelations of impurities among workers of which I had no knowledge whatsoever, and but for the fast I would never have gained that knowledge.

All the letters that have come under my notice go to show that it has led to greater purification amongst the workers. The fast was meant not for the purification of known workers only who had been found wanting, but for all the workers, known and unknown, in the Harijan cause. Nothing probably could have brought home to the workers so well as this fast the fact that the movement is purely religious in the highest sense of the term, to be handled in a religious spirit by workers of character above reproach.

The work of the removal of untouchability is not merely a social or economic reform whose extent can be measured by so much social amenities or economic relief provided in so much time. Its goal is to touch the hearts of the millions of Hindus who honestly believe in the present day untouchability as a God-made institution, as old as the human race itself. This, it will be admitted, is a task infinitely higher than mere social and economic reform. Its accomplishment undoubtedly includes all these and much more. For, it means nothing short of a complete revolution in the Hindu thought and the disappearance of the horrible and terrible doctrine of inborn inequality and high-and-lowness, which has poisoned Hinduism and is slowly undermining its very existence. Such a change can only be brought about by an appeal to the highest in man. And I am more than ever convinced that that appeal can be made effective only by self-purification, i.e. by fasting conceived as the deepest prayer coming from a lacerated heart.

I believe that the invisible effect of such fasting is far greater and far more extensive than the visible effect. The conviction has, therefore, gone deeper in me that my fast is but the beginning of a chain of true voluntary fasts by men and women who have qualified themselves by previous preparation for them and who believe in prayer as the most effective method of reaching the heart of things. How that chain can be established I do not know as yet. But I am striving after it. If it can be established, I know that it will touch, as nothing else will, the hearts

of Hindus, both the opponents of reform and the Harijans. For the Harijans have also to play their part in the movement no less than the reformers and the opponents. And I am glad to be able to inform the reader that the Harijans have not been untouched by the fast.

*Harijan*, 8-7-'33

## 66

## WAS IT COERCIVE ?

In the current number of the *Modern Review*, amongst the notes which are always worth reading, there are some paragraphs on my most recent fast. The writer of these notes quotes the following from my letter to the authorities dated 14th August last :

> "That (viz. fasting) is the only way in which I can fulfil my vow and also relieve myself somewhat of the strain mentioned above ("The strain of deprivation of this work is becoming unbearable"). I do not want the suspension of nourishment in any way to act as pressure on the Government. Life ceases to interest me if I may not do Harijan service without let or hindrance.....I do indeed want permission (to do Harijan work), but only if the Government believe that justice demands it and not because I propose to deprive myself of food if it is not granted. That deprivation is intended purely for my consolation."

and then remarks

> "As these words are the words of a truth-seeker and truth-speaker of Mahatma Gandhi's eminence, one should believe that he did not intend to put pressure on the Government by his fast. Nevertheless one cannot help being curious as to whether it never crossed Mahatmaji's mind that the fast would actually put pressure, if only indirect pressure, on the Government.
>
> "When Mahatmaji fasted before the Poona Pact relating to depressed class seats in the Legislatures, etc., that fast did put pressure on Indians, as Rabindranath Tagore has openly confessed, though such pressure might not have been intended by the Mahatma.

"The pressure felt by Indians is direct. There are, we believe, some Englishmen and other foreigners on whom Mahatmaji's fast puts direct pressure. But it may be said without injustice to British politicians and bureaucrats that the pressure which they feel, if and when they do so, is of the indirect sort .....But we.....are constrained to observe that, though fasts undertaken solely for one's own purification and consolation are the exclusive concern of the individual fasting, fasts undertaken directly or indirectly to bring about political or social changes *have* a coercive effect, even though coercion may not be intended. Like other coercion, this sort of unintended coercion is also undesirable and produces some harmful consequences. Under such coercion, some people may pretend to be convinced or think they have been convinced when they are not really convinced, and they may be hurried into agreeing to or doing things which they would not have agreed to or done if there had not been any pressure on their minds. Therefore, such coercion does not lead to universally sincere conduct and lasting reform."

I propose to deal with this criticism because it affects a matter that is by no means closed. Fasting has been for years past an integral part of my life and I may have to resume it whether outside or inside prison walls. I cannot, therefore, write too often on the science of fasting, if I may use the sacred word 'science' in connection with my fasts. It is necessary to write on this matter as well for those who would thoughtlessly imitate me, as for those who criticize me sometimes without being in possession of full data.

With much of what the writer says I can readily agree. I do admit that my fast of September did unfortunately coerce some people into action which they would not have endorsed without my fast. I do admit also that my last fast coerced the Government into releasing me. I admit, too, that such coercion can and does sometimes lead to insincere conduct. This is about the extent of my agreement.

These admissions do not cut at the very root of fasts. They only show that there is great need for caution and that special qualifications are necessary for those who would resort to fasting as a method of reform or securing justice.

In any examination of moral conduct the intention is the chief ingredient. Being concerned with the morality of my action, I asserted that the intention behind the fast was not to exert coercion or pressure upon the Government. I wanted the Government to take me at my word and let me die in peace, if they could not see the justice of granting me the facilities I desired. The production of my letter would have absolved them from the charge of heartlessness, if I had died in prison. I did, indeed, know that my fast was likely, in spite of the declaration of my intention to the contrary, to influence the Government to some extent. But one may not be deflected from the right course for fear of possible but unintended consequences. If one were to be so deterred, it could be shown that hardly any great action could be undertaken.

To make my meaning clearer, let me take the September fast. It is a better illustration for examination, seeing that it was unconnected with the Government. It *was intended* to influence both the caste and the Harijan Hindus. But there the intention was most decidedly not to induce, irrespective of merits, the decision I desired, but it *was* to stir the Hindus to action on my submission. That intention was completely fulfilled and to that extent the fast was not therefore, from the practical standpoint, open to objection. That it went beyond the intention and coerced some people into giving a decision against their conviction was unfortunate. But such conduct is of daily occurrence in the ordinary affairs of life. People do not always act independently of others or of surrounding circumstances. But I am able to say that the vast majority of people concerned with the Pact would not accept it without a full and free discussion, and that what they accepted was accepted because they considered it to be on the whole just and fair. They did not sacrifice principle for saving my life.

And now whilst I am on the Pact I may observe parenthetically that, if any injustice was done, it is not yet beyond repair. If injustice can be proved to the

satisfaction of the parties concerned, it is not too late to redress it. And I need hardly give the assurance that I should regard it my sacred duty to exert myself to the best of my ability in helping to secure redress of any real injustice.

To revert to the issue under examination, I may say that I began my experiments in fasting on any large scale as an instrument of reform in 1913. I had fasted often enough before, but not in the manner of 1913. My definite opinion is that the general result of my numerous fasts was without doubt beneficial. They invariably quickened the conscience of the people interested in, and sought to be influenced by those fasts. I am not aware of any injustice having been perpetrated through those fasts. If Bengal proves injustice, it will be an exception. In no case was there any idea of exercising coercion on any one. Indeed, I think that the word coercion would be a misnomer for the influence that was exerted by the fasts under criticism. Coercion means some harmful force used *against* a person who is expected to do something desired by the user of the force. In the fasts in question, the force used was against myself. Surely, force of self-suffering cannot be put in the same category as the force of suffering caused to the party sought to be influenced. If I fast in order to awaken the conscience of an erring friend whose error is beyond question, I am not coercing him in the ordinary sense of the word.

The writer of the notes says that there can be fasts that have no ' coercive effect ', but if the expression ' coercive effect ' can be lawfully used for my fasts, then in that sense, all fasts can be proved to have that effect to a greater or less extent. The fact is that all spiritual fasts always influence those who come within the zone of their influence. That is why spiritual fasting is described as *tapas*. And all *tapas* invariably exerts purifying influence on those in whose behalf it is undertaken.

Of course, it is not to be denied that fasts can be really coercive. Such are fasts to attain a selfish object. A fast undertaken to wring money from a person or for fulfilling

some such personal end would amount to the exercise of coercion or undue influence. I would unhesitatingly advocate resistance of such undue influence. I have myself successfully resisted it in the fasts that have been undertaken or threatened against me. And if it is argued that the dividing line between a selfish and an unselfish end is often very thin, I would urge that a person who regards the end of a fast to be selfish or otherwise base should resolutely refuse to yield to it, even though the refusal may result in the death of the fasting person. If people will cultivate the habit of disregarding fasts which in their opinion are taken for unworthy ends, such fasts will be robbed of the taint of coercion and undue influence. Like all human institutions, fasting can be both legitimately and illegitimately used. But as a great weapon in the armoury of Satyagraha, it cannot be given up because of its possible abuse. Satyagraha has been designed as an effective substitute for violence. This use is in its infancy and, therefore, not yet perfected. But as the author of modern Satyagraha I cannot give up any of its manifold uses without forfeiting my claim to handle it in the spirit of a humble seeker.

*Harijan*, 9-9-'33

## 67

## A PURIFICATORY CHAIN OF FASTS

On discovering impurities amongst Harijan servants, I saw that it was no use merely writing about impurities. I was searching for a way out of the difficulty. The reader should believe me when I tell him that the fast was the last thing in the world that I was thinking of, but as I have described in these pages, it came to me all of a sudden and gave me great relief. I know that it did much good. But, how far could the fast of a single mortal go? Hence it was that I developed the idea of a chain of such purificatory fasts. The idea has by no means been dropped. It comes to me again and again. But it does not admit of a mechanical organization. Several co-workers

are ready to inaugurate or take part in the chain after it is inaugurated, but I have not yet found the way to begin it. The proper way will have to come to me or to the co-workers before the chain can be begun. Meanwhile I can only reiterate my conviction that untouchability will not be removed root and branch except through the service of men and women who take it up for its own sake and in a religious spirit. Unless we have a fair number of such servants throughout the length and breadth of India, we will never succeed in changing the hearts of millions of human beings.....The vicarious penance of the comparatively pure is needed to bring about a change in the hearts of both *Savarnas* and Harijans.

*Harijan*, 24-11-'33

## 68

## PRAYER

'Often, Sir, do you ask us to worship God, to pray but never tell us how to and to whom to do so. Will you kindly enlighten me?' asks a reader of the *Navajivan*. Worshipping God is singing the praise of God. Prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness. God has a thousand names, or rather, He is Nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him Rama, some Krishna, others call Him Rahim, and yet others call Him God. All worship the same spirit, but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller, All-Powerful and Omniscient knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And the prayers of those whose tongues are nectared but whose hearts are full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray

to God, must cleanse his heart. Rama was not only on the lips of Hanuman, He was enthroned in his heart. He gave Hanuman exhaustless strength. In His strength he lifted the mountain and crossed the ocean. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wideawake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased he is spiritually healthy, physically pure, he rolls in spiritual riches.

'But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent?' one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught; but who can teach the language of the heart? Only the *bhakta*—the true devotee—knows it and can teach it. The *Gita* has defined the *bhakta* in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a *bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have therefore suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellowmen. That is why Narasinha Mehta who 'saw and knew' sang 'He is a true *Vaishnava* who knows to melt at other's woe.' Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen, and therefore his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woebegone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a *bhakta* therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the 'suppressed' classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor, and trots out lame excuses, does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor inviting them to do likewise serves God as no one else does. 'He who gives Me even a trifle such as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of *bhakti* is my servant,' says the Lord in the *Bhagawadgita*. And

he hath his footstool where live 'the humble, the lowliest and the lost.' Spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly pray ; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.

*Young India*, 24-9-'25

## 69

## WHAT IS PRAYER ?

A medical graduate asks :

> "What is the best form of prayer ? How much time should be spent at it ? In my opinion, to do justice is the best form of prayer, and one who is sincere about doing justice to all does not need to do any more praying. Some people spend a long time over *sandhya* and 95 per cent of them do not understand the meaning of what they say. In my opinion prayer should be said in one's mother-tongue. It alone can affect the soul best. I should say that a sincere prayer for one minute is enough. It should suffice to promise God not to sin."

Prayer means asking God for something in a reverent attitude. But the word is used also to denote any devotional act. Worship is a better term to use for what the correspondent has in mind. But definition apart, what is it that millions of Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians and Jews and others do everyday during the time set apart for the adoration of the Maker ? It seems to me that it is a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His blessing. It is in this case the attitude that matters, not words uttered or muttered. And often the association of words that have been handed down from ancient times has an effect which in their rendering into one's mother-tongue they will lose altogether. Thus the *Gayatri* translated and recited in, say, Gujarati, will not have the same effect as the original. The utterance of the word Rama will instantaneously affect millions of Hindus,

when the word God, although they may understand the meaning, will leave them untouched. Words after all acquire a power by long usage and sacredness associated with their use. There is much therefore to be said for the retention of the old Sanskrit formulae for the most prevalent *mantras* or verses. That the meaning of them should be properly understood goes without saying.

There can be no fixed rule laid down as to the time these devotional acts should take. It depends upon individual temperament. These are precious moments in one's daily life. The exercises are intended to sober and humble us and enable us to realize that nothing happens without His will and that we are but 'clay in the hands of the Potter'. These are moments when one reviews one's immediate past, confesses one's weakness, asks for forgiveness and strength to be and do better. One minute may be enough for some, twenty-four hours may be too little for others. For those who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. Their life is one continuous prayer or act of worship. For those others who act only to sin, to indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much. If they had patience and faith and the will to be pure, they would pray till they feel the definite purifying presence of God within them. For us ordinary mortals there must be a middle path between these two extremes. We are not so exalted as to be able to say that all our acts are a dedication, nor perhaps are we so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence have all religions set apart times for general devotion. Unfortunately these have nowadays become merely mechanical and formal, where they are not hypocritical. What is necessary therefore is the correct attitude to accompany these devotions.

For definite personal prayer in the sense of asking God for some thing, it should certainly be in one's own tongue. Nothing can be grander than to ask God to make us act justly towards everything that lives.

*Young India*, 10-6-'26

## 70

# THE ETERNAL DUEL

A friend writes :

"In the article entitled 'The Tangle of *Ahimsa*' appearing in *Young India* of October 11th, you have stated most forcefully that cowardice and *ahimsa* are incompatible. There is not an ambiguous syllable in your statement. But may I request that you tell us how cowardice can be exorcised from a man's character ? I notice that all characters are but the sum total of habits formed. How are we to undo our old habits and build the new ones of courage, intelligence, and action ? I am convinced that habits can be destroyed and better and nobler habits can be formed giving birth to a new character in a person. It seems to me that you know prayers, discipline, and studies by which man can attain a second birth. Won't you kindly tell us about them ? Do give us your knowledge and advice in one of the numbers of *Young India*. Please help us by giving an account of the method of praying and working by which a man can recreate himself."

The question refers to the eternal duel that is so graphically described in the *Mahabharata* under the cloak of history and that is everyday going on in millions of breasts. Man's destined purpose is to conquer old habits, to overcome the evil in him and to restore good to its rightful place. If religion does not teach us how to achieve this conquest, it teaches us nothing. But there is no royal road to success in this the truest enterprise in life. Cowardice is perhaps the greatest vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For it comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes. But I am sorry that I have not the ability to give 'the knowledge and the advice' that the correspondent would have me to give on how to dispel cowardice and other vices. But I can give my own testimony and say that a heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits. Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within.

Christianity and Islam describe the same process as a duel between God and Satan, not outside but within; Zorostrianism as a duel between Ahurmazd and Ahriman; Hinduism as a duel between forces of good and forces of evil. We have to make our choice whether we should ally ourselves with the forces of evil or with the forces of good. And to pray to God is nothing but that sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of the prince of darkness. But a heartfelt prayer is not a recitation with the lips. It is a yearning from within which expresses itself in every word, every act, nay, every thought of man. When an evil thought successfully assails him, he may know that he has offered but a lip prayer and similarly with regard to an evil word escaping his lips or an evil act done by him. Real prayer is an absolute shield and protection against this trinity of evils. Success does not always attend the very first effort at such real living prayer. We have to strive against ourselves, we have to believe in spite of ourselves, because months are as our years. We have therefore to cultivate illimitable patience if we will realize the efficacy of prayer. There will be darkness, disappointment and even worse; but we must have courage enough to battle against all these and not succumb to cowardice. There is no such thing as retreat for a man of prayer.

What I am relating is not a fairy tale. I have not drawn an imaginary picture. I have summed up the testimony of men who have by prayer conquered every difficulty in their upward progress, and I have added my own humble testimony that the more I live the more I realize how much I owe to faith and prayer which is one and the same thing for me. And I am quoting an experience not limited to a few hours, or days or weeks, but extending over an unbroken period of nearly 40 years. I have had my share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, counsels of despair, counsels of caution, subtlest assaults of pride, but I am able to say that my faith, — and I know that it is still little enough, by no means as great as I

want it to be, — has ultimately conquered every one of these difficulties up to now. If we have faith in us, if we have a prayerful heart, we may not tempt God, may not make terms with Him. We must reduce ourselves to a cipher. Barodada sent me a precious Sanskrit verse not long before his death. It means impliedly that a man of devotion reduces himself to zero. Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness can we conquer the evil in us. God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation.

*Young India*, 20-12-'28

## 71

## A DISCOURSE ON PRAYER

[The following is a summary of the discourse given in Gujarati by Gandhiji at Sabarmati to a conference of hostel boys from Gujarat :]

I am glad that you all want me to speak to you on the meaning of and the necessity for prayer. I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and therefore prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it

and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of truth. This joy however is not at all worldly, but springs out of communion with the divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

Now I come to the next thing, viz. that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or in its wider sense is inward communion. In either case the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He therefore who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. Any amount of repetition of *Ramanama* is futile if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heartfelt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience and that of my companions when I say that he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together but not a single moment without prayer. For without prayer there is no inward peace.

If that is the case, some one will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it, but we erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the divine. We therefore fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Suradas's hymn. It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the divine. According to our standards he was a saint, but according to his own

he was a proclaimed sinner. Spiritually he was miles ahead of us, but he felt the separation from the divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair.

I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and therethrough I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wideawake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world ; the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart therefore from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts. We inmates of the Ashram came here in search of truth and for insistence on truth professed to believe in the efficacy of prayer, but had never up to now made it a matter of vital concern. We did not bestow on it the care that we did on other matters. I awoke from my slumbers one day and realized that I had been woefully negligent of my duty in the matter. I have therefore suggested measures of stern discipline and far from being any the worse, I hope we are the better for it. For it is so obvious. Take care of the vital thing and other things will take care of themselves. Rectify one angle of a square, and the other angles will be automatically right.

Begin therefore your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares. Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the divine. Only, whatever be the form, let not the spirit wander while the words of prayer run on out of your mouth.

If what I have said has gone home to you, you will not be at peace until you have compelled your hostel superintendents to interest themselves in your prayer and to make it obligatory. Restraint self-imposed is no compulsion. A man, who chooses the path of freedom from restraint, i. e. self-indulgence, will be a bondslave of passions, whilst the man who binds himself to rules and restraints releases himself. All things in the universe, including the sun and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single moment. You, whose mission in life is service of your fellowmen, will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraint that separates us from the brute. If we will be men walking with our heads erect and not walking on all fours, let us understand and put ourselves under voluntary discipline and restraint.

*Young India*, 23-1-'30

## 72

## WHY PRAY ?

Why pray at all ? Does not God, if there be One, know what has happened ? Does He stand in need of prayer to enable Him to do His duty ?

No, God needs no reminder. He is within every one. Nothing happens without His permission. Our prayer is a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer,— without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search.

*Harijan*, 8-6-'35

73

# A DIALOGUE WITH A BUDDHIST

## The Meaning of Prayer

Dr. Fabri, a follower of Buddha, called on Gandhiji at Abbottabad, and enquired :

"Could the Divine Mind be changed by prayer? Could one find it out by prayer?"

"It is a difficult thing to explain fully what I do when I pray," said Gandhiji. "But I must try to answer your question. The Divine Mind is unchangeable, but that Divinity is in every one and everything — animate and inanimate. The meaning of prayer is that I want to evoke that Divinity within me. Now I may have that intellectual conviction, but not a living touch. And so when I pray for Swaraj or Independence for India I pray or wish for adequate power to gain that Swaraj or to make the largest contribution I can towards winning it, and I maintain that I can get that power in answer to prayer."

"Then you are not justified in calling it prayer. To pray means to beg or demand," said Dr. Fabri.

"Yes, indeed. You may say I beg it of myself, of my Higher self, the Real self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification. You may, therefore, describe it as a continual longing to lose oneself in the Divinity which comprises all."

## Be Humble

"What about the people who cannot pray?" asked Dr. Fabri.

"Be humble," said Gandhiji, "I would say to them, and do not limit even the real Buddha by your own conception of Buddha. He could not have ruled the lives of millions of men that he did and does today if he was not humble enough to pray. There is something infinitely higher than intellect that rules us and even the sceptics. Their scepticism and philosophy does not help them in critical periods of their lives. They need something better,

something outside them that can sustain them. And so if someone puts a conundrum before me, I say to him, 'You are not going to know the meaning of God or prayer unless you reduce yourself to a cipher. You must be humble enough to see that in spite of your greatness and gigantic intellect you are but a speck in the universe. A merely intellectual conception of the things of life is not enough. It is the spiritual conception which eludes the intellect, and which alone can give one satisfaction. Even moneyed men have critical periods in their lives. Though they are surrounded by everything that money can buy and affection can give, they find themselves at certain moments in their lives utterly distracted. It is in these moments that we have a glimpse of God, a vision of Him who is guiding every one of our steps in life. It is prayer.'"

"You mean what we might call a true religious experience which is stronger than intellectual conception," said Dr. Fabri. "Twice in life I had that experience, but I have since lost it. But I now find great comfort in one or two sayings of Buddha: 'Selfishness is the cause of sorrow,' and 'Remember, monks, everything is fleeting.' To think of these takes almost the place of belief."

"That is prayer," repeated Gandhiji with an insistence that could not but have gone home.

*Harijan*, 19-8-'39

## 74

## IS NOT SERVICE WORSHIP ?

*Q.* Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends on the worship of God to the service of the poor ? And should not true service make devotional worship unnecessary for such a man ?

*A.* I sense mental laziness as also agnosticism in this question. The biggest of *karmayogis* never give up devotional songs or worship. Idealistically it may be said that true service of others is itself worship and that such devotees do not need to spend any time in songs etc. As a matter of fact, *bhajans* etc. are a help to true service

and keep the remembrance of God fresh in the heart of the devotee.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46

## 75

## QUESTION BOX

*Q.* While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite *Ramanama* (the name of God) in one's heart? Do people do so at such times and, if so, how?

*A.* Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided *Ramanama* is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat. Otherwise, *Ramanama* is a mere mechanical performance or at best has touched the heart only on the surface. When *Ramanama* has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because then it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that *Ramanama* contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine *Ramanama* in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have been lavished by men to acquire the non-existent philosopher's stone? Surely, God's name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

*Q.* Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

*A.* Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, *Ramanama* must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt *Ramanama* which has found an abiding place in the heart.

*Harijan*, 17-2-'46

## 76

## RAMANAMA, THE INFALLIBLE REMEDY

Shri Ganeshshastri Joshi, *Vaidya*, tells me after reading my article on Nature Cure in the *Harijan* of 3rd March, 1946, that in *Ayurveda*, too, there is ample testimony to the efficacy of *Ramanama* as a cure for all disease. Nature Cure occupies the place of honour and in it *Ramanama* is the most important. When Charaka, Vagbhata and other giants of medicine in ancient India wrote, the popular name for God was not Rama but Vishnu. I myself have been a devotee of Tulsidas from my childhood and have, therefore, always worshipped God as Rama. But I know that if, beginning with *Omkar*, one goes through the entire gamut of God's names current in all climes, all countries and all languages, the result is the same. He and His Law are one. To observe His Law is, therefore, the best form of worship. A man who becomes one with the Law does not stand in need of vocal recitation of the name. In other words, an individual with whom contemplation on God has become as natural as breathing is so filled with God's spirit that knowledge or observance of the Law becomes second nature, as it were, with him. Such a one needs no other treatment.

The question then arises as to why, in spite of having this prince of remedies at hand, we know so little about it and why even those who know, do not remember Him or remember Him only by lip service, not from the heart. Parrot-like repetition of God's name signifies failure to recognize Him as the panacea for all ills.

How can they? This sovereign remedy is not administered by doctors, *vaidyas*, *hakims* or any other medicinal practitioners. These have no faith in it. If they were to admit that the spring of the Holy Ganga could be found in every home their very occupation or means of livelihood would go. Therefore, they must perforce rely on their powders and potions as infallible

remedies. Not only do these provide bread for the doctor but the patient too seems to feel immediate relief. If a medical practitioner can get a few persons to say "so and so gave me a powder and I was cured", his business is established.

Nor, it must be borne in mind, would it really be of any use for doctors to prescribe God's name to patients unless they themselves were conscious of its miraculous powers. *Ramanama* is no copy-book maxim. It is something that has to be realized through experience. One who has had personal experience alone can prescribe it, not any other.

The *Vaidyaraj* has copied out for me four verses. Out of these Charaka's is the simplest and most apt. It means that if one were to obtain mastery over even one out of the thousand names of Vishnu, all ailments would vanish.

*Harijan*, 24-3-'46

## 77

## TOWARDS REALIZATION

What is the mark of him who has Rama enthroned in his heart? If we do not know this, there is danger of *Ramanama* being much misinterpreted. Some misinterpretation is already in existence. Many sport rosaries and put the sacred mark on the forehead and vainly babble His name. It may well be asked whether I am not adding to the current hypocrisy by continued insistence on *Ramanama*. I must not be deterred by such forebodings. Silence thus brought about is harmful. The living voice of silence needs to be backed by prolonged heartfelt practice. In the absence of such natural silence, we must try to know the marks of him who has Rama in his heart.

A devotee of Rama may be said to be the same as the steadfast one (*sthitaprajnya*) of the *Gita*. If one goes a little deeper it will be seen that a true devotee of God faithfully obeys the five elemental forces of nature. If he so obeys, he will not fall ill. If perchance he does,

he will cure himself with the aid of the elementals. It is not for the dweller in the body to get the body cured anyhow — he who believes that he is nothing but body will naturally wander to the ends of the earth in order to cure the body of its ills. But he who realizes that the soul is something apart from, though in the body, that it is imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, will not be perturbed nor mourn if the elementals fail. On the contrary he will welcome death as a friend. He will become his own healer instead of seeking for medical men. He will live in the consciousness of the soul within and look to the care, first and last, of the indweller.

Such a man will take God's name with every breath. His Rama will be awake even whilst the body is asleep. Rama will always be with him in whatever he does. The real death for such a devoted man will be the loss of this sacred companionship.

As an aid to keeping his Rama with him, he will take what the five elementals have to give him. That is to say he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving all the benefit he can from earth, air, water, sunlight and ether. This aid is not complementary to *Ramanama*. It is but a means of its realization. *Ramanama* does not in fact require any aid. But to claim belief in *Ramanama* and at the same time to run to doctors do not go hand in hand.

A friend versed in religious lore who read my remarks on *Ramanama* sometime ago wrote to say that *Ramanama* is an alchemy such as can transform the body. The conservation of the vital energy has been likened to accumulated wealth, but it is in the power of *Ramanama* alone to make it a running stream of ever-increasing spiritual strength ultimately making a fall impossible.

Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith. This strength can renovate the weakness of all man's physical organs. That is why it is said that when *Ramanama* is enshrined in the heart, it means the rebirth of man. This law applies to the young, the old, man and woman alike.

This belief is to be found in the West too. Christian sciences give a glimpse of it. In this issue of the *Harijan* Rajkumari has given apt illustrations culled from a book written by Seventh Day Adventists.

India needs no outside support for a belief which has been handed down to her people from time immemorial.

*Harijan*, 29-6-'47

## 78

## IS RAMANAMA ANOTHER NAME FOR CHARMS?

*Q.* My nephew was ill. His relations did not resort to medicines but to spells and charms for his cure. It cannot be said that these did any good. Your mother too must have indulged in these things. Now you talk of *Ramanama*. Is it not the same as spells and charms?

*A.* I have, in one form or another, answered this question before now. But it is as well to do so again. My mother gave me medicines so far as I remember. But she did believe in spells and charms. Learned friends have faith in them. I have not. And because I have no belief in such things, I can say fearlessly that there is no connection between *Ramanama* of my conception and *jantar mantar* (magic). I have said that to take *Ramanama* from the heart means deriving help from an incomparable power. The atom bomb is as nothing compared with it. This power is capable of removing all pain. It must, however, be admitted that it is easy to say that *Ramanama* must come from the heart, but to attain the reality is very difficult. Nevertheless, it is the biggest thing man can possess.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46

## 79

## RAMA

"I laugh within myself," replied Gandhiji, "when someone objects that *Rama* or the chanting of *Ramanama* is for the Hindus only, how can Mussulmans therefore take part in it? Is there one God for the Mussulmans and another for the Hindus, Parsis, or Christians? No, there is only one omnipotent and omnipresent God. He is named variously and we remember Him by the name which is most familiar to us.

"My *Rama*, the *Rama* of our prayers is not the historical Rama, the son of Dasharatha the King of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second. Him alone I worship. His aid alone I seek, and so should you. He belongs equally to all. I, therefore, see no reason why a Mussulman or anybody should object to taking His name. But he is in no way bound to recognize God as *Ramanama*. He may utter to himself Allah or *Khuda* so as not to mar the harmony of the sound."

*Harijan*, 28-4-'46

## 80

## WHO IS RAMA?

*Q.* You have often said that when you talk of 'Rama' you refer to the Ruler of the universe and not to Rama, the son of Dasharatha. But we find that your *Ramadhun* calls on 'Sita-Rama', 'Raja Rama' and it ends with 'Victory to Rama the Lord of Sita.' Who is this Rama if not the son of the King Dasharatha?

*A.* I have answered such questions before. But there is something new in this one. It demands a reply. In *Ramadhun* 'Raja Rama', 'Sita-Rama' are undoubtedly repeated. Is not this 'Rama' the same as the son of

Dasharatha ? Tulsidas has answered this question. But let me put down my own view. More potent than Rama is the Name. Hindu *Dharma* is like a boundless ocean teeming with priceless gems. The deeper you dive the more treasures you find. In Hindu religion God is known by various names. Thousands of people look doubtless upon Rama and Krishna as historical figures and literally believe that God came down in person on earth in the form of Rama the son of Dasharatha, and by worshipping him one can attain salvation. The same thing holds good about Krishna. History, imagination and truth have got so inextricably mixed up. It is next to impossible to disentangle them. I have accepted all the names and forms attributed to God, as symbols connoting one formless omnipresent Rama. To me, therefore, Rama described as the Lord of Sita, son of Dasharatha, is the all-powerful essence whose name inscribed in the heart, removes all suffering mental, moral and physical.

*Harijan*, 2-6-'46

## 81

## RAMA THE SON OF DASHARATHA

An Arya Samajist writes :

"How can the Rama whom you believe to be immortal, be Rama, the son of Dasharatha and the husband of Sita ? I often attend your prayer gathering with this dilemma always confronting me and because of it, I am unable to join in the *Ramadhun*. This hurts me for you are right when you say that all should take part in it. Cannot you make the *Ramadhun*, such that all can join in the recital ?"

I have already explained what I mean by *all*. It applies to all those who can join in it from the heart and recite it in tune. The others should remain silent. But this is a small matter. The important question is as to how Rama, the son of Dasharatha, can be deemed immortal. This question was raised by Saint Tulsidas himself and answered by him. The answer cannot in reality be reasoned out. It does not lend itself to intellectual

satisfaction. It is a matter of heart speaking to heart. I worshipped Rama as Sita's husband in the first instance, but as my knowledge and experience of Him grew, my Rama became immortal and omnipresent. This does not mean that Rama ceased to be Sita's husband ; but the meaning of Sita's husband expanded with the vision of Rama. This is how the world evolves. Rama cannot become omnipresent for the man who regards him merely as the son of Dasharatha. But for the believer in Rama as God, the father of the omnipresent Rama also becomes omnipresent — the father and son become one. It may be said that this is all a matter of imagination. "To each man according to his faith," is all that I can say. If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing, not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes all in all. Rama then is and is not the son of Dasharatha, the husband of Sita, the brother of Bharata and Lakshmana and yet is God, the unborn and eternal. All honour then to those who not believing in Rama as the son of Dasharatha still come to join in the collective prayers. This matter of Rama is one which transcends reason. I have merely tried to give to the reader my belief for what it is worth.

*Harijan*, 22-9-'46

## 82

## SILENCE DURING PRAYER

"True culture requires that there should be perfect peace in the prayer ground at the time of the prayer." There should be an atmosphere of solemnity as in a church, a mosque or a temple. He knew that many of the temples were full of clamour. It had hurt him deeply. "We go to the temple to worship not the stone or the metal image but God who resides in it. The image becomes what man makes of it. It has no power independently of the sanctity with which it is invested by the worshipper. Therefore every one, including children, should observe perfect silence at the time of prayer."

*Harijan*, 28-4-'46

# SECTION FIVE: BRAHMACHARYA



## BRAHMACHARYA OR SELF-CONTROL

[The following is Mahadev Desai's translation of an article I wrote on this delicate subject in the *Navajivan* of 25th May 1924. I gladly publish it in the *Young India* as I have before me many letters from other parts of India on the same subject. The stray thoughts collected together in the article might be of some help to those who are earnestly striving for a pure life. My inquirers have been all Hindus and naturally the article is addressed to them. The last paragraph is the most important and operative part. The names Allah or God carry with them the same potency. The idea is to realize the presence of God in us. All sins are committed in secrecy. The moment we realize that God witnesses even our thoughts we shall be free. — M. K. G.]

It is not easy to write on this subject. But the desire has been uppermost in my mind to share with my readers some grains out of the vast store of my experience. Some letters I have received have whetted the desire.

A friend asks: 'What is *brahmacharya*? Is it possible to practise it to perfection? If possible, do you do so?'

The full and proper meaning of *brahmacharya* is search of *Brahman*. *Brahman* pervades every being and can therefore be searched by diving into and realizing the inner self. This realization is impossible without complete control of the senses. *Brahmacharya* thus means control in thought, word and action, of all the senses at all times and in all places.

A man or woman completely practising *brahmacharya* is absolutely free from passion. Such a one therefore lives nigh unto God, is Godlike.

I have no doubt that it is possible to practise such *brahmacharya* in thought, word and action to the fullest extent. I am sorry to say that I have not yet reached that perfect state of *brahmacharya*, though I am every moment of my life striving to reach it. I have not given up hope of reaching that state in this very body. I have gained control over the body. I can be master of myself during my waking hours. I have fairly succeeded in learning to control my tongue. But I have yet to cover many stages in the control of my thoughts. They do not come and go at my bidding. My mind is thus constantly in a state of insurrection against itself.

In my waking moments, however, I can stop my thoughts from colliding with one another. I may say that in the waking state the mind is secure against the approach of evil thoughts. But in the hours of sleep, control over the thoughts is much less. When asleep, the mind would be swayed by all sorts of thoughts, by unexpected dreams, and by desire for things done and enjoyed by the flesh before. Such thoughts or dreams when unclean are followed by the usual consequences. Whilst such experiences are possible a person cannot be said to be free from all passion. The deviation is, however, diminishing, but has not yet ceased. If I had complete mastery over my thoughts I should not have suffered from the diseases of pleurisy, dysentery and appendicitis that I did during the last ten years. I believe that a healthy soul should inhabit a healthy body. To the extent, therefore, that the soul grows into health and freedom from passion, to that extent the body also grows into that state. This does not mean that a healthy body should be necessarily strong in flesh. A brave soul often inhabits a lean body. After a certain stage the flesh diminishes in proportion to the growth of the soul. A body is often heir to many an ill. Even if it is apparently free from disease, it is not immune from infections, contagions and the like.

A perfectly healthy body, on the contrary, is proof against all these. Incorruptible blood has the inherent virtue of resisting all infections.

Such an equipoise is indeed difficult of attainment. Otherwise I should have reached it, because my soul is witness to the fact that I would spare no pains to attain to this perfect state. No outward obstacle can stand between me and that state. But it is not easy for all, at least for me, to efface past *sanskaras*. But the delay has not in the least dismayed me. For I have a mental picture of that perfect state. I have even dim glimpses of it. The progress achieved fills me with hope, rather than despair. But even if I depart from this body before the hope is fulfilled, I would not think that I had failed. For I believe in rebirth as much as I believe in the existence of my present body. I therefore know that even a little effort is not wasted.

I have said so much about myself for the simple reason that my correspondents and others like them may have patience and self-confidence. The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are therefore the same for every one. With some, it has manifested itself, with others it has yet to do so. Patient striving would carry every one through and to the same experience.

I have heretofore discussed *brahmacharya* in its wider meaning. The ordinary accepted sense of *brahmacharya* is the control in thought, word and action of animal passion. And it is quite proper thus to restrict its meaning. It has been thought to be very difficult to practise this *brahmacharya*. This control of the carnal desire has been so very difficult, has become nearly impossible, because equal stress has not been laid on the control of the palate. It is also the experience of our physicians that a body enfeebled by disease is always a favourite abode of carnal desire, and *brahmacharya* by an enfeebled race is difficult to practise naturally.

I have talked above of a lean but healthy body. Let no one understand me to have deprecated physical culture. I have talked of *brahmacharya* in its perfect aspect

in my very crude language. It is likely therefore to be misunderstood. But one who would practise complete control of all the senses must needs welcome the waning of the flesh. With the extinction of attachment to the flesh, comes the extinction of the desire to have muscular strength.

But the body of a true *brahmachari* is bound to b exceptionally fresh and wiry. This *brahmacharya* is something unearthy. He who is not swayed by carnal desire even in his sleep is worthy of all adoration. The control of every other sense shall be 'added unto' him.

With reference to this restricted *brahmacharya*, another friend writes: 'I am miserable. I am haunted by carnal thoughts even whilst I am in my office, on the road, by night and day, whilst reading and working, even whilst I am praying. How is a wandering mind to be controlled? How is one to learn to look upon every woman as one's mother? How is the eye to radiate forth purest love? How can evil thoughts be eradicated? I have before me your article on *brahmacharya* (written years ago), but it has failed to help me.'

This condition is heart-rending. Many suffer from it. But so long as the mind is engaged in a perpetual struggle against evil thoughts, there is no reason to despair. When the eye offends, it should be closed. When the ears offend they should be stopped. It is best always to walk with downcast eyes. They will then have no occasion to go astray. All haunts of filthy talk or unclean music should be avoided. There should be full control of the palate. I know that he who has not mastered his palate cannot master the carnal desire. It is very difficult I know to master the palate. But mastery of the palate means automatic mastery of the other senses. One of the rules for control of the palate is to abjure completely or, as much as possible, all condiments. A more difficult rule is to cultivate the feeling that the food we eat is to sustain the body, never to satisfy the palate. We take air not for the pleasure of it but to breathe. We drink water to quench our thirst; and so should we take food

to satisfy our hunger. But from childhood upwards we are brought up to a different habit. Our parents make us cultivate all sorts of tastes, not with a view to our nourishment, but for indulging their affection for us. We thus get spoiled. We have therefore to struggle against the results of our own upbringing.

There is however a golden rule for gaining control of the carnal desire. It is the repetition of the divine word *Rama* or such other *mantra*. The *Dwadashakshara Mantra* * also serves the same purpose. Every one must select the *mantra* after his heart. I have suggested the word *Rama* because I was brought up to repeat it in my childhood and I have ever got strength and sustenance out of it. Whichever *mantra* is selected, one should be identified with it whilst repeating it. I have not the least doubt of ultimate success as a result of repetition of some such *mantra* in complete faith, even though other thoughts distract the mind. The *mantra* will be the light of one's life and will keep one from all distress. Such holy *mantras* should obviously never be used for material ends. If their use is strictly restricted to the preservation of morals, the results attained will be startling. Of course a mere repetition of such a *mantra* parrot-wise would be of no avail. One should throw his whole soul into it. The parrot repeats it like a machine. We should repeat it with a view to preventing the approach of unwelcome thoughts and with full faith in the efficacy of the *mantras* to that end.

*Young India*, 5-6-'24

---

* ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

## 84

## BIRTH-CONTROL

There can be no two opinions about the necessity of birth-control. But the only method handed down from ages past is self-control or *brahmacharya*. It is an infallible sovereign remedy doing good to those who practise it. And medical men will earn the gratitude of mankind, if instead of devising artificial means of birth-control they will find out the means of self-control. The union is meant not for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny. And union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent.

Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make man and woman reckless. And respectability that is being given to the methods must hasten the dissolution of the restraints that public opinion puts upon one. Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found to be worse than the disease. It is wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one's acts. It is good for a person who overeats to have an ache and a fast. It is bad for him to indulge his appetite and then escape the consequence by taking tonics or other medicines. It is still worse for a person to indulge in his animal passions and escape the consequences of his acts. Nature is relentless and will have full revenge for any such violation of her laws. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints. All other restraints defeat the very purpose for which they are intended. The reasoning underlying the use of artificial methods is that indulgence is a necessity of life. Nothing can be more fallacious. Let those who are eager to see the births regulated explore the lawful means, devised by the ancients and try to find out how they can be revived. An enormous amount of spade-work lies in front of them. Early marriages are a fruitful source of adding the population. The present mode of life

has also a great deal to do with the evil of unchecked procreation. If these causes are investigated and dealt with, society will be morally elevated. If they are ignored by impatient zealots and if artificial methods become the order of the day, nothing but moral degradation can be the result. A society that has already become enervated through a variety of causes will become still further enervated by the adoption of artificial methods. Those men therefore who are light-heartedly advocating artificial methods cannot do better than study the subject afresh, stay their injurious activity and popularize *brahmacharya* both for the married and the unmarried. That is the only noble and straight method of birth-control.

*Young India*, 12-3-'25

## 85

## STEPS TO BRAHMACHARYA

The first step is the realization of its necessity.

The next is gradual control of the senses. A *brahmachari* must needs control his palate. He must eat to live, and not for enjoyment. He must see only clean things and close his eyes before anything unclean. It is thus a sign of polite breeding to walk with one's eyes towards the ground and not wandering about from object to object. A *brahmachari* will likewise hear nothing obscene or unclean, smell no strong, stimulating things. The smell of clean earth is far sweeter than the fragrance of artificial scents and essences. Let the aspirant to *brahmacharya* also keep his hands and feet engaged in all the waking hours in healthful activity. Let him also fast occasionally.

The third step is to have clean companions — clean friends and clean books.

The last and not the least is prayer. Let him repeat *Ramanama* with all his heart regularly everyday, and ask for divine grace.

None of these things are difficult for an average man or woman. They are simplicity itself. But their very simplicity is embarrassing. Where there is a will, the way is simple enough. Men have not the will for it and hence vainly grope. The fact that the world rests on the observance, more or less, of *brahmacharya* or restraint, means that it is necessary and practicable.

*Young India*, 29-4-'26

## 86

## BRAHMACHARYA

What is *brahmacharya*? It is the way of life which leads us to *Brahma* (God). It includes full control over the process of reproduction. The control must be in thought, word and deed. If the thought is not under control, the other two have no value. There is a saying in Hindustani: "He whose heart is pure has the all purifying waters of the Ganga in his house." For one whose thought is under control, the other is mere child's play. The *brahmachari* of my conception will be healthy and will easily live long. He will not even suffer from so much as a headache. Mental and physical work will not cause fatigue. He is ever bright, never slothful. Outward neatness will be an exact reflection of the inner. He will exhibit all the attributes of the steadfast one described in the *Gita*. It need cause no worry if not one person is met with answering the description.

Is it strange that one who is able completely to conserve and sublimate the vital fluid which has the potentiality of creating human beings, should exhibit all the attributes described above? Who can measure the creative strength of such sublimation, one drop of which has the potentiality of bringing into being a human life? Patanjali has described five disciplines. It is not possible to isolate any one of these and practise it. It may be posited in the case of Truth, because it really includes the other four. And for this age the five have been expanded

into eleven. Acharya Vinoba has put them in the form of a Marathi verse. They are : non-violence, truth, non-stealing, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, bread labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal regard for all religions, Swadeshi and removal of untouchability.

All these can be derived from Truth. But life is complex. It is not possible to enunciate one grand principle and leave the rest to follow of itself. Even when we know a proposition, its corollaries have to be worked out.

It is well to bear in mind that all the disciplines are of equal importance. If one is broken all are. There seems to be a popular belief amongst us that breach of truth or non-violence is pardonable. Non-stealing and non-possession are rarely mentioned. We hardly recognize the necessity of observing them. But a fancied breach of *brahmacharya* excites wrath and worse. There must be something seriously wrong with a society in which values are exaggerated and underestimated. Moreover, to use the word *brahmacharya* in a narrow sense is to detract from its value. Such detraction increases the difficulty of proper observance. When it is isolated, even the elementary observance becomes difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it is essential that all the disciplines should be taken as one. This enables one to realize the full meaning and significance of *brahmacharya*.

*Harijan*, 8-6-'47

## 87

## WALLS OF PROTECTION

Let us ask ourselves what walls should be erected to protect *brahmacharya* of which I wrote last week. The answer seems clear. It is not *brahmacharya* that needs walls of protection. To say this is easy enough and sounds sweet. But it is difficult to understand the import of the statement and more so to act accordingly.

It is true that he who has attained perfect *brahmacharya* does not stand in need of protecting walls. But the aspirant undoubtedly needs them, even as a young mango plant has need of a strong fence round it. A child goes from its mother's lap to the cradle and from the cradle to the push-cart — till he becomes a man who has learnt to walk without aid. To cling to the aid when it is needless is surely harmful.

I made it clear last week that *brahmacharya* is one out of the eleven observances. It follows, therefore, that the real aid to *brahmacharya* are the remaining ten observances. The difference between them and the walls of protection is that the latter are temporary, the former permanent. They are an integral part of *brahmacharya.*

*Brahmacharya* is a mental condition. The outward behaviour of a man is at once the sign and proof of the inner state. He who has killed the sexual urge in him will never be guilty of it in any shape or form. However attractive a woman may be, her attraction will produce no effect on the man without the urge. The same rule applies to woman. But he or she who has not conquered lust should not turn the eyes even towards a sister or a brother, or a daughter or a son. This advice I have given to friends who have profited by it.

There are certain rules laid down in India for the would-be *brahmachari.* Thus he may not live among women, animals and eunuchs, he may not teach a woman only or even a group, he may not sit on the same mat as

a woman, he may not look at any part of a woman's body, he may not take milk, curds, *ghee* or any fatty substance nor indulge in baths and oily massages. I read about these when I was in South Africa. There I came in touch with some men and women who, while they observed *brahmacharya*, never knew that any of the above-named restraints were necessary. Nor did I observe them, and I was none the worse for the non-observance. I did give up milk, *ghee* and other animal substances but for different reasons. I failed in this attempt after two or three years after my return to India. But if today I could find any effective vegetable substitute for milk and *ghee*, I would gladly renounce all animal products. But this is another story.

A perfect *brahmachari* never loses his vital fluid. On the contrary, he is able to increase it day by day and, what is more, he conserves it; he will, therefore, never become old in the accepted sense and his intellect will never be dimmed.

It appears to me that even the true aspirant does not need the above-mentioned restraints. *Brahmacharya* is not a virtue that can be cultivated by outward restraints. He who runs away from a necessary contact with a woman does not understand the full meaning of *brahmacharya*.

Let not the reader imagine for one moment that what I have written is to serve as the slightest encouragement to life without the law of real restraint. Nor is there room in any honest attempt for hypocrisy.

Self-indulgence and hypocrisy are sins to be avoided.

The true *brahmachari* will shun false restraints. He must create his own fences according to his limitations, breaking them down when he feels that they are unnecessary. The first thing is to know what true *brahmacharya* is, then to realize its value and lastly to try to cultivate this priceless virtue. I hold that true service of the country demands this observance.

*Harijan*, 15-6-'47

## 88

# BRAHMACHARYA IN RELATION TO GOD

I have defined *brahmacharya* as that correct way of life which leads to *Brahma*, i. e. God. Straightaway the question arises : " What or who is God ? " If man knew the answer, it would enable him to find the path that leads to Him.

God is not a person. To affirm that He descends to earth every now and again in the form of a human being is a partial truth which merely signifies that such a person lives near to God. Inasmuch as God is omnipresent, He dwells within every human being and all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of Him. But this leads us nowhere. Rama, Krishna, etc. are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they actually lived or not does not affect the picture of them in men's minds. The Rama and Krishna of history often present difficulties which have to be overcome by all manner of arguments.

The truth is that God is the force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal. And yet, strangely enough, all are not able to derive either benefit from or shelter in the all-pervading living presence.

Electricity is a powerful force. Not all can benefit from it. It can only be produced by following certain laws. It is a lifeless force. Man can utilize it if he labours hard enough to acquire the knowledge of its laws.

The living force which we call God can similarly be found if we know and follow His law leading to the discovery of Him in us. But it is self-evident that to find out God's law requires far harder labour. The law may, in one word, be termed *brahmacharya*. The straight way to cultivate *brahmacharya* is *Ramanama*. I can say this from experience. Devotees and sages like Tulsidas have

shown us this royal path. No one need give undue importance to my own experience. Perhaps I am right in saying that the potency of *Ramanama* was brought vividly home to me in Uruli-Kanchan. It was there that I asserted that the surest remedy for all our ills was *Ramanama*. He who can make full use of it can show powerful results with very little outside effort.

Following this line of thought I can say with conviction that the orthodox aids to *brahmacharya* pale into insignificance before *Ramanama*, when this name is enthroned in the heart. Then and then only do we realize its transcendent beauty and power. In the vigilant search for this matchless and unfailing weapon we find that it is hard to differentiate between ends and means. Thus, the eleven rules of conduct are the means to enable us to reach God. Of the eleven rules Truth is the means and God called *Rama* is the end. Is it not equally true that *Ramanama* is the means and Truth is the end ?

But let me revert to the original point. The accepted meaning of *brahmacharya* is the attainment by man of complete control over the sex organ. The golden means to attain that end is *Ramanama*.

*Harijan*, 22-6-'47

## SECTION SIX : THE GITA



### GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE

A friend puts forward the following poser :

"The controversy about the teaching of the *Gita* — whether it is *himsa* (violence) or *ahimsa* (non-violence) — will, it seems, go on for a long time. It is one thing what meaning we read in the *Gita*, or rather we want to read in the *Gita*; it is another what meaning is furnished by an unbiased reading of it. The question, therefore, does not present much difficulty to one who implicitly accepts *ahimsa* as the eternal principle of life. He will say that the *Gita* is acceptable to him only if it teaches *ahimsa*. A grand book like the *Gita* could, for him, inculcate nothing grander than the eternal religious principle of *ahimsa*. If it did not it would cease to be his unerring guide. It would still be worthy of his high regard, but not an infallible authority.

"In the first chapter we find Arjuna laying down his weapons, under the influence of *ahimsa*, and ready to die at the hands of the Kauravas. He conjures up a vision of the disaster and the sin involved in *himsa*. He is overcome with ennui and in fear and trembling exclaims: 'Oh what a mighty sin we are up to!'

"Shri Krishna catches him in that mood and tells him: 'Enough of this high philosophy; No one kills or is killed. The soul is immortal and the body must perish. Fight then the fight that has come to thee as a matter of duty. Victory or defeat is no concern of thine. Acquit thyself of thy task.'

"In the eleventh chapter the Lord presents a panoramic vision of the Universe and says: 'I am *Kala*, the Destroyer of the worlds, the Ancient of Days; I am here engaged in My task of destruction of the worlds. Kill thou those already killed by Me. Give not thyself up to grief.'

"*Himsa* and *ahimsa* are equal before God. But for man what is God's message? Is it this: 'Fight; for thou art sure to foil thy enemies in the field'? If the *Gita* teaches *ahimsa* the first and the eleventh chapters are not consistent with the

rest, at any rate do not support the *ahimsa* theory. I wish you could find time to resolve my doubt."

The question put is eternal and every one who has studied the *Gita* must needs find out his own solution. And although I am going to offer mine, I know that ultimately one is guided not by the intellect but by the heart. The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reasons in support of whatever he does or wants to do.

I shall therefore appreciate the position of those who are unable to accept my interpretation of the *Gita*. All I need do is to indicate how I reached my meaning, and what canons of interpretation I have followed in arriving at it. Mine is but to fight for my meaning, no matter whether I win or lose.

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *ahimsa*. One of the lines of the Gujarati poet, Shamalbhatta, had taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love, and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of non-violence from it. It did not, for instance, cover all animal life. I had, before this, tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction today that even venomous creatures may not be killed by a believer in *ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel : 'What wonder if Britain rules !' etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, and there I escaped meat-eating etc. because of my determination to follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

Now whilst in England my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read', because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But

when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the *Gita* unaided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the second chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach are the 'eternal verities'. There is reasoning in them but they represent realized knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would even advise rejection of the verses that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say: 'It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come'. That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Every one cannot solve an algebraical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine qua non*. How ill would the grand truth 'I am *Brahman*' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man therefore who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must practise the *yamas* and *niyamas* — the eternal guides of conduct. A

superficial practice thereof is useless. The *shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *guru*. But a *guru* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill-qualified to interpret the scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them, but that will not be the true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

But even for the inexperienced there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts with Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth — *Sat* — is positive ; non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, non-violence negatives the fact. And yet non-violence is the highest religion. Truth is self-evident ; non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but as it is not self-evident a man may seek to interpret the *shastras* without accepting it. But his acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said : 'Violence is unreal, non-violence is real. Realization of Truth is impossible without non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul of Truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his search for Truth and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *shastras*.

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* is a notable book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is a verse in it which brackets drums, *shudras*, fools and women together as fit to

be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife, what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita the ideal wife, and Bharata the ideal of a devoted brother. Any justification incidentally met with therein of vicious customs should therefore be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realization and its means is the theme of the *Gita*, the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might, if you like, say that the Poet himself was not against war or violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the *Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of war by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadawas today?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite wrong to emphasize those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

The poet when he writes is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty

of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *himsa* but *ahimsa* is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the second chapter and summarized in the concluding 18th chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to the state beyond *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, a state that excludes anger, hatred etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger everytime he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

It was not in a spirit of *ahimsa* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Shri Krishna knows every one's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He therefore told him : 'Thou hast already done the killing. Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun.' If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given on a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *himsa* is the law of life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body.

And who are Dhritarashtra and Yudhishthira and Arjuna ? Who is Krishna ? Were they all historical

characters ? And does the *Gita* describe them as such ? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him ? And which is that *Gita* — the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which therefore he gave in the form of *Anugita* ?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the Poet Seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch the heart needs the winding of purity, or the Dweller ceases to speak.

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or no ; but that is not his *dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *moksha*, and *moksha* is the realization of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice is killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such ? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously ?

*Young India*, 12-11-'25

## 90

# KRISHNA AND THE GITA

[The following is a summary of a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Arsikere in Mysore State :]

We do not know what Shri Krishna's life means for us, we do not read the *Gita*, we make no attempt to teach it to our children. The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. If we thought of Krishna on every *Janmashtami* day and read the *Gita* and resolved to follow its teachings, we should not be in our present sorry plight. Shri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *karma*. He refused proud Duryodhana's sweets and preferred humble Vidura's spinach. As a child he was a cowherd and we still know him by the name of Gopala. But we, his worshippers, have neglected the cow today, the Adi-Karnatakas slaughter cows and eat beef, and our infants and invalids have to go without cow's milk. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil of the world, we his posterity have become indolent and forgotten the use of our hands. In the *Bhagawadgita* Lord Krishna has shown the path of *bhakti* — which means the path of *karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *bhaktas* or *jnanis*, *karma* is the only way ; but the *karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done, by Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians, by men, women and children ? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also

taught that to be a true *bhakta* we should make no difference between a *brahmana* and a scavenger. If that is true there can be no place for untouchability in Hinduism. If you are still hugging that superstition you can cleanse yourself by getting rid of it on this the sacred day of Krishna's birth. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Mussulman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by whatsoever name adores Him. The path of *bhakti*, *karma*, love as expounded in the *Gita*, leaves no room for the despising of man by man.

*Young India*, 1-9-'27

## 91

## THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

1. Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

2. The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

3. In this great work the *Gita* is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

4. Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified ; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

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

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

7. *That matchless remedy is renunciation of the fruits of action.*

8. This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God ? In other words how can one be free from action, i. e. from the taint of sin ? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language : " By desireless action ; by renouncing the fruits of action ; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e. by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

9. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the *Vedas* from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*, " Have devotion, and knowledge will follow." This devotion is not mere lip-worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

10. Thus the devotion required by the *Gita* is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented,

whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

11. We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.

12. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions, a mere learned man will pass as a *pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting of a *lota*.

13. Or take *bhakti*. The popular notion of *bhakti* is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This *bhakta* therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

14. But the *Gita* says: "No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more

necessary then for the people at large to engage in action ? "

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

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

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

17. From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing

manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita*, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

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

19. But if the *Gita* believed in *ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*.

20. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *ahimsa* and the like.

Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the *Gita*, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal-sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the *Gita* by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the *Gita* it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.

21. The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work ; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes

so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

22. Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

23. The *Gita* has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say:

> "Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."

*Young India*, 6-8-'31



# DISCOURSES ON THE GITA

[The following are the two discourses sent by Gandhiji to members of his Ashram at Sabarmati, from Yeravda Jail:]

## I

I run to my Mother *Gita* whenever I find myself in difficulties, and up to now she has never failed to comfort me. It is possible that those, who are getting comfort from the *Gita*, may get greater help, and see something altogether new, if they come to know the way in which I understand it from day to day.

This day I feel like giving a summary of the twelfth chapter. It is *Bhaktiyoga* — realization of God through devotion. At the time of marriage we ask the bridal couple to learn this chapter by heart and meditate upon it, as one of the five sacrifices to be performed. Without devotion, action and knowledge are cold and dry, and may even become shackles. So, with the heart full of love, let us approach this meditation on the *Gita*.

Arjuna asks of the Lord : "Which is the better of the two, the devotee who worships the Manifest or the one who worships the Unmanifest ?" The Lord says in reply : "Those who meditate on the Manifest in full faith, and lose themselves in Me, those faithful ones are My devotees. But those who worship the Unmanifest, and who, in order to do so, restrain all their senses, look upon and serve all alike, regarding none as high or low, those also realize Me."

So it cannot be affirmed that one is superior to the other. But it may be counted as impossible for an embodied being fully to comprehend and adore the Unmanifest. The Unmanifest is attributeless, and is beyond the reach of human vision. Therefore all embodied beings, consciously or unconsciously, are devotees of the Manifest.

"So," saith the Lord, "let thy mind be merged in My Universal Body, which has form. Offer thy all at His feet. But if thou canst not do this, practise the restraint of the passions of thy mind. By observing *yama* and *niyama* with the help of *pranayama*, *asana* and other practices, bring the mind under control. If thou canst not do thus, then perform all thy works with this in mind : that whatever work thou undertakest, that thou dost for My sake. Thus thy worldly infatuations and attachments will fade away, and gradually thou wilt become stainless and pure. The fountain of love will rise in thee. But if thou canst not do even this, then renounce the fruit of all thy actions ; yearn no more after the fruits of thy work. Ever do that work which falls to thy lot. Man cannot be master over the fruits of his work. The

fruit of work appears only after causes have combined to form it. Therefore be thou only the instrument. Do not regard as superior or inferior any of these four methods which I have shown unto thee. Whatever, in them, is suitable for thee, that make thou use of in thy practice of devotion.

"It seems that the path of hearing, meditating and comprehending, may be easier than the path of *yama*, *niyama*, *pranayama* and *asana*, to which I have referred; easier than that may be concentration and worship; and again easier than concentration may be renunciation of the fruits of works. The same method cannot be equally easy for every one; some may have to turn for help to all these methods. They are certainly intermixed. In any case thou wishest to be a devotee. Achieve that goal by whatever method thou canst. My part is simply to tell thee whom to count a true devotee. A devotee hates no one; bears no grudge against any one; befriends all creatures; is merciful to all. To accomplish this he eliminates all personal attachments; his ego is dissolved and he becomes as nothing; for him grief and happiness are one; he forgives those who trespass against himself, as he hungers for forgiveness from the world for his own faults; he dwells in contentment; he is firm in his good resolves; he surrenders to Me his mind, his intellect, his all. He never causes in other beings trouble or fear, himself knowing no trouble or fear through others. My devotee is free from joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. He has no desires, he is pure, skilful and wise. He has renounced all ambitious undertakings. He stands by his resolves, renouncing their good or bad fruit; he remains unconcerned. Such a one knows not enemies or friends, is beyond honour or disgrace.

"In peace and silence, contented with whatever may come his way, he lives inwardly as if alone, and always remains calm no matter what may be going on around him. One who lives in this manner, full of faith, he is My 'beloved devotee'."

*Young India*, 13-11-'30

## II

The *Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is considered to be a historical work but, for us, both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are not historical works, but religious works, or rather, if we call them histories, they are the histories of the soul. And it is not the description of what happened thousands of years ago, but it is the picture of what is going on in every human breast today. In both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* there is the description of the battle that is daily going on between the Gods and the Demons, between Rama and Ravana. The dialogue in the *Gita* between Shri Krishna and Arjuna is one such description. That dialogue is recited by Sanjaya before the blind Dhritarashtra. *Gita* means 'sung'. Here the word *Upanishad* is understood, so the complete meaning is, an '*Upanishad* that is sung'. *Upanishad* means Knowledge — instruction. Thus the *Gita* means the teachings of Shri Krishna to Arjuna. We should read the *Gita* with the realization that the Inward Seer, Lord Krishna, is ever present in our breasts, and that, whenever we, becoming as Arjuna in his desire for knowledge, turn to Him, He is ever ready to shelter us. We are asleep, the Inward Seer is always awake. He is awaiting the wakening of desire for knowledge in us. We do not know how to ask. We are not even inclined to ask. Therefore we daily contemplate a book like the *Gita*. We wish to create in ourselves a desire for religious knowledge — a desire to learn spiritual enquiry, while meditating on it. Whenever under stress we hasten to the *Gita* for relief and obtain consolation, it is at once for us a Teacher — a Mother. And we must have faith that with our head in her lap we shall always remain safe. The *Gita* shall unravel all our spiritual tangles. Those who will meditate on the *Gita* in this way will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day. There is not a single spiritual tangle which the *Gita* cannot unravel. It is a different thing, if, on account of our insufficient faith, we do not know how to

read and understand it. We daily recite the *Gita* in order that our faith may continually increase and that we may be ever wakeful. I am giving here the substance of what meanings I have obtained, and am still obtaining, from such meditations of the *Gita*, for the help of the inmates of the Ashram.

When the Pandavas and the Kauravas, with their armies, stand on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, then Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, describes to the teacher Drona the principal warriors of both sides. As both the armies prepare for the battle, their conches are blown, and Lord Shri Krishna, who is Arjuna's charioteer, drives up their chariot between the two armies. On seeing this Arjuna becomes agitated, and says to Shri Krishna : "How can I fight these men ? Had they been other persons I would have fought with them forthwith. But these are my people, mine own ! Where is the difference between the Kauravas and the Pandavas ? They are first cousins. We were brought up together. Drona can hardly be called the teacher of the Kauravas alone. It was he who taught us all the sciences. Bhishma is the head of our whole family. How can there be a fight with him ? True the Kauravas are murderous ; they have done many evil deeds, many iniquities ; they have deprived the Pandavas of their land ; they have insulted a great and faithful woman like Draupadi. All this is their fault indeed, but what good can come of killing them ? They are without understanding. Why should I behave like them ? I at least have some knowledge. I can discriminate between good and evil ; so I must know that to fight one's relatives is sinful. What does it matter that they have swallowed up the family share of the Pandavas ? Let them kill us. How can we raise our hands against them ? Oh Krishna ! I will not fight these relatives of mine." So saying Arjuna collapses in his chariot.

In this way the first chapter closes. It is called *Arjuna-vishada-yoga*. *Vishada* means distress. We have to experience such distress as Arjuna experienced. Knowledge cannot be obtained without spiritual anguish and thirst

for knowledge. What good can religious discourses be to a man who does not feel in his mind even so much as a desire to know what is good and what is bad. The battlefield of Kurukshetra is only by the way ; the true Kurukshetra is our body. It is at once the *Kurukshetra* and *Dharmakshetra*. If we regard it as and make it, the abode of God, it is the *Dharmakshetra*. In this battlefield lies one battle or another always before us, and most of such battles arise out of the ideas, " this is mine, this is thine." Such battles arise out of the difference between " my people and thy people ". Hence the Lord will later on tell Arjuna that the root of all irreligion is attachment and aversion. Believe a thing to be ' mine ', and attachment is created for it. Believe a thing to be ' not mine ', and aversion is created — enmity is created. The *Gita* and all the other religious books of the world proclaim to us that the difference between mine and thine should be forgotten. That is to say attachment and aversion should be relinquished. It is one thing to say this, and it is another thing to act according to it. The *Gita* teaches us to act according to it also.

*Young India*, 20-11-'30

## 93

## GITA RECITERS

The readers of the *Harijan* know what the *Gita* means to me. I have always regarded the learning by heart of such books as the *Gita* a very desirable thing. But I was never able to learn all the chapters of the *Gita* by heart myself though I made several attempts at it. I know I am very stupid at memorizing. So whenever I meet any one who knows the *Gita* by heart, he or she commands my respect. I have already met two such during the Tamilnad tour — a gentleman at Madura and a lady at Devakotta. The gentleman at Madura is a merchant unknown to fame ; and the lady is Parvatibai, a daughter of the late Justice Sadashiva Iyer, who during

his lifetime instituted an annual prize for the person who could best recite the *Gita* from memory. I would like, however, the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the *Gita*. By patience even a parrot can be taught to recite it by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the *Gita* should be what its author expects him to be — a *yogi* in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypocrite.

*Harijan*, 2-2-'34

## 94

## THE GITA IDEAL

[Addressing the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji said :]

I am a devotee of the *Gita* and a firm believer in the inexorable law of *karma*. Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood-pressure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, in spite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws.

*Harijan*, 29-2-'36

## NOTHING WITHOUT GRACE

The extraordinary precautions advised by the medical friends and equally extraordinary care taken by the two gaolers * enforced on me the exacting rest which I would not have taken and which allowed ample time for introspection. Not only have I profited by it but the introspection has revealed vital defects in my following out of the interpretation of the *Gita* as I have understood it. I have discovered that I have not approached with adequate detachment the innumerable problems that have presented themselves for solution. It is clear that I have taken many of them to heart and allowed them to rouse my emotional being and thus affect my nerves. In other words they have not, as they should have in a votary of the *Gita*, left my body or mind untouched. I verily believe that one who literally follows the prescription of the eternal mother need never grow old in mind. Such a one's body will wither in due course like leaves of a healthy tree, leaving the mind as young and as fresh as ever. That seems to me to be the meaning of Bhishma delivering his marvellous discourse to Yudhishthira though he was on his deathbed. Medical friends were never tired of warning me against being excited over or affected by events happening around me. Extra precautions were taken, to keep from me news of a tragic character. Though I think, I was not quite so bad a devotee of the *Gita* as their precautions lead me to suppose, there was undoubtedly substance behind them. For I discovered with what a wrench I accepted Jamnalalji's conditions and demand that I should remove from Maganwadi to Mahila Ashram. Any way I had lost credit with him for detached action. The fact of the collapse was for him eloquent enough testimony for discrediting my vaunted detachment. I must plead guilty to the condemnation.

---

* Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Shri Jamnalal Bajaj.

The worst however was to follow. I have been trying to follow *brahmacharya* consciously and deliberately since 1899. My definition of it is purity not merely of body but of both speech and thought also. With the exception of what must be regarded as one lapse, I can recall no instance during more than thirty six years' constant and conscious effort, of mental disturbance such as I experienced during this illness. I was disgusted with myself. The moment the feeling came I acquainted my attendants and the medical friends with my condition. They could give me no help. I expected none. I broke loose after the experience from the rigid rest that was imposed upon me. The confession of the wretched experience brought much relief to me. I felt as if a great load had been raised from over me. It enabled me to pull myself together before any harm could be done. But what of the *Gita*? Its teaching is clear and precise. A mind that is once hooked to the Star of Stars becomes incorruptible. How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God my much-vaunted Mahatmaship has never fooled me. But this enforced rest has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them, as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of the *Gita* is as bright as ever. Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same *Gita* says without any equivocation that the experience is not to be had without divine grace. We should develop swelled heads if Divinity had not made that ample reservation.

*Harijan*, 29-2-'36

## 96

## GOD OF LOVE, NOT WAR

The *Statesman* of Delhi has devoted four articles to an unmeasured condemnation of the no-war movement led by Canon Sheppard and other earnest Christians in England. The paper has dragged into its support the authority of the *Bhagawadgita* in these words :

> "Indeed the true but difficult teaching of Christianity seems to be that society must fight its enemies but love them.
>
> "Such, too, — will Mr. Gandhi please note — is the clear teaching of the *Bhagawadgita*, where Krishna tells Arjuna that victory also goes to him who fights with complete fearlessness and is utterly devoid of hatred. Indeed on the highest plane the argument between the conscientious objector and the knightly warrior is for ever settled in the second book of that great classic. We have little space to quote and the whole poem deserves to be read not once but many times."

The writer of the articles perhaps does not know that the terrorist has also used in his defence the very verses quoted by him. But the fact is that a dispassionate reading of the *Bhagawadgita* has revealed to me a meaning wholly contrary to the one given to it by the *Statesman* writer. He has forgotten that Arjuna was no conscientious objector in the sense the Western war-resisters are. Arjuna believed in war. He had fought the Kaurava hosts many times before. But he was unnerved when the two armies were drawn up in battle array and when he suddenly realized that he had to fight his nearest kinsmen and revered teachers. It was not love of man or the hatred of war that had actuated the questioner. Krishna could give no other answer than he did. The immortal author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is one — no doubt the brightest — of the many gems contained in that literary mine, has shown to the world the futility of war by giving the victors an empty glory, leaving but seven victors alive out of millions said to have been engaged in the fight in which unnamable atrocities were used on either side. But the *Mahabharata* has a better message

even than the demonstration of war as a delusion and a folly. It is the spiritual history of man considered as an immortal being ; and its author has used with a magnifying lens a historical episode considered in his times of moment for the tiny world round him, but in terms of present day values of no significance. In those days the globe had not shrunk to a pinhead as it has today on which the slightest movement on one spot affects the whole. The *Mahabharata* depicts for all time the eternal struggle that goes on daily between the forces of good and evil in the human breast and in which though good is ever victorious evil does put up a brave show and baffles even the keenest conscience. It shows also the only way to right action.

*Harijan*, 5-9-'36

97

## THE GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE

The *Statesman* has devoted a reasoned article to the argument advanced by me in reply to its criticism of Canon Sheppard's war against war. In that article a very clever attempt has been made to dispute the whole of the position taken up by me.

The writer says that whilst the *Bhagawadgita* assists him, it does not assist the terrorist. Once you admit the lawfulness of the use of physical force for purposes other than the benefit of the person against whom it is used, as in the case of a surgeon against his patient, you cannot draw an arbitrary line of distinction. The *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is only a tiny chapter, describes in gruesome detail a night slaughter of the innocents which, but for our recent experiences of our civilized war, would be considered unbelievable in actual practice. The grim fact is that the terrorists have in absolute honesty, earnestness and with cogency used the *Gita*, which some of them know by heart, in defence of their doctrine and policy. Only they have no answer to my interpretation of the

*Gita*, except to say that mine is wrong and theirs is right. Time alone will show whose is right. The *Gita* is not a theoretical treatise. It is a living but silent guide whose directions one has to understand by patient striving.

The *Statesman* writer next likens Canon Sheppard's position to that of Arjuna. Surely this is a faulty analogy, hastily drawn. Arjuna was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pandava forces. He became suddenly paralyzed when he contemplated the awful scene before him. As general he knew exactly what he had to do. He knew that he had to war against his cousins. His paralysis was due to momentary weakness. He could not have given up the task before him without creating the utmost confusion and disorder, and bringing disgrace on himself and his innumerable friends and followers. He was bound to engage himself and his followers in the terrible slaughter for which he had trained himself and them. It is profitless to conjecture what would have happened if non-violence in thought, word and deed had suddenly but really possessed him.

That rich possession, let us hope, has come to Dick Sheppard and his companions. Anyway, so far as I know, his position is wholly different from Arjuna's. He is no general of an army drawn up in battle array. He makes no distinction between kinsmen and others. For him man is man, no matter where he is born or what his skin is, or what he calls himself. After having prayerfully searched through the book which for him is the Book of Life, he has been driven to the conclusion that he may not hurt his fellowmen for gain for himself or his country, and that therefore he must himself abstain from participation, direct or indirect, in war. He naturally takes the next step of preaching to his neighbours the doctrine of peace or love and goodwill towards men without exception. This is a position which Arjuna never took up.

*Harijan*, 26-9-'36

## 98

# TEACHING OF HINDUISM

Referring to my recent articles on the English peace movement led by Canon Sheppard, a friend writes:

> "I hold the view that independently of the context of the *Gita* and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organized invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism no doubt holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object."

I have admitted in my introduction to the *Gita* known as *Anasaktiyoga* that it is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism as it is practised today, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the Quran or the Bible. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *karma*, *sannyasa*, *yajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed

animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Anyway I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the *Gita*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Upanishads*, etc.

*Harijan*, 3-10-'36

## 99

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

[Dr. Kagawa is a student of religions. He wanted to know how Gandhiji's *ahimsa* teaching could be reconciled with the *Bhagawadgita*. Gandhiji said it could not be discussed in a brief interval, but he would ask him to read his introduction to the *Gita* where he had answered the question. The answer had come to him as part of his experience, and the interpretation was, as he thought, not laboured in any way. —M. D.]

*Dr. Kagawa*: I am told you recite the *Bhagawadgita* daily?

*Gandhiji*: Yes, we finish the entire *Gita* reading once every week.

*Dr. Kagawa*: But at the end of the *Gita* Krishna recommends violence.

*Gandhiji*: I do not think so. I am also fighting. I should not be fighting effectively if I were fighting

violently. The message of the *Gita* is to be found in the second chapter of the *Gita* where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In 19 verses at the close of the 2nd chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions. I should like to see that man dealing death — who has no passions, who is indifferent to pleasure and pain, who is undisturbed by the storms that trouble mortal man. The whole thing is described in language of beauty that is unsurpassed. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight.

*Dr. Kagawa*: To the common mind it sounds as though it was actual fighting.

*Gandhiji*: You must read the whole thing dispassionately in its true context. After the first mention of fighting, there is no mention of fighting at all. The rest is a spiritual discourse.

*Dr. Kagawa*: Has anybody interpreted it like you?

*Gandhiji*: Yes. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within. The Pandavas and Kauravas are the forces of good and evil within. The war is the war between Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan, going on in the human breast. The internal evidence in support of this interpretation is there in the work itself and in the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is a minute part. It is not a history of war between two families, but the history of man — the history of the spiritual struggle of man. I have sound reasons for my interpretation.

*Dr. Kagawa*: That is why I say it is your interpretation.

*Gandhiji*: But that is nothing. The question is whether it is a reasonable interpretation, whether it carries conviction. If it does, it does not matter whether it is mine or X. Y. Z.'s. If it does not, it has no value even if it is mine.

*Dr. Kagawa*: To my mind Arjuna's ideas are wonderful. Krishna has found some excuse for him, and it was natural and necessary before Christianity.

*Gandhiji*: This interpretation is even historically wrong. For Buddha existed long before the Christian era, and he preached the doctrine of non-violence.

*Dr. Kagawa*: But Arjuna's views seem to me to be superior to Krishna's.

*Gandhiji*: Then according to you the disciple was greater than the master!

*Dr. Kagawa*: But I agree with your teaching of non-violence. I shall read the *Gita* again, bearing your interpretation in mind.

*Harijan*, 21-1-'39

100

## CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE GITA

"Is the central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence?"

"I have no doubt that it is *anasakti* — selfless action. Indeed I have called my little translation of the *Gita* *Anasaktiyoga*. And *anasakti* transcends *ahimsa*. He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *anasakti*, it does not go beyond it."

"Then does the *Gita* teach *himsa* and *ahimsa* both?"

"I do not read that meaning in the *Gita*. It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate *ahimsa*, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that if its central theme is *anasakti*, it also teaches *ahimsa*. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *ahimsa*. In the life beyond there is no *himsa* or *ahimsa*."

"But," said Balasaheb Kher, "Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *ahimsa*. For Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve :

'Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow.'

"And Lord Krishna teaches him to 'answer blow with blow'."

**What to Do ?**

"There I join issue with you," said Gandhiji. "Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday,' says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even today you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin !' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest."

*Harijan*, 1-9-'40

## 101

## GITA JAYANTI

Thus writes Shri G. V. Ketkar of the *Kesari*, Poona :

"This year the *Gita Jayanti* is on 22nd December, Friday. I repeat the request, which I have been making for some years, that you should write about the *Gita* and *Gita Jayanti* in the *Harijan*. I also repeat another which was made last year. In one of your speeches on the *Gita*, you have said that for those who have no time to go through the whole of the *Gita* (700 verses) it is sufficient to read the second and third chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomized. If possible, you should explain why you regard the second and third chapters as fundamental. I have tried to place the same idea before the public by publishing the verses of the second and third chapters as *Gita Bija* or the essence of *Gita*. Your writing on the subject will naturally be more effective."

I have hitherto resisted Shri Ketkar's request. I do not know that these *jayantis* serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the

ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and such other works on the millions. In yielding to Shri Ketkar's pressure, therefore, I entertain the hope that those who take part in the forthcoming celebration will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song. I have endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment. The theme of the *Gita* is contained in the second chapter, and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The *Gita* has been called गीताई (*Gitai*) by Vinoba who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is the real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties. I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in distress. It is, moreover, a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard the *Gita* as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But in my opinion, a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the *Gita*. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.

*Harijan*, 16-12-'39

## SECTION SEVEN : NON-VIOLENCE

### 102

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE SWORD

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

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

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.

And so I am not pleading for India to practise non-violence because it is weak. I want her to practise non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. No

training in arms is required for realization of her strength. We seem to need it because we seem to think that we are but a lump of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world. What is the meaning of Rama, a mere human being, with his host of monkeys, pitting himself against the insolent strength of ten-headed Ravana surrounded in supposed safety by the raging waters on all sides of Lanka ? Does it not mean the conquest of physical might by spiritual strength ? If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. She is not to copy Europe blindly. India's acceptance of the doctrine of the sword will be the hour of my trial. I hope I shall not be found wanting. My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to the service of India through the religion of nonviolence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism.

*Young India*, 11-8-'20

## 103

## SOCIAL BOYCOTT

Non-co-operation being a movement of purification is bringing to the surface all our weaknesses as also excesses of even our strong points. Social boycott is an age-old institution. It is coeval with caste. It is the one terrible sanction exercised with great effect. It is based upon the notion that a community is not bound to extend its hospitality or service to an excommunicate. It answered when every village was a self-contained unit, and the occasions of recalcitrancy were rare. But when opinion is divided as it is today, on the merits of non-co-operation, when its new application is having a trial, a summary use

of social boycott in order to bend a minority to the will of the majority is a species of unpardonable violence. If persisted in, such boycott is bound to destroy the movement. Social boycott is applicable and effective when it is not felt as a punishment and accepted by the object of boycott as a measure of discipline. Moreover, social boycott to be admissible in a campaign of non-violence must never savour of inhumanity. It must be civilized. It must cause pain to the party using it, if it causes inconvenience to its object. Thus, depriving a man of the services of a medical man, as is reported to have been done in Jhansi, is an act of inhumanity tantamount in the moral code to an attempt to murder. I see no difference in murdering a man and withdrawing medical aid from a man who is on the point of dying. Even the laws of war, I apprehend, require the giving of medical relief to the enemy in need of it. To deprive a man of the use of an only village well is notice to him to quit that village. Surely, non-co-operators have acquired no right to use that extreme pressure against those who do not see eye to eye with them. Impatience and intolerance will surely kill this great religious movement. We may not make people pure by compulsion. Much less may we compel them by violence to respect our opinion. It is utterly against the spirit of democracy we want to cultivate.

I hope, therefore, that non-co-operation workers will beware of the snares of social boycott. But the alternative to social boycott is certainly not social intercourse. A man who defies strong clear public opinion on vital matters is not entitled to social amenities and privileges. We may not take part in his social functions such as marriage feasts, we may not receive gifts from him. But we dare not deny social service. The latter is a duty. Attendance at dinner parties and the like is a privilege which it is optional to withhold or extend. But it would be wisdom to err on the right side and to exercise the weapon even in the limited sense described by me on rare and well-defined occasions. And in every case the user of the weapon will use it at his own risk. The use of it is not

as yet in any form a duty. No one is entitled to its use if there is any danger of hurting the movement.

*Young India*, 16-2-'21

## 104

## NON-VIOLENCE

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm ; he will wish him well ; he will not swear at him ; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrongdoer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beasts. They have not been created to feed our destructive propensities. If we only knew the mind of the Creator, we should find their proper place in His creation. Non-violence is therefore in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love. I read it in the Hindu Scriptures, in the Bible, in the Quran.

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state we are partly men and partly beasts and in our ignorance and even arrogance say that we truly fulfil the purpose of our species, when we deliver blow for blow and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. It is restraint that is obligatory. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulating. Restraint is the law of our being. For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe.

The goal ever recedes from us. The greater the progress, the greater the recognition of our unworthiness. Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory.

*Young India*, 9-3-'22

## 105

## HINDUISM AND NON-VIOLENCE

My claim to Hinduism has been rejected by some, because I believe and advocate non-violence in its extreme form. They say that I am a Christian in disguise. I have been even seriously told that I am distorting the meaning of the *Gita*, when I ascribe to that great poem the teaching of unadulterated non-violence. Some of my Hindu friends tell me that killing is a duty enjoined by the *Gita* under certain circumstances. A very learned *shastri* only the other day scornfully rejected my interpretation of the *Gita* and said that there was no warrant for the opinion held by some commentators that the *Gita* represented the eternal duel between the forces of evil and good, and inculcated the duty of eradicating evil within us without hesitation, without tenderness.

I state these opinions against non-violence in detail, because it is necessary to understand them, if we would understand the solution I have to offer.

What I see around me today is, therefore, a reaction against the spread of non-violence. I feel the wave of violence coming. The Hindu-Muslim tension is an acute phase of this tiredness.

I must be dismissed out of consideration. My religion is a matter solely between my Maker and myself. If I am a Hindu, I cannot cease to be one even though I may be disowned by the whole of the Hindu population. I do however suggest that non-violence is the end of all religions.

But I have never presented to India that extreme form of non-violence, if only because I do not regard

myself fit enough to redeliver that ancient message. Though my intellect has fully understood and grasped it, it has not as yet become part of my whole being. My strength lies in my asking people to do nothing that I have not tried repeatedly in my own life. I am then asking my countrymen today to adopt non-violence as their final creed, only for the purpose of regulating the relations between the different races, and for the purpose of attaining Swaraj. Hindus and Mussulmans, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis must not settle their differences by resort to violence, and the means for the attainment of Swaraj must be non-violent. This I venture to place before India, not as a weapon of the weak, but of the strong. Hindus and Mussulmans prate about no compulsion in religion. What is it but compulsion, if Hindus will kill a Mussulman for saving a cow? It is like wanting to convert a Mussulman to Hinduism by force. And similarly what is it but compulsion, if Mussulmans seek to prevent by force Hindus from playing music before mosques? Virtue lies in being absorbed in one's prayers in the presence of din and noise. We shall both be voted irreligious savages by posterity if we continue to make a futile attempt to compel one another to respect our religious wishes. Again, a nation of three hundred million people should be ashamed to have to resort to force to bring to book one hundred thousand Englishmen. To convert them, or, if you will, even to drive them out of the country, we need, not force of arms, but force of will. If we have not the latter, we shall never get the former. If we develop the force of will we shall find that we do not need the force of arms.

Acceptance of non-violence, therefore, for the purposes mentioned by me, is the most natural and the most necessary condition of our national existence. It will teach us to husband our corporate physical strength for a better purpose, instead of dissipating it, as now, in a useless fratricidal strife, in which each party is exhausted after the effort. And every armed rebellion must be an insane act unless it is backed by the nation. But almost

any item of non-co-operation fully backed by the nation can achieve the aim without shedding a single drop of blood.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24

## 106

## THE HIGHEST BRAVERY

Dussehra was the celebration of Rama's victory over Ravana but his victory was not achieved by violence. When Vibhishana asked Shri Ramachandra how unarmed, unshod, without any armour, he was going to defeat the heavily armed and mighty Ravana with his chariots, Rama's reply was that it was faith and purity that were going to win the battle. His bow was his self-control. His victory was the victory of good over evil.

He was receiving, Gandhiji went on to say, letters of abuse saying that his doctrine of non-violence was emasculating the Hindus, that he was no *Mahatma*, that he was injuring them and leading them astray. The speaker said, he never laid claim to being a *Mahatma*. He was an ordinary mortal as any one of them. He hoped he had never injured any one. What he told them he told them for their own and the universal good. He had said that if they could not act non-violently they should defend themselves violently rather than be cowards. But the ability to die smiling at the hands of a brother without retaliation, physical or mental, was the highest bravery.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

## 107

## PURITY ESSENTIAL FOR NON-VIOLENCE

Speaking in the prayer meeting, Gandhiji said that while he admitted his impotency regarding the spread of the *ahimsa* of the brave and the strong as distinguished from that of the weak, the admission was not meant to imply that he did not know how that inestimable virtue was to be cultivated. Consciousness of the living presence of God within one was undoubtedly the first requisite. Acquisition of this consciousness did not require or mean temple-going. The daily recitation, however, carried with it certain well-defined implications. Assuming that the millions of India daily recited at a given time the name of God as Rama, Allah, *Khuda*, *Ahura Mazda* and Jehovah but the recitation was not free from drunkenness, debauchery, gambling on the market or in gambling dens, black-marketing etc., the *Ramadhun* was a vain and inglorious effort. One with a wicked heart could never be conscious of the all-purifying presence of God.

*Harijan*, 29-6-'47

## 108

## VEGETARIANISM

I was told by all responsible leaders — both Hindu and Mohammedan — who are not given to be panicky — that it was taxing their resources to the utmost to avoid a Hindu-Mussulman disturbance. They informed me that certain Hindus, by name Gangaram Sharma, Bhutanath and Vidyanand for instance, had told the people that I had prohibited the use of meat to any Hindus or Mussulmans and that meat and fish were even forcibly taken away from people by overzealous vegetarians. I know that unlawful use is being made of my name in many places, but this is the most novel method of misusing it. It is generally known that I am a staunch vegetarian and

food reformer. But it is not equally generally known that *ahimsa* extends as much to human beings as to lower animals and that I freely associate with meat-eaters.

Needless to say I have authorized no one to preach vegetarianism as part of non-co-operation. I do not know the persons named above. I am sure that our purpose will be defeated if propaganda of any kind is accompanied by violence. Hindus may not compel Mussulmans to abstain from meat or even beef-eating. Vegetarian Hindus may not compel other Hindus to abstain from fish, flesh or fowl. I would not make India sober at the point of the sword. Nothing has lowered the morale of the nation so much as violence. Fear has become a part of the national character. Non-co-operators will make a serious mistake, if they seek to convert people to their creed by violence.

*Young India*, 18-5-'21

## 109

## VEGETARIANISM

A correspondent is born in a meat-eating family. He has successfully resisted the pressure from his parents to return to the fish-pot. "But," he says, "in a book I have before me, I read the opinion of Swami Vivekananda on the subject, and feel a good deal shaken in my belief. The Swami holds that for Indians in their present state flesh-diet is a necessity and he advises his friends to eat flesh freely. He even goes so far as to say, 'If you incur any sin thereby throw it upon me; I will bear it.' I am now in a fix whether to eat flesh or not."

This blind worship of authority is a sign of weakness of mind. If the correspondent has such a deep-seated conviction that flesh-eating is not right, why should he be moved by the opinion to the contrary of the whole world? One needs to be slow to form convictions, but once formed they must be defended against the heaviest odds.

As for the opinion of the great Swami, I have not seen the actual writing but I fear the correspondent has correctly quoted him. My opinion is well-known. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary for us at any stage and under any clime in which it is possible for human beings ordinarily to live. I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world if we are superior to it. Experience teaches that animal food is unsuited to those who would curb their passions.

But it is wrong to overestimate the importance of food in the formation of character or in subjugating the flesh. Diet is a powerful factor not to be neglected. But to sum up all religion in terms of diet, as is often done in India, is as wrong as it is to disregard all restraint in regard to diet and to give full reins to one's appetite. Vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of Hinduism. It may not be lightly given up. It is necessary therefore to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind or body, or passive or inert in action. The greatest Hindu reformers have been the activest in their generation and they have invariably been vegetarians. Who could show greater activity than say Shankara or Dayanand in their times ?

But my correspondent must not accept me as his authority. The choice of one's diet is not a thing to be based on faith. It is a matter for every one to reason out for himself. There has grown up especially in the West an amount of literature on vegetarianism which any seeker after truth may study with profit. Many eminent medical men have contributed to this literature. Here, in India, we have not needed any encouragement for vegetarianism. For it has been hitherto accepted as the most desirable and the most respectable thing. Those however who like the correspondent feel shaken, may study the growing movement towards vegetarianism in the West.

*Young India*, 7-10-'26

## 110

## IS THIS HUMANITY ?

The Ahmedabad Humanitarian League has addressed me a letter from which I take the relevant portions :

> "The talk of the whole city of Ahmedabad is the destruction of 60 dogs on his mill premises at the instance of Sheth..... Many a humanitarian heart is considerably agitated over the incident. When Hinduism forbids the taking of the life of any living being, when it declares it to be a sin, do you think it right to kill rabid dogs for the reason that they would bite human beings and by biting other dogs make them also rabid ? Are not the man who actually destroys the dogs as also the man at whose instance he does so both sinners ?
>
> "A deputation of three gentlemen from our Society waited on the Sheth on the 28th ultimo. He confessed in the course of the interview, that he had to take the course in question to save human life. He also said: 'I myself had no sleep on the night I took that decision. I met Mahatmaji the next morning and ascertained his view in the matter. He said, "What else could be done ?"' Is that a fact ? And if so, what does it mean ?
>
> "We hope you will express your views in the matter and set the whole controversy at rest and prevent humanitarianism from being endangered by the shocks given to it by distinguished men like the Sheth. The Ahmedabad Municipality, we have heard, is soon going to have before it a resolution for the castration of stray dogs. Is it proper ? Does religion sanction the castration of an animal ? We should be thankful if you would give your opinion in this matter also."

I gave the reply that the Society's letter attributes to me.

I have since thought over the matter and feel that my reply was quite proper.

Imperfect, erring mortals as we are, there is no course open to us but the destruction of rabid dogs. At times we may be faced with the unavoidable duty of killing a man who is found in the act of killing people.

If we persist in keeping stray dogs undisturbed, we shall soon be faced with the duty of either castrating them or killing them. A third alternative is that of having a

special *pinjrapole* for dogs. But it is out of the question. When we cannot cope with all the stray cattle in the city, the very proposal of having a *pinjrapole* for dogs seems to me to be chimerical.

There can be no two opinions on the fact that Hinduism regards killing a living being as sinful. I think all religions are agreed on the principle. There is generally no difficulty in determining a principle. The difficulty comes in when one proceeds to put it into practice. A principle is the expression of a perfection, and as imperfect beings like us cannot practise perfection, we devise every moment limits of its compromise in practice. So Hinduism has laid down that killing for sacrifice is no *himsa* (violence). This is only a half-truth. Violence will be violence for all time, and all violence is sinful. But what is inevitable is not *regarded* as a sin, so much so that the science of daily practice has not only declared the inevitable violence involved in killing for sacrifice as permissible but even regarded it as meritorious.

But unavoidable violence cannot be defined. For it changes with time, place, and person. What is regarded as excusable at one time may be inexcusable at another. The violence involved in burning fuel or coal in the depth of winter to keep the body warm may be unavoidable and therefore a duty, for a weak-bodied man, but fire unnecessarily lit in midsummer is clearly violence.

We recognize the duty of killing microbes by the use of disinfectants. It is violence and yet a duty. But why go even as far as that? The air in a dark closed room is full of little microbes, and the introduction of light and air into it by opening it is destruction indeed. But it is ever a duty to use that finest of disinfectants — pure air.

These instances can be multiplied. The principle that applies in the instances cited applies in the matter of killing rabid dogs. To destroy a rabid dog is to commit the minimum amount of violence. A recluse, who is living in a forest and is compassion incarnate, may not destroy a rabid dog. For in his compassion he has the virtue of making it whole. But a city-dweller who is responsible

for the protection of lives under his care and who does not possess the virtues of the recluse, but is capable of destroying a rabid dog, is faced with a conflict of duties. If he kills the dog he commits a sin. If he does not kill it, he commits a graver sin. So he prefers to commit the lesser one and save himself from the graver.

I believe myself to be saturated with *ahimsa* — non-violence. *Ahimsa* and truth are as my two lungs. I cannot live without them. But I see every moment with more and more clearness, the immense power of *ahimsa* and the littleness of man. Even the forest-dweller cannot be entirely free from violence, in spite of his limitless compassion. With every breath he commits a certain amount of violence. The body itself is a house of slaughter, and therefore *Moksha* and Eternal Bliss consist in perfect deliverance from the body, and therefore all pleasure, save the joy of *Moksha*, is evanescent, imperfect.

That being the case, we have to drink, in daily life, many a bitter draught of violence.

It is therefore a thousand pities that the question of stray dogs etc. assumes such a monstrous proportion in this sacred land of *ahimsa*. It is my firm conviction that we are propagating *himsa* in the name of *ahimsa* owing to our deep ignorance of the great principle. It may be a sin to destroy rabid dogs and such others as are liable to catch rabies. But we are responsible, the *Mahajan* is responsible, for this state of things. The *Mahajan* may not allow the dogs to stray. It is a sin, it should be a sin, to feed stray dogs, and we should save numerous dogs if we had legislation making every stray dog liable to be shot. Even if those who feed stray dogs consented to pay a penalty for their misdirected compassion we should be free from the curse of stray dogs.

Humanity is a noble attribute of the soul. It is not exhausted with saving a few fish or a few dogs. Such saving may even be sinful. If I have a swarm of ants in my house, the man who proceeds to feed them will be guilty of a sin. For God has provided their grain for the ants, but the man who feeds them might destroy me and

my family. The *Mahajan* may feel itself safe and believe that it has saved their lives by dumping dogs near my field, but it will have committed the greater sin of putting my life in danger. Humaneness is impossible without thought, discrimination, charity, fearlessness, humility and clear vision. It is no easy thing to walk on the sharp sword-edge of *ahimsa* in this world which is so full of *himsa*. Wealth does not help; anger is the enemy of *ahimsa*; and pride is a monster that swallows it up. In this strait and narrow observance of this religion of *ahimsa* one has often to know so-called *himsa* as the truest form of *ahimsa*.

Things in this world are not what they seem and do not seem as they really are. Or if they are seen as they are, they so appear only to a few who have perfected themselves after ages of penance. But none has yet been able to describe the reality, and no one can.

*Young India*, 21-10-'26

## 111

## IS THIS HUMANITY?

We cast a morsel at the beggar come to our door, and feel that we have earned some merit, but we really thereby add to the number of beggars, aggravate the evil of beggary, encourage idleness and consequently promote irreligion. This does not mean that we should starve the really deserving beggars. It is the duty of society to support the blind and the infirm, but every one may not take the task upon himself. The head of the society, i.e., the *Mahajan* or the State where it is well-organized, should undertake the task, and the philanthropically inclined should subscribe funds to such an institution. If the *Mahajan* is pure-minded and wise it will carefully investigate the condition of beggars and protect the deserving ones. When this does not happen, i. e., when

relief is indiscriminate, scoundrels disguised as beggars get the benefit of it and the poverty of the land increases.

If it is thus a sin on the part of an individual to undertake feeding beggars, it is no less a sin for him to feed stray dogs. It is a false sense of compassion. It is an insult to the starving dog to throw crumb at him. Roving dogs do not indicate the civilization or compassion of society, they betray on the contrary the ignorance and lethargy of its members. The lower animals are our brethren. I include among them the lion and the tiger. We do not know how to live with these carnivorous beasts and poisonous reptiles because of our ignorance. When man knows himself better, he will learn to befriend even these. Today he does not even know how to befriend a man of a different religion or from a foreign country.

The dog is a faithful companion. There are numerous instances of the faithfulness of dogs and horses. But that means that we should keep them and treat them with respect as we do our companions and not allow them to roam about. By aggravating the evil of stray dogs we shall not be acquitting ourselves of our duty to them. But if we regard the existence of stray dogs as a shame to us, and therefore refuse to feed them, we shall be doing the dogs as a class a real service and make them happy.

What then can a humane man do for stray dogs ? He should set apart a portion of his income and send it on to a society for the protection of those animals if there be one. If such a society is impossible — and I know it is very difficult even if it is not impossible — he should try to own one or more dogs. If he cannot do so, he should give up worrying about the question of dogs and direct his humanity towards the service of other animals.

" But you are asking us to destroy them ? " is the question angrily or lovingly asked by others. Now, I have not suggested the extirpation of dogs as an absolute duty. I have suggested the killing of some dogs as a 'duty in distress' and under certain circumstances. When the State does not care for stray dogs, nor does the *Mahajan*, and when one is not prepared to take care of them oneself,

then, and if one regards them as a danger to society, he should kill them and relieve them from a lingering death. This is a bitter dose, I agree. But it is my innermost conviction that true love and compassion consist in taking it.

Taking life may be a duty. Let us consider this position.

We do destroy as much life as we think is necessary for sustaining the body. Thus for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants etc. and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so.

This is as regards one's own self. But for the sake of others, i. e., for the benefit of the species we kill carnivorous beasts. When lions and tigers pester their villages, the villagers regard it a duty to kill them or have them killed.

Even manslaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing any one that comes his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Any one who despatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded a benevolent man.

From the point of view of *ahimsa* it is the plain duty of every one to kill such a man. There is indeed one exception if it can be so-called. The *yogi* who can subdue the fury of this dangerous man may not kill him. But we are not here dealing with beings who have almost reached perfection; we are considering the duty of a society of ordinary erring human beings.

There may be a difference of opinion as regards the appositeness of my illustrations. But if they are inadequate, others can be easily imagined. What they are meant to show is that refraining from taking life can in no circumstances be an absolute duty.

The fact is that *ahimsa* does not simply mean non-killing. *Himsa* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is *ahimsa*.

SEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

The physician who prescribes bitter medicine causes you pain but does no *himsa*. If he fails to prescribe bitter medicine when it is necessary to do so, he fails in his duty of *ahimsa*. The surgeon who, from fear of causing pain to his patient, hesitates to amputate a rotten limb is guilty of *himsa*. He who refrains from killing a murderer who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent him otherwise) earns no merit, but commits a sin; he practises no *ahimsa* but *himsa* out of a fatuous sense of *ahimsa*.

Let us now examine the root of *ahimsa*. It is uttermost selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one's body. When some sage observed man killing numberless creatures, big and small, out of a regard for his own body, he was shocked at his ignorance. He pitied him for thus forgetting the deathless soul, encased within the perishable body, and for thinking of the ephemeral physical pleasure in preference to the eternal bliss of the spirit. He therefrom deduced the duty of complete self-effacement. He saw that if man desires to realize himself, i. e. Truth, he could do so only by being completely detached from the body, i. e. by making all other beings feel safe from him. That is the way of *ahimsa*.

A realization of this truth shows that the sin of *himsa* consists not in merely taking life, but in taking life for the sake of one's perishable body. All destruction therefore involved in the process of eating, drinking etc. is selfish and therefore *himsa*. But man regards it to be unavoidable and puts up with it. But the destruction of bodies of tortured creatures being for their own peace cannot be regarded as *himsa*, or the unavoidable destruction caused for the purpose of protecting one's wards cannot be regarded as *himsa*.

This line of reasoning is liable to be most mischievously used. But that is not because the reasoning is faulty, but because of the inherent frailty of man to catch at whatever pretexts he can get to deceive himself to satisfy his selfishness or egoism. But that danger may not

excuse one from defining the true nature of *ahimsa*. Thus we arrive at the following result from the foregoing:

(1) It is impossible to sustain one's body without the destruction of other bodies to some extent.

(2) All have to destroy some life

(a) for sustaining their own bodies;

(b) for protecting those under their care; or

(c) sometimes for the sake of those whose life is taken.

(3) (a) and (b) in (2) mean *himsa* to a greater or less extent. (c) means no *himsa*, and is therefore *ahimsa*. *Himsa* in (a) and (b) is unavoidable.

(4) A progressive *ahimsa-ist* will therefore commit the *himsa* contained in (a) and (b) as little as possible only when it is unavoidable, and after full and mature deliberation and having exhausted all remedies to avoid it.

The destruction of dogs that I have suggested comes under (4) and can therefore be resorted to only when it is unavoidable, when there is no other remedy and after mature deliberation. But I have not the slightest doubt that refraining from that destruction when it is unavoidable is worse than destruction. And, therefore, although there can be no absolute duty to kill dogs etc., it becomes a necessary duty for certain people at certain times and under certain circumstances.

*Young India*, 4-11-'26

## 112

## IS THIS HUMANITY ?

A friend writes a long letter mentioning his difficulties and pointing out what Jainism has to say to him, a *shrawak*, in the matter. One of his questions is :

> "You say that if we can neither take individual charge of roving dogs nor have a *pinjrapole* for them, the only alternative is to kill them. Does that mean that every roving dog should be killed, although it may not be rabid ? Don't you agree that we leave unmolested all harmful beasts, birds and reptiles, so long as they do not actually harm us ? Why should the dogs be an exception ? Where is the humanity of shooting innocent dogs whenever they are found roving ? How can one wishing well to all living beings do this ?"

The writer has misunderstood my meaning. I would not suggest even the destruction of rabid dogs for the sake of it, much less that of innocent roving dogs. Nor have I said that these latter should be killed wherever they are found. I have only suggested legislation to that effect, so that as soon as the law is made, humane people might wake up in the matter and devise measures for the better management of stray dogs. Some of these might be owned, some might be put in quarantine. The remedy, when it is taken, will be once for all. Stray dogs do not drop down from heaven. They are a sign of the idleness, indifference, and ignorance of society. When they grow into a nuisance, it is due to our ignorance and want of compassion. A stray dog is bound to take to his heels if you do not feed him. The measure that I have suggested is actuated no less by a consideration of the welfare of the dogs than by that of society. It is the duty of a humanitarian to allow no living being aimlessly to roam about. In performance of that duty it may be his duty once in a way to kill some dogs.

Here is another question :

> "I agree that the dogs are sure to be killed by man whenever they become a menace to society. But you say, 'To wait

until they get rabid is not to be merciful to them.' This means that every dog is potentially rabid and that therefore it should be killed as a matter of precaution. I met a friend from the Ashram who assured me that you did not mean this, and that you had suggested it only as a last resource when dogs had become a menace. This is not clear from your articles. Will you make it clear ?"

My previous articles and my answer to the first question leave nothing to be cleared. I must explain what I mean when I say that you cannot wait on until the dog gets rabid. Every stray dog is harmful. The harm is confined to cities alone and it must stop. We do not wait until the serpent bites us. The rabies of the dog is concealed in its capacity to bite. A friend has sent me figures of cases of hydrophobia treated in the Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad :

| Period | Cases from the city | Cases from the District | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jan. to Dec. '25 | 194 | 923 | 1,117 |
| Jan. to Sept. '26 | 295 | 695 | 990 |

These figures must alarm every one who is interested in the welfare of the community, especially if he is a humanitarian. I admit that all the cases may not have been of hydrophobia. But it is difficult to say, whether a dog is or is not rabid, and many run in fear to the hospital because most dogs are found to be rabid afterwards. There is only one remedy to relieve them of this fear and it is not to allow dogs to roam about.

I was in England 40 years ago when effective measures were taken to stamp out rabies. There were of course no stray dogs there. But even for the dogs which had regular owners, an order was passed that dogs found without collars with the name and address of the owner thereon and without muzzles would be killed. The measure was taken purely in the public interest. Practically the next day all the dogs in London were found to be with collars and muzzles. It was therefore necessary to kill only a very few. If any one thinks that the people in the West are innocent of humanity he is sadly mistaken.

The ideal of humanity in the West is perhaps lower, but their practice of it is very much more thorough than ours. We rest content with a lofty ideal and are slow or lazy in its practice. We are wrapped in deep darkness, as is evident from our paupers, cattle and other animals. They are eloquent of our irreligion rather than of religion.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26

## 113

## IS THIS HUMANITY ?

In the letter under consideration as also in many others I see that there is an instinctive horror of killing living beings under any circumstances whatsoever. For instance, an alternative has been suggested in the shape of confining even rabid dogs in a certain place and allowing them to die a slow death. Now my idea of compassion makes this thing impossible for me. I cannot for a moment bear to see a dog, or for that matter any other living being, helplessly suffering the torture of a slow death. I do not kill a human being thus circumstanced because I have more hopeful remedies. I should kill a dog similarly situated, because in its case I am without a remedy. Should my child be attacked by rabies and there was no hopeful remedy to relieve his agony, I should consider it my duty to take his life. Fatalism has its limits. We leave things to Fate after exhausting all the remedies. One of the remedies and the final one to relieve the agony of a tortured child is to take his life.

But I shall not labour this point. What to my mind is impotence of the votaries of *ahimsa* is an obstacle to a true understanding of this *dharma*. I hope therefore that those who differ from me will for the present bear with me.

So much about the thoughtful letter of a friend. I shall now deal with an angry letter.

> "You have been" (says the letter) "so much under the Western influence that you have learnt to think it proper to kill lower beings for the sake of man. It is better for you to confess your error and apologize to the world. You should have made up your mind in this matter after exhaustless sifting. Instead, you have passionately taken sides and discredited yourself."

This is the least offensive sentence I have picked up from letters of this type. I submit I have not formed my opinion without much deliberation. It is not an opinion I have recently formed. Neither is it hasty. One should not let his so-called greatness come in the way of the formation of opinion, otherwise he cannot arrive at truth.

I do not think that everything Western is to be rejected. I have condemned Western civilization in no measured terms. I still do so, but it does not mean that everything Western should be rejected. I have learnt a great deal from the West and I am grateful to it. I should think myself unfortunate if contact with and the literature of the West had no influence on me. But I do not think I owe my opinion about the dogs to my Western education or Western influence. The West (with the exception of a small school of thought) thinks that it is no sin to kill the lower animals for what it regards to be the benefit of man. It has therefore encouraged vivisection. The West does not think it wrong to commit violence of all kinds for the satisfaction of the palate. I do not subscribe to these views. According to the Western standard, it is no sin, on the contrary it is a merit, to kill animals that are no longer useful. Whereas I recognize limits at every step, I regard even the destruction of vegetable life as *himsa*. It is not the teaching of the West.

*Argumentum ad hominem* has no place in a discussion of principles and their practice. My opinions should be considered as they are, irrespective of whether they are derived from the West or the East. Whether they are based on truth or untruth, *himsa* or *ahimsa*, is the only thing to be considered. I firmly believe that they are based on *truth* and *ahimsa*.

*Young India*, 18-11-'26

## 114

## IS THIS HUMANITY ?

Some of my correspondents do not seem to realize the fundamental consideration underlying my suggestion for the destruction of dogs under certain circumstances. Thus, for instance, I have not made the suggestion in a purely utilitarian spirit. The utility to society incidentally accrues from the act, but the principal consideration is the relief of the long drawn-out agony of the creatures whose present condition it is simply impossible for me to tolerate. In the articles in this series there has not been even the remotest suggestion that man has the right of disposal over the lower animals and that he may therefore kill them for his own comfort or pleasure. One of the writers betrays a strange confusion of thought when he says that the characteristic of an exalted soul is that he remains unaffected by the misery around him. He is callous, rather than exalted, who has not learnt to melt at other's woe, who has not learnt to see himself in others and others in himself. Intense longing for the happiness of others was the mother of discovery of *ahimsa*. And the sage who was the embodiment of compassion found his soul's delight in renouncing his own physical comfort and stopped killing for his pleasure the dumb creation about him.

A correspondent reminds me of the advice given me by Shri Rajachandra when I approached him with a doubt as to what I should do if a serpent threatened to bite me. Certainly his advice was that rather than kill the serpent I should allow myself to be killed by it. But the correspondent forgets that it is not myself that is the subject matter of the present discussion, but the welfare of society in general as also of the suffering animals. If I had approached Raychandbhai with the question whether I should or should not kill a serpent writhing in agony, and whose pain I could not relieve otherwise, or whether

I should or should not kill a serpent threatening to bite a child under my protection if I could not otherwise turn the reptile away, I do not know what answer he would have given. For me the answer is clear as daylight and I have given it.

A studious correspondent confronts me with some verses from a Jain philosopher and asks if I agree with the position taken up in them. One of the verses says: 'One should not kill even beasts of prey in the belief that by killing one such, he saves the lives of many.' Another says: 'Nor should one kill them out of a compassionate feeling that if they were suffered to live longer, they might sink deeper into sin.' 'Nor,' says the third verse, 'should one kill distressed creatures presuming that he would thereby shorten the length of their agony.'

To me the meaning of the verses is clear. And it is this that a particular theory should not be the spring of action in any case. You may commit *himsa*, not in order that you thereby realize in practice a pet theory of yours, but because you are driven to it as an imperative duty. Work which spontaneously comes to one's lot, or action without attachment, in the words of the *Gita*, is the duty of a seeker after *moksha*. Confine your energy to work that comes your way, I conceive the Jain philosopher to say, never seek fresh fields of activity. The verses, to me, define the mental attitude of detachment that should govern one's action in cases where *himsa* seems to be imperative and unavoidable.

But I have arrived at my present views independently of any authority, though originally they may have been drawn from various sources, and I submit that they are in perfect consonance with *ahimsa*, even though they may be proved to be contrary to the teaching of the philosopher.

*Young India*, 25-11-'26

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

115

# THE GREATEST GOOD OF ALL

A constant reader of *Young India* sends the following :

"Here is news in a press-cutting of a year ago which would seem to support your view regarding the duty of taking life under certain circumstances, which you have been expounding in the series of articles under the caption 'Is this Humanity ?', particularly in the fourth of the series published in *Young India* of November 4.

"'Special to the *Times of India*
Littleton (Colorado), Nov. 13 (1925)

"'Harold Blazer, a country doctor, aged 61, who chloroformed his daughter because he felt that his own end was near and there was no one to care for her when he was gone, was fully acquitted when the prosecution moved the dismissal of the case following the inability of the jury to agree after fourteen hours, at the end of which eleven were for an acquittal. Dr. Blazer's counsel, Mr. Howry, declared: 'Blazer did a right and moral thing by keeping the poor girl for whom he had cared for thirty-two years from becoming a charge on others. This imbecile girl, gargoyle, without arms, legs, speech or thought, whom it was necessary to feed with food already masticated, could not have a soul.'

"At about the same time last year I remember I read about a Paris case in which an actress shot and killed her lover at his own importunate request, as he was suffering excruciating pain from a disease from which there was no hope of recovery. The actress was tried for manslaughter, but acquitted on the jury's verdict that no crime had been committed in view of the circumstances. Though there appears to be no law in France to justify such a verdict, I have read that in Denmark there has been actually a law passed making it no crime for certain authorized persons in cases like the above to put an end to a human life with 'happy despatch'. I hope these cases may be of interest to you and many of my fellow readers of *Young India*."

I reproduce this letter for it helps me to elucidate my own position. If such a very careful reader of *Young India*, as I know this correspondent is, misunderstands my position as is evident from his letter, how many more occasional readers must have done likewise ? Several

readers did draw my attention to the danger of a misunderstanding arising owing to the traditional hardness of our hearts which makes us prone to seize every opportunity of doing violence. One can only be — one ought to be — most careful in the handling of delicate problems; but no fear of misuse of statements can be permitted to stop a free and honest discussion of fundamental truths. For me, I shall learn to be and do right only by prayerful discussion, elucidation and interchange of views. This letter I have quoted is an instance in point. The discussion has brought to light an honest misunderstanding of difference between the correspondent and myself in the interpretation of the same principle.

Whilst I am of opinion that Dr. Blazer was well acquitted, according to the test laid down by me, he was wrong in taking the life of his daughter. It betrayed want of faith in the humanity of those round him. There was no warrant for him to suppose that the daughter would not have been cared for by others. The position in the case of dogs under the circumstances assumed by me is materially different from the position in which Dr. Blazer found himself. Nor am I able to subscribe to the view that an idiot has no soul. I believe that even the lower creation have souls.

Weightier still is the difficulty which another earnest reader puts and which may be thus summarized:

> "I appreciate the position you have taken up. It is the only true position. But does not your argument after all resolve itself into the utilitarian doctrine of the greater good of the greater number? And if that is your position, wherein does the doctrine of non-violence differ from the utilitarian which makes no pretence to non-violence and which will not hesitate to destroy life if the destruction would lead to the greater good of the greater number?"

In the first place, even though the outward act may be the same, its implications will vary according to the motive prompting it. Thus as non-violence in the West stops at man and, even then, only where possible, there is no compunction felt either over subjecting animals to vivisection for the supposed greater good of mankind or

over heaping up most destructive armaments also in the name of the same doctrine of utility. A votary of non-violence, on the other hand, might have done one act of destruction in common with the utilitarian, but he would prefer to die rather than make himself party to vivisection or to an endless multiplication of armaments.

The fact is that a votary of *ahimsa* cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greater number, and therefore he and the utilitarian will converge at many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself. The absolutist, when he kills a dog, does so either out of weakness or in rare cases for the sake of the dog himself. That it is a dangerous thing to decide what is or is not good for the dog, and that he may therefore make grievous mistakes is irrelevant to the fact of the motive prompting the act. The absolutist's sphere of destruction will be always the narrowest possible. The utilitarian's has no limit. Judged by the standard of non-violence, the late war was wholly wrong. Judged by the utilitarian standard, each party has justified it according to its idea of utility. Even the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre was justified by its perpetrators on the grounds of utility. And precisely on the same ground the anarchist justifies his assassinations. But none of these acts can possibly be justified on the greatest-good-of-all principle.

*Young India*, 9-12-'26

## 116

## "HAPPY DESPATCH"?

The esteemed correspondent whose letter evoked the article, "The Greatest Good of All" (*Young India*, 9-12-'26) writes :

> "Of the three cases, you have dealt only with the first, that of Dr. Blazer, and expressed no opinion on the merits of the other two — the Paris case and the Danish law. I and many others of your readers, I am sure, would be grateful if you could enlighten us as to how you would judge these matters also from your own ethical standpoint."

The cases referred to are :

> "At about the same time last year I remember I read about a Paris case in which an actress shot and killed her lover at his own importunate request, as he was suffering excruciating pain from a disease from which there was no hope of recovery. The actress was tried for manslaughter, but acquitted on the jury's verdict that no crime had been committed in view of the circumstances. Though there appears to be no law in France to justify such a verdict, I have read that in Denmark there has been actually a law passed making it no crime for certain authorized persons in cases like the above to put an end to a human life with 'happy despatch'."

In my opinion, such killing, if it is done bona fide, will certainly not count as *himsa* as understood and defined by me. But I could not take it upon my shoulders to justify such action on the part of a third party, as I would never have sufficient material to judge such a case. The defence will rest solely upon the intention. And since no one but God is the infallible judge of intentions, every one must act on his own responsibility and take all the consequences. It follows, therefore, that the Danish law cannot be defended. And I should hold it to be most dangerous to justify any act of killing on the ground of the desire of the victim to be killed. There are many cases in which a man may for the moment, being overwhelmed with pain, desire to be killed rather than live in agony. But he would be most grateful upon recovery to know that his wish was not complied with. The better

thing would, in my opinion, be boldly to put an end to a life which we may absolutely know to be past saving. Such a case would be that of a comrade on the battle-field who has received a fatal wound and who has no possibility of receiving any medical aid. In this case it will not be his wish that would determine the act of killing but the certain knowledge of a lingering death in utter helplessness and without hope even of loving nursing. For it is assumed that the soldier who ends the agony by killing is not able even to nurse his wounded comrade.

*Young India*, 30-12-'26

## 117

## AHIMSA AGAIN

An M. B. B. S. from Mandalay writes :

"In the *Young India* for December 9, 1926, there appeared a press-cutting that one doctor Harold Blazer, who chloroformed his daughter because he felt that his own end was near and there was no one to care for her when he was gone, was fully acquitted. Dr. Blazer's counsel, Mr. Howry declared : 'Blazer did a right and moral thing by keeping the poor girl from becoming a charge on others.' To this you expressed your opinion that Dr. Blazer was wrong in taking the life of his daughter because it betrayed want of faith in the humanity of those round him and that there was no warrant for him to suppose that the daughter would not have been cared for by others. I would say that in expressing your opinion you have not pleaded like a pleader. I would request you to think over it again, for I think this is not an ordinary matter. For it is evident that you have got no scruples to put a useless burden on society simply because you have got enough faith in the society to shoulder the burden. For God's sake please excuse us from believing in that useless, nay, extremely harmful faith. Such a faith of yours, I sincerely believe, is very harmful to the best interests of India. Please see what did Dr. Blazer's counsel plead. He declared that Dr. Blazer did a right and moral thing by preventing the poor useless girl from becoming a burden on society. The question whether society would have cared for the child or not is beside the point. I would ask you one question : 'If after many more years of faithful service of India, you become blind, dumb and deaf, etc., or in other words become

absolutely useless to society, will you like society to feed you because you have got still life left in you or because you served so well?' I do not know what curious ideas you have got about *ahimsa* but my answer is quite clear. If I were quite useless for society even after many years of service, I should like to be killed rather than become a burden on society, for I reasonably believe that I shall be benefiting society by being killed, thus removing the burden upon the society which I love. That it is the duty of society to care for all useful human beings and animals is quite a different thing."

I do believe that whilst the jury was right in acquitting Dr. Blazer, considered from the strictly moral point of view, Dr. Blazer was wrong. My correspondent in his utilitarian zeal has overlooked the frightful consequences and implications of the doctrine he lays down. Indeed, his doctrine would belie his own profession. What would he say if a young practitioner chloroformed to death a patient whom he the junior practitioner considered to be incurable and therefore a useless burden to society and whom another as a senior subsequently found to be a case quite capable of cure? Is it not the boast of medical science to treat no case as finally incurable? As for myself, well, I do expect my countrymen to support me when I become a useless and burdensome article, assuming of course that I shall still want to live. What is more, I have full faith in my countrymen supporting me if that event comes to pass. I wonder whether my correspondent will have all the lepers, the blind, the deaf, one fine night to be chloroformed to sweet everlasting sleep. And yet Damien was a leper and Milton was a blind poet. Man is not all body but he is something infinitely higher.

His next question is:

"In the same article, i.e. 'The greatest good of all', you wrote, that a votary of *ahimsa* cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die so that the others may live. May I conclude then that you will prefer to be bitten by a poisonous snake and die rather than kill the same in trying to save yourself? If I am right in my conclusion, I think that in allowing yourself to be bitten by the snake rather than kill it, you will be committing the greatest sin I can ever think of. In that way you will be doing the

greatest possible harm to India by trying to save a harmful living creature and by dying willingly in trying to realize the ideal of your so-called greatest good of all. Is it not clear to you now ? Will you not change your opinion now about benefiting all ? I fear you will harm India in trying to benefit the whole world. You admit that you are an imperfect mortal. So it is impossible for you to benefit the whole world. It is even impossible for you to benefit the whole of India in all possible ways. Therefore it is quite reasonable to be contented with the greatest good of the greatest number rather than pretend to do the greatest good to all without exception, — the good and the wicked, the useful and the useless, man, animal etc. etc."

This is a question I would fain avoid answering, not because of want of faith but because of want of courage. But I must not conceal my faith even though I may not have the courage to act up to it when it is put on its trial. Here then is my answer. I do not want to live at the cost of the life even of a snake. I should let him bite me to death rather than kill him. But it is likely that if God puts me to that cruel test and permits a snake to assault me, I may not have the courage to die, but that the beast in me may assert itself and I may seek to kill the snake in defending this perishable body. I admit that my belief has not yet become so incarnate in me as to warrant my stating emphatically that I have shed all fear of snakes so as to befriend them as I would like to be able to. It is my implicit belief that snakes, tigers etc. are God's answer to the poisonous wicked evil thoughts that we harbour. Anna Kingsford saw in the streets of Paris tigers in men already taking shape. I believe that all life is one. Thoughts take definite forms. Tigers and snakes have kinship with us. They are a warning to us to avoid harbouring evil, wicked, lustful thoughts. If I want to rid the earth of venomous beasts and reptiles, I must rid myself of all venomous thoughts. I shall not do so if in my impatient ignorance and in my desire to prolong the existence of the body I seek to kill the so-called venomous beasts and reptiles. If in not seeking to defend myself against such noxious animals I die, I should die to rise again a better and a fuller man. With that faith in me how should I seek to kill a fellow-being in a snake ? But

this is philosophy. Let me pray and let my readers join in the prayer to God that He may give me the strength to live up to that philosophy. For philosophy without life corresponding is like a body without life.

I know that in this land of ours we have enough philosophy and but little life. But I know also that the laws governing the conduct of man have still to be explored and the condition of exploration is imperative and unalterable. We shall explore them only by dying, never by killing. We must become living embodiments of Truth and Love, for God is Truth and Love.

*Young India*, 14-4-'27

## 118

## TORTURE OF BULLOCKS

An English lady writes :

"I am much distressed and perplexed by the habitual torture of bullocks by the inhabitants of this country, chiefly Hindus, who call themselves protectors of the cow! The sight of the dislocated mutilated tail joints of the overburdened creatures toiling along roads is one never to be forgotten by a visitor to this country. The way the hands of the drivers, made filthy by cruelty, grasp and twitch the very backbone of the shrinking creatures at the tail socket, when the tail itself is a broken twisted abomination, is a sight which brings shame on the Hindu religion. Can you do nothing through your paper the *Young India* on behalf of these creatures, as also on behalf of the tormented fowls carried by the legs head down for miles to their destruction ? I enclose a picture of English oxen at work. The Indian has adopted the motor car for himself, why not the harness for his bullocks ?"

Whilst it is true that this fair visitor to India has indulged in a hasty generalization by accusing the inhabitants of India of habitual torture of bullocks,— for it is not every inhabitant, not even every tenth man who ill uses bullocks,— there is no doubt that some drivers in the cities are guilty of the practice referred to in the letter, and there is no doubt also that the passer-by goes his way totally oblivious of the torture, and there is truth

too in the statement about the inhuman carrying of fowls. It is possible to say of us who talk about *ahimsa* that we strain at a gnat and easily swallow a camel. We would be agitated if a rabid dog was shot, but we are indifferent, if not willing witnesses to the cruelties such as are mentioned in the letter I have produced. We seem to think that we have fully carried out the doctrine of *ahimsa* so long as we do not actually kill. In my opinion, this is a travesty of *ahimsa*. Every act of injury to a living creature and every endorsement of such act by refraining from non-violent effort wherever possible to prevent it is a breach of *ahimsa*. Here there is work for religious organizations that would be faithful to their convictions to conduct a crusade against cruelties to lower animals practised in the cities. The change from the yoke to the harness is undoubtedly desirable.

*Young India*, 30-8-'28

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
COLLECTED

119

# THE FIERY ORDEAL

[The killing of an ailing calf in the Ashram under circumstances described below having caused a great commotion in certain circles in Ahmedabad and some angry letters having been addressed to Gandhiji on the subject, he critically examined the question in the light of the principle of non-violence in an article in the *Navajivan*, the substance of which is given below.]

## I

## When Killing may be Ahimsa

An attempt is being made at the Ashram to run a small model dairy and tannery on behalf of the Go-seva Sangh. Its work in this connection brings it up, at every step, against intricate moral dilemmas that would not arise but for the keenness to realize the Ashram ideal of seeking Truth through the exclusive means of *ahimsa*.

For instance, some days back a calf having been maimed lay in agony in the Ashram. Whatever treatment and nursing was possible was given to it. The surgeon

whose advice was sought in the matter declared the case to be past help and past hope. The suffering of the animal was so great that it could not even turn its side without excruciating pain.

In these circumstances, I felt that humanity demanded that the agony should be ended by ending life itself. I held a preliminary discussion with the Managing Committee most of whom agreed with my view. The matter was then placed before the whole Ashram. At the discussion a worthy neighbour vehemently opposed the idea of killing even to end pain and offered to nurse the dying animal. The nursing consisted in co-operation with some of the Ashram sisters in warding the flies off the animal and trying to feed it. The ground of the friend's opposition was that one has no right to take away life which one cannot create. His argument seemed to me to be pointless here. It would have point if the taking of life was actuated by self-interest. Finally in all humility but with the clearest of convictions I got in my presence a doctor kindly to administer the calf a quietus by means of a poison injection. The whole thing was over in less than two minutes.

I knew that public opinion especially in Ahmedabad would not approve of my action and that it would read nothing but *himsa* in it.

But I know too that performance of one's duty should be independent of public opinion. I have all along held that one is bound to act according to what, to one, appears to be right even though it may appear wrong to others. And experience has shewn that that is the only correct course. I admit that there is always a possibility of one's mistaking right for wrong and vice versa but often one learns to recognize wrong only through unconscious error. On the other hand, if a man fails to follow the light within for fear of public opinion or any other similar reason he would never be able to know right from wrong and in the end lose all sense of distinction between the two. That is why the poet has sung :

"The pathway of love is the ordeal of fire,
The shrinkers turn away from it."

The pathway of *ahimsa*, that is, of love, one has often to tread all alone.

But the question may very legitimately be put to me: Would I apply to human beings the principle I have enunciated in connection with the calf? Would I like it to be applied in my own case? My reply is, 'Yes; the same law holds good in both the cases.' The law of यथा पिंडे तथा ब्रह्मांडे (as with one, so with all) admits of no exceptions, or the killing of the calf was wrong and violent. In practice however we do not cut short the sufferings of our ailing dear ones by death because as a rule we have always means at our disposal to help them and because they have the capacity to think and decide for themselves. But supposing that in the case of an ailing friend I am unable to render any aid whatever and recovery is out of the question and the patient is lying in an unconscious state in the throes of fearful agony then I would not see any *himsa* in putting an end to his suffering by death.

Just as a surgeon does not commit *himsa* but practises the purest *ahimsa* when he wields his knife on his patient's body for the latter's benefit, similarly one may find it necessary under certain imperative circumstances to go a step further and sever life from the body in the interest of the sufferer. It may be objected that whereas the surgeon performs his operation to save the life of the patient, in the other case we do just the reverse. But on a deeper analysis it will be found that the ultimate object sought to be served in both the cases is the same, viz. to relieve the suffering soul within from pain. In the one case you do it by severing the diseased portion from the body, in the other you do it by severing from the soul the body that has become an instrument of torture to it. In either case it is the relief of the soul within from pain that is aimed at, the body without the life within being incapable of feeling either pleasure or pain. Other circumstances can be imagined in which not to kill would

spell *himsa*, while killing would be *ahimsa*. Suppose for instance, that I find my daughter — whose wish at the moment I have no means of ascertaining — is threatened with violation and there is no way by which I can save her, then it would be the purest form of *ahimsa* on my part to put an end to her life and surrender myself to the fury of the incensed ruffian.

But the trouble with our votaries of *ahimsa* is that they have made of *ahimsa* a blind fetish and put the greatest obstacle in the way of the spread of true *ahimsa* in our midst. The current (and, in my opinion, mistaken) view of *ahimsa* has drugged our conscience and rendered us insensible to a host of other and more insidious forms of *himsa* like harsh words, harsh judgments, ill-will, anger and spite, and lust of cruelty. It has made us forget that there may be far more *himsa* in the slow torture of men and animals, the starvation and exploitation to which they are subjected out of selfish greed, the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and the killing of their self-respect that we witness all around us today than in mere benevolent taking of life. Does any one doubt for a moment that it would have been far more humane to have summarily put to death those who in the infamous lane of Amritsar were made by their torturers to crawl on their bellies like worms? If any one desires to retort by saying that these people themselves today feel otherwise, that they are none the worse for their crawling, I shall have no hesitation in telling him that he does not know even the elements of *ahimsa*. There arise occasions in a man's life when it becomes his imperative duty to meet them by laying down his life; not to appreciate this fundamental fact of man's estate is to betray an ignorance of the foundation of *ahimsa*. For instance, a votary of truth would pray to God to give him death to save him from a life of falsehood. Similarly a votary of *ahimsa* would on bent knees implore enemy to put him to death rather than humiliate him or make him do things unbecoming the dignity of a human being. As the poet has sung:

"The way of the Lord is meant for heroes,
Not for cowards."

It is this fundamental misconception about the nature and scope of *ahimsa*, this confusion about the relative values, that is responsible for our mistaking mere non-killing for *ahimsa* and for the fearful amount of *himsa* that goes on in the name of *ahimsa* in our country. Let a man contrast the sanctimonious horror that is affected by the so-called votaries of *ahimsa* at the very idea of killing an ailing animal to cut short its agony, with their utter apathy and indifference to countless cruelties that are practised on our dumb cattle world. And he will begin to wonder whether he is living in the land of *ahimsa* or in that of conscious or unconscious hypocrisy.

It is our spiritual inertia, lack of moral courage — the courage to think boldly and look facts squarely in the face that is responsible for this deplorable state of affairs. Look at our *pinjrapoles* and *goshalas*; many of them represent today so many dens of torture to which as a sop to conscience we consign the hapless and helpless cattle. If they could only speak they would cry out against us and say, "Rather than subject us to this slow torture give us death." I have often read this mute appeal in their eyes.

To conclude then, to cause pain or wish ill to or to take the life of any living being out of anger or a selfish intent is *himsa*. On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgment to kill or cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of *ahimsa*. Each such case must be judged individually and on its own merits. The final test as to its violence or non-violence is after all the intent underlying the act.

## II

### When Killing is Himsa

I now come to the other crying problem that is confronting the Ashram today. The monkey nuisance has become very acute and an immediate solution has become absolutely necessary. The growing vegetables and fruit

trees have become a special mark of attention of this privileged fraternity and are now threatened with utter destruction. In spite of all our efforts we have not yet been able to find an efficacious and at the same time non-violent remedy for the evil.

The matter has provoked a hot controversy in certain circles and I have received some angry letters on the subject. One of the correspondents has protested against the 'killing of monkeys and wounding them by means of arrows in the Ashram'. Let me hasten to assure the reader that no monkey has so far been killed in the Ashram, nor has any monkey been wounded by means of 'arrows' or otherwise, as imagined by the correspondent. Attempts are undoubtedly being made to drive them away and harmless arrows have been used for the purpose.

The idea of wounding monkeys to frighten them away seems to me unbearable though I am seriously considering the question of killing them in case it should become unavoidable. But this question is not so simple or easy as the previous one.

I see a clear breach of *ahimsa* even in driving away monkeys, the breach would be proportionately greater if they have to be killed. For any act of injury done from self-interest whether amounting to killing or not is doubtless *himsa*.

All life in the flesh exists by some *himsa*. Hence the highest religion has been defined by a negative word *ahimsa*. The world is bound in a chain of destruction. In other words *himsa* is an inherent necessity for life in the body. That is why a votary of *ahimsa* always prays for ultimate deliverance from the bondage of flesh.

None, while in the flesh, can thus be entirely free from *himsa* because one never completely renounces the will to live. Of what use is it to force the flesh merely if the spirit refuses to co-operate? You may starve even unto death but if at the same time the mind continues to hanker after objects of the sense, your fast is a sham and a delusion. What then is the poor helpless slave to the will to live to do? How is he to determine the exact

nature and the extent of *himsa* he must commit? Society has no doubt set down a standard and absolved the individual from troubling himself about it to that extent. But every seeker after truth has to adjust and vary the standard according to his individual need and to make a ceaseless endeavour to reduce the circle of *himsa*. But the peasant is too much occupied with the burden of his hard and precarious existence to have time or energy to think out these problems for himself, and the cultured class instead of helping him chooses to give him the cold shoulder. Having become a peasant myself, I have no clear-cut road to go by and must therefore chalk out a path for myself and possibly for fellow peasants. And the monkey nuisance being one of the multitude of ticklish problems that stare the farmer in the face, I must find out some means by which the peasants' crops can be safeguarded against it with the minimum amount of *himsa*.

I am told that the farmers of Gujarat employ special watchman whose very presence scares away the monkeys and saves the peasant from the necessity of killing them. That may be, but it should not be forgotten that whatever efficacy this method might have, it is clearly dependent upon some measure of destruction at some time or other. For these cousins of ours are wily and intelligent beings. The moment they discover that there is no real danger for them, they refuse to be frightened even by gun shots and only gibber and howl the more when shots are fired. Let nobody therefore imagine that the Ashram has not considered or left any method of dealing with the nuisance untried. But none of the methods that I have known up to now is free from *himsa*. Whilst therefore I would welcome any practical suggestions from the readers of the *Navajivan* for coping with this problem let the intending advisers bear in mind what I have said above and send only such solutions as they have themselves successfully tried and cause the minimum amount of injury.

***Young India*, 4-10-'28**

GANDHI SEVA SANGH TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

# THE TANGLE OF AHIMSA

My article " The Fiery Ordeal " has brought down upon me the ire of many an incensed critic. Some of them seem to have made the violence of their invective against me a measure of their solicitude for *ahimsa*. Others, as if to test my capacity for *ahimsa*, have cast all decorum and propriety to the winds and have poured upon me the lava of their unmeasured and acrimonious criticism, while still some others have felt genuinely grieved at what seems to them a sad aberration on my part and have written to me letters to unburden their grief to me. I have not the time to reply to all the letters that have been sent to me, nor do I feel it to be necessary. As for the acrimonious letters, the only possible purpose that they can serve is to provide me with some exercise in forbearance and non-violence. Leaving aside such letters therefore I shall here try to examine some arguments that I have been able to glean from other and soberly written communications.

I am always prepared to give my best consideration to letters that are brief and to the point and are neatly written out in ink in a clear legible hand. For I claim to be a humble seeker after truth and am conducting the *Navajivan* not merely to teach but also to learn.

To come now to the objections and the counsels addressed to me by my correspondents. They may be summed up as follows :

1. You should now retire from the field of *ahimsa*.

2. You should confess that your views about *ahimsa* are imported from the West.

3. You must not express views even when they are correct if there is a possibility of their being misused.

4. If you believe in the law of *karma* then your killing of the calf was a vain attempt to interfere with the operation of that law.

5. What warrant had you for believing that the calf was bound not to recover? Have you not heard of cases of recovery after the doctors have pronounced them to be hopeless?

Whether I should retire or not from the field of *ahimsa*, or for the matter of that from any other field, is essentially and solely for me to judge. A man can give up a right, but he may not give up a duty without being guilty of a grave dereliction. Unpopularity and censure are often the lot of a man who wants to speak and practise the truth. I hold it to be the bounden duty of a *satyagrahi* openly and freely to express his opinion which he holds to be correct and of benefit to the public even at the risk of incurring popular displeasure and worse. So long as I believe my views on *ahimsa* to be correct, it would be a sin of omission on my part not to give expression to them.

I have nothing to be ashamed of if my views on *ahimsa* are the result of my Western education. I have never tabooed all Western ideas, nor am I prepared to anathematize everything that comes from the West as inherently evil. I have learnt much from the West and I should not be surprised to find that I had learnt something about *ahimsa* too from the West. I am not concerned what ideas of mine are the result of my foreign contacts. It is enough for me to know that my views on *ahimsa* have now become a part and parcel of my being.

I have publicly discussed my views in the matter of the calf, not necessarily because I believe them to be correct, but because they are to the best of my knowledge based on pure *ahimsa* and as such likely to throw light on the tangled problem of *ahimsa*.

As for the problem of the monkeys, I have discussed it publicly, because I do not know my duty in the matter, and I am anxious to be enlightened. Let me assure the readers that my effort has not been in vain and I have already received several helpful suggestions from my correspondents. Let me further assure them that I would not proceed to the extreme length of killing unless I am

absolutely driven to it. It is because I am anxious to be spared this painful necessity that I have invited suggestions for dealing with these persistent and unwelcome guests.

I firmly believe in the law of *karma*, but I believe too in human endeavour. I regard as the *summum bonum* of life the attainment of salvation through *karma* by annihilating its effects by detachment. If it is a violation of the law of *karma* to cut short the agony of an ailing animal by putting an end to its life, it is no less so to minister to the sick or try to nurse them back to life. And yet if a man were to refuse to give medicine to a patient or to nurse him on the ground of *karma*, we would hold him to be guilty of inhumanity and *himsa*. Without therefore entering into a discussion about the eternal controversy regarding pre-destination and free-will I will simply say here that I deem it to be the highest duty of man to render what little service he can.

I admit that there was no guarantee that the calf would not recover. I have certainly known cases that were pronounced by doctors to be hopeless and were cured afterwards. But even so I hold that a man is bound to make the utmost use of his reason, circumscribed and poor as undoubtedly it is, and to try to penetrate the mists of ignorance by its light and try to act accordingly. And that is precisely what we do in countless cases in our everyday life. But strangely paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that the moment we come to think of death the very idea frightens us out of our wits and entirely paralyzes our reasoning faculty, although as Hindus we ought to be the least affected by the thought of death, since from the very cradle we are brought up on the doctrines of the immortality of the spirit and the transitoriness of the body. Even if it were found that my decision to poison the calf was wrong, it could have done no harm to the soul of the animal. If I have erred I am prepared to take the consequences of my error, but I refuse to go into hysterics because by my action I possibly cut short the painful existence of a dying calf, say, by a

couple of hours. And the rule that I have applied to the calf I am prepared to apply in the case of my own dear ones as well. Who knows how often we bring those we love to a premature end by our coddling, infatuation, wrong diagnosis or wrong treatment? The letters that I have received from my correspondents more than ever confirm me in my conviction that in our effusiveness over matters like this we forget the elementary duty of kindness, are led away from the path of true love, and discredit our *ahimsa*. The fear of death is thus the greatest obstacle in the way of our realizing the true nature of *ahimsa*.

*Young India*, 11-10-'28

## 121

## A CONUNDRUM

Some fiery champions of *ahimsa*, who seem bent upon improving the finances of the Postal Department, inundate me with letters full of abuse, and are practising *himsa* in the name of *ahimsa*. They would if they could prolong the calf controversy indefinitely. Some of them kindly suggest that my intellect has suffered decay with the attainment of the sixtieth year. Some others have expressed the regret that the doctors did not diagnose my case as hopeless when I was sent to the Sassoon Hospital and cut short my sinful career by giving me a poison injection in which case the poor calf in the Ashram might have been spared the poison injection and the race of monkeys saved from the menace of destruction. These are only a few characteristic samples from the sheaf-fuls of 'love letters' that I am receiving daily. The more I receive these letters the more confirmed I feel in the correctness of my decision to ventilate this thorny question in the columns of the *Navajivan*. It never seems to have struck these good people that by this unseemly exhibition of spleen they merely prove their unfitness to be votaries or exponents of *ahimsa* and strike it at the very root. I turn however

from these fulminations to one from among a batch of letters of a different order that I have received and I take the following from it :

> "Your exposition of the ethics of the 'calf-incident' has cleared up a lot of my doubts and shed valuable light on the implications of *ahimsa*. But unfortunately it raises a fresh difficulty. Suppose, for instance, that a man begins to oppress a whole people and there is no other way of putting a stop to his oppression; then proceeding on the analogy of the calf, would it not be an act of *ahimsa* to rid society of his presence by putting him to death? Would you not regard such an act as an unavoidable necessity and therefore as one of *ahimsa*? In your discussion about the killing of the calf you have made the mental attitude the principal criterion of *ahimsa*. Would not, according to this principle, the destruction of proved tyrants be counted as *ahimsa*, since the motive inspiring the act is of the highest? You say that there is no *himsa* in killing off animal pests that destroy a farmer's crops; then why should it not be *ahimsa* to kill human pests that threaten society with destruction and worse?"

The discerning reader will have already perceived that this correspondent has altogether missed the point of my argument. The definition of *ahimsa* that I have given cannot by any stretch of meaning be made to cover a case of manslaughter such as the correspondent in question postulates. I have nowhere described the unavoidable destruction of life that a farmer has to commit in pursuit of his calling as *ahimsa*. One may regard such destruction of life as unavoidable and condone it as such, but it cannot be spelt otherwise than as *himsa*. The underlying motive with the farmer is to subserve his own interest or, say that of society. *Ahimsa* on the other hand rules out such interested destruction. But the killing of the calf was undertaken for the sake of the dumb animal itself. Any way its good was the only motive.

The problem mentioned by the correspondent in question may certainly be compared to that of the monkey nuisance. But then there is a fundamental difference between the monkey nuisance and the human nuisance. Society as yet knows of no means by which to effect a change of heart in the monkeys, and their killing *may*

therefore be held as pardonable, but there is no evil-doer or tyrant who need be considered beyond reform. That is why the killing of a human being out of self-interest can never find a place in the scheme of *ahimsa*.

To come now to the question of motive, whilst it is true that mental attitude is the crucial test of *ahimsa*, it is not the sole test. To kill any living being or thing save for his or its own interest is *himsa*, however noble the motive may otherwise be. And a man who harbours ill-will towards another is no less guilty of *himsa* because for fear of society or want of opportunity he is unable to translate his ill-will into action. A reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order finally to decide whether a particular act or abstention can be classed as *ahimsa*. After all intent has to be inferred from a bunch of correlated acts.

*Young India*, 18-10-'28

GRAMASEVA TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

## 122

## JAIN AHIMSA ?

A Jain friend who is reputed to have made a fair study of the Jain philosophy as also of the other systems has addressed me a long letter on *ahimsa*. It deserves a considered reply. He says in effect :

> "Your interpretation of *ahimsa* has caused confusion. In the ordinary sense of the term *himsa* means to sever life from body and not to do so is *ahimsa*. Refraining from causing pain to any living creature is only an extension of the original meaning which cannot by any stretch of language be made to cover the taking of life. You would not understand me to mean from this that I regard all taking of life as wrong in every possible circumstance; for I do not think that there is any ethical principle in this world that can be regarded as absolute and admitting of no exception whatever. The maxim, '*Ahimsa* is the highest or the supreme duty' embodies a great and cardinal truth, but it does not cover the entire sum of human duties. Whilst therefore what you have termed 'non-violent killing' may be a right thing it cannot be described as *ahimsa*."

I am of opinion that just as life is subject to constant change and development, the meanings of terms too are

constantly undergoing a process of evolution ; this can be amply proved by illustrations from the history of any religion. The word *yajna* or sacrifice in the Hindu religion, for instance, is an illustration in point. Sir J. C. Bose's discoveries are today revolutionizing the accepted connotations of biological terms. Similarly if we will fully realize *ahimsa* we may not fight shy of discovering fresh implications of the doctrine of *ahimsa*. We cannot improve upon the celebrated maxim, '*Ahimsa* is the highest or the supreme duty', but we are bound, if we would retain our spiritual inheritance, to explore the implications of this great and universal doctrine. But I am not particular about names. I do not mind whether the taking of life in the circumstances I have mentioned is called *ahimsa* or not, so long as its correctness is conceded.

Another poser mentioned by this friend is as follows :

> "I have been unable to follow you in your description of the imaginary killing of your daughter in the hypothetic circumstances described by you. It may be right to kill the ruffian in such a case, but what fault has the poor daughter committed ? Would you regard the pollution of the poor victim as a disgrace to be avoided by death ? Don't you think that in such circumstances even if the poor girl for fear of public ignominy and shame begs to be put out of life, it would be your duty to dissuade her from her wishes ? As for me, I do not see the slightest difference between a case of dishonour or rape and a case in which one has had one's limbs cut off by force."

My reason for putting my daughter to death in circumstances mentioned by me would not be that I feared her being polluted but that she herself would have wished death if she could express her desire. If my daughter wanted to be put out of life because she was afraid of public scandal and criticism I would certainly try to dissuade her from her wish. I would take her life only if I was absolutely certain that she would wish it. I know that Sita would have preferred death to dishonour by Ravana. And that is also what, I believe, our *shastras* have enjoined. I know that it is the daily prayer of thousands of men and women that they might have death rather than

dishonour. I deem it to be highly necessary that this feeling should be encouraged. I am not prepared to admit that the loss of chastity stands on the same footing as the loss of a limb. But I can imagine circumstances in which one would infinitely prefer death even to being maimed.

The third poser runs :

> "I cannot understand why the idea of wounding a few monkeys in order to frighten away the rest instead of straightaway proceeding to kill them off should be regarded as intolerable by you. Don't you feel that the longing for life is strong even among the blind and the maimed animals ? Don't you think that the impulse to kill a living creature because one cannot bear to see its suffering is a kind of selfishness ?"

The idea of wounding monkeys is unbearable to me because I know that a wounded monkey has to die a lingering death if left to itself. And if monkeys have to die at all by any act of mine, I would far rather that they were killed summarily than that they were left to die by inches. Again it beats my comprehension how I am practising *ahimsa* by thus wounding the monkeys instead of killing them outright. It might be a different thing if I was prepared to erect a hospital for wounded monkeys. I concede that the maimed and the blind would evince a longing for life if they have some hope of getting succour or relief. But imagine a blind ignorant creature, with no faith in God, marooned in a desert place beyond the reach of any help and with a clear knowledge of his plight and I cannot believe that such a creature would want to continue its existence. Nor am I prepared to admit that it is one's duty to nurse the longing for life in *all* circumstances.

The fourth poser is as follows :

> "The Jain view of *ahimsa* rests on the following three principles :
>
> 'No matter what the circumstances are or how great the suffering, it is impossible for any one deliberately to renounce the will to live or to wish another to put him out of pain. Therefore the taking of life cannot in any circumstances be morally justified.
>
> 'In a world full of activities which necessitate *himsa*,

an aspirant for salvation should try to follow *ahimsa* by engaging in the fewest possible activities.

'There are two kinds of *himsa* — direct such as that involved in agriculture, and indirect as that involved in the eating of agricultural produce. Where one cannot altogether escape from either, a votary of *ahimsa* should try to avoid direct *himsa*.'

I would earnestly request you critically to examine and discuss these three Jain principles of *ahimsa* in the *Navajivan*. I notice that there is a vital difference between your view of *ahimsa* and that of the Jains. Whereas your view of *ahimsa* is based on the philosophy of action, that of the Jains is based on that of renunciation of action. The present is an era of action. If the principle of *ahimsa* be an eternal and universal principle untrammelled by time and place, it seems to me that there is a great need to stimulate the people's mind to think out for themselves as to how the principle of *ahimsa* that has so far been confined to the field of renunciation only can be worked in present day life of action and what form it will take when applied to this new environment."

It is with the utmost reluctance that I have to enter into a discussion of these principles. I know the risks of such discussion. But I see no escape from it. As for the first principle I have already expressed my opinion on it in a previous portion of this article. It is my firm conviction that the principle of clinging to life in *all* circumstances betrays cowardice and is the cause of much of the *himsa* that goes on around us, and blind adherence to this principle is bound to increase instead of reducing *himsa*. It seems to me that if this Jain principle is really as it is here enunciated, it is a hindrance to the attainment of salvation. For instance, a person who is constantly praying for salvation will never wish to continue his life at the expense of another's. Only a person steeped in ignorance who cannot even remotely understand what salvation means would wish to continue life on any terms. The *sine qua non* of salvation is a total annihilation of all desire. How dare, then, an aspirant for salvation be sordidly selfish or wish to preserve his perishable body at all costs ? Descending from the field of salvation to that of the family, one's country, or the world of humanity, we again find innumerable instances of men and women who

have dedicated themselves to the service of their family, their country or the world at large in entire disregard of their own life, and this ideal of utter self-sacrifice and self-abnegation at present is being inculcated throughout the world. To hang on to life at all costs seems to me the very height of selfishness. Let however nobody understand me to mean that one may try to wean another even from such sordid egoism by force. I am adducing the argument merely to show the fallacy of the doctrine of will to live at all costs.

As for the second, I do not know whether it can at all be described as a principle. But be that as it may, to me it represents a truism and I heartily endorse it.

Coming to the third principle in the form in which it is enunciated by the friend, it suffers from a grave defect. The most terrible consequence of this principle to me seems to be this that if we accept it, then a votary of *ahimsa* must renounce agriculture although he knows that he cannot renounce the fruits of agriculture, and that agriculture is an indispensable condition for the existence of mankind. The very idea that millions of the sons of the soil should remain steeped in *himsa* in order that a handful of men who live on the toil of these people might be able to practise *ahimsa* seems to me to be unworthy of and inconsistent with the supreme duty of *ahimsa*. I feel that this betrays a lack of perception of the inwardness of *ahimsa*. Let us see, for instance, to what it leads to if pushed to its logical conclusion. You may not kill a snake but if necessary, according to this principle, you may get it killed by somebody else. You may not yourself forcibly drive away a thief but you may employ another person to do it for you. If you want to protect the life of a child entrusted to your care from the fury of a tyrant, somebody else must bear the brunt of the tyrant's fury for you. And you thus refrain from direct action in the sacred name of *ahimsa* ! This, in my opinion, is neither religion nor *ahimsa*. So long as one is not prepared to take the risks mentioned and to face the consequences, one cannot be free from fear, and so long as a man has not

27 SEP 1955

shed all fear he is *ipso facto* incapable of practising *ahimsa*. Our scriptures tell us that *ahimsa* is all-conquering. That before it even the wild beasts shed their ferocity and the most hard-hearted of tyrants forget their anger. Utterly inadequate and imperfect as my own practice of *ahimsa* has been, it has enabled me to realize the truth of this principle. I cannot once more help expressing my doubt that Jainism subscribes to the third principle of *ahimsa* as enunciated by this friend. But even if the Jain doctrine is just as it is stated by the friend, I must say, I for one cannot reconcile myself to it.

Now to come to the question of renunciation versus action: I believe in the doctrine of renunciation but I hold that renunciation should be sought for in and through action. That action is the *sine qua non* of life in the body, that the Wheel of Life cannot go on even for a second without involving some sort of action goes without saying. Renunciation can, therefore, in these circumstances, only mean detachment or freedom of the spirit from action, even while the body is engaged in action. A follower of the path of renunciation seeks to attain it not by refraining from all activity but by carrying it on in a perfect spirit of detachment and altruism as a pure trust. Thus a man may engage in farming, spinning, or any other activity without departing from the path of renunciation provided one does so merely for selfless service and remains free from the taint of egoism or attachment. It remains for those therefore who like myself hold this view of renunciation to discover for themselves how far the principle of *ahimsa* is compatible with life in the body and how it can be applied to acts of everyday life. The very virtue of a *dharma* is that it is universal, that its practice is not the monopoly of the few, but must be the privilege of all. And it is my firm belief that the scope of truth and *ahimsa* is world-wide. That is why I find an ineffable joy in dedicating my life to researches in truth and *ahimsa* and I invite others to share it with me by doing likewise.

*Young India*, 25-10-'28

123

# MORE ABOUT AHIMSA

## I

A correspondent writes :

"I have read your article 'The Fiery Ordeal' over and over again but it has failed to satisfy me. Your proposal about the killing of monkeys has taken me aback. I believed that a person like you with his being steeped in *ahimsa* would never swerve from the right path even though the heavens fell. And now you say that you might kill off the monkeys to protect your Ashram against their inroads. May be that my first impression about you was wrong. But I cannot describe to you what a shock your proposal about the killing of the monkeys has given me, and may I also confess, how angry it has made me feel against you ? Would you kindly help me out of my perplexity ? "

I have received several other letters, too, in the same strain. I am afraid people have formed an altogether exaggerated estimate of me. These good people seem to think that because I am trying to analyze and define the ideal of *ahimsa* I must have fully attained that ideal. My views regarding the calf and the monkeys seem happily to have shattered this illusion of theirs. Truth to me is infinitely dearer than the *mahatmaship* which is purely a burden. It is my knowledge of my limitations and my nothingness which has so far saved me from the oppressiveness of the *mahatmaship*. I am painfully aware of the fact that my desire to continue life in the body involves me in constant *himsa*, that is why I am becoming growingly indifferent to this physical body of mine. For instance, I know that in the act of respiration I destroy innumerable invisible germs floating in the air. But I do not stop breathing. The consumption of vegetables involves *himsa*, but I find that I cannot give them up. Again, there is *himsa* in the use of antiseptics, yet I cannot bring myself to discard the use of disinfectants like kerosene etc. to rid myself of the mosquito pest and the like. I suffer snakes to be killed in the Ashram when it is impossible to catch and put them out of harm's way. I

even tolerate the use of the stick to drive the bullocks in the Ashram. Thus there is no end of *himsa* which I directly and indirectly commit. And now I find myself confronted with this monkey problem. Let me assure the reader that I am in no hurry to take the extreme step of killing them. In fact, I am not sure that I would at all be able finally to make up my mind to kill them. As it is, friends are helping me with useful suggestions and the adoption of some of them may solve the difficulty at least temporarily without our having to kill them. But I cannot today promise that I shall never kill the monkeys even though they may destroy all the crop in the Ashram. If as a result of this humble confession of mine, friends choose to give me up as lost, I would be sorry, but nothing will induce me to try to conceal my imperfections in the practice of *ahimsa*. All I claim for myself is that I am ceaselessly trying to understand the implications of great ideals like *ahimsa* and to practise them in thought, word and deed, and that not without a certain measure of success as I think. But I know that I have a long distance yet to cover in this direction. Unless therefore the correspondent in question can bring himself to bear with my imperfections I am sorry I can offer him but little consolation.

## II

Another correspondent writes :

> "Supposing my elder brother is suffering from a terrible and painful malady and doctors have despaired of his life and I too feel likewise, should I in the circumstances put him out of life ?"

My reply is in the negative. I am afraid some of my correspondents have not even taken the trouble to understand my article. In propounding their conundrums they forget that whilst I have certainly compared the case of an ailing human being with that of an ailing calf and recommended the killing of the former in exactly similar circumstances, in actual practice such a complete analogy is hardly ever to be found. In the first place, the human body being much more manageable in bulk is always

easier to manipulate and nurse; secondly, man being gifted with the power of speech, more often than not, is in a position to express his wishes, and so the question of taking his life without his consent cannot come within the rule. For I have never suggested that the life of another person can be taken against his will without violating the principle of *ahimsa*. Again, we do not always despair of the life of a person when he is reduced to a comatose state and even when he is past all hope he is not necessarily past all help. More often than not, it is both possible and practicable to render service to a human patient till the very end. Whilst, therefore, I would still maintain that the principle enunciated regarding the calf applies equally to 'man and bird and beast' I should expect an intelligent person to know the obvious natural difference between a man and an animal. To recapitulate the conditions of the fulfilment of *all* of which alone can warrant the taking of life from the point of view of *ahimsa*:

1. The disease from which the patient is suffering should be incurable.
2. All concerned have despaired of the life of the patient.
3. The case should be beyond all help or service.
4. It should be impossible for the patient in question to express his or its wish.

So long as even one of these conditions remains unfulfilled the taking of life from the point of view of *ahimsa* cannot be justified.

## III

A third correspondent writes:

> "Well, the killing of the calf is all right so far as it goes. But have you considered that your example is likely to afford a handle to those who indulge in animal sacrifices and thus accentuate the practice; do you not know that even those who commit these deeds argue that the animals sacrificed gain merit in the life to follow?"

Such abuse of my action is quite possible, and inevitable so long as there are hypocrisy and ignorance in this world. What crimes have not been committed in the

world in the sacred name of religion ? One therefore need not be deterred from doing what he considers to be right merely because one's conduct may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by others. And as for those who practise animal sacrifice, surely they do not need the authority of my example to defend their conduct since they profess to take their stand on the authority of the *shastras*. My fear, however, is that proceeding on my analogy some people might actually take it into their head summarily to put to death those whom they might imagine to be their enemies on the plea that it would serve both the interests of society and the 'enemies' concerned, if the latter were killed. In fact I have often heard people advance this argument. But it is enough for my purpose to know that my interpretation of *ahimsa* affords no basis whatever for such an argument, for in the latter case there is no question of serving or anticipating the wishes of the victims concerned. Finally, even if it were admitted that it was in the interests of the animal or the enemy in question to be summarily despatched, the act would still be spelt as *himsa* because it would not be altogether disinterested. The fallacy is so obvious. But who can help people who seeing see not, or are bent upon deceiving themselves ?

*Young India*, 1-11-'28

## 124

## SOME POSERS IN AHIMSA

### I

A correspondent writes :

"My baby is four months old. It fell ill a fortnight after its birth and there seems no end of its ailment in sight. Several *vaidyas* and doctors have tried their skill upon him, but in vain; some of them now even decline to administer any medicine to him. They feel, and I feel with them, that the fate of the poor thing is sealed. I have a big family to maintain and I feel myself reduced to sore straits as I have an accumulation of debts. Nor can I any longer bear to see the terrible sufferings of the baby. Would you kindly tell me what I should do in the circumstances ?"

It is clear that this friend has not been reading the *Navajivan* carefully or he would not have asked this question. There would be no warrant for taking the life of the baby even if all the doctors in the world were to pronounce the case to be hopeless because it would always be possible for its father to nurse it. He can soothe the baby in a variety of ways, its size unlike the calf's being manageable. It is only when every possible avenue of service however small is closed and the last ray of hope of the patient surviving seems extinct that one is justified in putting him out of pain, and then too only if one is completely free from the taint of selfish feeling. In the present case, not only is the service of the ailing baby possible, but the main consideration that, on the father's own admission, weighs with him is the personal inconvenience involved in nursing the baby. Largeness of the family or one's pecuniary difficulty can never serve as a justification for putting an end to the life of an ailing patient, and I have not the slightest doubt that in the present instance it is the bounden duty of the father to lavish all his love and care on his suffering baby. There is however one thing more which he can do: if he has sense enough to see it, he should resolve forthwith to lead a life of perfect self-restraint and further stop procreating irrespective of whether his present baby survives or not.

## II

Another friend writes in the course of a Hindi letter:

> "I am the manager of.....*goshala*. There are in my charge some 500 head of cattle. They are all utterly useless for any purpose and are simply eating their head off. Out of these from 350 to 400 animals on the average are constantly at death's door, destined to die off one by one in the long run every year. Now tell me what am I to do?"

As I have already explained, giving the short shrift, from considerations of financial expediency, can never be compatible with non-violence. And if it is a fact that not a day passes in this *goshala* without some animal or other dying painfully in the manner of that calf in the Ashram,

it makes out a strong case for closing the *goshala* at once for it betrays fearful mismanagement. The calf in the Ashram was reduced to such piteous plight only as the result of an accident but daily instances like this should *ipso facto* be impossible in a well-managed institution. The duty of the management in the present case is thus clear. It is incumbent upon them and upon the organizers of all similarly placed institutions to devise the most effective means of nursing and ministering to the needs of diseased and ailing cattle. I would also recommend to them for careful study and consideration my description of an ideal *pinjrapole* and the way it ought to be managed that I have given more than once in these pages.

## III

Writes a *Kanabi* friend :

> "There is a grazing ground for the cattle near our village. It is overrun by a herd of deer about five to seven hundred strong. They work havoc upon all our cotton saplings. We are in a fix. We can easily get rid of them by employing professional watchmen who would kill them for the venison they would get. What would be your advice to a man in my condition ? Again when insect pests attack our crops the only way to deal with them is to light a fire of hay which means making a holocaust of the insect pests. What course would you suggest in these circumstances ?"

This question is of a different order from the other two questions ; it falls under the category of the monkey question, not the calf question. I am unable to guide any one in the path of *himsa*. In fact no person can lay down for another the limit to which he may commit *himsa* ; this is a question which everybody must decide for himself according to the measure of his capacity for *ahimsa*. This much, however, I can say without any hesitation that to use the analogy of the monkeys to justify the killing of the deer would only betray a laziness of thought and lack of discrimination. The two cases are so dissimilar. Besides, I have not yet decided to kill the monkeys, nor is there any likelihood of my doing so presently. On the contrary it has been and shall be my

ceaseless anxiety to be spared that painful necessity. Moreover, there is quite a number of ways of keeping off the deer from the fields which would be impossible in the case of elusive creatures like monkeys. Whilst therefore reiterating what every farmer knows from his daily experience also to be true, viz., that destruction of small insects and worms is inevitable in agriculture, I am unable to proceed any further, but must content myself by stating generally that it is sacred duty of everybody to avoid committing *himsa* to the best of one's power.

## IV

Still another friend writes:

> "You say that an absolute observance of *ahimsa* is incompatible with life in the body, that so long as a man is in the flesh he cannot escape the commission of *himsa* in some form or other as the very process of our physical existence involves *himsa*. How then can *ahimsa* be the highest virtue, the supreme duty? Would you set forth as the highest religious ideal a code of conduct which is altogether impossible of being fulfilled in its completeness by man? And if you do, what would be the practical worth of such an ideal?"

My humble submission is, that contrary to what this writer says, the very virtue of a religious ideal lies in the fact that it cannot be completely realized in the flesh. For a religious ideal must be proved by faith, and how can faith have play if perfection could be attained by the spirit while it was still surrounded by its 'earthly vesture of decay'? Where would there be scope for its infinite expansion which is its essential characteristic? Where would be room for that constant striving, that ceaseless quest after the ideal that is the basis of all spiritual progress, if mortals could reach the perfect state while still in the body? If such easy perfection in the body was possible, all we would have to do would be simply to follow a cut and dry model. Similarly if a perfect code of conduct were possible for all there would be no room for a diversity of faiths and religions because there would be only one standard religion which everybody would have to follow.

The virtue of an ideal consists in its boundlessness. But although religious ideals must thus, from their nature, remain unattainable by imperfect human beings, although by virtue of their boundlessness they may seem ever to recede farther away from us, the nearer we go to them, still they are closer to us than our very hands and feet because we are more certain of their reality and truth than even of our own physical being. This faith in one's ideals alone constitutes true life, in fact it is man's all in all.

*Young India*, 22-11-'28

## 125

## AHIMSA AND VEGETARIANISM

It should be remembered that mere *jivadaya* (kindness to animals) does not enable us to overcome the 'six deadly enemies' within us, namely lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood. Give me the man who has completely conquered self and is full of goodwill and love towards all and is ruled by the law of love in all his actions, and I for one will offer him my respectful homage even though he be a meat-eater. On the other hand the *jivadaya* of a person who is steeped in anger and lust but daily feeds the ants and insects and refrains from killing has hardly anything in it to recommend itself. It is a mechanical performance without any spiritual value. It may even be worse — a hypocritical screen for hiding the corruption within.

*Harijan*, 15-9-'40

## EATING NON-VEGETARIAN FOOD

*Q.* You say that those who eat fish should be provided with the same. Does not this entail violence both for him who eats and him who provides the fish ?

*A.* Both commit violence. So do those who eat vegetables. This kind of violence is inherent in all embodied life, therefore, in man too. It is in this condition and in spite of it that we have to practise non-violence as a duty. I have often indicated how we may do so. The man who coerces another not to eat fish commits more violence than he who eats it. Fishermen, fish-vendors and fish-eaters are probably unaware of any violence in their action. Even if they were they might look upon it as unavoidable. But the man who uses coercion is guilty of deliberate violence. Coercion is inhuman. Those who quarrel among themselves, those who will stoop to anything in order to amass wealth, those who exploit or indulge in forced human labour, those who overload or goad or otherwise torture animals, all these knowingly commit such violence as can easily be stopped. I do not consider it violence to permit the fish-eater to eat fish. It is my duty to suffer it. *Ahimsa* is the highest duty. Even if we cannot practise it in full, we must try to understand its spirit and refrain as far as is humanly possible from violence.

*Harijan*, 24-3-'46

127

## NON-KILLING OF ANIMALS

My *ahimsa* is my own. I am not able to accept in its entirety the doctrine of non-killing of animals. I have no feeling in me to save the life of these animals who devour or cause hurt to man. I consider it wrong to help in the increase of their progeny. Therefore, I will not feed ants, monkeys, or dogs. I will never sacrifice a man's life in order to save theirs.

Thinking along these lines I have come to the conclusion that to do away with monkeys where they have become a menace to the well-being of man is pardonable. Such killing becomes a duty. The question may arise as to why this rule should not also apply to human beings. It cannot because, however bad, they are as we are. Unlike the animal, God has given man the faculty of reason.

*Harijan*, 5-5-'46

128

## HOW TO SPREAD VEGETARIANISM

A Muslim friend complained that in his part of the Union vegetarian Hindus insisted upon the Muslims living in their midst, abstaining even from fish and mutton. Gandhiji said that he had no patience with such intolerance and narrow-mindedness. Vegetarians in India, from religious conviction, were said to be in a minority. The vast majority of the Hindus throughout India whenever they got an opportunity, did not hesitate to eat fish, fowl or mutton. What right had vegetarians to impose their cult on the Muslims? They would not dare to impose it on their Hindu non-vegetarians. The whole thing appeared to him to be ridiculous. The correct way for people to spread vegetarianism was to reason out its beauties, which should be exhibited in their lives. There was no other royal road to bringing others round to one's view.

*Harijan*, 16-11-'47

## 129

## HINDUISM AND NON-VIOLENCE

The lesson of non-violence was present in every religion but Gandhiji fondly believed that perhaps it was here in India that its practice had been reduced to a science. Innumerable saints had laid down their lives in *tapashcharya* until poets had felt that the Himalayas became purified in their snowy whiteness by means of their sacrifice. But all that practice of non-violence was nearly dead today. It was necessary to revive the eternal law of answering anger by love and violence by non-violence; and where could this be more readily done than in this land of King Janaka and Ramachandra?

Should we forget our humanity and return a blow for a blow? If some misdirected individual took it into his head to desecrate a temple or break idols, should a Hindu in return desecrate a mosque on that account? Did it any way help to protect the temple or to save the cause of Hinduism? Personally, said Gandhiji, he was as much an idol-worshipper as an idol-breaker, and he suggested that the whole of the audience, whether Hindu, Muslim or any other, were also so, whether they admitted it or not. He knew that mankind thirsted for symbolism. Were not *masjids* or churches in reality the same as *mandirs*? God resided everywhere, no less in stock or stone than in a single hair on the body of man. But men associated sacredness with particular places and things more than with others. Such sentiment was worthy of respect when it did not mean restrictions on similar freedom for others. To every Hindu and Mussulman, Gandhiji's advice was that if there was compulsion anywhere, they should gently but firmly refuse to submit to it. Personally he himself would hug an idol and lay down his life to protect it rather than brook any restriction upon his freedom of worship.

That required courage of a higher order than was needed in violent resistance.

*Harijan*, 30-3-'47

## 130

## HINDUS TO EXPIATE

Gandhiji commenced (his post-prayer discourse) with a reference to Garahwan village where (Muslim) men, women and children had been brutally done to death, and asked those assembled before him to sit in mournful silence in sympathy with the deceased. He asked them to consider for themselves why innocent women and children had been killed. Was it to save any religion? No religion, Gandhiji emphasized, taught any one to kill his neighbours. What was done was nothing but wanton destruction — he did not stop to think whether it was done from motives of self-interest or any other.

The houses which a few months ago were full of life, Gandhiji said, were now desolate and everyone knew about it. But then what was to be done next? People went to bathe in the Ganga, believing that their sins could thus be washed off. The ruins before them should remind them of the sin they had committed on helpless women and children and they should seek to expiate it by considering in what way they could redeem themselves. He told them that they should clean the ruined houses and make them neat and habitable. They should also express to their Muslim brethren their repentance for the past occurrences and persuade them to return to their villages, telling them that then alone they would have peace of mind. It was possible that the Muslims might turn round and ask how they could go back and live in the houses where their kith and kin had been done to death. The Muslims, Gandhiji said, would be justified in asking so. But, if the guilty men or their relations could go to the Muslims with truly penitent hearts and assure them

that what was past was past and would never be repeated, he was sure that even a stone heart would melt.

Continuing he said that if the Hindus realized the error of their past conduct, then he would expect them in the affected areas to contribute physical labour for the renovation of damaged houses. That act performed voluntarily, freely and sincerely would inspire lost confidence as nothing else could.

Gandhiji mentioned that after his arrival at Masurhi about fifty persons who were wanted in connection with the riots had surrendered to the authorities. By this time the number had probably gone up and he hoped many more would come forward to acknowledge their guilt. Confession of their guilt, Gandhiji concluded, not only evoked respect for their courage but would ultimately enhance the prestige of the province as a whole.

*Harijan*, 6-4-'47

## SECTION EIGHT: ASHRAM VOWS

131

# ASHRAM VOWS

[Gandhiji sent during 1930 a series of weekly discourses from the Yeravda Jail (which he called *mandir* or temple) to members of his Ashram at Sabarmati. Four of these, dealing with the Ashram vows of Truth, Non-violence, Chastity and Non-possession are given here. The remaining seven vows of the Ashram are: Control of the Palate, Non-stealing, Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Bread Labour, Equality of Religions and Swadeshi. Gandhiji's discourses on these also will be found in the booklet *From Yeravda Mandir* (published by the Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad).]

## Importance of Vows

Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a bulwark of strength. One, who says that he will do something 'as far as possible', betrays either his pride or his weakness. I have noticed in my own case, as well as in the case of others, that the limitation 'as far as possible' provides a fatal loophole. To do something 'as far as possible' is to succumb to the very first temptation. There is no sense in saying that one would observe truth 'as far as possible'. Even as no businessman will look at a note in which a man promises to pay a certain amount on a certain date 'as far as possible', so will God refuse to accept a promissory note drawn by one, who would observe truth 'as far as possible'.

God is the very image of the vow. God would cease to be God if He swerved from His own laws even by a hair's breadth. The sun is a great keeper of observances; hence the possibility of measuring time and publishing almanacs. All business depends upon men fulfilling their promises. Are such promises less necessary

in character-building or self-realization? We should therefore never doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization.

## I

## Truth

I deal with Truth first of all, as the Satyagraha Ashram owes its very existence to the pursuit and the attempted practice of Truth.

The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means 'being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, names of God such as 'King of Kings' or 'the Almighty' are and will remain generally current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realized, that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God.

And where there is Truth, there also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word *Chit* or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (*Ananda*). There sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as *Sat-chit-ananda*, One who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the

truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fulness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading.

But how is one to realize this Truth, which may be likened to the philosopher's stone or the cow of plenty? By single-minded devotion (*abhyasa*) and indifference to all other interests in life (*vairagya*) — replies the *Bhagawadgita*. In spite, however, of such devotion, what may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves *tapas* — self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true *bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal.

In this connection it would be well to ponder over the lives and examples of Harishchandra, Prahlad,

Ramachandra, Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain, the Christian saints, etc. How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth ? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price ; may He be so to every one of us.

## II

## Ahimsa or Love

We saw last week how the path of Truth is as narrow as it is straight. Even so is that of *ahimsa*. It is like balancing oneself on the edge of a sword. By concentration an acrobat can walk on a rope. But the concentration required to tread the path of Truth and *ahimsa* is far greater. The slightest inattention brings one tumbling to the ground. One can realize Truth and *ahimsa* only by ceaseless striving.

But it is impossible for us to realize perfect Truth so long as we are imprisoned in this mortal frame. We can only visualize it in our imagination. We cannot, through the instrumentality of this ephemeral body, see face to face Truth which is eternal. That is why in the last resort we must depend on faith.

It appears that the impossibility of full realization of Truth in this mortal body led some ancient seeker after Truth to the appreciation of *ahimsa*. The question which confronted him was : " Shall I bear with those who create difficulties for me, or shall I destroy them ? " The seeker realized that he who went on destroying others did not make headway but simply stayed where he was, while the man who suffered those who created difficulties marched ahead, and at times even took the others with him. The first act of destruction taught him that the Truth which was the object of his quest was not outside himself but within. Hence the more he took to violence, the more he receded from Truth. For in fighting the imagined enemy without, he neglected the enemy within.

We punish thieves, because we think they harass us. They may leave us alone ; but they will only transfer their attentions to another victim. This other victim however is also a human being, ourselves in a different form, and so we are caught in a vicious circle. The trouble from thieves continues to increase, as they think it is their business to steal. In the end we see that it is better to endure the thieves than to punish them. The forbearance may even bring them to their senses. By enduring them we realize that thieves are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished. But whilst we may bear with the thieves, we may not endure the infliction. That would only induce cowardice. So we realize a further duty. Since we regard the thieves as our kith and kin, they must be made to realize the kinship. And so we must take pains to devise ways and means of winning them over. This is the path of *ahimsa*. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Given these two conditions, the thief is bound in the end to turn away from his evil ways. Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world ; we realize the greatness of God — of Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering ; we become braver and more enterprising ; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not ; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish, and the evil within us diminishes from day to day.

*Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our

presence there. What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachment to it. This freedom from all attachment is the realization of God as Truth. Such realization cannot be attained in a hurry. The body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over to our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find Truth. *Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.

## III

### Brahmacharya or Chastity

The third among our observances is *brahmacharya*. As a matter of fact all observances are deducible from Truth, and are meant to subserve it. The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses? A man, whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of

Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should, after what has been said before, appear a contradiction in terms.

If we look at it from the standpoint of *ahimsa* (non-violence), we find that the fulfilment of *ahimsa* is impossible without utter selflessness. *Ahimsa* means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means, "We two first, and the devil take all the rest of them." As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence one who would obey the law of *ahimsa* cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. Those who have enjoyed this happy condition will be able to bear me out. Many have to my knowledge successfully tried the experiment. If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all the women in the world are his sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrel become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrelling where the love is selfish and bounded.

If the foregoing argument is appreciated, a consideration of the physical benefits of chastity becomes a matter of secondary importance. How foolish it is intentionally to dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment! It is a grave misuse to fritter away for physical gratification that which is given to man and woman for the full development of their bodily and mental powers. Such misuse is the root cause of many a disease.

*Brahmacharya*, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word and deed. We are told in the *Gita*, and experience will corroborate the statement, that the foolish man, who appears to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, makes a vain effort. It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray. Where the mind wanders, the body must follow sooner or later.

It is necessary here to appreciate a distinction. It is one thing to allow the mind to harbour impure thoughts; it is a different thing altogether if it strays among them in spite of ourselves. Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-co-operate with the mind in its evil wanderings.

We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control, the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves. Body and mind may be said to go together, so long as we continue to resist the approach of every evil thought.

The observance of *brahmacharya* has been believed to be very difficult, almost impossible. In trying to find a reason for this belief, we see that the term *brahmacharya* has been taken in a narrow sense. Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *brahmacharya*. I feel, that this conception is incomplete and wrong. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ,

and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in a fire, and then expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt, that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success. Perhaps the palate is the chief sinner. That is why in the Ashram we have assigned to control of the palate a separate place among our observances.

Let us remember the root meaning of *brahmacharya*. *Charya* means course of conduct ; *brahma-charya* conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma*, i.e., Truth. From this etymological meaning arises the special meaning, viz., control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

## IV

## Non-possession or Poverty

Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of Love, cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow ; He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured, that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which

are therefore neglected and wasted ; while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. Perfect fulfilment of the ideal of Non-possession requires, that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming impossibility. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Judging by this criterion, we find that in the Ashram we possess many things, the necessity for which cannot be proved, and we thus tempt our neighbours to thieve.

From the standpoint of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. It has been truly said, that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body, and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths. The soul is omnipresent ; why should she care to be confined within the cagelike body, or do evil and even kill for the sake of that cage ? We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purpose of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life.

We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fulness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember, that Non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. A man who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impendiments in our way.

## SECTION NINE : EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

### 132

### " HINDU " AND " HINDUISM "

[Referring to a question that was sent by a member of the audience, " What is a Hindu ? What is the origin of the word ? Is there any Hinduism ? " Gandhiji said :]

These were pertinent questions for the time. He was no historian, he laid claim to no learning. But he had read in some authentic book on Hinduism that the word *Hindu* did not occur in the *Vedas* but when Alexander the Great invaded India, the inhabitants of the country to the east of the Sindhu, which is known by the English-speaking Indians as the Indus, were described as Hindus. The letter *S* had become *H* in Greek. The religion of these inhabitants became Hinduism and as they knew it, it was a most tolerant religion. It gave shelter to the early Christians who had fled from persecution, also to the Jews known as Beni-Israel as also to the Parsis. He was proud to belong to that Hinduism which was all-inclusive, and which stood for tolerance. Aryan scholars swore by what they called the *Vedic* religion and Hindustan was otherwise known as Aryavarta. He had no such aspiration. Hinduism of his conception was all-sufficing for him. It certainly included the *Vedas*, but it included also much more. He could detect no inconsistency in declaring that he could, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zorostrianism, and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines. Tulsidas had summed it up in one *doha* : " The root of religion is embedded in mercy, whereas egotism is the root of sin.

Tulsi says that 'Mercy' should never be abandoned, so long as there is life in the body."

*Harijan*, 30-11-'47

## 133

## NO CONVERSION PERMISSIBLE

The English press cuttings contain among many delightful items the news that Miss Slade, known in the Ashram as Mirabai, has embraced Hinduism. I may say that she has not. I hope that she is a better Christian than when four years ago she came to the Ashram. She is not a girl of tender age. She is past thirty and has travelled all alone in Egypt, Persia and Europe befriending trees and animals. I have had the privilege of having under me Mussulman, Parsi and Christian minors. Never was Hinduism put before them for their acceptance. They were encouraged and induced to respect and read their own scriptures. It is with pleasure that I can recall instances of men and women, boys and girls having been induced to know and love their faiths better than they did before if they were also encouraged to study the other faiths with sympathy and respect. We have in the Ashram today several faiths represented. No proselytizing is practised or permitted. We recognize that all these faiths are true and divinely inspired, and all have suffered through the necessarily imperfect handling of imperfect men. Miss Slade bears not a Hindu name but an Indian name. And this was done at her instance and for convenience.

***Young India***, 20-2-'30

*C. F. Andrews*: "What would you say to a man who after considerable thought and prayer said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian?"

*Gandhiji*: "I would say if a non-Christian (say a Hindu came to a Christian and made that statement, he should ask him to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith."

*C. F. A.*: "I cannot in this go the whole length with you, though you know my own position. I discarded the position that there is no salvation except through Christ long ago. But supposing the Oxford Group Movement people changed the life of your son, and he felt like being converted, what would you say?"

*Gandhiji*: "I would say that the Oxford Group may change the lives of as many as they like, but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions and change their lives by asking them to live according to them. There came to me a man, the son of *brahmana* parents, who said his reading of your book had led him to embrace Christianity. I asked him if he thought that the religion of his forefathers was wrong. He said, 'No.' Then I said: 'Is there any difficulty about your accepting the Bible as one of the great religious books of the world and Christ as one of the great teachers?' I said to him that you had never through your books asked Indians to take up the Bible and embrace Christianity, and that he had misread your book —unless of course your position is like that of the late M. Mahomed Ali's, viz. that 'a believing Mussulman, however bad his life, is better than a good Hindu.'"

*C. F. A.*: "I do not accept M. Mahomed Ali's position at all. But I do say that if a person really needs a change of faith I should not stand in his way."

*Gandhiji* : "But don't you see that you do not even give him a chance? You do not even cross-examine him. Supposing a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the *Bhagawata* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, I should say to him : 'No. What the *Bhagawata* offers the Bible also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.'"

*C.F.A.*: "I don't know. If someone earnestly says that he will become a good Christian, I should say, 'You may become one', though you know that I have in my own life strongly dissuaded ardent enthusiasts who came to me. I said to them, 'Certainly not on *my* account will you do anything of the kind.' But human nature does require a concrete faith."

*Gandhiji* : "If a person wants to believe in the Bible let him say so, but why should he discard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God."

"Consider," continued Gandhiji, "whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect."

*Harijan*, 28-11-'36

## EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

There is in Hinduism room enough for Jesus, as there is for Mohammed, Zoroaster and Moses. For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. "Warring creeds" is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the mother, as I believe her to be, of Religion or religions. If she is truly the mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man are a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula; it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion, i. e. God Himself.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37

## ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TO HINDUISM

My fear is that though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in the breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they believe it is the only true religion. Without some such thing it is not possible to understand, much less to appreciate, the C. M. S. appeal * from which I reproduced in these columns some revealing extracts the other day. One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy that house that had served well with him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For both the terms presuppose equality of status, a commcn platform. There cannot be a common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and unenlightened, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the high-

* The appeal issued by the Church Missionary Society of England, the extracts wherefrom were reproduced in the *Harijan* issue of 26th December, 1936.

born and the low-born, the caste-man and the outcaste. My comparison may be defective, may even sound offensive. My reasoning may be unsound. But my proposition stands.

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37

## 137

## EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

Mr. Keithahn who was here the other day was not quite sure what was at the back of Gandhiji's mind when he said that all religions were not only true but equal. Scientifically, he felt, it was hardly correct to say that all religions are equal. People would make comparisons between animists and theists. "I would say," said Mr. Keithahn, "it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?"

"You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physically and mentally. Therefore, superficially there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithahn. And what are we in this mighty universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no use asking which is smaller and which is bigger. Inherently we are equal. The differences of race and skin, of mind and body, and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way, essentially, all religions are equal. If you read the Quran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the *Gita*, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of Genesis

or of Matthew. We read a long pedigree and then at the end we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it all with the eye of a Christian."

"Then," said Mr. Keithahn, "even in our Bible, there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We must hold them to be equal?"

"Yes," said Gandhiji. "All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plain."

"If we think in terms of Einstein's Relativity all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality."

"That is why I say they are equally true and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, 'Mine is the superior one.' None is superior, none is inferior, to the other."

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37

## 138

## EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

Kakasaheb Kalelkar, who presided over the third day's session of the Parliament of Religions which met in Calcutta last week, carried a message from Gandhiji which was expressed in a question: "What will the Parliament of Religions say in respect of all religions? Are all religions equal, as we hold, or is any particular religion in the sole possession of truth and the rest either untrue or a mixture of truth and error as many believe? The opinion of the Parliament in such matters must prove a helpful guidance." I do not know that the Parliament did express any opinion on this crucial question, but as we saw in the last issue, Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore's

discourse left no doubt on the question. Kakasaheb invited the leaders present on the third day to express their opinion, and Sir Francis Younghusband in response to the invitation is reported to have said: "To Mahatma Gandhi's question I would add another question: Are all mothers equally good? All mothers are not equally good, but each would think his own mother as the best in the world. Similarly, each one would regard his own religion as the best in the world. At any rate, that was certainly the impression that he gained at the World Congress of Faiths last year. Each one did honestly believe that his religion was the best. I have come in very close contact with people of diverse faiths and have discovered a fundamental unity among all these religions. It is this fundamental unity which I desire this Congress to realize and deepen and make it permanent and abiding."

This was far from being a direct reply to the question asked, for if each one regarded his own religion as the best, there was hardly any possibility of ending religious strife which should be the first object of a parliament of religions. For if regarding one's own religion as the best means regarding other religions as inferior to one's own, there is an end to peace. Behind the desire to convert is the belief that one's religion is superior to that of the one whom one seeks to convert.

So Kakasaheb invited Sir Francis to realize the full implication of his simile, and said: "Indeed every one of us regards his own mother as the best, but does he, therefore, expect or ask others to give up their own mothers and adopt his own?" In other words, just as one's own mother is *best for oneself*, so is every one's religion the best, each for himself; just as one's own country is *best for oneself*, every one's religion is best, each for himself. The equality of all religions lies in each being adequate or best for its respective adherents.

*Harijan*, 20-3-'37

139

## CRIME OF READING THE BIBLE

Several correspondents have written to me taking me to task for reading the New Testament to the students of the Gujarat National College. One of them asks :

> "Will you please say why you are reading the Bible to the students of the Gujarat National College ? Is there nothing useful in our literature ? Is the *Gita* less to you than the Bible ? You are never tired of saying that you are a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu. Have you not now been found out as a Christian in secret ? You may say a man does not become a Christian by reading the Bible. But is not reading the Bible to the boys a way of converting them to Christianity ? Can the boys remain uninfluenced by the Bible reading ? Are they not likely to become Christians by reading the Bible ? What is there specially in the Bible that is not to be found in our sacred books ? I do hope you will give an adequate reply and give preference to the *Vedas* over the Bible."

I am afraid I cannot comply with the last request of my correspondent. I must give preference to that which the boys lawfully want over what I or others may desire. When they invited me to give them an hour per week, I gave them the choice between reading the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana*, and answering questions. By a majority of votes, they decided to have the New Testament and questions and answers. In my opinion, the boys were entitled to make that choice. They have every right to read the Bible or to have it read to them. I offered to read the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* as I am reading both at the Ashram to the inmates and as therefore the reading of either at the National College would have involved the least strain and the least preparation. But the boys of the College probably thought they could read the other books through others but they would have from me my interpretation of the New Testament as they knew that I had made a fair study of it.

I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the

world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. We need not dread, upon our grown up children, the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when some one reads his own scriptures to young people with the intention secretly or openly of converting them. He must then be biassed in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the Bible, the Quran, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu. He is no *Sanatani* Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures to satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

The charge of being a Christian in secret is not new. It is both a libel and a compliment — a libel because there are men who can believe me to be capable of being secretly anything, i. e. for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussulman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Quran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussulman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither

Hindus, nor Christians nor Mussulmans. There all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.

The hyper-sensitiveness that my correspondents have betrayed is but an indication of the intensity of the wave of intoleration that is sweeping through this unhappy land. Let those who can, remain unmoved by it.

*Young India*, 2-9-'26

## 140

## A CATHOLIC FATHER'S FEARS

"When Hinduism comes to power, will it not make a united front against Christianity? There are all signs of Hinduism coming to power. And if it happens here, as it is happening in Spain, Indian Christians will be despised and persecuted and swept off," said the Catholic Father from Germany.

"It is an impossible picture," said Gandhiji, reassuring him. "There is no such thing as Hindu rule, there will be no such thing. How can any one eradicate a population of seven million Christians? And that presupposes the destruction of Mussulmans too! Let me tell you that no Hindu in his wildest imagination ever thought of this. Will the world tolerate any such thing? If Hinduism ever sought to do it, it would be committing suicide. But I tell you that has never been the desire of the Hindus. Hinduism was well able to destroy the first Christians that came. Why did it not do anything of the kind? Travancore is a brilliant example of toleration. I was asked while I was there to see the most ancient church where St. Thomas is said to have planted the first Cross. Why should he have been allowed to plant it?"

"But in St. Francis Xavier's time there came a time when Christians were persecuted. But I do not know history and my information may be incorrect. But what makes me afraid is what I actually saw and heard in Japan. There I heard in a public speech a responsible man saying, 'Buddhism is the religion of Japan we must consolidate; all other religions should be destroyed.'"

"Well, well, no Hindu dreams of such a thing. Even if he dreamt it, it would be impossible."

But now the Father revealed his bugbear — Arya Samaj!

"I agree," said Gandhiji laughing at the idea, "that the Arya Samaj represents a type of militant Hinduism, but they never believed in the cult of the sword. The worst thing they are capable of is to ask you to become a Hindu if you went and spoke on their platform!"

"But I have heard Arya Samajists say that Christianity is a Western religion, and as everything that comes from the West is to be discarded, Christianity must also be discarded."

"I have never heard of the talk of Christianity being blotted out of India. The Arya Samaj is a community that asks its followers to go to the ends of the earth to preach *Arya Dharma*, but they have not yet done so. It has a firm foothold in the Punjab. Arya supremacy in the sense you dread is an inconceivable thing. The Hindus are really not the major community if you put the rest together. But why should I prolong the discussion? It is not a practical proposition at all."

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37

141

# MESSAGE TO BUDDHISTS

[The following is from a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Vidyodaya College, Colombo, in reply to an address presented to him by the All-Ceylon Congress of Buddhist Associations.]

It is my deliberate opinion that the essential part of the teachings of the Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India today to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama effected in Hinduism. By his immediate sacrifice, by his great renunciation and by the immaculate purity of his life he left an indelible impress upon Hinduism, and Hinduism owes an eternal debt of gratitude to that great teacher. And if you will forgive me for saying so, and if you will also give me the permission to say so, I would venture to tell you that what Hinduism did not assimilate of what passes as Buddhism today was not an essential part of Buddha's life and his teachings.

It is my fixed opinion that Buddhism or rather the teaching of Buddha found its full fruition in India, and it could not be otherwise, for Gautama was himself a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the best that was in Hinduism, and he gave life to some of the teachings that were buried in the *Vedas* and which were overgrown with weeds. His great Hindu spirit cut its way through the forest of words, meaningless words, which had overlaid the golden truth that was in the *Vedas*. He made some of the words in the *Vedas* yield a meaning to which the men of his generation were utter strangers, and he found in India the most congenial soil. And wherever the Buddha went, he was followed by and surrounded not by non-Hindus but Hindus, those who were themselves saturated with the *Vedic* law. But the Buddha's teaching like his heart was all-expanding and all-embracing and so it has survived his own body and swept across the face of the earth. And at the risk of being called a follower of Buddha I claim this achievement as a triumph of Hinduism.

Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. He gave it a new life and a new interpretation. But here comes the point where I shall need your forgiveness and your generosity, and I want to submit to you that the teaching of Buddha was not assimilated in its fulness whether it was in Ceylon, or in Burma, or in China or in Tibet. I know my own limitations. I lay no claim to scholarship in Buddhistic law. Probably, a fifth form boy from Nalanda Vidyalaya would plough me in a Buddhist catechism. I know that I speak in the presence of very learned priests and equally learned laymen, but I should be false to you and false to myself if I did not declare what my heart believes.

## Belief in God

You and those who call themselves Buddhists outside India have no doubt taken in a very large measure the teaching of the Buddha, but when I examine your life and when I cross-question the friends from Ceylon, Burma, China or Tibet, I feel confounded to find so many inconsistencies between what I have come to understand as the central fact of Buddha's life and your own practice, and if I am not tiring you out, I would like hurriedly to run through three prominent points that just now occurred to me. The first is the belief in an all-pervading Providence called God. I have heard it contended times without number and I have read in books also claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. In my humble opinion the confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice, could repent of his actions, and like the kings of the earth could possibly be open to temptations and bribes and could possibly have favourites. His whole soul rose in mighty indignation against the belief that a being called God required for his satisfaction the living

blood of animals in order that he might be pleased, — animals who were his own creation. He, therefore, reinstated God in the right place and dethroned the usurper who for the time being seemed to occupy that White Throne. He emphasized and redeclared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this universe. He unhesitatingly said that the Law was God Himself.

### What Is Nirvana ?

God's laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. And hence the great confusion that Buddha disbelieved in God and simply believed in the moral law, and because of this confusion about God Himself, arose the confusion about the proper understanding of the great word *nirvana*. *Nirvana* is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life, *nirvana* is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. *Nirvana* is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.

### Buddha's Greatest Contribution

The third point is the low estimation in which the idea of sanctity of all life came to be held in its travels outside India. Great as Buddha's contribution to humanity was in restoring God to His eternal place, in my humble opinion greater still was his contribution to humanity in his exacting regard for all life, be it ever so low. I am aware that his own India did not rise to the height that he would fain have seen her occupy. But the teaching of Buddha, when it became Buddhism and travelled outside, came to mean that sacredness of animal life had not the sense that it had with an ordinary man. I am not aware of the exact practice and belief of Ceylonese Buddhism in this matter, but I am aware what

shape it has taken in Burma and China. In Burma especially the Burmese Buddhists will not kill a single animal, but do not mind others killing the animals for them and dishing the carcasses for them for their food. Now, if there was any teacher in the world who insisted upon the inexorable law of cause and effect, it was inevitably Gautama, and yet my friends, the Buddhists outside India, would, if they could, avoid the effects of their own acts. But I must not put an undue strain upon your patience. I have but lightly touched upon some of the points which I think it my duty to bring to your notice, and in all earnestness and equal humility I present them for your serious consideration.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27

## 142

## MUSIC BEFORE MOSQUES

Either continuous music, *arati* or the repeating of *Ramanama* is a religious necessity or it is not. If it is a religious necessity no prohibition order by a court of law can be held obligatory. Music must be played, *arati* must be made and *Ramanama* repeated, cost what it may. If my formula were accepted a procession of the meekest men and women, unarmed even with lathis, would march with *Ramanama* on their lips, supposing that that was the bone of contention and draw down on their heads the whole of the Mussulman wrath. But if they would not accept that formula they would still proceed with the sacred name on their lips and fight every inch of the ground. But to stop music for fear of a row or because of an order of a court is to deny one's religion.

But then there is the other side to the question. Is continuous playing of music even while passing mosques at prayer time always a religious necessity? Is repeating of *Ramanama* similar necessity? What about the charge that the fashion nowadays is to organize processions purely for the sake of irritating Mussulmans and to make *arati*

just at the time of prayer and to utter *Ramanama* not because it is held religiously necessary but in order to create an occasion for a fight ? If such be the case it will defeat its own end and naturally the zest being wanting, a court's order, a military display or a shower of brick-bats would end the irreligious show.

A religious necessity must therefore be clearly established. Every semblance of irritation must be avoided. A mutual understanding should be sincerely sought. And where it is not possible, an irreducible minimum should be fixed making due allowance for the opposite sentiment and then without seeking the intervention of courts or in spite of a prohibition order a fight must be put up for that minimum. Let no one charge me with ever having advised or encouraged weakness or surrender on matters of principle. But I have said, as I say again, that every trifle must not be dignified into a principle.

*Young India*, 22-10-'25

## 143

## PARTIALITY FOR MUSSULMANS

In his speech at Sholapur Gandhiji referred to the usual charge made against him of partiality for the Mussulmans, and gave, if possible, a more vigorous answer : " You say I am partial to the Mussulmans. So be it, though the Mussulmans do not admit it. But my religion will not suffer even by an iota by reason of my partiality. I shall have to answer my God and my Maker if I give any one less than his due, but I am sure that He will bless me if He knows that I gave some one more than his due. I ask you to understand me. If my hand or heart has done anything more than was any one's due, you should be proud of it, rather than deplore it. It should be a matter of pride to you as Hindus to think that there was amongst you at least one mad Gandhi who was not only just to the Mussulmans, but even went out of his way in giving them more than their due. Hinduism is

replete with instances of tolerance, sacrifice and forgiveness. Think of the sacrifice of the Pandavas, think of the forgiveness of Yudhishthira. Should it be a matter of sorrow for you, that there is at least one man who has tried to carry out the precept of Hinduism to the letter ?

*Young India*, 10-3-'27

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

## 144

## ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

A Mussulman friend writes :

"You regard Mohammed as a Prophet of God and hold him in high regard. You have even publicly spoken of him in the highest terms. I have heard and even seen reports in cold print to the effect that you have studied the Quran itself. All this, I must confess, has puzzled me. I am at a loss to understand how a person like you, with all your passion for truth and justice, who has never failed to gloze over a single fault in Hinduism or to repudiate as unauthentic the numerous corruptions that masquerade under it, can holus-bolus accept all that is in the Quran. I am not aware of your ever having called into question or denounced any iniquitous injunction of Islam. Against some of these I learnt to revolt when I was scarcely 18 or 20 years old, and time has since only strengthened that first feeling."

I have nowhere said that I believe literally in every word of the Quran, or, for the matter of that, of any scripture in the world. But it is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other faiths, or to point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practise the truths that there may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticize or condemn things in the Quran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand. But I welcome every opportunity to express my admiration for such aspects of his life as I have been able to appreciate and understand. As for things that present difficulties, I am content to see them through the eyes of devout Mussulman friends, while I try to understand them with the help of the writings of eminent Muslim expounders of Islam. It is only through such a reverential approach to faiths other than mine that I can realize the principle of equality of all

religions. But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in order to purify it and to keep it pure. But when non-Hindu critics set about criticizing Hinduism and cataloguing its faults they only blazon their own ignorance of Hinduism and their incapacity to regard it from the Hindu view point. It distorts their vision and vitiates their judgment. Thus my own experience of the non-Hindu critics of Hinduism brings home to me my limitations and teaches me to be wary of launching on a criticism of Islam or Christianity and their founders.

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37

## 145

## HINDU PANI AND MUSLIM PANI

A stranger travelling in Indian trains may well have a painful shock when he hears at railway stations for the first time in his life ridiculous sounds about *pani* (water), tea and the like being either Hindu or Muslim. It would be repulsive now that the Government at the Centre is wholly national. We have a right, therefore, to assume that this unholy practice of having separate everything for every community at railway stations will go. Scrupulous cleanliness is a desideratum for all. If taps are used for all liquids there need be no compunction felt by the most orthodox about helping themselves. A fastidious person may keep his own *lota* and cup and receive his milk, tea, coffee or water through a tap. In this there is no interference with religion. No one is compelled to buy anything at railway stations. As a matter of fact many orthodox persons fast for water and food during travel. Thanks we still breathe the same air, walk on the same mother earth.

All communal cries at least at railway stations should be unlawful.

As I have often said in these columns, trains and steamers are the best media for the practical education of the millions of travellers in spotless cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation and camaraderie between different communities

of India. Let us hope that the Cabinet will have the courage to act up to their convictions and may confidently expect the hearty co-operation of the Railway staff and the public in making this much-needed reform a thorough success.

*Harijan*, 20-10-'46

## 146

## HINDUISM AND THE QURAN

With reference to objections raised by some against recitation of verses from the Quran in his prayers held at a Hindu temple in Delhi, Gandhiji said that the true Hindu saw Truth in every religion. The Hindu religion was a great religion and had infinite toleration in it and powers of absorption. God was everywhere. He was the ruler of men's hearts. He only wanted single-minded worship in whatsoever form it be and whatsoever language. It was, therefore, wholly un-Hindu and irreligious to object to the great verse from the *Quran Sharif* being recited.

How could it be a sin to chant God's name in Arabic? Gandhiji implored them not to degrade Hinduism by not understanding their immortal scriptures. Every one should be at liberty to pray as he liked.

Gandhiji exhorted the audience to pause and think where they were drifting. He begged of the Hindus not to harbour anger in their hearts against the Muslims even if the latter wanted to destroy them. None should fear death. Death was inevitable for every human being. But if they died smiling, they would enter into a new life — they would create a new Hindustan. The second chapter of the *Gita* described in its ending *shlokas* how the God-fearing man should live and move and have his being. He wanted them to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the meaning of every one of those *shlokas*. They would then realize what their ideals were and how far short of them they had fallen today.

*Harijan*, 20-4-'47

## HINDUS v. MUSLIMS

So bitter are the hearts of both the Hindus and the Muslims today that on three consecutive days no prayers were allowed to be held because some embittered persons objected to the recital of the verse from the *Quran Sharif*. The crowds came daily, but had to go away disappointed because Gandhiji would not have the prayers even if there was one objector. If there had been none but objectors on the prayer ground, he said, he would willingly have held the prayer and hoped he would have had the courage to die at their hands with the names of Rama and Rahim on his lips if they wanted to kill him. But he wished to avoid a clash on the prayer ground between those who wanted the prayers to be held and those who objected. In the end his non-violence prevailed and after three days the objectors withdrew.

Questions poured in as did angry letters. Why did he not call himself a Muslim ? Why did he consider that there was no difference between Rama and Rahim ? Why had he gone so far as to say that he had no objection to reciting the *Kalma* ? Why did he not go to the Punjab ? Was he not a bad Hindu ? Was he not a fifth columnist ? Was not his non-violence making cowards of the Hindus ? One envelope came to him addressed as Mohammed Gandhi !

Quietly and patiently Gandhiji reasoned with them. Why should and how could Islam be condemned for the sins of a few ? He claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu and because the essence of Hinduism, and indeed, all religions was toleration he claimed that if he was a good Hindu, he was also a good Muslim and a good Christian. It was against the spirit of religion to claim superiority. Humility was essential to non-violence. Had not the Hindu scriptures said that God had a thousand names ? Why may

not Rahim be one of them? The *Kalma* merely praised God and acknowledged Mohammed as His Prophet. He had no hesitation in praising God and acknowledging Mohammed as a Prophet in the same way as he acknowledged Buddha and Zoroaster and Jesus. The fact that he had come to Delhi and was having talks with the Viceroy and the leaders did not mean that he was neglecting his work in either Noakhali or Bihar or in the Punjab. Nothing would stop him from going to the Punjab when the call came. Today there was no Indian *raj* there. It was the rule of a British Governor. In any event, he was working for all these places wherever he was. How could he be a fifth columnist? He could not put his *ahimsa* in cold storage because the Hindus and the Sikhs had been butchered in the Punjab. The Hindus had done equally savage things in Bihar and it was his duty to tell the Hindus and the Muslims alike that they must put away anger and malice from their hearts and realize that the more they resorted to violence the more savagery would ensue. He told them how he had to hang his head in shame when the foreign delegates to the Inter-Asian Conference who came to see him asked him about the communal strife. All he could say was that this madness had seized a few of them, and he hoped and prayed and believed that it would soon subside. Indians of whatever religion, had to live together. They were of the same soil, they were nursed by the self-same mother and they could not go on killing each other if India was to live.

*Harijan*, 27-4-'47

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

## 148

## A TRUE HINDU

[Addressing the gathering after prayer Gandhiji said:]

You may be astonished to learn that I continue to receive letters charging me that I have compromised the interests of the Hindus by acting as a friend of the Muslims. How can I convince people by mere words if the sixty years of my public life have failed to demonstrate that by trying to befriend the Muslims I have only proved myself a true Hindu and have rightly served the Hindus and Hinduism? The essence of true religious teaching is that one should serve and befriend all. I learnt this in my mother's lap. You may refuse to call me a Hindu. I know no defence except to quote a line from Iqbal's famous song: *Majhab nahin sikhata apasmen ber rakhna* (मज़हब नहीं सिखाता आपसमें बैर रखना।) meaning religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another. It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy, is the quintessence of true religion.

*Harijan*, 11-5-'47

## 149

## HINDUS DEMORALIZED BY AHIMSA

*Q.* The Hindus being influenced by your preaching of *ahimsa* may in the near future get beaten by the Muslim League followers. This is the general feeling in view of the belief that the Muslims are being secretly armed on a wide scale.

*A.* The assumption is serious. If it is sound it casts a grave reflection upon the Provincial Governments. In any event, how I wish the Hindus were influenced by my teaching of *ahimsa* which is a force mightier than the force of arms however powerful. No teacher can be held responsible for a caricature of his teachings. Do we not know how geometrical propositions are caricatured by indifferent pupils? Are the teachers to be blamed? The

utmost that can be said against me is that I am an incompetent teacher of *ahimsa*. If such be the case, let us pray that my successor will be much more competent and successful.

*Harijan*, 25-5-'47

## 150

## A HINDU'S DUTY TOWARDS A MUSLIM

What is the duty of the Hindu towards his Muslim neighbour ? His duty is to befriend him as man, to share his joys and sorrows and help him in distress. He will then have the right to expect similar treatment from his Muslim neighbour and will probably get the expected response. Supposing the Hindus are in a majority in a village with a sprinkling of Muslims in their midst, the duty of the majority towards the few Muslim neighbours is increased manifold, so much so that the few will not feel that their religion makes any difference in the behaviour of the Hindus towards them. The Hindus will *then* earn the right, *not* before, that the Muslims will be natural friends with them and in times of danger both the communities will act as one man. But suppose that the few Muslims do not reciprocate the correct behaviour of the many Hindus and show fight in every action, it will be a sign of unmanliness. What is then the duty of the many Hindus ? Certainly not to overpower them by the brute strength of the many ; that will be usurpation of an unearned right. Their duty will be to check their unmanly behaviour as they would that of their blood brothers. It is unnecessary for me to dilate further upon the illustration. I will close it by saying that the application will be exactly the same if the position is reversed. From what I have said it is easy enough to extend the application with profit to the whole of the present state which has become baffling because people do not apply in practise the doctrine of deriving every right from a prior duty well performed.

*Harijan*, 6-7-'47

## A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING

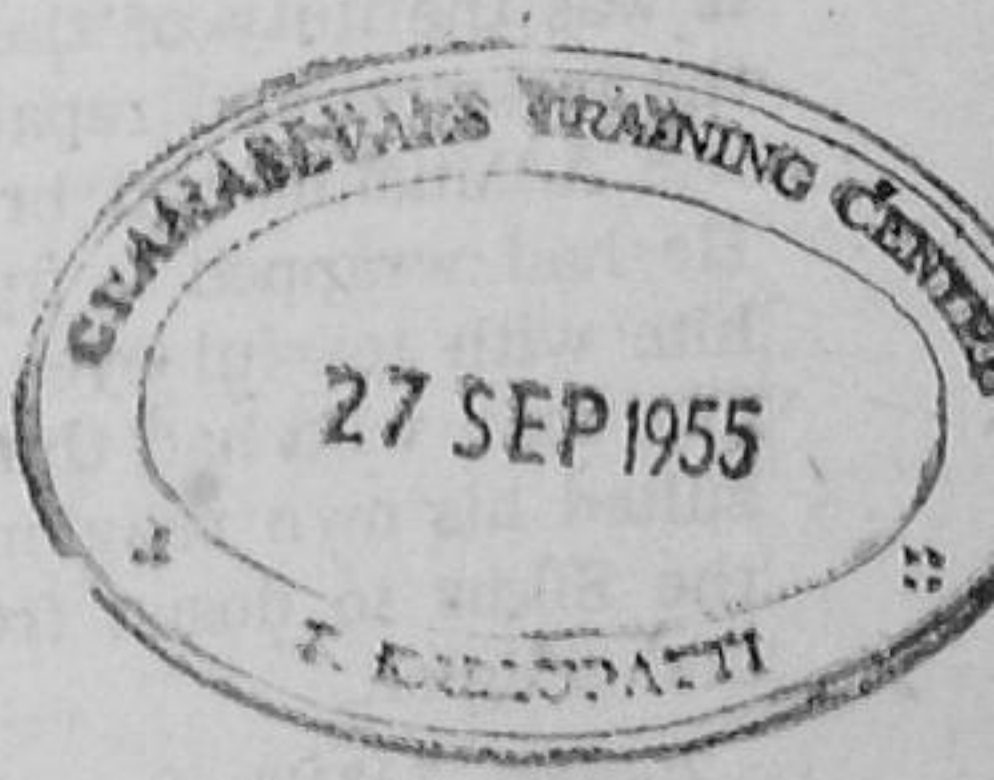
In his post-prayer speech, Gandhiji referred to a letter from a Muslim who described himself as a *sufi*. Its purport was that there was nothing common between Hinduism and Islam and that the two could not be as if they were one. For, the writer argued, the Hindus did not believe in one and only God but held cows and goats as superior to man, and believed in high and low, whereas Islam was a brotherhood in which there was no hierarchy and which believed in one God as Allah. In this, Gandhiji argued, there was a caricature of Hinduism. There was no Hindu who put animals, the cow and the goat, before man. But he submitted that if any one like him believed himself to be the lowest in God's creation, there was nothing wrong. It was a sign of true humility. He held that every Hindu believed in one and only God. He admitted that excrescences had grown round Hinduism and that its votaries had not always been true to Hinduism undefiled. It was, therefore, up to an impartial man to understand Hinduism as its votaries like him understood it, just as it was the duty of an impartial Hindu to understand Islam as a good Muslim understood it. That, he held, was the safest rule of interpretation for any faith. Then it would be found that all great religions sprang from the same source and the fundamentals were common to them all.

*Harijan*, 7-9-'47

## SCRIPTURES AND IDOLS

In his post-prayer speech Gandhiji said that he would advise the Hindus and the Sikhs to read the *Quran* as they read the *Gita* and the *Granthasaheb*. To the Muslims he would say that they should read the *Gita* and the *Granthasaheb* with the same reverence with which they read the *Quran*. They should understand the meaning of what they read and have equal regard for all .religions. This was his life-long practice and ideal. He claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, though he was not an idolater in the accepted sense. But he could not despise those who worshipped idol. The idol-worshipper saw God in the stone image. God was omnipresent. If it was wrong to see God in a stone how was it right to seek Him in a book called the *Gita*, the *Granthasaheb* or the *Quran*? Was not that also idol-worship? By cultivating tolerance and respect they would be able to learn from all. Then they would forget the communal differences and live together in peace and amity.

*Harijan*, 25-1-'48



## ACT OF UNGODLINESS

Gandhiji said that he could not help mentioning the fact that according to his information about 137 mosques in Delhi were more or less damaged during the recent disturbances. Some of them were converted into *mandirs*. One such was near Connaught Place which nobody could miss. There was a tricolour flying there. It was converted into a *mandir* with the installation of an idol. He (the speaker) considered all such desecration as a blot upon Hinduism and Sikhism. It was, in his opinion, a wholly ungodly act. That the Muslims in Pakistan had resorted to such desecration could not be pleaded in extenuation of the blot he had mentioned. Any such act, in his opinion, constituted an act of destroying Hinduism, Sikhism or Islam as the case may be.

*Harijan*, 30-11-'47

An idol had no value unless it was duly installed in a consecrated place by duly qualified devotees. Forcible possession of a mosque disgraced Hinduism and Sikhism. It was the duty of the Hindus to remove the idols from the mosques and repair the damage.

A Muslim had brought to him a half-burnt *Quran*. He had wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, showed it to him with tearful eyes and went away without speaking. The man who had thus tried to insult the *Quran* had insulted his own religion. He appealed to the Hindus and the Sikhs to desist from bringing ruin to their country and religion.

*Harijan*, 7-12-'47

# SECTION TEN : RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## 154

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*Reader* : The question of religious education is very difficult.

*Gandhiji* : Yet we cannot do without it. India will never be godless. Rank atheism cannot flourish in this land. The task is indeed difficult . My head begins to turn as I think of religious education. Our religious teachers are hypocritical and selfish ; they will have to be approached. The *mullas*, the *dasturs* and the *brahmanas* hold the key in their hands, but if they will not have the good sense, the energy that we have derived from English education will have to be devoted to religious education. This is not very difficult. Only the fringe of the ocean has been polluted and it is those who are within the fringe who alone need cleansing. We who come under this category can even cleanse ourselves because my remarks do not apply to the millions. In order to restore India to its pristine condition, we have to return to it. All else will follow.

*Hind Swaraj*, chap. XVIII

## THE PRIVILEGE OF THE SHUDRAS

The visit to the Chamarajendra Sanskrit Pathashala in Bangalore afforded Gandhiji the opportunity of giving a frank talk to the Sanskrit *pandits* who had gathered there, and who addressed him in a simple and easy Sanskrit. He said : "I hold that every Hindu boy and girl must acquire a knowledge of Sanskrit, and that every Hindu should have enough knowledge of Sanskrit to be able to express himself in that language whenever an occasion arises. I am pained to hear that there are *pandits* in the Mysore State who fight shy of teaching Sanskrit to *shudras* and *panchamas*. I do not know how far the contention that the *shudras* have no right to learn Sanskrit and hence to read the *Vedas* is supported by the authority of the scriptures, but as a *Sanatani* Hindu I am firmly of opinion that even if there is any authority, we must not kill the spirit of our religion by a literal interpretation of the texts. Words have, like man himself, an evolution, and even *Vedic* texts must be rejected if it is repugnant to reason and contrary to experience. Thus so far as I understand the *shastras* I think that there is no authority in them for untouchability as we understand it today, and my experience of the so-called untouchables in different parts of India has shown me that man to man the 'untouchable' is in no way inferior to his touchable brother either intellectually or morally. I know suppressed class people who are leading as clean and moral lives as any one of us. And I have seen Adi-Karnatak boys who read and recite Sanskrit verses as well as any of the *brahmana* boys and girls here. I am grateful therefore that you should have thought it fit to invite a man of such radical views in your midst, and even to vote an address to him, and to approve of those views in the address. I am glad to see so many *brahmanas* plying their *taklis*, but I want you not to confine yourselves to making your sacred

threads out of the yarn. The *yajnopavitas* of course will continue to be of *takli* yarn, but you will make your clothes also from that yarn or *charkha* yarn. I tell you I was pained to see boys and girls dressed in foreign clothes reciting verses from the scriptures. To say the least, it struck me to be incongruous. The external is in no way the essence of religion, but the external oft proclaims the internal, and whenever, therefore, I go to a Sanskrit college or an institution where Aryan culture is taught, I look forward to being reminded of the simple and sacred surroundings of our ancient *rishis*. I am sorry that you have not fulfilled my expectation, and I appeal to the teachers and the parents of these children to make the children true representatives of ancient culture."

*Young India*, 18-8-'27

## 156

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The other day, in the course of a conversation, a missionary friend asked me, if India was really a spiritually advanced country, why it was that he found only a few students having any knowledge of their own religion, even of the *Bhagawadgita*. In support of the statement, the friend who is himself an educationist, told me, that he had made it a point to ask the students he met whether they had any knowledge of their religion or of the *Bhagawadgita*. A vast majority of them were found to be innocent of any such knowledge.

I do not propose to take up at the present moment the inference that because certain students had no knowledge of their own religion, India was not a spiritually advanced country, beyond saying that the ignorance on the part of students of religious books did not necessarily mean absence of all religious life or want of spirituality among the people to which the students belonged. But there is no doubt that the vast majority of students who pass through the Government educational institutions are

devoid of any religious instruction. The remark of the missionary had reference to the Mysore students and I was somewhat pained to observe that even the students of Mysore had no religious instruction in the State schools. I know that there is a school of thought which believes in only secular instruction being given in public schools. I know also that in a country like India, where there are most religions of the world represented and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there must be difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. But if India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instruction. It is true that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that of religion. But if we cannot have religion we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best. And whether there is such instruction given in the schools or not, grown up students must cultivate the art of self-help about matters religious as about other. They may start their own class just as they have their debating and now spinners' clubs.

Addressing the Collegiate High School students at Shimoga, I found upon enquiry at the meeting that out of a hundred or more Hindu boys, there were hardly eight who had read the *Bhagawadgita*. None raised his hand in answer to the question, whether of the few who had read the *Gita* there was any who understood it. Out of five or six Mussulman boys all raised their hands as having read the *Quran*. But only one could say that he knew its meaning. The *Gita* is in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the *Gita* is in my opinion unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I nevertheless think that there

should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translations should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the *Gita* intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teachings of the *Bhagawadgita* because they do not know Sanskrit.

*Young India*, 25-8-'27

GANDHI SEVA SANGH CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
K. KALLUPATTI

## 157

## HINDU STUDENTS AND THE GITA

[The following is taken from an address to students at Mannargudi :]

You state in your address that you read the Gospels daily even as I do. I cannot say that I read the Gospels daily, but I can say that I have read the Gospels in a humble and prayerful spirit, and it is well with you if you are also reading the Gospels in that spirit. But I expect that the vast majority of you are Hindu boys. I wish that you could have said to me that at least your Hindu boys were reading the *Bhagawadgita* daily to derive inspiration. For I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I therefore admit, in all humility, that even the *Vedas*, the Quran and the Bible are imperfect

word of God, and imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fulness, and so I say to a Hindu boy, that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Mussulman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions. And so whilst I would welcome your learning the Gospel and your learning the Quran, I would certainly insist on all of you Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the *Gita*. It is my belief that the impurity that we see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of child-widowhood and child-marriage may be considered to be ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean, and it is because I see the same God in the *Bhagawadgita* as I see in the Bible and the Quran that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiration from the *Bhagawadgita* because they will be tuned to the *Gita* more than to any other book.

*Young India*, 22-9-'27

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
RAJAPATTI



## STUDENTS AND THE GITA

[A correspondent has been endeavouring with the help of the head master of a High School to introduce the teaching of the *Gita* among its boys. But at a recent meeting convened to organize *Gita* readings a Bank Manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the *adhikara* (qualification) for studying the *Gita*; it was not a plaything to be placed before students. With reference to this objection Gandhiji wrote:]

I had heard of *adhikara* in connection with the *Vedas*, but I never knew that the *Gita* required the qualifications that the Bank Manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The *Gita* clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the *Gita* they may not read any religious works at all. Indeed the original conception in Hinduism is the life of a *brahmachari* who should begin it with a knowledge of religion *coupled with practice* so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

*Adhikara* then there certainly was. But it was the *adhikara* of right conduct known as the five *yamas* or cardinal restraints — *ahimsa* (innocence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non--possession), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). These were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But today the word *adhikara* like many such potent words has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called a *brahmana*, has *adhikara* to read and expound the *shastras* to us, whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a

particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is a part wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objection, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided, I presume, that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression 'I presume' for at the time of writing I do not recall the observance of the *yamas* as a condition precedent to a person studying the *Mahabharata*. Experience however shows that purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for a proper understanding of religious books.

The printing age has broken down all barriers and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) that the religiously minded have. But we are here discussing the propriety of students reading the *Gita* as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable to the restraints and thus more fitted than students for such instruction. Unfortunately, it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors in the majority of cases think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.

*Young India*, 8-12-'27

159

## THE GITA IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS

A correspondent asks whether the *Gita* may be compulsorily taught in national schools to all boys whether Hindus or non-Hindus. When I was travelling in Mysore two years ago I had occasion to express my sorrow that the Hindu boys of a high school did not know the *Gita*. I am thus partial to the teaching of the *Gita* not only in national schools but in every educational institution. It should be considered a shame for a Hindu boy or girl not to know the *Gita*. But my insistence stops short at compulsion, especially so for national schools. Whilst it is true that the *Gita* is a book of universal religion, it is a claim which cannot be forced upon any one. A Christian or a Mussulman or a Parsi may reject the claim or may advance the same claim for the Bible, the Quran or the *Avesta* as the case may be. I fear that the *Gita* teaching cannot be made compulsory even regarding all those who may choose to be classed as Hindus. Many Sikhs and Jains regard themselves as Hindus but may object to compulsory *Gita* teaching for their boys and girls. The case will be different for sectional schools. I should hold it quite appropriate for a *Vaishnava* school, for instance, to lay down the *Gita* as part of religious instruction. Every private school has the right to prescribe its own course of instruction. But a national school has to act within well-defined limits. There is no compulsion where there is no interference with a right. No one can claim the right to enter a private school, every member of a nation has the right presumptively to enter a national school. Hence what would be regarded in the one case as a condition of entrance would in the other be regarded as compulsion. The *Gita* will never be universal by compulsion from without. It will be so if its admirers will not

seek to force it down the throats of others and if they will illustrate its teachings in their own lives.

*Young India*, 20-6-'29

## 160

## THE STATE AND RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

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

As to this question Gandhiji said that he did not believe in State religion even though the whole community had one religion. State interference would probably always be unwelcome. Religion was purely a personal matter. There were in reality as many religions as minds. Each mind had a different conception of God from that of the other.

He was also opposed to State aid partly or wholly to religious bodies. For he knew that an institution or group, which did not manage to finance its own religious teaching, was a stranger to true religion. This did not mean that State schools would not give ethical teaching. Fundamental ethics were common to all religions.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47

## IMMORTAL MALAVIYAJI

There is a saying in English, "The King is dead, Long live the King". Perhaps it can be said with greater aptness though in a different setting of the great and good Malaviyaji whom death has kindly delivered from physical pain and to whom his body had ceased for some time to give the work he would gladly have taken from it. Can we not say of him "Malaviyaji the adored of *Bharata-varsha* is dead, Long live Malaviyaji?" His unremitting toil from his early youth to ripe old age has made him immortal. His services were many but the Banaras Hindu University, styled in Hindi as *Kashi Vishwavidyalaya* must for all time be counted as his greatest and best creation. If it is more popularly known as the Banaras Hindu University, the fault was not his, or, if it was, it was due to his magnanimous nature. He was a servant of his followers. He allowed them to do as they wished. I happen to know personally that this spirit of accommodation was part of his nature, so much so that at times it took the shape of weakness. Only he was a powerful man. And has not his own special favourite *Bhagawata* said that no fault accrues to the powerful? But it is a defect which can easily be remedied now. Every stone of that majestic structure should be a reflection of true *Hindu Dharma* or culture. The institution must not in any shape or form reflect the glory of materialism as of the West that we are familiar with but it should be a true reflection of the glory that is spiritualism. Is every pupil a representative of pure undefiled religion? If he is not, why not? This University will be judged, as all universities should be, not by the number of pupils studying at it at a given time but by their quality, however few in numbers they may be. I know that this is easier said than done. Nevertheless, it is the foundation of this University. If it is not that, it is nothing. Hence it is

the clear duty of the progeny of the deceased as also his followers to give it that shape. It is essentially the function of the University to assign Hindu religion its status in the body of the religions of the world, as it is its function to rid it of its defects and limitations. The devotees of the deceased should regard it as their special duty to shoulder this burden.

Malaviyaji has left an imperishable memorial of himself in the *Kashi Vishwavidyalaya*. To put it on a stable foundation, to secure its evolutionary growth, will surely be the most suitable memorial that can be erected by us to the memory of the great patriot. He spared no pains in making a big collection for his pet child. Every one who reveres his memory can give a helping hand to the labour of continuing the collection.

So far about his outward activity. His internal life was purity exemplified. He was a repository of kindness and gentleness. His knowledge of religious scriptures was very great. He was by heredity a great religious preacher. He had a marvellous memory and his life was as clean as it was simple.

His politics I must leave alone as also his other manifold activities. He, whose life was singled out for selfless service and who had many gifts, would naturally stand for limitless activities. I have ventured to single out what has appealed to me as his most prominent service. And to give a real helping hand in making the institution a living example of true Hinduism will only be done by those who will try to imitate sincerely the purity and simplicity of his life.

*Harijan*, 8-12-'46

# SECTION ELEVEN: COW PROTECTION

162

## SAVE THE COW

Cow protection is the dearest possession of the Hindu heart. No one who does not believe in cow protection can possibly be a Hindu. It is a noble belief. Cow worship means to me worship of innocence. For me, the cow is the personification of innocence. Cow protection means the protection of the weak and the helpless. As Professor Vaswani truly remarks, cow protection means brotherhood between man and beast. It is a noble sentiment that must grow by patient toil and *tapasya*.

*Young India*, 8-6-'21

163

## COW PROTECTION

The central fact of Hinduism is cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation

is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow.

The way to protect is to die for her. It is a denial of Hinduism and *ahimsa* to kill a human being to protect a cow. Hindus are enjoined to protect the cow by their *tapasya*, by self-purification, by self-sacrifice. The present-day cow protection has degenerated into a perpetual feud with the Mussulmans, whereas cow protection means conquering the Mussulmans by our love. A Mussulman friend sent me some time ago a book detailing the inhumanities practised by us on the cow and her progeny : How we bleed her to take the last drop of milk from her, how we starve her to emaciation, how we ill-treat the calves, how we deprive them of their portion of milk, how cruelly we treat the oxen, how we castrate them, how we beat them, how we overload them. If they had speech, they would bear witness to our crimes against them which would stagger the world. By every act of cruelty to our cattle, we disown God and Hinduism. I do not know that the condition of the cattle in any other part of the world is so bad as in unhappy India. We may not blame the Englishman for this. We may not plead poverty in our defence. Criminal negligence is the only cause of the miserable condition of our cattle. Our *pinjrapoles*, though they are an answer to our instinct of mercy, are a clumsy demonstration of its execution. Instead of being model dairy farms and great profitable national institutions, they are merely depots for receiving decrepit cattle.

Hindus will be judged not by their *tilaks*, not by the correct chanting of *mantras*, not by their pilgrimages, not by their most punctilious observance of caste rules but by their ability to protect the cow. Whilst professing the religion of cow protection, we have enslaved the cow and her progeny, and have become slaves ourselves.

It will now be understood why I consider myself a *Sanatani* Hindu. I yield to none in my regard for the

cow. I have made the Khilafat cause my own, because I see that through its preservation full protection can be secured for the cow. I do not ask my Mussulman friends to save the cow in consideration of my service. My prayer ascends daily to God Almighty, that my service of a cause I hold to be just may appear so pleasing to Him, that He may change the hearts of the Mussulmans, and fill them with pity for their Hindu neighbours and make them save the animal the latter hold dear as life itself.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21

## 164

## WHAT COW PROTECTION INVOLVES

Cow protection should commence with ourselves. In no part of the world perhaps are cattle worse treated than in India. I have wept to see Hindu drivers goading their jaded oxen with the iron points of their cruel sticks. The half-starved condition of the majority of our cattle is a disgrace to us. The cows find their necks under the butcher's knife because Hindus sell them. Cow protection societies must turn their attention to the feeding of cattle, prevention of cruelty, preservation of the fast disappearing pasture land, improving the breed of cattle, buying from poor shepherds and turning *pinjrapoles* into model self-supporting dairies. Hindus do sin against God and man when they omit to do any of the things I have described above.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24

TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

165

# COW PROTECTION

[The following are extracts from Gandhiji's Presidential Speech at the Cow Conference held at Belgaum :]

Let alone other provinces. Would you believe me if I told you that the Hindus of Gujarat practise cow killing? You will wonder but let me tell you that in Gujarat the bullocks employed for drawing carts are goaded with spiked rods till blood oozes from their bruised backs. You may say that this is not cow killing but bullock killing. But I see no difference between the two, the killing of the cow and killing her male progeny. Again you may say that this practice may be abominable and worthy of condemnation but it hardly amounts to killing. But here, again, I beg to differ. If the bullock in question had a tongue to speak and were asked which fate he preferred,—instantaneous death under the butcher's knife or the long-drawn agony to which he is subjected,—he would undoubtedly prefer the former. At Calcutta a Sindhi gentleman used to meet me often. He used always to tell me stories about the cruelty that was practised by milkmen on cows in Calcutta. He asked me to see for myself the process of milking the cows as carried on in the dairies. The practice of blowing is loathsome. The people who do this are Hindus. Again, nowhere in the world is the condition of cattle so poor as in India. Nowhere in the world would you find such skeletons of cows and bullocks as you do in our cow-worshipping India. Nowhere are bullocks worked so beyond their capacity as here. I contend that so long as these things continue we have no right to ask anybody to stop cow-killing. In the *Bhagawata*, in one place, the illustrious author describes the various things which have been the cause of India's downfall. One of the causes mentioned is that we have given up cow protection. Today I want to bring home to you if I can, the close relation which exists between the present

poverty-stricken condition of India and our failure to protect the cow. We, who live in cities, probably can have no idea of the extent of the poverty of our poor folk. Millions upon millions cannot afford to have two full meals per day. Some live on rotten rice only. There are others for whom salt and chillies are the only table luxuries. Is it not a just nemesis for our belying of our religion ?

Then in India we have the system of *pinjrapoles*. The way in which most of these are managed is far from satisfactory. And yet, I am sorry to observe that the people who are mostly responsible for them are Jains, who are out and out believers in *ahimsa*. Well organized, these *pinjrapoles* ought to be flourishing dairies supplying pure good milk at a cheap rate to the poor. I am told however that even in a rich city like Ahmedabad there are cases of the wives of labourers feeding their babies on flour dissolved in water. There cannot be a sadder commentary on the way in which we protect the cow than that in a country which has such an extensive system of *pinjrapoles* the poor should experience a famine of pure, good milk. That I hope will serve to explain to you how our failure to protect the cow at one end of the chain results in our skin and bone starvings at the other.

If, therefore, I am asked to save the cow my first advice will be, " Dismiss from your minds the Mussulmans and Christians altogether and mind your own duty first."

Our *rishis* made the startling discovery (and everyday I feel more and more convinced of its truth) that sacred texts and inspired writings yield their truth only in proportion as one has advanced in the practice of *ahimsa* and truth. The greater the realization of truth and *ahimsa* the greater the illumination. These same *rishis* declared that cow protection was the supreme duty of a Hindu and that its performance brought one *moksha*, i.e. salvation. Now I am not ready to believe that by merely protecting the animal cow, one can attain *moksha*. For *moksha* one must completely get rid of one's lower feelings like attachment, hatred, anger, jealousy, etc.

It follows, therefore, that the meaning of cow protection in terms of *moksha* must be much wider and far more comprehensive than is commonly supposed. The cow protection which can bring one *moksha* must, from its very nature, include the protection of everything that feels. Therefore, in my opinion, every little breach of the *ahimsa* principle, like causing hurt by harsh speech to any one, man, woman or child, to cause pain to the weakest and the most insignificant creature on earth, would be a breach of the principle of cow protection, would be tantamount to the sin of beef-eating, differing from it in degree, if at all, rather than in kind. That being so, I hold that with all our passions let loose we cannot today claim to be following the principle of cow protection.

At Lahore I met Lala Dhanpatrai, somewhat of a crank like myself. He told me that if I wanted to save the cow I should wean the Hindus from their false notions. He said it was the Hindus who sold cows to the Mussulman butcher and but for them the latter would have no cows to kill. The reason for this practice, he told me, was economical. The village commons that served as grazing grounds for the cattle had been enclosed by the Government and so people could not afford to keep cows. He suggested a way out of the difficulty. It was no longer necessary, he told me, to sell cows that had ceased to give milk. He himself, he said, had tried the experiment of buying such cows. He then put them to the plough. After some time, if proper care was taken, they put on flesh and became fit to bear again. I cannot vouch for the truth of this statement. But I see no reason why this practice should not be generally adopted if the facts are as stated by Lala Dhanpatrai. Our *shastras* certainly have nowhere said that under no circumstances should the cow be used for draught purposes. If we feed the cow properly, tend it carefully and then use her for drawing carts or working the plough, always taking care not to tax her beyond her capacity, there can be nothing wrong in it. I therefore commend the suggestion for consideration and adoption

if it is found to be workable. We may not look down upon a person if he tries to protect the cow in this manner.

*Young India*, 29-1-'25

GRAMASEVAKA TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955

## 166

## COW-PROTECTION

A correspondent writes :

"The Hindu scriptures alone seem to have enjoined cow protection on its followers. I have been trying to understand the philosophy of it. If the cow has to be protected purely from selfish motives, on account of its continuous utility from its birth till after its death, cow protection should have become universal and not confined to the Hindus alone, for, mankind by instinct is selfish. If on the other hand it has to be protected on account of its meek and harmless nature, there are other animals as the sheep and deer which also equally require human protection. What then is the special virtue in the cow, exclusively known or useful to the Hindu, over other domestic animals at any rate ? If the Hindus, not excluding the vegetarian and orthodox sections, are entitled to kill buffaloes, goats, sheep, etc. for purposes of food or sacrifice, what right have we to resent the Mussulmans killing the cow for sacrifice or food ? Would not the appeal of the Hindus to the Mussulmans to protect the cow be more reasonable and effective, if we Hindus ourselves give up animal killing for food or sacrifice ?"

There is much to be said in favour of the argument adopted by the correspondent. But man does not govern himself by logic. He is a complex being ; therefore a multiplicity of considerations act upon him and move him to do or to refrain from doing things. Logically speaking, therefore, a Hindu who protects the cow should protect every animal. But taking all things into consideration, we may not cavil at his protecting the cow because he fails to protect the other animals. The only question therefore to consider is whether he is right in protecting the cow. And he cannot be wrong in so doing if non-killing of animals generally may be regarded as a duty for one who believes in *ahimsa*. And every Hindu, and for that matter every man of religion, does so. The duty

of not killing animals generally and therefore protecting them must be accepted as an indisputable fact. It is then so much to the credit of Hinduism that it has taken up cow protection as a duty. And he is a poor specimen of Hinduism who stops merely at cow protection when he can extend the arm of protection to other animals. The cow merely stands as a symbol, and protection of the cow is the least he is expected to undertake. But as I have shown already in my previous writings he is failing even in this elementary obligation.

The motive that actuates cow protection is not 'purely selfish', though selfish consideration undoubtedly enters into it. If it was purely selfish, the cow would be killed as in other countries after it had ceased to give full use. The Hindus will not kill the cow even though she may be a heavy burden. The numberless *goshalas* that have been established by charitably-minded people for tending disabled and useless cows is in a way an eloquent testimony of the effort that is being made in the direction. Though they are today very poor institutions for the object to be achieved the fact does not detract from the value of the motive behind the act.

The philosophy of cow protection, therefore, is, in my opinion, sublime. It immediately puts the animal creation on the same level with man so far as the right to live is concerned. But it is no part of Hinduism to prevent by force cow slaughter by those who do not believe in cow protection. The Hindus will bring the Mussulmans and the rest of the world to their way of thinking only by living the religion of *ahimsa* as fully as it is humanly possible. They must rely upon the working of the great principle in their own lives and making its effective appeal to the outer world. They will not convert the latter by force of arms. They certainly can by force of *ahimsa*. We little realize the matchless potency of *ahimsa* when it is thoroughly put in active operation.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26

# MUSLIMS AND COW PROTECTION

[Extracts put together by M. D. to quote in essence Gandhiji's views on cow protection in relation to the Muslims.]

The Hindus may not compel the Mussulmans to abstain from meat or even beef-eating.....To attempt cow protection by violence is to reduce Hinduism to Satanism and to prostitute to a base end the grand significance of cow protection.....The Hindus can protect the cow only by developing the faculty for dying, for suffering. The only chance the Hindus have of saving the cow in India from the butcher's knife, is by trying to save Islam from the impending peril and trusting their Mussulman countrymen to return nobility, i. e. voluntarily to protect the cow out of regard for their Hindu countrymen.....I have heard that at big fairs if a Mussulman is found in possession of cows or even goats, he is at times forcibly dispossessed. Those who, claiming to be Hindus, thus resort to violence, are enemies of the cow and of Hinduism. (*Young India*, 18-5-'21.)

It must be an article of faith for every Hindu that the cow can only be saved by Mussulman friendship. Let us recognize frankly that complete protection of the cow depends purely upon Mussulman goodwill. To carry cow protection at the point of the sword is a contradiction in terms. *Rishis* of old are said to have performed penance for the sake of the cow. Let us follow in the footsteps of the *rishis*, and ourselves do penance, so that we may be pure enough to protect the cow and all that the doctrine means and implies. (*Young India*, 8-6-'21.)

The way to save the cow is not to kill or quarrel with the Mussulman. The way to save the cow is to die in the act of saving the Khilafat without mentioning the cow.....I make bold to assert, without fear of contradiction, that it is not Hinduism to kill a fellow-man even to save the cow. Hinduism requires its votaries to

immolate themselves for the sake of their religion, i.e. for the sake of saving the cow. (*Young India*, 28-7-'21.)

Cow protection means conquering the Mussulmans by our love. (*Young India*, 6-10-'21.)

I am as eager to save the cow from the Mussulman's knife as any Hindu. But on that very account I refuse to make my support of the Mussulman claim on the Khilafat conditional upon his saving the cow. The Mussulman is my neighbour. He is in distress. His grievance is legitimate, and it is my bounden duty to help him to secure redress by every legitimate means in my power, even to the extent of losing my life and property. That is the way I can win permanent friendship with the Mussulmans.....But one observes a spirit of impatience on the part of the Hindus. In our eagerness to protect the cow we seek to legislate through Municipalities and get resolutions passed by Mussulman meetings. I would urge my Hindu countrymen to be patient.....We must let the Mussulmans solve the problem in their own way. My advice to my Hindu brethren is, 'Simply help the Mussulmans in their sorrow in a generous and self-sacrificing spirit without counting the cost and you will automatically save the cow.' (*Young India*, 4-8-'20.)

[The following occurs in Gandhiji's historical essay, *Hindu-Muslim Tension, Its Cause and Cure*, written long after the Khilafat had ceased to be a live issue:]

Hindus and Mussulmans prate about no compulsion in religion. What is it but compulsion, if Hindus will kill a Mussulman for saving a cow? It is like wanting to convert a Mussulman by force.....

Though I regard cow protection as the central fact of Hinduism, central because it is common to classes as well as masses, I have never been able to understand the antipathy towards the Mussulmans on that score. We say nothing about the slaughter that daily takes place on behalf of Englishmen. Our anger becomes red-hot when a Mussulman slaughters a cow. All the riots that have taken place in the name of the cow have been an insane

waste of effort. They have not saved a single cow, but they have on the contrary stiffened the backs of the Mussulmans and resulted in more slaughter.....The Hindus commit no sin, if they cannot prevent cow slaughter at the hands of Mussulmans, and they do sin grievously when in order to save the cow they quarrel with the Mussulmans. (*Young India*, 29-5-'24.)

[On the subject of legislation, Gandhiji said :]

Even a Hindu State may not prohibit cow slaughter for purposes considered to be religious by any of its subjects, without the consent of the intelligent majority of such subjects, so long as such slaughter is conducted in private and without any intention of provoking or giving offence to Hindus.....But in my opinion the economic side of the cow question, if it is properly handled, automatically provides for the delicate religious side. Cow slaughter should be and can be made economically impossible, whereas unfortunately of all places in the world it is the sacred animal for the Hindus which has become the cheapest for slaughter. (*Young India*, 7-7-'27.)

I know what would spare the Hindus' feeling in the matter of the cow. It is nothing short of complete *voluntary* stoppage of cow slaughter by Mussulmans, whether for sacrifice or for food. The Hindu *Dharma* will not be satisfied if some tyrant secured by force of arms immunity of the cow from the slaughter. (*Young India*, 1-1-'28.)

*Harijan*, 22-1-'38

GHANDHIGRAM TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

## BEEF

*Q*. The Muslim public need to be satisfied on a very important question. Will the Muslims be allowed to eat their national food — beef — under a Hindu majority Government? If you can satisfy the Muslims on this all-important question, a great deal of knots will be solved. You should give a straight answer to this question in your paper the *Harijan*.

*A*. I do not know how this question arises. For whilst Congressmen were in office they are not known to have interfered with the practice of beef-eating by Muslims. The question is also badly conceived. There is no such thing as a Hindu majority Government. If a free India is to live at peace with herself, religious divisions must entirely give place to political divisions based on considerations other than religious. Even as it is, though unfortunately religious differences loom large, most parties contain members drawn from all sects. It is moreover not true to say that beef is the *national* food of the Muslims. In the first place, the Muslims of India are not as yet a separate nation. In the second, beef is not their ordinary food. Their ordinary food is the same as that of the millions. What is true is that there are very few Muslims who are vegetarians from a religious motive. Therefore they will take meat, including beef, when they can get it. But during the greater part of the year millions of Muslims, owing to poverty, go without meat of any kind. These are facts. But the theoretical question demands a clear answer. As a Hindu, a confirmed vegetarian, and a worshipper of the cow whom I regard with the same veneration as I regard my mother (alas no more on this earth), I maintain that the Muslims should have full freedom to slaughter cows, if they wish, subject of course to hygienic restrictions and in a manner not to wound the susceptibilities of their Hindu neighbours. Fullest

recognition of freedom to the Muslims to slaughter cows is indispensable for communal harmony, and is the only way of saving the cow. In 1921 thousands of cows were saved by the sole and willing effort of the Muslims themselves. In spite of the black clouds hanging over our heads, I refuse to give up the hope that they will disperse and that we shall have communal peace in this unhappy land. If I am asked for proof, I must answer that my hope is based on faith and faith demands no proof.

*Harijan*, 27-4-'40

## 169

## THE COW MOTHER

[The following is taken from a discourse a Harijan boy from Andhra named Prabhakar had with Gandhiji and reported by M. D.]

"I * said to Bapu that I had realized that the cow was like our mother. 'Mother gives us milk for a couple of years. Mother cow gives us milk the whole of our life.' But Bapu said: 'I am prepared to go one better than you. Mother cow is in many ways better than the mother who gave us birth. Our mother gives us milk for a couple of years and then expects us to serve her when we grow up. Mother cow expects from us nothing but grass and grain. Our mother often falls ill and expects service from us. Mother cow rarely falls ill. Here is an unbroken record of service which does not end with her death. Our mother when she dies means expenses of burial or cremation. Mother cow is as useful dead as when she is alive. We can make use of every part of her body — her flesh, her bones, her intestines, her horns and her skin. Well I say this not to disparage the mother who gives us birth, but in order to show you the substantial reasons for my worshipping the cow.'"

*Harijan*, 15-9-'40

---

* Prabhakar, the Harijan boy from Andhra.

## THE BULLOCK'S FESTIVAL

A group of villagers now comes every Sunday morning to see Gandhiji who talks to them and answers any questions they may have to ask. On the 1st of this month they invited him to go and see their cattle parade, and Gandhiji readily agreed. That one day is the only gala day in the year for the poor beasts. No work is taken from the bullocks that day, so much so that if there is anything urgent to do the men will do it themselves. The bullocks are garlanded and decorated, but I do not know whether they are given any special feed that day.

Gandhiji gladly spent the evening with the villagers. He told them how happy he was that they celebrated this ancient custom of giving a holiday to their cows and bullocks. "In ancient India," he said to them, "a man's wealth was reckoned according to the number of cows he possessed, not according to the gold and silver he owned. The cow was worshipped as mother, for she sustained us with milk and her male progeny helped us to carry on agriculture which kept us alive. Cows are there in the West also, and they are kept very well indeed. But their male progeny is not used for agricultural purposes, it is turned into beef. From time immemorial this idea has been repugnant to us, and we have worshipped the cow and her progeny. The bullocks are the means of transport everywhere in our villages and have not ceased to be such even in a place like Simla. The railway train and the motor car go there, but all along the mountain road I found bullocks trudging up and down dragging heavily-laden carts. It seems as if this means of transport is part of our lives and our civilization. And the bullock has to endure if our handicraft civilization is to endure.

"But we have fallen on evil days. Our idea of wealth has changed, we reckon it in terms of hard cash, and have

come to neglect our cattle which have been progressively deteriorating. I am glad that you are celebrating this day, but you must know its implications. A day's celebration would have no meaning if you neglected your cattle the rest of the year. You have to find out whose animals are the best and to discover how he manages to keep them so well. You will find out whose cow gives the largest amount of milk and discover how he keeps her and feeds her. You may fix some prize for the best bullock and the best cow in the village. We are here for your service. Parnerkarji, who is a qualified dairyman, and Balwantsing, known for his love and care of the animals, are at your disposal. The stud-bull is being maintained for the benefit of the village. You must make use of all the facilities we have provided. But you can do so only when you have a genuine love for your animals."

"Here," he said, showing a spiked stick that is used in order to prod the bullocks, "here is a thing of which you and I should be ashamed. Supposing I were to prod one of your children with this stick, would you let me do it? And if you will not, how dare you treat these useful animals so? Nowhere else in the world, to my knowledge, is such an instrument of torture used. You should either give this up or not invite me to these shows. You should treat them so kindly and handle them so gently that they will understand a word or a gesture from you without the use of any stick at all. Address yourselves to the task from today, and see what progress you can make by the time we have the next festival. Our aim is to make of Sevagram a model village. I have on another occasion told you what to do in other matters. Today I am telling you that without model cattle we cannot have a model village. Our service is at your disposal, but our service too cannot be of much use without your co-operation. I hope you will, therefore, meet together at once and frame a programme of immediate action."

*Harijan*, 15-9-'40

## HOW TO SAVE THE COW ?

In so far as the pure economic necessity of cow protection is concerned, it can be easily secured if the question was considered on that ground alone. In that event all the dry cattle, the cows who give less milk than their keep and the aged and unfit cattle would be slaughtered without a second thought. This soulless economy has no place in India, although the inhabitants of this land of paradoxes may be, indeed, are guilty of many soulless acts.

Then how can the cow be saved without having to kill her off when she ceases to give the economic quantity of milk or when she becomes otherwise an uneconomic burden ? The answer to the question can be summed up as follows :

1. By the Hindus performing their duty towards the cow and her progeny. If they did so, our cattle would be the pride of India and the world. The contrary is the case today.

2. By learning the science of cattle breeding. Today there is perfect anarchy in this work.

3. By replacing the present cruel method of castration by the humane method practised in the West.

4. By thorough reform of the *pinjrapoles* of India which are today, as a rule, managed ignorantly and without any plan by men who do not know their work.

5. When these primary things are done, it will be found that the Muslims will, of their own accord, recognize the necessity, if only for the sake of their Hindu brethren, of not slaughtering cattle for beef or otherwise.

The reader will observe that behind the foregoing requirements lies one thing and that is *ahimsa*, otherwise known as universal compassion. If that supreme thing is realized, everything else becomes easy. Where there is

*ahimsa*, there is infinite patience, inner calm, discrimination, self-sacrifice and true knowledge. Cow protection is not an easy thing. Much money is wasted in its name. Nevertheless, in the absence of *ahimsa* the Hindus have become destroyers instead of saviours of the cow. It is even more difficult than the removal of foreign rule from India.

[*Note* : The average quantity of milk that the cow in India yields is said to be roughly 2 lb. per day, that of New Zealand 14 lb., of England 15 lb., of Holland 20 lb. The index figure for health goes up in proportion to the increase in the yield of milk. — M. K. G.]

*Harijan*, 31-8-'47

# SECTION TWELVE: UNTOUCHABILITY

## 172

## UNTOUCHABILITY NOT A PART OF HINDUISM

I have always claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu. It is not that I am quite innocent of the scriptures. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* only in translation. Naturally therefore mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should do as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit. By the time I had reached the age of 21, I had studied other religions also.

There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism ; and that, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me.

True, Hinduism does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the *shastras*. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the *Bhagwata* or the *Manusmriti*. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the Empire. Even the Mussulmans caught the sinful contagion from us, and in South Africa, in East Africa and in Canada the Mussulmans no less than the Hindus came to be regarded as pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of untouchability.

*Young India*, 27-4-'21

## 173

## CONTRARY TO SPIRIT OF HINDUISM

Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the *Vedas* are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me the *Vedas* are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth.' It is the spirit that giveth the light. And the spirit of the *Vedas* is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.

*Young India*, 19-1-'21

27 SEP 1955

## 174

## UNTOUCHABILITY

[Speaking at a meeting in Akola Gandhiji remarked :]

My views on untouchability are not the product of my Western education. I had formed them long before I went to England, and long before I studied the scriptures, and in an atmosphere which was by no means favourable to those views. For I was born in an orthodox Vaishnava family and yet ever since I reached the year of discretion I have firmly held my uncompromising views in the matter, which later comparative study of Hinduism and experience have only confirmed. How in face of the fact that no scriptural text mentions a fifth *varna*, and in face of the express injunction of the *Gita* to regard a *brahmana* and a *bhangi* as equals, we persist in maintaining this deep blot on Hinduism, I cannot understand. Regarding

a *brahmana* and a *bhangi* as equals does not mean that you will not accord to a true *brahmana* the reverence that is due to him, but that the *brahmana* and the *bhangi* are equally entitled to our service, that we accord to the *bhangi* the same rights of sending his children to public schools, of visiting public temples, of the use of public wells, etc., on the same basis as these rights are enjoyed by any other Hindu.

*Young India*, 7-2-'27

## 175

## UNTOUCHABILITY AND THE VEDAS

A correspondent asks: "Do you think that sins of touch and sight are of Vedic origin?"

Though I cannot speak with authority based on first-hand knowledge, I have full confidence in the purity of the *Vedas*, and therefore have no hesitation in asserting that the sins of touch and sight have no support in the *Vedas*. I would however add, that no matter what is credited with *Vedic* origin if it is repugnant to the moral sense, it must be summarily rejected as contrary to the spirit of the *Vedas*, and perhaps what is more, as contrary to fundamental ethics.

The next four questions may be condensed as follows:

> "Don't you think that the *karmakanda* is based upon a knowledge of the laws of magnetism, and that the rules regarding touch and sight, birth pollution and death pollution are intended for the purification of the mind?"

In so far as they are so intended, they have a certain relative value; but the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all the other *shastras* as also the other religions of the world proclaim in no uncertain terms, that purification of the mind is an inward process, and that the magnetism produced by the inter-action of physical bodies is nothing compared to the other subtle magnetism of mind upon mind, and the outward purificatory rites

become soul-destroying, when they result in making man arrogate to himself superiority over fellow human beings and in making him treat them virtually as beasts or even less.

* * *

Rules have to appeal to reason and must never be allowed to crush the spirit within. The rules about untouchability have been demonstrated and can be demonstrated to be injurious to the growth of the spirit, and they are wholly contrary to all that is best and noblest in Hinduism.

*Young India*, 3-10-'29

## 176

## DR. AMBEDKAR'S INDICTMENT

The readers will recall the fact that Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided last May at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Torak Mandal of Lahore. But the conference itself was cancelled because Dr. Ambedkar's address was found by the Reception Committee to be unacceptable.

Dr. Ambedkar was not going to be beaten by the Reception Committee. He has answered their rejection of him by publishing the address at his own expense. He has priced it at 8 annas. I would suggest a reduction to 2 annas or at least 4 annas.

No reformer can ignore the address. The orthodox will gain by reading it. This is not to say that the address is not open to objection. It has to be read if only because it is open to serious objection. Dr. Ambedkar is a challenge to Hinduism. Brought up as a Hindu, educated by a Hindu potentate, he has become so disgusted with the so-called *savarna* Hindus for the treatment that he and his have received at their hands that he proposes to leave not only them but the very religion that is his and their common heritage. He has transferred to that religion his disgust against a part of its professors.

But this is not to be wondered at. After all one can only judge a system or an institution by the conduct of its representatives. What is more, Dr. Ambedkar found that the vast majority of *savarna* Hindus had not only conducted themselves inhumanly against those of their fellow religionists whom they classed as untouchables, but they had based their conduct on the authority of their scriptures, and when he began to search them he had found ample warrant for their belief in untouchability and all its implications. The author of the address has quoted chapter and verse in proof of his threefold indictment — inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted by their scriptures.

*Harijan*, 11-7-'36

* * *

In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value, and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.

In his able address, the learned Doctor has overproved his case. Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnyanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Raja Rammohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda and a host of others who might be easily mentioned, be so utterly devoid of merit as is made out in Dr. Ambedkar's address? A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to, if not to improve upon.

*Harijan*, 18-7-'36

177

## FOR HINDUS ONLY

Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must purify themselves, they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin. The silent loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the hearts of millions of Hindus ; but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the 'untouchables' will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well-intentioned and generous it may be ; for it will not bring home to them the sense of guilt. On the contrary, they would probably hug the sin all the more for such interference. All reform to be sincere and lasting must come from within.

*Young India*, 1-5-'24

178

## HOW TO FRATERNIZE THE HARIJANS

How is this blot on Hinduism to be removed ?

It is necessary for us Hindus to repent of the wrong we have done, to alter our behaviour towards those whom we have 'suppressed' by a system as devilish as we believe the English system of the Government of India to be. We must not throw a few miserable schools at them : we must not adopt the air of superiority towards them. We must treat them as our blood-brothers as they are in fact. We must return to them the inheritance of which we have robbed them. And this must not be the act of a few English-knowing reformers merely, but it must be a conscious voluntary effort on the part of the masses. We may not wait till eternity for this much-belated reformation. We must aim at bringing it about within this year of grace, probation, preparation, and *tapasya*. It is a reform not to follow Swaraj but to precede it.

*Young India*, 19-1-'21



27 SEP 1955

## 179

# UNTOUCHABILITY AND INTERDINING

[The following are extracts from a free rendering of Gandhiji's speech at the Untouchability Conference held at Belgaum during the Congress Week:]

I do not regard interdining and intermarriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. The religion to which I belong prescribes for our observance *Maryada Dharma*. The *rishis* of old carried on exhaustive researches through meditation, and as a result of the researches they discovered some great truths, such as have no parallel perhaps in any other religion. One of these was that they regarded certain kinds of foods as injurious for the spiritual wellbeing of man. So they interdicted their use. Now suppose someone had to travel abroad and live among strange people with different customs and standards as regards their diet. Knowing as they did how compelling sometimes the force of social customs of the people among whom men lived was, they promulgated *Maryada Dharma* to help one in such emergencies. Though, however, I believe in *Maryada Dharma*, I do not regard it as an essential part of Hinduism. I can even conceive a time when these restrictions might be abolished with impunity. But the reform contemplated in the untouchability movement does not obliterate the restriction as to interdining and intermarrying. I cannot recommend wholesale abolition of these restrictions to the public, even at the risk of being charged with hypocrisy and inconsistency. For instance, I let my son dine freely in Mussulman households because I believe he can take sufficient care as to what to take and what not to take. I myself have no scruples in taking my food in Mussulman households because I have my own strict rules about my diet.

I have dwelt on this point at such great length, because I want to be absolutely plain with you

('untouchables'). I do not want to employ diplomacy in my dealings with you or for that matter with any one. I do not want to keep you under any false illusion or win your support by holding out temptations.

The only means open to me are those of *ahimsa* and truth. I have adopted an 'untouchable' child as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to love her as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger; I can do so only by love. If any of my people have done you wrong, I ask your forgiveness for it. Some members of the 'untouchable' class said when I was at Poona that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them. Can untouchability be removed by force? Can the amelioration of the 'untouchables' come through these methods? The only way by which you and I can wean orthodox Hindus from their bigotry is by patient argument and correct conduct. So long as they are not converted, I can only ask you to put up with your lot with patience. I am willing to stand by you and share your sufferings with you. You must have the right of worship in any temple in which members of other castes are admitted. You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office in the land not excluding even that of the Viceroy's. That is my definition of the removal of untouchability.

But I can help you in this only by following the way indicated by my religion and not by following Western methods. For that way I cannot save Hinduism. Yours is a sacred cause. Can one serve a sacred cause by adopting Satan's methods? I pray you, therefore, to dismiss from your mind the idea of ameliorating your condition by brute force. The *Gita* tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain *moksha*. Meditation is waiting on God. If waiting on God brings the highest bliss of salvation, how much quicker must it bring removal of untouchability? Waiting on God means increasing purity. Let us by prayer purify ourselves and

we shall not only remove untouchability but shall also hasten the advent of Swaraj.

*Young India*, 22-1-'25

## 180

## CASTE v. CLASS

Man being a social being has to devise some method of social organization. We in India have evolved caste: they in Europe have organized class. Neither has the solidarity and naturalness of a family which perhaps is a God-ordained institution. If caste has produced certain evils, class has not been productive of anything less.

If class helps to conserve certain social virtues, caste does the same in equal, if not greater, degree. The beauty of the caste system is that it does not base itself upon distinctions of wealth possessions. Money, as history has proved, is the greatest disruptive force in the world. Even the sacredness of family ties is not safe against the pollution of wealth,— says Shankaracharya. Caste is but an extension of the principle of the family. Both are governed by blood and heredity. Western scientists are busy trying to prove that heredity is an illusion and that *milieu* is everything. The solid experience of many lands goes against the conclusion of these scientists; but even accepting their doctrine of *milieu*, it is easy to prove that *milieu* can be conserved and developed more through caste than through class. The Anglo-Saxon is temperamentally incapable of appreciating any outlook but his own. One can understand his violent opposition to everything that goes against his grain. But Indians, whether Hindus or Christians, ought to be able to see that the spirit behind caste is not one of arrogant superiority; it is the classification of different systems of self-culture. It is the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. Just as the spirit of the family is inclusive of those who love each other and are wedded to each other by ties of blood and relation, caste also tries to include families of a particular way of purity of life (not standard

of life, meaning by this term, economic standard of life). Only it does not leave the decision, whether a particular family belongs to a particular type, to the idiosyncracies or interested judgement of a few individuals. It trusts to the principle of heredity, and being only a system of culture does not hold that any injustice is done if an individual or a family has to remain in a particular group in spite of their decision to change their mode of life for the better. As we all know, change comes very slowly in social life, and thus, as a matter of fact, caste has allowed new groupings to suit the changes in lives. But these changes are quiet and easy as a change in the shapes of the clouds. It is difficult to imagine a better harmonious human adjustment.

Caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognizes different outlooks and corresponding modes of life. But it is no use denying the fact that a sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste-system, but it cannot be called the creation of the *brahmanas*. When all castes accept a common goal of life a hierarchy is inevitable, because all castes cannot realize the ideal in equal degree. If all the castes believe that vegetarian diet is superior to animal diet, the vegetarian caste will naturally be looked up to. There are certain sub-castes in India that have ever stood on a par with each other, and yet have not interdined or intermarried. Just as a Hindu or a Mohammedan does not think himself an inferior of the other because of his differences of faith, or just as a *brahmana* or a *lingayat* in Southern India mutually refuse to interdrink, all castes can confine their food and drink to their own caste. Only by accepting the standard of the *brahmana* or the Vaishnavas as the best, have the other castes consented to dine at the hands of the 'purer' castes.

Touch, drink, food and marriage are progressively private affairs. But by refusing to touch a man, you practically refuse all intercourse with him. He is thus denied all the fruits of social development. The touchables, for instance, can all attend the *kathas*, the *kirtans*

(religious sermons). They can enter temples and thus get the *free* education of religion, rituals and arts. In the temple, all the touchables exchange their love and service, and the fruits of civilization. The 'untouchables' are automatically barred from all that. In many places being required to live outside the village, they are deprived of even the protection of their life and property. In the social division of labour they do the utmost and one of the most important duties to society, and they are deprived of the fruits of the great social life which is evolved by the family of castes. Untouchability has made the 'depressed' classes, the cinderella of Hindu society. The question of food and drink has or ought to have no social value. It is merely the satisfaction of physical wants. It is, on the other hand, an opportunity for the control of the senses. Interdining has never been known to promote brotherhood in any special sense. But the restraints about interdining have to a great extent helped the cultivation of will-power and conservation of certain social virtues.

*Young India*, 29-12-'20

## 181

## TEMPLE-ENTRY

It was in last September that leading Hindus, claiming to represent the whole of Hindu India, met together and unanimously passed a resolution, condemning untouchability and pledging themselves to abolish it by law, if possible even during the existing regime, and, failing that, when India had a Parliament of her own.

Among the marks of untouchability to be removed was the prohibition against temple-entry by Harijans. In the course of the struggle, it was discovered that the British Courts in India had recognized this evil custom, so much so that certain acts done by 'untouchables' as such came to be offences under the British Indian Penal Code. Thus, the entry by an 'untouchable' into a Hindu temple would be punishable as a crime under the I.P.C.

Before, therefore, the movement of temple-entry can make headway, it has become imperative to have this anomaly removed. It is for this purpose that Sjt. Ranga Iyer has given notice of two Bills to be introduced in the Central Legislature. After ascertaining the opinion of the Provincial Governments, H. E. the Viceroy has sanctioned the introduction of these Bills. But, being private Bills, they have a poor chance of becoming the law of the land, unless the Government and the members of the Assembly refrain from obstructing its consideration. It may be argued that, being pledged to neutrality in matters of religion, the Government are bound to facilitate the passage of the first Bill at any rate, inasmuch as it merely seeks to undo the effect produced by the decisions of British Indian Courts, and this it does by withdrawing legal recognition from untouchability.

There are practices in various religions professed by the inhabitants of this land whose breach is not regarded as criminal, though it would be regarded as very serious by the respective religious codes. Thus beef-eating by a Hindu is an offence in the eye of the Hindu religious code, but rightly not punishable as a crime under the Indian Penal Code. Is there, then, any reason why the common law of India should punish a breach of the custom of untouchability ? If there are many Hindus learned in the Hindu scriptures who find support in them for the present practice of untouchability, there are quite a number of equally learned Hindus holding the opposite view. Though this opinion of the *pandits* has already appeared in the Press, it is reproduced elsewhere for ready reference. Let it be noted that the signatories are all orthodox Hindus, as much lovers of their faith as are the learned men of the opposite school. On the 25th of January 1933 was held the session of the All-India Sanatana Dharma Sabha, presided over by Pandit Malaviyaji and attended by over one hundred learned men. It passed a resolution to the effect that Harijans were as much entitled to temple-entry as the rest of the Hindus.

If the Bills are not passed, it is obvious that the central part of the reform will be hung up almost indefinitely. Neutrality in matters of religion ought not to mean religious stagnation and hindrance to reform.

With due regard to the *Sanatanists*, it is difficult to understand the cry of 'religion in danger'. Under neither bill will a single temple be opened against the will of the majority of temple-goers in question. The second bill expressly says so. The first bill takes up a neutral attitude. It does not help a Harijan to force his way into a temple. The reformers do not seek to compel the opponents to their will. They desire, by the fairest means possible, to convert the majority or the minority, as the case may be, to their view of untouchability.

It is said that the Harijans themselves do not want temple-entry and that they want only betterment of their economic and political condition. The reformer, too, wants the latter, but he believes that this betterment will be much quicker brought about, if religious equality is attained. The reformer denies that the Harijans do not want temple-entry. But it may be that they are so disgusted with caste Hindus and Hindu religion itself as to want nothing from them. They may in sullen discontent choose to remain outside the religious pale. Any penance on the part of caste Hindus may be too late.

Nevertheless, the caste Hindus who recognize that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism have to atone for the sin of untouchability. Whether, therefore, Harijans desire temple-entry or not, caste Hindus have to open their temples to Harijans, precisely on the same terms as other Hindus. For a caste Hindu with any sense of honour, temple prohibition is a continuous breach of the pledge taken at the Bombay meeting of September last. Those, who gave their word to the world and to God that they would have the temples opened for the Harijans, have to sacrifice their all, if need be, for redeeming the pledge. It may be that they did not represent the Hindu mind. They have, then, to own defeat and do the proper penance. Temple-entry is the one spiritual act that would

constitute the message of freedom to the 'untouchables' and assure them that they are not outcastes before God.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33

## 182

## WHY TEMPLE-ENTRY LEGISLATION ?

There is a legal bar against temple-entry which cannot be removed by any agreement on the part of all the Hindus combined. A legal bar can only be removed by a legislative act. What an agreement amongst Hindus can do is to move the Government to give effect to it as was done in connection with the political part of the Yeravda Pact. Those caste Hindus who strained themselves to ensure recognition of the political part of the Yeravda Pact are now doubly bound to give effect to the other resolutions which were the direct and natural consequence of the Yeravda Pact ; and since in the course of complying with those resolutions it has been discovered that there is a legal difficulty which was not foreseen then, that difficulty has got to be removed at the earliest possible moment. Hence the two Bills.

But, says Malaviyaji, temple-entry, the opening of wells etc. had to be done by persuasion, not by compulsion. I quite agree, but to remove a legal bar is not to do the desired thing by compulsion. There is the Madura temple. If I am correctly informed, the trustees of that temple are elected by the Hindu voters. They are pledged to open the temple. By an overwhelming majority, the Hindu voters have desired the opening of the temple. But, because of the legal bar, the trustees cannot open the temple to the Harijans. Will it be compulsion to have that legal bar removed by law ? I can cite several other instances where willing trustees of public temples are powerless to give effect to the public demand and their own wishes. I venture, therefore, to think that there is no escape from permissive and corrective legislation.

*Harijan*, 18-2-'33

183

## THE WRONG WAY

The following are extracts from a letter of a professor who claims to be a *Sanatanist* :

> "I am an orthodox *Sanatanist brahmana*.....Up till now, I was also an opponent of temple-entry by Harijans, but my inner voice today, all of a sudden, spoke to me that, unless the so-called untouchables are given the right of having *darshan* of *Patitpawan Bhagwan* in temples, Hinduism is doomed. Bitter experiences of past months have compelled me to revolutionize my views now.....But, in order to persuade orthodox *Sanatanists* to agree with me, I request you with all the emphasis at my command to accept a condition that only those Harijans may be freely allowed to enter a temple who have taken a solemn vow to bathe daily, to wear clean clothes, and to discard beef and carrion. Poor *Sanatanists* are also not to be blamed. It is these unclean habits that are really responsible for the practice of untouchability itself. Harijans are themselves to be blamed to a great extent for the disabilities under which they are groaning. To ask *Sanatanists* to allow Harijans to enter temples without, at the same time, rebuking them for their evil habits is, I fear, tantamount to putting a premium on them (habits).
>
> "So I entreat you to accept my suggestion, and I assure you that I shall leave no stone unturned to see that it is consented to by my orthodox *Sanatanist* friends too. I will also carry on intense propaganda in its favour, and I am confident by grace of Providence I will attain success."

The position taken up by the professor is typical. It is, therefore, necessary to show the fallacy underlying it. Whilst I appreciate the conversion of the writer on the temple-entry question, I cannot help saying that the condition he seeks to impose upon the Harijans will frustrate the very end he has in view. He forgets that caste-Hindus are responsible for the present condition of the Harijans. We have, therefore, to receive them as they are and have faith that our contact and love will, if we are true, make them shed all those habits that may be repugnant to decent society. To blame the Harijans for their present condition is like a slave-holder blaming his slave for the misery and squalor the latter may be living

in. We would ridicule the slave-holder, perhaps even accuse him of insincerity, if he made the removal of squalor by the slave as a condition precedent to the grant of freedom. It should also be borne in mind that the Harijans will enter temples subject to the same condition that is applicable to the rest of the Hindus. Nature has not made of Harijans a separate species distinguished from caste-Hindus by definite unmistakable signs. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Harijans enter temples without being detected. The studies of Census reports published in these columns must make it clear to anybody that those who were not classified as 'untouchables' must have entered temples without let or hindrance. The mere fact of a new enumeration, for the first time including certain classes and excluding certain other classes from the Harijan list, surely cannot be used as any test of untouchability or touchability. Only Hindus can claim no merit for the undetected entry of the so-called State-made untouchables into temples. What is now claimed is that caste-Hindus should seek merit, in other words, purify themselves, by deliberately banishing untouchability from their midst as a sin. I cannot repeat too often that by untouchability I mean the thing as it is practised today. Let the professor and those who think like him remember that the reform the anti-untouchability campaign stands for is no mere make-shift for placating Harijans. It stands for a fundamental change in Hindu practice, it stands for the total abolition of the practice of high-and-lowness that has crept into Hinduism in spite of its lofty and unequivocal declaration that all life is one and that differentiation is *maya*, is false. Practice of equal treatment of all human beings should be the least direct outcome of that belief not reserved for *sannyasis* but for the ordinary man in his ordinary dealings with fellowmen.

*Harijan*, 15-7-'33

## GURUVAYUR SPEECH

Keenly and deeply as I feel the taint of untouchability, and deeply as I feel convinced that, if this untouchability is not removed root and branch from Hinduism, Hinduism is bound to perish, I would not have untouchability removed by force or show of force or compulsion of any kind whatsoever. Removal of untouchability is not a matter of law or of compulsion. Removal of untouchability is a matter of change of heart, perfect purification on the part of millions of Hindus. And that can only be brought about by the sacrifice of thousands of workers themselves, and not by causing injury to other people. Hence has every scripture that I have read pronounced from the housetops that religion can only be defended by *tapashcharya*. I will, therefore, beseech every one of you, who crowd round me wherever I go, to remember that this movement is a movement of personal, individual self-purification and self-conviction. And if you cannot approach this question from that point of view, I would far rather that I was deserted by you and that all the meetings were deserted by you. And if any man or woman is eager to come and listen to me or to give me an ounce of milk, he or she should do so, provided he or she has got that complete identification with the cause and a perfect spirit of self-purification.

Having said this and having made this declaration of my faith under the shadow of the great temple of Guruvayur, I would like to make this appeal from the bottom of my heart to those who are organizing the activities of the Varnashrama Swarajya Sangh, and kindred bodies also, to understand that they will not defend what they call *Sanatana Dharma* by staging demonstrations of the character that they have been doing. They sent a body of men throughout the tour in C. P. who wanted to fall prostrate before the car and impede my progress at every

stage. There were often clashes between volunteers who were looking after me and this body of six or seven young men. Fortunately, no serious or untoward event happened, though scratches certainly were inflicted on either side even during the C. P. tour. I quickly made friends with those people who were staging those obstructive demonstrations and told them as earnestly as I could that that was not the way to protect Hinduism. Some of them were youngsters who did not even know what they were doing. With the exception of one, I doubt if any of them had any idea of the elements of Hinduism. And I had hoped here also that, if there were such men who wanted to stage demonstrations, I should come in touch with them, discuss with them, understand them and know who they were. But I was sorry that hardly had I put my foot in Malabar when I was faced with the scene that I witnessed here. It would have been better if I had been able to make their acquaintance before and ascertained what they wanted to do. But they chose to take a different course. I still invite them to meet me and tell me what they would exactly want me to do; and, short of stopping this tour, I would make every facility for them, and every convenience for them to express their thoughts or even to make whatever peaceful demonstrations that they might want to stage. But what I am most anxious to avoid is *goondaism* in every shape and form on the part of either party. I give the same credit to those who call themselves *Sanatanists* for honesty of purpose that I would claim for myself, but both must have an equal right to give expression to their views and mould public opinion. After all, *Sanatana Dharma* is not the prerogative of one set of people. I claim myself to be a representative of *Sanatana Dharma* in every sense of the term that they claim. I base my vehement opposition to untouchability upon the same *shastras* by which they swear, and I should stand by my interpretation of the *shastras* even though I were the solitary one amongst the millions of Hindus; because the same *shastras* tell me that I may not resist the inner call of my fundamental being. Thank God, however,

that I do not stand alone in the interpretation that I have been placing before you. On the contrary, there are learned *shastris* who have just as much right to interpret the *shastras* as those who call themselves the exponents of *Sanatana Dharma*. And they give precisely the same interpretation that I have placed before tens of thousands of men and women. And it is my settled conviction, based upon an unbroken experience extending over a period of nearly fifty years, that untouchability as we practise it today has absolutely no warrant whatsoever in the Hindu *shastras*.

*Harijan*, 26-1-'34

## 185

## RIGHT OF MINORITY

A *Sanatanist* asks :

"As a *Sanatanist* I have a difficulty about temple-entry by Harijans. Supposing among temple-goers of a particular temple there is a majority of 99 to 1 in favour of Harijans entering the temple and the temple is opened. What about the minority of one who has objection to worshipping in a temple visited by Harijans ? If reformers have their way, will it not be an undue interference with the right of worship which belongs to the *Sanatanists* from time immemorial ?

"There may be a public Church of the Roman Catholics as well as a public Church of Protestants in an English town. Even if the Protestants be in a majority, they would not interfere with the conduct of affairs in the Roman Catholic Church. Why, then, should the reformers (even though in the majority) interfere with the conduct of affairs in a public temple belonging to the *Sanatanists* ?"

I should answer the questions by putting another. If the one solitary *Sanatanist* has the right, as he undoubtedly has, what about the majority ? Have they no rights ? The parallel quoted does not apply. The questioner has imagined the existence side by side of two churches belonging to different denominations. It would be a monstrous impertinence on the part of Protestants to interfere with the rights of Roman Catholics or vice versa. But

suppose all the Protestants but one decided to admit to their temple persons whom they had excommunicated for ages. Surely, they would have every right to lift the ban. Here there would be no question of changing one's religion, as there is in the case imagined by the questioner. In the temple-entry movement, reformers do not seek to alter their faith. If they did, in theory at least, not even a unanimous decision of temple-goers of a temple should entitle them to use a temple for purposes never intended by the founders. Here the reformers claim that the faith they profess in common with the *Sanatanists* permits the use of their temples by fellow-Hindus, the Harijans. It is, therefore, a question of interpretation, and in such matters, the opinion of a majority must prevail. If it did not, it would amount to the coercion of a majority by a minority, and there would be an end to all progress. Indeed, the doctrine the questioner propounds would mean decay and death to a society that subscribes to it. It should be remembered that the minority is free to build a temple for itself. And so far as I am concerned, I have given my opinion that even a minority of one should have its prejudices so far respected that a special hour may be set apart so as to enable it to offer worship free from the intrusion, whether of reformers or of Harijans.

*Harijan*, 9-11-'34

186

## TEMPLE-ENTRY

The reader will recall the important resolution on temple-entry passed recently by the Harijan Sevak Sangh. The local *Sanghs* should make a sustained effort to have the existing temples thrown open and even to build new ones, not for Harijans only but for all. If they are situated in healthy localities and have a school, a meeting place and a *dharmashala* attached to them, they must prove useful and popular among all classes of Hindus. There may be public prayers held there every evening or at stated periods and religious discourses may be occasionally arranged. If these temples are properly conducted, they would go a long way towards removing the prejudice against the opening of existing temples to Harijans. Care must be taken, where temples are opened to Harijans, that no discrimination is made against them. They must be opened on precisely the same terms as they are opened to the other Hindus.

It is hardly necessary to state that in different localities different methods may be adopted for securing the desired end. Perfect non-violence must of course be maintained in all cases. An all-India simultaneous movement of the same type is not contemplated. It will vary in intensity and method according to the circumstances in each locality. Nowhere should temples be opened where there is an active minority opposed to the opening. Practical unanimity should be secured before any temple is opened. Thus what is required is sustained effort to convert local public opinion in favour of temple-entry.

*Harijan*, 28-3-'36

## AN EXAMPLE FOR HINDU PRINCES

The Travancore Durbar have earned the congratulations of the whole Hindu world, and all thoughtful men, by issuing the following Proclamation :

> " Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries adapted itself to the need of the changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth, caste or community, be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government."

The action has been long overdue. But better late than never.

Let us hope that no attempt will be made to whittle away the hard-earned freedom of Harijans by hedging it round by any the least distinction between one Hindu and another. If the Proclamation means anything it means that in the temples conducted under the State aegis Harijans will offer worship precisely on the same terms as the highest caste Hindu so-called. In other words, in the house of God in Travancore henceforth there will be no distinction between man and man, there will be no Harijan and no high caste, all will be *Hari-jans* — children of God. If these are not the implications of the great Proclamation, it is nothing but a mere scrap of paper. But we have no reason to doubt its sincerity or suspect any mental reservations.

Travancore has a large and important Christian community. Christian missions are flirting with Harijans, rightly no doubt from their own standpoint, they are spending money on them and holding out hope of real freedom and equality of social status. It is beside the

present discussion that for Harijans there is no social equality, no real freedom anywhere except when it is first obtained in Hinduism. I am not thinking of individuals. I am thinking of the whole mass. The latter are so intertwined with the other Hindus that unless they become brothers with them instead of remaining serfs, which they are, no change of label can avail anything. But this apart, let us realize that the working of the Proclamation will be narrowly watched and criticized by the sister communities. It therefore behoves the State authorities as well as the caste Hindus to give full effect to the letter and the spirit of the Proclamation.

The main duty of working the Proclamation, however, devolves in a way upon the reformers and Harijans. They should avail themselves of the freedom in a religious, becoming and humble spirit. Reformers should see to it that Harijans enter these temples after proper ablutions and in a clean condition. I know that this primary rule is observed more in the breach than in the performance by the vast majority of temple-going caste Hindus. Harijans may not copy the bad manners of caste Hindus. They should take pride in setting a good example in cleanliness both of body and heart.

The Proclamation should have no political significance, as it has none. I regard it as the performance of a purely religious duty of the State. And it should be so taken and so treated by all the Hindus of the State. To give it any other colour will be to destroy its great spiritual purpose and effect.

Let us hope that the example of Travancore will prove infectious and all the other Hindu States will follow suit. There is no reason why they should not. It is the privilege and duty of a Hindu prince to propound religious codes which are not inconsistent with the fundamental principles of Hinduism as derived from the *Vedas* and which are demanded by the spirit of the times. This must be true of all the progressive and living religions. This rule accounts for apparent inconsistencies of the different *Smritis* and also obvious departures from the original

tenets, as even a careless student will detect even in the same *Smriti*. If the Hindu princes do not perform this primary function, it is not so much their fault as of the lost *brahmanhood*. If the *brahmanical* spirit was restored, princes would be *rishis*, who would take from the revenues the honest minimum necessary to support them as a commission for their labours on behalf of the ryots, and hold their revenues in trust for the ryots. They would not have private property as they possess today and feel independent of their ryots and their wishes.

But whether we reach the ideal state outlined here during the present generation or ever, surely there is nothing to prevent the Hindu princes from following the example set by Travancore and thus hastening the day of the total removal of untouchability from Hinduism, and helping to save it from certain destruction. I would advise the responsible Hindus in every Hindu State to approach their princes and their advisers to initiate the overdue reform.

*Harijan*, 21-11-'36

## 188

## THE PANDALAI SPEECH

### An Appeal to Their Highnesses

Great as this Proclamation is and great as is its religious merit, greater still is the responsibility that His Highness has taken upon his shoulders, and so also his advisers. Whilst without the effort of every *savarna* Hindu the Proclamation can undoubtedly be rendered ineffective, I must also say that the Proclamation would not have its full effect unless it is backed in an ample measure by State action. So far as I can see the Proclamation demands State activities in all departments of life. Of these I propose to take the religious first ; because from it must follow activities in all the other departments. Temples have been matters of indifference, except to

women, who have no capital save divine faith, and to men who from many mixed motives have been going to them. They have been neglected by what may be called the intelligentsia. The result has been that they have almost ceased to be repositories of Hinduism and have ceased to impart spiritual power to those who have followed the faith. They have ceased to shed unmistakable spiritual fragrance in and about and around them. Then, I venture to suggest that it is the duty of the State,— or of the Maharajah, if there is any distinction between the two, for he is the custodian of the vast majority of Hindu temples —,that he should see to it that the temples are renovated spiritually, and have the authority and sanctity that they used undoubtedly to have at one time. And I believe that it can only be done if they are in charge of priests who know what they have to do, who know something of the sanctity of them, and of the duties to which they are called. In other words, they should not be ignorant people following their calling for a livelihood, but they should be men who are proud of their privilege of bringing the message of God to temple-goers, showing by their own conduct and their life that these temples are abodes of Divinity.

Then there should be the correct kind of instruction given in these temples. The Harijans will be taken by the hand by someone in charge of temples and they will be told what they are expected to gain by temple-worship. This means undoubtedly, according to modern thought, a revolution in the upkeep and conduct of these temples. But the Proclamation itself is nothing short of a revolutionary document, and if that revolution is to touch, as it ought to touch, the lives of all Hindus, naturally temples have to be abodes of the living God, and not abodes of a mere mass of gold or other metals worked into figures. Then I should expect a history of these temples, understandable by the common folk, to be distributed freely or at a cheap price to all who want to know what these temples are. That means a training school for training the right kind of teachers who will be entrusted with the

religious training of the people. If some such thing does not happen, I fear that the purpose of the Proclamation, viz. to expect and to induce *lakhs* and *lakhs* of Harijans to go to these temples in a religious spirit, will fail.

So much for the religious department. Then I take the economic. The economic life of the Harijans has got to be lifted out of its miserable state. I venture to think that by a judicious and thoughtful working out of the programme, it can be prosecuted in a short time and with a limited financial outlay, in such a manner that Harijans may be easily able to hold their own by being taught to turn an honest *chakram*. Nor can the State now dare neglect the mental training — I mean literary — of these people. I know to my cost that today it is very difficult to carry on a connected conversation with Pulayas and Pariahs so that you can get a ready response even about simple facts of life.

Similarly, the State has to raise the social status of these people. They should be invited to all State occasions and functions, as for instance Durbars. They must not be allowed to feel that these functions are a sealed book to them, and that they should have to have another agitation before they can attain a social status entitling them to be invited or allowed to take part in those functions. But if the Proclamation bears the meaning I have given to it, then the social uplift of the Harijans has to come as if by magic, as the religious status of going to the temples has come.

In my humble opinion, in suggesting this four-fold programme of the uplift of the Harijans in the State I have not suggested any programme beyond the capacity or resources of a State like Travancore.

But having addressed these few words to the State in all humility, I want to come back to you. The State may resolve to do all these things, but its resolution will not mean the coming in of man-power in order to carry out all these things. And if, from the few words I have addressed to Their Highnesses and their advisers, you think that after all it is Their Highnesses who have to do

everything and you have to do nothing, then I am afraid that my labours will have gone in vain. The requisite man-power has got to be supplied by you, and as a man of experience I will tell you that man-power cannot come by offers of money. Thus, for instance, men who are capable of taking the management of temples cannot be had by offering scholarships of hundreds of rupees. For such people have got to be fired by a religious spirit, by love of their own work, and should therefore be ready to work for a bare maintenance. It should be their proud privilege to take this training and to fit themselves for this highest task in life. Similarly, unless the State gets men required for giving Harijans educational training, the State can do nothing.

After all, there is a world of meaning about the title that the Maharajahs of Travancore have adopted for themselves, viz. *Padmanabha-dasa.* They pride themselves in calling themselves servants of God, but that means that they are also servants of their people. So, as I said at one of these meetings, the Maharajahs are not the first lords among the people of Travancore, but they are the first servants among the people who are also servants. But the first servants of the people will fare badly unless they are ably assisted by the people who are their fellow servants. Therefore, the meaning of His Highness the Maharajah going to the temple every day and taking instructions as to his daily duties from Shri Padmanabhaswami means nothing less than that he should be assisted by his people for their own good — spiritual, religious, social, economic.

*Harijan*, 6-2-'37

## THE VITHOBA TEMPLE

A telegram to Gandhiji stated that although the trustees of the Vithoba temple of Pandharpur in Maharashtra had decided to throw it open to the Harijans, some members of the priestly class — whose number was by no means small — had taken exception and had even started a hunger strike in protest. He would tell these friends, remarked Gandhiji, that theirs was a very unbecoming attitude. It was un-Hindu. The Vithoba temple was one of the most sacred shrines in Maharashtra. The decision to throw it open had been taken by the trustees after due deliberation. Nobody had opposed it then. If his voice could reach the hunger strikers, he would tell them in all humility but with firmness that by what they were doing they were ill-serving Hinduism. In the all-embracing shrine of Vishnu there was room for all. Even the impure became pure in His sacred presence. How could the admission of the Harijans defile it? In his opinion it was a blasphemy to regard the Harijans as impure. There were black sheep and white in all communities and it was just the same with the Harijans. So long as a single Hindu, irrespective of his caste or creed, was excluded from the Vithoba temple, it was an inert, lifeless shrine. The real *pranapratishtha* was performed only when the temple was thrown open to all — including the Harijans. The present hunger strike by the priestly class, therefore, said Gandhiji, was not a pious act, but an impious one — it was a sin. Gandhiji hoped that they would realize their mistake and give up their hunger strike.

*Harijan*, 11-1-'48

341

SRIMATHEPARA TEMPLE & CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

# FROM THE VAIKOM SPEECH

## A Historical Fact

Some of you may remember that I had more than one serious discussion with the *shastris* who were residing within this temple precincts, and who were attached, if I remember rightly, to the temple. In support of the proposition that even roads leading to temples were barred against *avarna* Hindus although they were not barred against non-Hindus, they produced a book called *Shankarasmriti.* I had never heard of such a *Smriti* before I came to Vaikom and heard it quoted. You will be astonished to know that when I had that *Smriti* translated for me, I could not find in it any authority for closing the roads. But I grant that it was enough for them that they believed that the *Shankarasmriti* supported their contention. Then, as I was negotiating through the then Commissioner of Police and with the Senior Maharani, I just asked the question that supposing as a result of the negotiations the Maharani issued orders to open the roads to the *avarna* Hindus, what would be their attitude to them ? Then without the slightest hesitation they said : 'Oh ! that is a different thing altogether ; a Hindu Prince or Princess has every right to issue an order which has the authority of a *Smriti* !' They said that was implied in Hinduism as Hindu kings are repositories of Hindu faith and they have every right to issue orders which are not inconsistent with *Shruti.* I asked them whether the same thing applied to the opening of the temples. They said, 'Most decidedly.' Let me tell you that these *shastris* were not the only *shastris* that gave this reply. I asked the same question to *shastris* in Cochin and Tamilnad and they gave the same answer. As a matter of fact that is the historical evolution of *Smritis* and for that matter of the eighteen *Puranas.* They were all produced or inspired in response to the want of those times. They do

not always express eternal verities. The eternal verity is summed up in the first verse of the *Ishopanishad* as I have been saying.

*Harijan*, 6-2-'37

191

## A TALK TO EZHAVAS IN TRAVANCORE

"Last time," said Gandhiji, "when I passed through Cochin and Travancore, I had the pleasure of meeting several Ezhava friends. Many of them were very bitter against Hinduism and Hindus. They took pride in saying that they were atheists and no Hindus. They would gladly burn the books which passed under the name of Hindu scriptures. I know that this Proclamation has steadied these unbelievers. I sympathized with them at that moment, as those who discussed with me will bear testimony. They could not help being bitter and atheistic when they saw that it was the hand of *savarnas* that was held against them. They were bound to take the *savarna* belief and practices as an index of true Hindu belief and practices. But now they know that the *savarna* heart is changed. In passing through Travancore I have found no opposition among the *savarnas* I have met during this pilgrimage. I have not discovered any distinction between man and man, and if these crowds contained thousands of erstwhile untouchables, they also contained thousands of so-called *savarnas*. But assume for one moment that the *savarna* heart is not changed. Why should your religion depend upon their change of heart? One's religion ought to be totally independent of the conduct of other people towards us. Our religion has its source from God within. And if we will be true to our God, we will never forsake the faith we derive from Him. With God as our Guide, Master, Ruler, in everything that we may do, we can defy the whole world's opposition and stick to our faith."

*Harijan*, 6-2-'37

192

## THE INWARDNESS OF THE MOVEMENT

[Addressing a public meeting at Nagpur on 8th November 1933, Gandhiji said :]

It is my certain conviction that, if the Hindu heart is completely purged of the taint of untouchability, the event will have its inevitable influence not only upon all the communities in India but on the whole world. This belief is daily becoming stronger. I cannot remove from my heart untouchability regarding several millions of human beings and harbour it towards some other millions. The very act of the Hindu heart getting rid of distinctions of high and low must cure us of mutual jealousies and distrust of and among other communities. It is for that reason that I have staked my life on this issue. In fighting this battle against untouchability, I am fighting for unity not only among Hindu 'touchables' and Hindu 'untouchables' but among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all other different religious communities. Do not for one moment believe that I am interested in the numerical strength of Hindus. I have never, throughout my life, laid stress upon quantity. I have ever insisted upon quality at the sacrifice of quantity. If I collected a million false coins they would be a worthless burden to me. One true coin would be worth its value. A religion cannot be sustained by the number of its lip followers denying in their lives its tenets. This great Hindu religion itself will perish in spite of its so-called millions of followers, if its votaries persist in harbouring the evil of untouchability. Not because 'untouchables' can be counted by the millions. It would perish even if they were a handful. Milk is poisoned and has to be thrown away whether you put a little or much arsenic in it.

*Harijan*, 17-11-'33

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955



# THE WIDER MESSAGE

[The following is from Gandhiji's speech before the students of the Union Christian College, Alwaye, on 17-1-'34 :]

My message is exceedingly simple. It is no new truth that has dawned upon me today. I have to the best of my ability striven to live up to it for the past fifty years. And the more I have succeeded in living up to it, the greater has been my inward joy. Nor is it for the first time that I am delivering this message to India. But because of some incidents in the recent past, it comes to the people as a new thing. My message is simply this that *savarna* Hindus, who have been considering themselves superior to those whom they have called untouchables, unapproachables, invisibles, or *avarna* Hindus, should realize that this arrogation of superiority has no sanction whatsoever in the *shastras*. If I discovered that those scriptures which are known as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagawadgita*, the *Smritis*, etc., clearly showed that they claimed divine authority for untouchability as I have described it to you, then nothing on this earth would hold me to Hinduism. I should throw it overboard as I should throw overboard a rotten apple. My reason is offended and my heart is wounded at the very thought that God Himself who has created both *savarna* Hindus and *avarna* Hindus, should impose this bar sinister between His children. The very thought that the *rishis*, who gave the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and who in every *mantra* that they pronounced taught the unity of God, could ever conceive of any such thing as untouchability as it is practised today in Hinduism must be repugnant to every intelligent person. But prejudices and superstitions die hard. They cloud the reason, befog the intellect and harden the heart. And so you find learned men defending this untouchability.

But you, students, should know that behind this message there lurks also a much greater message. This

monster of untouchability has invaded every form of society in India ; and the idea behind this message is that there should be not only no untouchability as between Hindus and Hindus, but that there should be no untouchability whatsoever between Hindus, Christians, Mussulmans, Parsis and the rest. I am convinced that if this great change of heart can be brought about among millions of *savarna* Hindus, and if their hearts can be purified — as certainly they will be purified — we should live in India as one people trusting each other and without any mutual distrust or suspicion. It is untouchability with all its subtle forms that separates us from one another and makes life itself unlovely and difficult to live.

*Harijan*, 26-1-'34

## 194

## WHY NOT SIMPLE 'HINDU'?

In the course of a letter a caste Hindu correspondent writes :

> "If these depressed classes are finally to be merged in the Hindus, was it not better that instead of 'Harijans' they should have been given the name 'Hindus' which would have applied to both the caste Hindus and the depressed classes ? It is still time that the word *Harijan* is given up in favour of the *Hindu*, so that the caste Hindus and the Hindu depressed classes are known in common parley as well as in Government papers as only Hindus."

The correspondent is too late with his suggestion. If a separate register of 'untouchable' classes had not come to stay, at least for the time being, the common name might have answered the purpose. But the separate register makes it absolutely necessary to know the 'untouchable' classes by some name, and if such is the case, why not give them a name that truly befits them and has no ill-flavour about it ? I regard 'Harijan' as a fitting name, because the caste Hindus cannot be properly considered God's children, but the 'untouchables' certainly can.

I have suggested the real method of abolishing the distinction between caste Hindus and Harijans, namely, by caste Hindus performing the purification ceremony of ridding themselves of untouchability and becoming Harijans themselves. And if it was open to any one to be classified as 'untouchables' in the register for 'untouchables', I should most decidedly advise caste Hindus to declare themselves as such and to live also as such. That will be a substantial and organic method of amalgamating the two into one body.

This is the proper place for referring to the same suggestion made by a Harijan friend but from a different standpoint. He says that the best way of getting rid of untouchability is to advise Harijans to adopt names that will never signify an 'untouchable' and to declare themselves also as mere Hindus or as *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* or *vaishyas*. This suggestion was made to me even as early as 1915 when I began the crusade against untouchability. This Harijan had his own experiences and told me that he had travelled from one end of India to the other, that he had freely entered all the principal places of pilgrimage without let or hindrance, and that he had taken with him a party.

When he was introduced to me, I saw no mark about him of being a Harijan. He was dressed like a *brahmana*, had a *tilak* on his forehead, a *mala* of *tulsi* or *rudraksh* — I forget which — and his speech was that of an ordinary Gujarati. He and his party took up their abode in *dharmashalas* and never had the slightest difficulty, having unhesitatingly proclaimed themselves as belonging to one *varna* or the other.

My visitor told me that this practice of 'untouchables' hiding their identity was quite a common thing amongst them and that it was growing. He unfortunately received no encouragement from me. I told him that that practice might be convenient for him and the few who could afford the means and had sufficient training to be able to shed some of the habits which marked out an 'untouchable' from the rest, but that the practice of a few,

apart from its being dishonest, and, therefore, tending to deterioration of manhood, would make no impression upon the tens of thousands of 'untouchables' who could not even stir out of their villages.

The reply that I then gave applies with equal force even today. The straightest and the quickest method, therefore, is to conduct the movement openly, to know the untouchables as such and yet for caste Hindus to treat them on terms of absolute equality with themselves; and as the movement has begun on a very large scale and the declaration was made on behalf of caste Hindus in September last that untouchability was gone, it surely became necessary to know 'untouchables' by an inoffensive name whilst the process of amalgamation was going on. 'Harijan' in my opinion was the best name to know them by.

*Harijan*, 11-3-'33

## 195

## TRUE INWARDNESS

An Arya Samajist writes a long letter in Hindi. Here is the gist :

1. Should Harijans in order to rise in the social scale remain Hindus or will it serve the same purpose if they became Christians or Mussulmans ?

2. Is not untouchability determined merely by the name of the caste to which one may belong ?

3. If untouchability is to be removed from Hinduism, why not invite untouchables to join the Arya Samaj ?

4. What is the speciality of Hinduism for which a Hindu need cling to it ?

In my opinion these questions betray the ignorance of the questioner about the true scope of the reform that is being attempted. The pages of the *Harijan* make it clear from week to week that it is the so-called higher classes that have to reform themselves by getting rid of untouchability, of high-and-lowness. It is they who have to repent and purify themselves. They have to come in

contact with Harijans not for the sake of the latter, not as their patrons but for the sake of themselves and as the servants of Harijans. Therefore the object is not served by Harijans forsaking Hinduism.

And in my opinion religion is a much deeper thing than the questioner would allow. It is not a matter of convenience or of bettering one's social or material condition. People have been known to cling to their religion although they have had to face social ostracism, material ruin and much worse. One's religion keeps one true in the face of the greatest adversity. It is the sheet-anchor of one's hope in this world and even after. It binds one to one's God, to Truth as to nothing else. Therefore, whilst Harijans must know best what is good for them, I, in their place, could not be satisfied by change of religion. From the practical point of view they seem to me to be so inextricably mixed up with the so-called higher classes that the vast majority simply cannot help remaining Hindus. It is this helplessness which lays a burden upon 'the higher classes' of doing the much belated reparation by regarding them as respected members of the Hindu family in spite of some of their habits. Indeed, whatever is evil in their habits is due to the criminal neglect of 'the higher classes'. The quickest way to remove the evil is to remove untouchability and receive them, as they are, as full-fledged Hindus.

The answer to the second question is in the affirmative. That just shows how precarious untouchability is. If the Harijans would conceal their caste name and simply declare themselves as Hindus they will, as in many cases they do, pass muster except in their immediate neighbourhood. But from the standpoint that I have suggested, such subterfuge can only protract the agony. It cannot cure 'the high classes' of the taint of superiority and touch-me-not-ism.

As to the third question, what I have said above makes it clear that the admission of Harijans to the Arya Samaj does not solve the difficulty. The hearts of millions of non-Arya-Samajists will not be touched by the Harijans'

acceptance of the Arya Samaj. It is the 'superior' Hindu heart that has to melt. It is the whole of Hinduism that has to be purified and purged. What I am aiming at, what I hope the Servants of the Untouchables Society is aiming at, is the greatest reform of the age. That it may take time to achieve it, does not much matter. The reform is assured, if there are reformers enough who will not be baffled by any difficulty and will not lower the flag on any account whatsoever. They will not, if the conviction has gone home that for Hinduism to live, untouchability has got to go.

The fourth is an invidious question. Perhaps it is also profitless. But I must answer it, if only to show what I mean by religion. The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion. And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of that religion. Indeed, faithfulness, not blind adherence, demands a keener perception of shortcomings and therefore a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I do of religion, it is unnecessary for me, to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu if I was not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding

critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good I may find in them and miss in mine.

*Harijan*, 12-8-'33

196

## WHOSE IS THE HUMILIATION ?

From a long letter of a worker among Harijans I take the following paragraph :

> "There is a growing discontent on the part of educated Harijans to call themselves Hindus. Because if they say they are Hindus, they have to disclose their caste also, and the inferiority complex makes this unpleasant. They would rather call themselves Christians than undergo humiliation by calling themselves Hindus. Why may we not then ask them to become Sikhs or Buddhists and end the humiliation ? For Sikhs and Buddhists are as good as Hindus."

The correspondent gives up his case when he says that Sikhs and Buddhists are as good as Hindus. For if that is so, there is no occasion to prompt Harijans or any one else in the direction. Any Hindu is free to call himself a follower of any of the innumerable Hindu sects and yet remain Hindu. And why should a Hindu disclose his caste if he does not want to or if he has renounced caste ? Many Hindus do not believe in caste. I have endeavoured to show that caste is no part of Hinduism. *Varna* is not caste, it is class. A man may call himself a *brahmana*, i.e. a teacher of religion if he is one in fact ; or a *kshatriya*, i.e. a soldier if he is one ; or a *vaishya*, i.e. a merchant or a farmer if he is that ; or a *shudra*, i.e. an employee if he is one. These divisions are not castes but classes and have reference to callings. There is no such class as untouchable. Hence an untouchable is not bound to say he is one. He may say if he wishes that Hindu society has regarded him as such but he does not recognize that distinction. I may say that though I have been classified by Hindu society as belonging to the *bania* caste, I am not that, as I do not believe in caste, but that

if I must call myself anything more than mere Hindu, I am a Harijan by choice, having made, so far as in me lies, common cause with Harijans.

And why is there any humiliation in a Harijan disclosing his classification made by Hindu society? Surely the humiliation is of the society that reduces its members to the condition of helots, consigned to ghettoes and shunned by society. The very education of the Harijan should make him proud of the fact that he can truthfully call himself a Hindu even though so-called higher castes have denied their religion in their lives and persecuted him in a manner beyond description. If untouchability is destroyed root and branch and Hinduism lives, the future historian will assign the place of honour to Harijans who will have stood by their faith in spite of heartless persecution by their fellows. Each time, therefore, a Harijan has to say what he is classed as in Hindu society, the humiliation is not his but of his persecutors — the so-called caste Hindus.

*Harijan*, 31-10-'36

## 197

## UNTOUCHABILITY AND CONVERSION

*Q.* If the object of the Congress in the liquidation of untouchability is to give Harijans a status of equality with the rest, is this not achieved by their conversion to Islam? Why does the Independence Pledge allocate the programme of the removal of untouchability to the Hindus only? Does this not show that the Congress is anxious to maintain a Hindu majority and therefore denies to the Mussulmans their right of conversion?

*A.* Liquidation of untouchability cannot be attained by the conversion of untouchables to Islam or any other religion. For it is the so-called caste Hindu who has to rid himself of the sin of untouchability. He can wash away the stain only by doing justice, however tardy, to

the outcaste. You will thus see why Muslims are not invited by the Congress to share the burden with the Hindus. They have committed no sin against the untouchables. I cannot prevent you from looking at a simple but necessary social reform as a political dodge to maintain a majority. Tens of thousands of Hindus who are doing penance have no thought of majority. All they want is to do justice to those whom, under the guise of religion, caste Hindus have reduced to a state worse than slavery. Lastly, you are hopelessly wrong in suggesting that the Congress denies the right to Muslims to convert 'untouchables'. The Congress cannot prevent anybody from doing conversion work. Whether you will exercise the right in the right manner or wrong is for you to consider.

*Harijan*, 20-4-'40



## LIMITATION OF REFORMERS

Ever since Dr. Ambedkar has thrown his bombshell in the midst of Hindu society in the shape of threatened conversion, frantic efforts have been made to wean him from the proposed step. Dr. Ambedkar's threat has had its repercussions on Harijans too, who are at all literate and are able to read newspapers. They have begun to approach Hindu institutions or reformers with a demand for posts, scholarships, or the like, accompanying it with the statement that the writer might, in the event of refusal, be obliged to change to another faith, aid having been offered on behalf of the representatives of that faith.

Without a doubt these threats are a portent and a matter of grave concern to those who care at all for the religion of their forefathers. But it will not be served by coming to terms with those who have lost faith in Hinduism or for that matter in any religion. Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form. Or if

such an expression can be used in connection with things of the spirit, religion can only be purchased with one's own blood. If therefore any Harijan wants to give up Hinduism, he should be entirely free to do so.

There must be a searching of heart for the reformer. Has his practice or that of his neighbour's caused the defection? If it has and if it is found to be improper, it must be changed.

It is an admitted fact that the conduct of a vast number of Hindus who call themselves *Sanatanists* is such as to cause the greatest inconvenience and irritation to the Harijans all over India. The wonder is that many more Harijans than already have, have not left Hinduism. It speaks volumes for their loyalty or for the innate virtue of Hinduism that millions of Harijans have clung to it in spite of the inhumanities to which in the name of that very faith they have been subjected.

This wonderful loyalty of Harijans and their unexampled patience render it imperative for every *savarna* Hindu to see that Harijans receive the same treatment that every other Hindu does. The course before *savarnas* is, therefore, on the one hand, not to interfere with Harijans wishing to leave the Hindu fold by trying to keep them within it by the offer of bribes in the shape of finding employment or scholarships; and on the other hand, to insist on full justice being done to Harijans in every walk of life. Indeed reformers should anticipate the Harijans' requirements and not wait till they begin to complain. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is the biggest institution for the removal of untouchability. It has wisely adopted a most liberal policy of giving scholarships to deserving students. It employs as many Harijans as possible. But it is in no sense a bureau for finding jobs for unemployed Harijans. Generally speaking there is no dearth of jobs for Harijans who are fit for the jobs for which they offer themselves. The greatest hardship felt by thousands of Harijans is want of pure water for drinking and domestic use, denial of access to public schools and other institutions, constant pin-pricks in villages, and

last but not least, denial of access to temples of worship. These disabilities are stern realities in the lives of the vast mass of Harijans. If they as a mass give up Hinduism they will do so because of these common disabilities which brand them as lepers of Hindu society. Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial by the so-called *savarna* Hindus of elementary justice to Harijans. Every threat of conversion is, therefore, a warning to the *savarnas* that if they do not wake up in time, it may be too late!

One word to the impatient and needy Harijans. They must not use threats when they approach Hindu institutions or individuals for help. They should rely upon the strength of their case commanding a hearing. The majority of Harijans do not know what change of religion can mean. They mutely suffer the continuing degradations to which *savarnas* in their selfishness have consigned them. They must be the primary care of Hindu reformers whether they complain or do not. Those who are enlightened enough to know and feel the degradation and know also what change of religion means are either too good Hindus to desert their ancestral faith and deserve every help they need, or being indifferent as to religion may not claim help from *savarna* Hindus in exchange for their condescending to remain in the Hindu fold. I would, therefore, plead with enlightened Harijans for their own sakes not to seek material betterment under threat of conversion. And whilst reformers must on no account yield to threats, they must ceaselessly strive to secure justice for Harijans at the hands of *savarna* Hindus.

*Harijan*, 21-3-'36

199

## ON HARIJAN RECONVERSIONS

*Q.* What is to be our attitude to Harijans who want to come back to Hinduism ?

*A.* We shall simply say to them : "You are perfectly welcome,' but you will offer no inducements to those you expect to win back by doing so.

*Q.* Oh, no. That is out of the question. I was wondering if you would approve of any purification ceremony.

*A.* No purification ceremony is necessary. If they had become converts wantonly, they will regretfully come back, in which case those who take them back may ask them to do some *shuddhi.* I would simply ask them to take *Ramanama* a hundred times.

*Q.* Won't you object to a Harijan-*sevak* attending a voluntary *shuddhi* ceremony of this character ?

*A.* I see no objection to his attending such a ceremony, but let him be clear that *shuddhi* is no part of the Harijan Sevak Sangh's programme, and also he should be sure that the man wanting to be reconverted was doing so absolutely freely and without the offer of any inducement. The question is : Are you convinced of the downright sincerity of the man wanting to be reconverted ? If you are, do everything to befriend him.

*Harijan,* 4-7-'36

200

## THE SACRED THREAD

*Q.* You desire ladies to sacrifice their jewels. Why do you not ask the casteman to sacrifice his pride by giving up his thread ?

*A.* There is no parallel between the two cases. The thread is a symbol of consecration for those who believe it. I do not wear it, because it has no meaning for me

and I know that millions go without it. In so far as it is used as a mark of superiority, it is worse than jewellery and the mere discarding of the thread would be valueless if pride, of which it is a symbol, is also not discarded. There is nothing to prevent Harijans from adopting it if they choose. But I should strongly discountenance the practice, as it would be an imitation without the original meaning behind it.

*Harijan*, 2-2-'34

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955
T. KALLUPATTI

201

## DR. AMBEDKAR AND CASTE

The following has just been received from Dr. Ambedkar :

"At the end of our conversation on Saturday last you asked me to send a message for insertion in the first issue of your new weekly *Harijan*. I feel I cannot give a message. For I believe it will be a most unwarranted presumption on my part to suppose that I have sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from me with respect. I can only speak as man to man. As such it may be desirable that the Hindus should know my views on the momentous issue of Hindu social organization with which you have chosen to occupy yourself. I am therefore sending you the accompanying statement for publication in your *Harijan*."

**Statement**

"The outcaste is a bye-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma."

B. R. AMBEDKAR

Damodar Hall,
Parel, Bombay 12,
7th February, 1933

Dr. Ambedkar is bitter. He has every reason to feel so. He has received a liberal education. He has more than the talents of the average educated Indian. Outside India he is received with honour and affection, but, in

India, among Hindus, at every step he is reminded that he is one of the outcastes of Hindu society. It is nothing to his shame, for, he has done no wrong to Hindu society. His exterior is as clean as that of the cleanest and the proudest *brahmana*. Of his interior, the world knows as little as of that of any of us. In spite of all this, he "believes that it will be a most unwarranted presumption on his part to suppose that he has sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from him with respect". This is the caste Hindus' shame, not his, but I would like him to feel that there are today thousands of caste Hindus who would listen to his message with the same respect and consideration that they would give to that of any other leader, and that in their estimation there is no person high and no person low. I would like him, too, to know that the *Harijan* is not *my* weekly. So far as the proprietory rights are concerned, it belongs to the Servants of the Untouchables Society and, therefore, I would like him to feel that it is as much his as of any other Hindu.

As to the burden of his message, the opinion he holds about the caste system is shared by many educated Hindus. I have not, however, been able to share that opinion. I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from *varnashrama*, to be an 'odious and vicious dogma'. It has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and, if it is a bye-product of the caste system it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or of a crop because of the weeds. The outcaste-ness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-lowness.'

The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true *Varna Dharma*, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other. How it can be and what that *varnashrama* is, it is not necessary to examine here. But, such being my faith, I have always respectfully differed from those distinguished countrymen, Dr. Ambedkar among them, who have held that untouchability will not go without the destruction of *Varnashrama Dharma*. They have made no distinction between caste and *varna*. But that is another story. At the present moment, it is the 'untouchable', the outcaste, with whom all Hindu reformers, whether they believe in *varnashrama* or not, have agreed to deal. The opposition to untouchability is common to both. Therefore, the present joint fight is restricted to the removal of untouchability, and I would invite Dr. Ambedkar and those who think with him to throw themselves, heart and soul, into the campaign against the monster of untouchability. It is highly likely that at the end of it we shall all find that there is nothing to fight against in *varnashrama*. If, however, *varnashrama* even then looks an ugly thing, the whole of Hindu society will fight it. For this campaign against untouchability is not one of compulsion, but of conversion. At the end of the chapter, I hope that we shall all find ourselves in the same camp. Should it prove otherwise, it will be time enough to consider how and by whom *varnashrama* is to be fought.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33

# SECTION THIRTEEN : VARNA DHARMA

## 202

## VARNASHRAMA

[The following is from Gandhiji's speech delivered on 16-9-'27 at Tanjore.]

In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of *advaita* and my interpretation of *advaita* excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All — whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever — have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief, that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the *brahmanas* themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth, or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. *I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being.* And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the *Bhagawadgita*, and I am therefore through and through with every non-*brahmana* when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a *brahmana* or by anybody else. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

But in spite of all my beliefs, that I have explained to you, I still believe in *Varnashrama Dharma. Varnashrama*

GRAMSEVA MANDAL'S PUBLIC CENTRE 27 SEP 1955

*Dharma* to my mind is a law which, however much you and I may deny, cannot be abrogated. To admit the working of that law is to free ourselves for the only pursuit in life for which we are born. *Varnashrama Dharma* is humility. Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish therefore to suggest that qualities are not inherited ; but on the contrary I believe that just as every one inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is this doctrine of *Varnashrama Dharma* which I have always accepted. You would be entitled to say that this is not how *varnashrama* is understood in these days. I have myself said times without number that *varnashrama* as it is at present understood and practised is a monstrous parody of the original, but in order to demolish this distortion let us not seek to demolish the original. And if you say that the idealistic *varnashrama* which I have placed before you is quite all right you have admitted all that I like you to admit. I would also urge on you to believe with me that no nation, no individual, can possibly live without proper ideals. And if you believe with me in the idealistic *varnashrama*, you will also strive with me to reach that ideal so far as may be. As a matter of fact the world has not anywhere been able to fight against this law. What has happened and what must happen in fighting against the law is to hurt ourselves and to engage in a vain effort ; and I suggest to you that your fight will be all the more successful if you understand all that our forefathers have bequeathed to us and engage in fighting all the evil excrescences that have grown round this great bequest.

*Young India*, 29-9-'27

# VARNA AND ASHRAMA

[The following is taken from a speech delivered on 9-10-'27 at Trivandrum.]

So far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of *varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as the traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the law of our being, if we would accept the definition of man given in all religions. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker, and from this definition it was that the *rishis* of old discovered this law of our being. You will realize that if all of us follow this law of *varna* we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God. You will at once then see that nine-tenths of the activities that are today going on throughout the world and which are engrossing our attention would fall into disuse. You would then be entitled to say that *varna* as we observe it today is a travesty of the *varna* that I have described to you. And so it undoubtedly is, but just as we do not hate truth because untruth parades itself as truth, but we sift untruth from truth and cling to the latter, so also we can destroy the distortion that passes as *varna*, and purify the state to which the Hindu society has been reduced today.

*Ashrama* is a necessary corollary to what I have stated to you, and if *varna* today has become distorted,

*ashrama* has altogether disappeared. *Ashrama* means the four stages in one's life, and I wish the students who have kindly presented their purses to me — the Arts and Science students and the Law College students — were able to assure me that they were living according to the laws of the first *ashrama*, and that they were *brahmacharis* in thought, word and deed. The *brahmacharya ashrama* enjoins that only those who live the life of a *brahmachari*, at least up to 25 years, are entitled to enter the second *ashrama*, i. e. the *Grihasthashrma*. And because the whole conception of Hinduism is to make man better than he is and draw him nearer to his Maker, the *rishis* set a limit even to the *grihasthashrama* stage and imposed on us the obligation of *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*. But today you will vainly search throughout the length and breadth of India for a true *brahmachari*, for a true *grihastha*, not to talk of a *vanaprastha* and *sannyasi*. We may, in our elongated wisdom, laugh at this scheme of life, if we wish to. But I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the secret of the great success of Hinduism. The Hindu civilization has survived the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. The Christian is but two thousand years old. The Islamic is but of yesterday. Great as both these are they are still in my humble opinion in the making. Christian Europe is not at all Christian, but is groping, and so in my opinion is Islam still groping for its great secret, and there is today a competition, healthy as also extremely unhealthy and ugly, between these three great religions.

As years go by, the conviction is daily growing upon me that *varna* is the law of man's being and therefore as necessary for Christianity and Islam, as it has been necessary for Hinduism and has been its saving. I refuse, therefore, to believe that *varnashrama* has been the curse of Hinduism, as it is the fashion nowadays in the South on the part of some Hindus to say. But that does not mean that you and I may tolerate for one moment or be gentle towards the hideous travesty of *varnashrama* that we see about us today. There is nothing in common

between *varnashrama* and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is, as I have already called it or described it, an excrescence upon *varnashrama*. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of *varna*, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority. If I again interpret the Hindu spirit rightly all life is absolutely equal and one. It is therefore an arrogant assumption on the part of the *brahmana* when he says, 'I am superior to the other three *varnas*.' That is not what the *brahmanas* of old said. They commanded homage not because they claimed superiority, but because they claimed the right of service through and through without the slightest expectation of a reward. The priests, who today arrogate to themselves the function of the *brahmana* and distort religion, are no custodians of Hinduism or *brahmanism*. Consciously or unconsciously they are laying the axe at the root of the very tree on which they are sitting, and when they tell you that the *shastras* enjoin untouchability and when they talk of pollution distance, I have no hesitation in saying that they are belying their creed and that they are misinterpreting the spirit of Hinduism. You will now perhaps understand why it is absolutely necessary for you Hindus who are here and listening to me to energize yourselves and rid yourselves of this curse. You should take pride in leading the way of reform, belonging as you do to an ancient Hindu State. So far as I can read the atmosphere around you here, the moment is certainly propitious for you if you will sincerely and energetically undertake this reform.

*Young India*, 20-10-'27

*Q.* We do not understand your emphasis on *Varna Dharma.* Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of *varna*?

*A.* *Varna* means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of *varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or chooses his father's profession. *Varna* therefore is in a way the law of heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature — the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation. Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered so did the law of *varna.* It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

*Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *varna.* It is this travesty of *varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the law of *varna* is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form, and monstrous practices to which the original law has been reduced, do not fight the law itself.

*Q.* How many *varnas* are there?

*A.* Four *varnas*, though it is not a rigid division inherent in *varna* itself. The *rishis* after incessant experiment and research arrived at this fourfold division — the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

*Q.* Logically, therefore, there are as many *varnas* as there are professions ?

*A.* Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions — that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as *grihastha-shrama* is the most dominant amongst all *ashramas*. *Vaishya* is the keynote among the *varnas*. The defender is not wanted if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the severe discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well-ordered society, and so the fourth.

*Q.* If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what *varna* does he belong to ?

*A.* According to the Hindu belief he belongs to the *varna* in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being — a *patita.*

*Q.* A *shudra* does an act which belongs to a *brahmana* by birth. Does he become a *patita* ?

*A.* A *shudra* has as much right to knowledge as a *brahmana*, but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. Today he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakimsaheb * thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice !

* Hakim Ajmalkhan, a great nationalist Muslim who presided one of the sessions of the Indian National Congress.

*Q.* But may not a man follow a profession after his heart ?

*A.* But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession, on the contrary it is noble. What we find today are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was an honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

*Q.* All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose today when every one is hankering after paying professions ?

*A.* It is a sweeping generalization. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for the learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to every one. The present seems to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and Government servants ? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are *vaishyas*. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

*Q.* So far as Tamilnad is concerned, all non-*brahmanas* want to take up professions to which they were not born.

*A.* I reject your claim to speak on behalf of the 22 million Tamilians. I give you a formula : *Let us not want*

*to be what every one else cannot be.* And you can work out this proposition only on the basis of *varna* as I have defined it.

*Q.* You have been saying that the law of *varna* curbs our worldly ambition. How ?

*A.* When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

*Q.* You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. Today those who follow their fathers' professions have no spiritual culture at all — their very *varna* unfits them for it.

*A.* We are talking with crooked notions of *varna.* When *varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the *Gita,* if every one who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to re-arrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have today, and we cannot do it unless we follow the law of *varna.*

*Q.* You will excuse us, if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the *varna* of a man practising different professions at different times ?

*A.* It may not make any difference in his *varna* so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession

from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth degrades himself and falls from *varna.*

*Q.* A *shudra* may have all the qualities of a *brahmana* and yet may not be called a *brahmana* ?

*A.* He may not be called a *brahmana* in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *varna* to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

*Q.* Do you believe that qualities attaching to *varna* are inherited and not acquired ?

*A.* They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

*Q.* Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character ?

*A.* That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the law of *varna* as I have endeavoured to explain to you. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

*Q.* Caste, as we see it today, consists only in restrictions about interdining and intermarriage. Does preservation of *varna* then mean keeping these restrictions ?

*A.* No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

*Q.* Can they be omitted ?

*A.* They can be, and *varna* is preserved even by marrying into other *varnas.*

*Q.* Then the mother's *varna* will be affected.

*A.* A wife follows the *varna* of her husband.

*Q.* Is the doctrine of *Varna Dharma,* as you have expounded it, to be found in our *shastras,* or is it your own ?

*A.* Not my own. I derive it from the *Bhagawadgita.*

*Q.* Do you approve of the doctrine as given in the *Manusmriti* ?

*A.* The principle is there. But the applications do not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

*Q.* Does not the *Manusmriti* contain a lot of injustice ?

*A.* Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower 'castes'. All is not *shastra* that goes by that name. The *shastras* so called therefore need to be read with much caution.

*Q.* But you go by the *Bhagawadgita.* It says *varna* is according to *guna* and *karma.* How did you bring in birth ?

*A.* I swear by the *Bhagawadgita* because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The *Gita* does talk of *varna* being according to *guna* and *karma*, but *guna* and *karma* are inherited by birth. Lord Krishna says, all *varnas* have been created by me – चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टम् – i. e., I suppose by birth. The law of *varna* is nothing, if not by birth.

*Q.* But there is no superiority about *varna* ?

*A.* No, not at all, though I do say *brahmanism* is the culmination of the other *varnas*, just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, but no superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.

*Q. Kural* you know. Do you know that the author of that Tamil classic says there is no caste by birth ? At birth, he says, all life is equal.

*A.* He says it as an answer to the present-day exaggerations. When superiority was claimed by any *varna*, he had to raise his voice against it. But that does not cut at the root of *varna* by birth. It is only the reformer's attempt to cut at the root of inequality.

*Q.* The present practice is so distorted, that may it not be the best thing to give it up altogether and begin on a clean slate ?

*A.* Only if we were creators. We cannot by a stroke of the pen alter Hindu nature. We can find out a method of working the law, not destroying it.

*Q.* When authors of *shastras* created new *smritis*, why not you ?

*A.* If I could create a new creation ! My state then would be far worse than Vishvamitra's and he was far greater than I.

*Q.* So long as you do not destroy *varna*, untouchability cannot be destroyed.

*A.* I do not think so. But if *varna* goes to the dogs in the removal of untouchability, I shall not shed a tear. But what bearing has *varna* as defined by me on untouchability ?

*Q.* But the opponents of reform quote you in support.

*A.* That is the lot of every reformer. He will be misquoted by interested parties, but you also know that some of them want me to relinquish Hinduism. Others would banish me if they could from the Hindu fold. I have come nowhere to defend *Varna Dharma*, though for the removal of untouchability I went to Vaikom. I am the author of a Congress resolution for propagation of *khadi*, establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability, the three pillars of Swaraj. But I have never placed establishment of *Varnashrama Dharma* as the fourth pillar. You cannot therefore accuse me of placing a wrong emphasis on *Varnashrama Dharma*.

*Q.* Do you know that many of your followers distort your teaching ?

*A.* Do I not know it ? I know that I have many followers only so called.

*Q.* Buddhism was driven out of India because *brahmanas* dominated the organization. Similarly they will drive Hinduism out, if it does not serve their end.

*A.* Let them dare. But I am certain that Buddhism has not gone out of India. India is the country that imbibed most of the spirit of the Buddha. Buddhism must be distinguished from the spirit of the Buddha as well as

Christianity from the spirit of the Christ. They were successful in driving out Buddhism, because they had assimilated the central teaching of the Buddha.

*Q.* The same *brahmana* who assimilated the good things of Buddhism has committed the worst crimes, worse than the Amritsar wrong, by not allowing untouchables entry into temples and imposing on them cruel disabilities.

*A.* You are right to a certain extent. But you are wrong in fixing the guilt on *brahmanas.* It is the whole of Hinduism that is responsible. *Varna Dharma* having become distorted gave rise to untouchability. There was no deliberate wickedness, but the result was a human tragedy.

*Q.* But so long as you use the word *Varnashrama Dharma,* it brings in with it the evil associations of today.

*A.* The moral is, destroy the evil association and restore *Varna Dharma* to its purity.

**My Programme for You**

*Q.* There is an utter state of confusion. How shall we go back ?

*A.* All I have to say to you is, do not destroy the foundation, let us try to purify. Instead, you are trying to deliver a new religion to receive which no one is prepared. *Brahmanism* is synonymous with Hinduism. That is to say, the only term we had for Hinduism was *brahmanism,* i. e. *Brahma-vidya,* and in trying to destroy that, you are trying to destroy Hinduism. Fight the *brahmana* inch by inch, when he encroaches on your rights and try to reform him. But it is no use blackguarding every *brahmana.* There are *brahmanas* and *brahmanas.* One is an out and out reformer, the other is an opponent of reform. You must range the best of the reformer *brahmanas* on your side, and with their help carry out the constructive part of your programme, which can bring about the salvation both of *brahmanas* and non-*brahmanas.*

Fight the opponents of reform and tell them, "We shall not call you *brahmanas* if you pursue wealth and

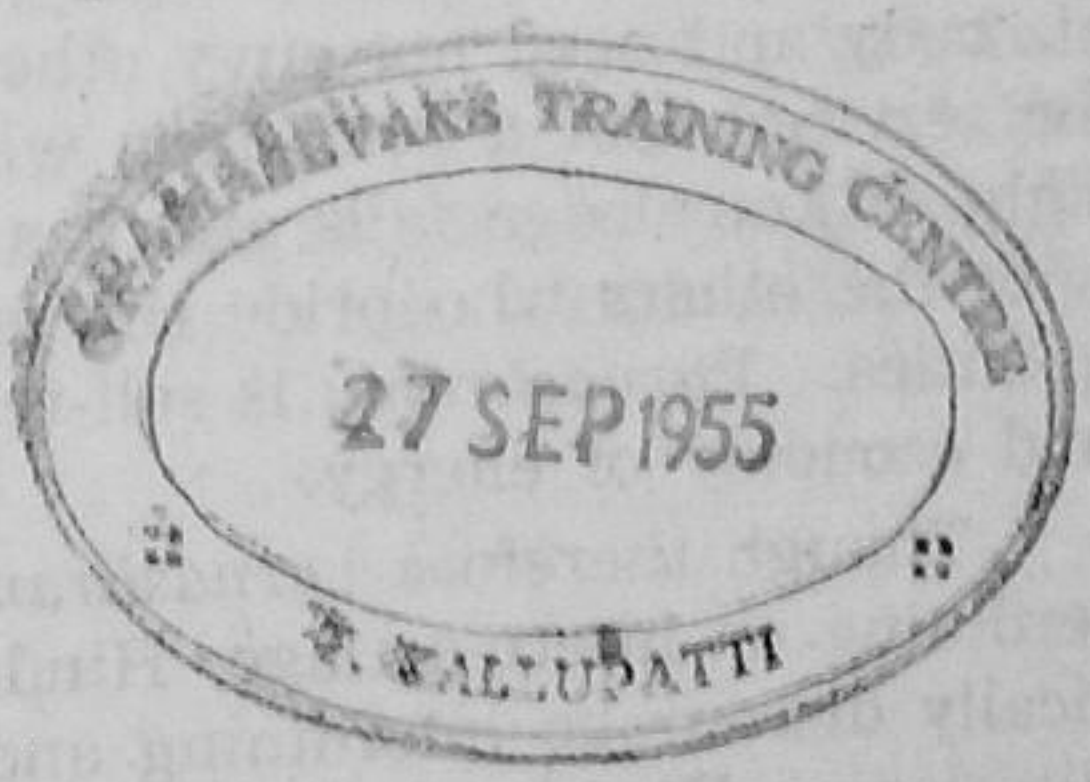
power, and if you are not learned and are not able to teach us the true religion." Then you will not evoke any opposition from them. You will carry on a fierce agitation to bring about reform, you will boycott the schools and temples which distinguish against any non-*brahmanas*. You will insist upon priests of pure character, of learning and without worldly ambition. You may build new temples if the old ones refuse to admit the so-called untouchables.

Then there is the question of interdining. I should not make that a ground for quarrel with anybody. But I should boycott a function where there was a dividing line.

Then I would fraternize with 'untouchables' and try to deal by them as I should with a blood-brother, and break to pieces all little castes and sections. And therefore when I marry my boy I will go out of my way and seek a girl from other sub-sections. We are really so hidebound today by wretched custom that you will not give me a girl to domicile in Gujarat, and you will not take a girl from Gujarat to settle in Tamilnad.

Then I would give the 'untouchables' religious education, a grounding in the principles of Hinduism and morality. They are leading a purely animal life today. I would induce them to refrain from eating forbidden food and live a pure and clean life. You can easily expand these questions and work out a big constructive programme.

*Young India*, 24-11-'27



## VARNASHRAMA AND INTERDINING

*Varnashrama* is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his *varna* by choice. Not to abide by one's *varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing.

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

Though therefore *varnashrama* is not affected by interdining or intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of

self-restraint. It undoubtedly is a religion of renunciation of the flesh so that the spirit may be set free. It is no part of a Hindu's duty to dine with his son. And by restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint. Hinduism does not regard a married state as by any means essential for salvation. Marriage is a 'fall' even as birth is a 'fall'. Salvation is freedom from birth and hence death also. Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of *varna*. A *brahmana* may remain a *brahmana*, though he may dine with his *shudra* brother, if he has not left off his duty of service by knowledge. It follows from what I have said above, that restraint in matters of marriage and dining is not based upon notions of superiority. A Hindu who refuses to dine with another from a sense of superiority misrepresents his *dharma*.

Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a pious Hindu by taking toast at a Mussulman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Mussulman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Mussulman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing its substance if it resolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things, but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21

206

## VARNASHRAMA

*Varnashrama*, as I interpret it, satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of a community. It satisfies the religious needs, because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual perfection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, i. e. strictly equal, distribution. Therefore, when people in disregard of the law mistake duties for privileges and try to pick and choose occupations for self-advancement, it leads to confusion of *varna* and ultimate disruption of society. In this law, there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude; that is to say, there can be no compulsion from without as there was none for, perhaps, several thousand years, during which the law of *varnashrama* worked without interruption. By training, the people had recognized the duty and the justice of the law, and they voluntarily lived under it. Today, nations are living in ignorance and breach of that law and they are suffering for it. The so-called civilized nations have by no means reached a state which they can at all regard with equanimity and satisfaction.

It is easy enough to see that this conception of *varnashrama* has nothing to do with restrictions as to interdining and intermarriage. The *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata* are filled with illustrations both of interdining and intermarriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or contract marital relations. No doubt social habits will grow up and

regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of religious observances. In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as an absolutely separate subject, unconnected either with untouchability or even with *varnashrama* reform.

So far as the multiplicity of castes apart from *Varna Dharma* is concerned, they are essentially trade guilds or societies, with intermarriage and interdining restrictions of a more or less rigid character superimposed upon them. Castes are as numerous as the leaves of the famous banyan tree whose every branch becomes a trunk for shooting out more branches. They are undergoing a perpetual transformation. Many have disappeared and new ones are appearing. Surely, they have nothing to do with *varnashrama* ; nor have they anything to do with religion. That today they are regarded by *Sanatanists* as an integral part of Hinduism arises, in my opinion, from an utter ignorance of the working of these trade guilds. There are undoubtedly many undesirable practices that have crept into these corporations, but that is only because Hinduism as a religion has ceased to be a living, vitalizing force. We are today living upon capital which is itself being fast exhausted.

*Harijan*, 4-3-'33

## 207

## VARNA DHARMA

As I have interpreted *Varna Dharma*, there is no bar in any shape or form to the highest mental development. The bar altogether normal is against change of hereditary occupation for the sake of bettering one's material condition, and thus setting up a system of unhealthy and ruinous competition which is today robbing life of all its joy and beauty.

*Harijan*, 29-7-'33

208

# THE LAW OF VARNA AND ASHRAMA

## I

Every one will admit that Hinduism is nothing without the law of *varna* and *ashrama*. It would be impossible to find any *Smriti* work of which a large part was not devoted to *Varnashrama Dharma*. This law of *varna* and *ashrama* is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures — the *Vedas*, and so no one who calls himself a Hindu may ignore it. It is his duty to study it in all its bearings, and to reject it if it is an excrescence, and to foster it and restore it to its pristine purity, if it represents a universal law.

So far as the law of *ashrama* is concerned, it is extinct, alike in profession and observance. Hinduism lays down four *ashramas* or stages — the life of a *brahmachari* (continent student), the life of a *grihastha* (householder), the life of a *vanaprastha* (who has retired) and the life of a *sannyasi* (renunciator) — through which every Hindu has to pass to fulfil his purpose in life. But the first and the third are practically non-existent today, the fourth may be said to be observed in name to a small extent. The second is professed to be observed by all today, but it is observed in name, not in spirit. *Grihasthas* or householders of a kind we are all, inasmuch as we eat and drink and propagate our kind, like all created beings. But in doing so, we fulfil the law of the flesh and not of the spirit. Only those married couples who fulfil the law of the spirit can be said to observe the law of *grihasthashrama*. Those who live the mere animal life do not observe the law. The life of householders of today is one of indulgence. And as the four stages represent a ladder of growth and are interdependent, one cannot leap to the stage of a *vanaprastha* or a *sannyasi*, unless he or she fulfilled the law of the first two *ashramas* — *brahmacharya* and *grihastha*. The law of the *ashrama*, therefore, is a dead

letter today. It can be revived only if the law of *varna*, with which it is intimately interlinked, is revived.

That brings us to a consideration of the law of *varna*. *Varna* is intimately, if not indissolubly, connected with birth, and the observance of the law of *varna* means the following on the part of us all of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers in a spirit of duty. Those who thus fulfil the law of their *varna* can be counted on one's fingers' ends. This performance of one's hereditary function is done as a matter of duty, though it naturally carries with it the earning of one's livelihood. Thus, the function of a *brahmana* is to study and to teach the science of *Brahman* (or spiritual truth). He performs the function, as he cannot do otherwise, as it is the law of his being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift from God. A *kshatriya* will perform the function of protecting the people in the same spirit, accepting for his livelihood whatever the people can afford to give him. A *vaishya* will pursue wealth-producing occupations for the welfare of the community, keeping for himself enough for his own maintenance and rendering the balance to the community in one shape or other. A *shudra* will perform physical labour in the same spirit of service.

*Varna* is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of *brahmana* parents will be called a *brahmana*, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a *brahmana* when he comes of age, he cannot be called a *brahmana*. He will have fallen from *brahmanahood*. On the other hand, one who is born not a *brahmana* but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a *brahmana* will be regarded as a *brahmana*, though he will himself disclaim the label.

*Varna* thus conceived is no man-made institution but the law of life universally governing the human family. Fulfilment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperization, solve the problem of population and even end disease and suffering.

But if *varna* reveals the law of one's being and thus the duty one has to perform, it confers no right, and the idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. All *varnas* are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. Today *varna* means gradations of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original. The law of *varna* was discovered by our ancestors by stern austerities. They sought to live up to the law to the best of their capacity. We have distorted it today and have made ourselves the laughing stock of the world. No wonder that we have today amongst the Hindus a section which is bending its energies to a destruction of the institution which in their opinion spells the ruin of the Hindus. And certainly one need have no mercy for the hideous distortion, which means nothing but destruction of Hinduism.

II

I do not for a moment suggest that there should be no restrictions about food and drink or about marital relations. I do not myself regard it a duty to eat whatever is offered and in whatever company I should chance to be, and I regard it as nothing short of self-indulgence to marry according to one's fancy. Strict restraint is the law of life and must, therefore, govern these relations no less than others. I hold that there are rules about diet. Man is not a omnivorous animal, nor may he pick up his mate wherever he likes. But restrictions on marital or social relations have nothing to do with *Varna Dharma*, which is a different thing altogether. I can conceive blameless marital relations between different *varnas*, and people of different *varnas* seated together to eat food permissible to all. There is evidence enough to show that in ancient times there were no watertight compartments between *varnas*, so far as marital and social relations went, and I have no doubt that, in making *varna* a mere matter of restrictions about food and drink and marriage, we have done Hinduism grave harm.

Though the law of *varna* is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every

religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the law of *varna*. The world may ignore it today but it will have to accept it in the time to come.

The four *varnas* have been compared in the *Vedas* to the four members of the body, and no simile could be happier. If they are members of one body, how can one be superior or inferior to another? If the members of the body had the power of expression and each of them were to say that it was higher and better than the rest, the body would go to pieces. Even so, our body politic, the body of humanity, would go to pieces, if it were to perpetuate the canker of superiority or inferiority. It is this canker that is at the root of the various ills of our time, especially class-wars and civil strife. It should not be difficult for even the meanest understanding to see that these wars and strifes could not be ended except by the observance of the law of *varna*. For it ordains that every one shall fulfil the law of one's being by doing in a spirit of duty and service that to which one is born.

*Harijan*, 28-9-'34

## 209

## VARNA

If I had the power, I should declare that we are all Hindus, all of the same *varna*. As I have made it clear over and over again there is no real *varna* today. When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves, we may have the four *varnas* according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But *varna* then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service will be called *brahmanas*. They will assume no superior airs but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do

not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true *Varna Dharma*. Its real revival would mean true democracy.

*Harijan*, 4-4-'36

## 210

## VARNASHRAMA OR VARNASANKARA ?

A fair friend writes :

"In a place where the whole station was lined from one end to the other with volunteers dressed in military style with swords hanging at their sides, where the whole air was redolent with reminiscences of bravery and chivalry of men of the military caste of India, was not your message urging them in a way to substitute the music of your wheel for the music of their sword a preaching of the *dharma* of your caste to all castes *ad absurdum* like the Christian missionary ? Should you not rather like the sages of ancient India exhort a *brahmana* to be a true *brahmana*, a *kshatriya* to be an ideal *kshatriya*, and a *vaishya* to be a model *vaishya* ? The insignia of the *brahmana* is the book or pen, of the *kshatriya* the sword, and of the *vaishya* the wheel or the plough. You may well pride yourself in being called a weaver or an agriculturist as thereby you are true to the natural tendencies of your *jati* or to *vaishya-dharma*. But why would you, a Hindu, a believer in *varnashrama* principles, help in the degradation of a *brahmana* or a *kshatriya* by insisting on their accepting *vaishya-dharma* and rejecting or neglecting their respective *jati-dharmas* ? Can a *kshatriya* not serve and protect the poor even in these days but in the *vaishya* way ?

"The great men of India have always upheld *swadharma* for each individual temperament. You are the first of them to preach the throwing in of the *dharmas* of all people into the same melting pot and thereby *vaishyaizing* the whole nation. Uplift the *vaishya* by all means but pray do not pull the *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* by their legs. Spiritualize your caste people but do not materialize the men of other castes by turning them into spinners and weavers with the spell of your personality. To my thinking a Vinoba and a Balkoba would have rendered more potent service to the nation as pure *brahmanas* with their intellects fully developed rather than as spiritual weavers which you have turned them into."

I have not reproduced the whole of the letter but I have given the cream of it. The rest is a commentary

on the extract quoted by me. The friend is born and claims to be a Hindu even as I claim to be one. As I have regarded spinning to be superior to sectional religions, I had hoped that I would not be misunderstood by cultured friends. But it was not to be. The friend tells me she is not the only one to oppose the *charkha*. I must therefore endeavour patiently to examine the argument. I have noted in the course of my journalistic experience dating from 1904 that most of the criticism received by editors is based upon an imperfect understanding of an opponent's statement. In the case in point if only the friend had borne in mind that I had presented the message of the wheel not to the Hindus alone but to all Indians without exception, to men and women, to Mussulmans, Parsis, Christians, Jews, Sikhs and all others who claimed to be Indians, she would have written differently. She would then have inferred that I had placed before the people of India something which not only did not come in conflict with the several religions but which in so far as it was taken up added lustre to one's own religion and in Hinduism to one's own *varna* or caste. Mine therefore I claim to be a method not of confusion but cleansing. I ask no one to forsake his own hereditary *dharma* or occupation but I ask every one to add spinning to his natural occupation. The Rajputs of Kathiawad knew this. They asked me whether I wanted them to give up their swords. I told them I wanted them to do no such thing. On the contrary, I added, I wanted each one of them to possess a trusty sword so long as they believed in it. But I certainly told them that my ideal Rajput was he who defended without the sword and who died at his post without killing. A sword may be snatched from one, not so the bravery to die without striking. But this is by the way. For my purpose, it is enough to show that the Rajputs were not to give up their calling of protecting the weak. Nor do I want the *brahmanas* to give up their vocation as teachers. I have suggested to them that they become better teachers for sacrificial spinning. Vinoba and Balkoba are better *brahmanas* for having

become spinners and weavers and scavengers. Their knowledge is more digested. A *brahmana* is one who knows God. Both these fellow-workers are nearer God today by reason of their having felt for and identified themselves through spinning with the starving millions of India. Divine knowledge is not borrowed from books. It has to be realized in oneself. Books are at best an aid, often even a hindrance. A learned *brahmana* had to learn divine wisdom from a God-fearing butcher.

What is this *varnashrama*? It is not a system of watertight compartments. It is a recognition to me of a scientific fact whether we know it or not. A *brahmana* is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a *brahmana* who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The *rishis* of old who lived in the forests cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. But their pursuit in life was pre-eminently search after Truth. Similarly a Rajput without learning was good for nothing no matter how well he wielded the sword. And a *vaishya* without divine knowledge sufficient for his own growth will be a veritable monster eating into the vitals of society as many modern *vaishyas* whether of the East or the West have become. They are, according to the *Gita* 'incarnations of sin who live only for themselves'. The spinning wheel is designed to wake up every one to a sense of his duty. It enables every one better to fulfil his *dharma* or duty. When a vessel is running on smooth waters, work on board is exquisitely divided. But when it is caught in the grip of a violent storm and is about to sink, every one has to give a helping hand to the necessary work of life-saving.

Let us also bear in mind that with the rest of the world India finds herself in the deadly coil of the mercantile cobra. It is a nation of shop-keeping soldiers that claims to rule her. It will tax all the resources of all her best *brahmanas* to unwind India from that coil. Her learned men and her soldiers will therefore have to bring their learning and their prowess to bear upon the mercantile requirements of India. They must therefore, in order

to be able faithfully to carry out their *dharma*, learn and practise spinning.

Nor have I the least hesitation in recommending hand-weaving as a bread-winning occupation to all who are in need of an honest occupation. To the *brahmanas*, the *kshatriyas* and others, who are at the present moment not following their hereditary occupation but are engaged in the mad rush for riches, I present the honest and (for them) selfless toil of the weaver and invite them with a view to returning to their respective *dharmas* to be satisfied with what little the handloom yields to them. Just as eating, drinking, sleeping etc. are common to all castes and all religions, so must spinning be common to all without exception whilst the confusion, selfish greed and resulting pauperism persist. Mine therefore is a method not of making *varnasankara* — confusion worse confounded — but it is one of making *varnashrama* — cleansing more secure.

*Young India*, 17-7-'24

## 211

## WOMEN AND VARNA

An esteemed friend writes :

"From your recent writing on *varna* in the *Harijan* it seems that the principle of *varna* adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women ? What would determine a woman's *varna* ? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her *varna* from her father ; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband and, in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children ?

"Be that as it may, the fact remains that ours is an era of woman suffrage and that she has definitely entered the lists with men in the pursuit of independent avocations. It is, thus, the commonest thing now-a-days to find a woman serving as a school-mistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what *varna* would the woman under these

circumstances belong ? Under the *varnashrama* dispensation, a man would normally take up the avocation and, therefore, also the *varna* of his parents, while a woman would adopt that of her parents ; and they may well be expected to stick to their respective avocations after their marriage. To what *varna* between these would their children belong ? Or would you leave the question to be decided by the children themselves, by their free, independent choice ? In the latter case, what becomes of the heredity basis of *varna* which the *Varnashrama Dharma*, as expounded by you, postulates ?"

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing today. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion of the *varnas*, today there are in reality no *varnas*, the *varna* principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy ; the four *varnas* today exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of *varna*, there is only one *varna* today for all, whether men or women ; we are all *shudras*.

In the resuscitated *Varna Dharma*, as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage will belong to the *varna* of her father, just like her brother. Intermarriages between different *varnas* will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her *varna* unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different *varna*, then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his *varna* and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of *varna* be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities since the institution of *varna* in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four *varnas*.

I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management ; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that " For woman there can be no freedom " is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangna*, ' the better half ', and *sahadharmini*, ' the help-mate '. The husband addressing the wife as *devi* or ' goddess ' does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a status of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her *varna*. For, *varna* does not connote a set of rights or privileges ; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the role of the woman in society is accepted, the question of the *varna* of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the *varnas* of the husband and wife.

*Harijan*, 12-10-'34



## AN AMERICAN CLERGYMAN'S QUESTIONS

*Q.* " In your Hinduism do you basically include the caste system ? "

*A.* " I do not. Hinduism does not believe in caste. I would obliterate it at once. But I believe in *Varna Dharma* which is the law of life. I believe that some people are born to teach and some to defend and some to engage in trade and agriculture and some to do manual labour, so much so that these occupations become hereditary. The

law of *varna* is nothing but the law of conservation of energy. Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?"

"Indeed? Do you go so far?"

"I do, because I hold scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's."

"I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U. S. A.?"

"But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States? Gladstone used to chop wood."

"But he did not accept it as his calling."

"He would not have been worse off if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism. There is no better communism on earth, and I have illustrated it with one verse from the *Upanishads* which means: "God pervades all — animate and inanimate. Therefore, renounce all and dedicate it to God and then live." The right of living is thus derived from renunciation. It does not say, 'When all do their part of the work I too will do it.' It says, "Don't bother about others, do your job first and leave the rest to HIM." *Varna Dharma* acts even as the law of gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The law of *varna* is the antithesis of competition which kills."

*Harijan*, 6-3-'37

# SECTION FOURTEEN :

# BRAHMANA–NON-BRAHMANA



## BRAHMANA–NON-BRAHMANA

[In his speech at Cuddalore, Gandhiji spoke at length on the *Brahmana–Non-Brahmana* problem. The following is a brief extract from his speech :]

To the *brahmanas* I will say : "Seeing that you are repositories of all knowledge and embodiments of sacrifice and that you have chosen the life of mendicancy, give up all that the non-*brahmana* wants and be satisfied with what they may leave for you." But the modern *brahmana* would, I know, summarily reject my non-*brahmana* interpretation of his *dharma*. To the non-*brahmana* I say : "Seeing that you have got numbers on your side, seeing that you have got wealth on your side, what is it that you are worrying about ? Resisting as you are, and as you must, untouchability, do not be guilty of creating a new untouchability in your midst. In your haste, in your blindness, in your anger against the *brahmanas*, you are trying to trample under foot the whole of the culture which you have inherited from ages past. With a stroke of the pen, may be at the point of the sword, you are impatient to rid Hinduism of its bed-rock. Being dissatisfied and properly dissatisfied with the husk of Hinduism you are in danger of losing even the kernel, life itself. You in your impatience seem to think that there is absolutely nothing to be said about *varnashrama*. Fight by all means the monster that passes for *varnashrama* today, and you will find me working side by side with you. My *varnashrama* enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi,

whatever he is. My *varnashrama* accommodates a *pariah* girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My *varnashrama* accommodates many *panchama* families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure, — to dine with whom is a privilege. My *varnashrama* refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my *varnashrama* compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face. Do not therefore swear by words that have, at the present moment, become absolutely meaningless and obsolete. Swear all you are worth, if you like, against *brahmanas* but never against *Brahmanism*. Even at the risk of being understood or being mistaken by you to be a pro-*brahmana*, I make bold to declare to you that whilst *brahmanas* have many sins to atone for, and many for which they will receive exemplary punishments, there are today *brahmanas* living in India who are watching the progress of Hinduism and who are trying to protect it with all the piety and all the austerity of which they are capable. Them you perhaps do not even know. They do not care to be known. They expect no reward ; they ask for none. Their work is its own reward. They work in this fashion because they must. It is their nature. You and I may swear against them for all we are worth, but they are untouched. Do not run away with the belief that I am putting in a plea for the *brahmanas*, the vakils and the Ministers and even Justices of the High Courts in India. I do not have them in my mind at all. What, therefore, both *brahmanas* and non-*brahmanas* and for that matter everybody who wants India to progress has to do, is to sweep his own house clean. I therefore suggest to non-*brahmanas*, who have not yet lost their heads, to think out clearly what it is that they are grieved over, and make up their minds and fight for all they are worth to remove those grievances.

*Young India*, 22-9-'27

## THE MUCH-MALIGNED BRAHMANA

I believe *Brahmanism* to be unadulterated wisdom leading one to the realization of *Brahma*, that is God. If I did not hold that view, I should no longer call myself a Hindu. *Brahmanas*, however, like all the other members of the human family, are not all true representatives of *Brahmanism*. But I have to believe that, of all the classes in the world, the *brahmana* will show the largest percentage of those who have given up their all in search of knowledge, that is Truth. I know of no system other than Hinduism under which a class has been set apart from generation to generation for the exclusive pursuit of divine knowledge and consigned to voluntary poverty. That *brahmanas* could not keep up the high standard that they had imposed upon themselves is no special fault of theirs. Their imperfection merely proves that they were as fallible as the rest of mankind, and so corruption crept into the so-called sacred books, and we have the spectacle of the most selfless rules governing *brahmanas* side by side with the selfish rules also made by them in order to help their breed. But it was the *brahmanas* who rose against the corruptions and selfish interpolations into the sacred texts. It was they who time and again strove to purge themselves and society of evil. I confess that I have the highest reverence for *Brahmanism* and a sneaking regard for *brahmanas* and that, in spite of what is to me the sorrowful spectacle of *brahmanas* so called making a frantic effort against the reform movement and lending their undoubted ability to the opposition, I am consoled, and let every unbiassed Hindu be consoled, by the fact that the reform movement, too, is being led by those who are born *brahmanas* but who today take no pride in their birth. If a census was taken of all the workers against untouchability, I think it will be found that the majority of workers who are devoted to the cause without any remuneration or with only just enough to

keep body and soul together are *brahmanas*. But I admit that *brahmanas* as a class have suffered degradation. If they had not, if they had lived up to their profession, Hinduism would not be in the degraded state in which it is. It would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that Hinduism is what it is, in spite of the correct life of the *brahmanas*. That could not be, because the *brahmanas* themselves have taught us to believe that they are the true custodians of the divine wisdom and that, where there is divine wisdom, there is no fear, there is no grinding pauperism, there is no high and low state, there is no greed, jealousy, war, plunder and the like. Because *Brahmanism* went down, it drew down with it all the other classes of Hindus, and I have not a shadow of doubt in my mind that, if *Brahmanism* does not revive, Hinduism must perish, and for me the infallible test of the revival of *Brahmanism*, that is Hinduism, is the root and branch removal of untouchability. Today *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras* are mere labels. There is utter confusion of *varna* as I understand it, and I wish that all Hindus will voluntarily call themselves *shudras*. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of *Brahmanism* and to revive *Varna Dharma* in its true state. Because all Hindus may be classed as *shudras*, wisdom and power and wealth will not disappear, but they will all be used for the service of not a sectional religion but the service of Truth and Humanity. Anyway, in battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."

*Harijan*, 25-3-'33

## ANTI-BRAHMANISM

With reference to a suspicion that behind his Harijan movement there was a design to undermine *Brahmanism* Gandhiji said at Guruvayur :

I can only tell you that I cannot be guilty of any such design ; for, to me to undermine *Brahmanism* is to undermine Hinduism. This does not mean endorsement of the claim that the *brahmanas*, so called, may put forth today. No man can be accepted as a *brahmana* by society merely by reason of his birth. The *shastras* themselves say that a born *brahmana* who does not act according to the requirements of *Brahmanism* will forfeit his right to be called a *brahmana* by the people in general. There are *brahmanas* themselves today in this very movement who say that they cannot be called *brahmanas* unless they carry out the precepts of the *shastras* referring to them. I believe that the *brahmana* is the corner-stone of Hinduism, as of every other religion. But there you must understand the meaning of the word *brahmana*. The *brahmana* is the person who has realized *Brahma*. If he has not that realization in every act of his, he shows that he is ever after it and nothing else. Such a *brahmana* demands my ten thousand prostrations every morning, but not the *brahmana* who is dictated to by self, who is multiplying himself day after day and thinks mostly of himself, rarely of others, nor even the *brahmana* who smears himself with ashes from top to toe and can punctiliously and correctly recite the *Vedas*. It may be necessary for him to smear himself with ashes. It is necessary for him to translate the *Vedas* in his own life. It is necessary for him to exhibit *Brahma* in every act of his life. It is necessary for him to be pure and to impart that purity to all his surroundings. It is necessary for him to be ever ready to die that others may live. Now you understand what regard I have for the true *brahmana* and *Brahmanism*.

*Harijan*, 26-1-'34

## BRAHMANA MINORITY

Proceeding to the topic which he had intended to deal with, Gandhiji referred to a letter he had received complaining that the hopelessly insignificant minority of the *brahmanas* was faring badly, in that the admission of *brahmana* boys and girls to colleges and services was becoming increasingly difficult because of the anti-*brahmana* movement. He could sympathize with the complainant, because hitherto being more receptive, more industrious and more eager to gain knowledge the *brahmanas* seemed to have a monopoly, not because of any brute force they exercised but because of their superior qualities. But though he sympathized with the *brahmanas* in their lot, he did not share their grief or disappointment. In the first instance, he could not appreciate their considering themselves as a minority. If we were one nation, there could be no question of minority and majority. He might as well complain of being a minority and then imagine himself to be hurt that he could not enjoy all the privileges he might wish for. He would, therefore, advise his *brahmana* friends to forget that they were a class or group apart from the ocean of India's humanity. Considering them even as Hindus rather than Indians, sons of the same soil, there was to be no high and low in the ocean of Hinduism. If they ceased to consider themselves a minority, they would be proud to share the majesty of the ocean of Indian or Hindu humanity, and could feel with a drop in the ocean, if it was not isolated from the latter, the greatness of the ocean, which carried on its broad bosom thousands of mighty steamships. After all what were the colleges and services in terms of the millions of villagers living in the seven *lakhs* of India's villages? He suggested that the *brahmana* friends should feel happy that they were no longer exposed to the temptation of having to go to colleges or to services under the

Government. Such persons could only be few and far between. Those who refused to take part in the unseemly struggle for entrance to colleges or to services were the real servants of India. Knowledge was not confined within the four walls of a school or a college. It was open for every industrious boy or girl to gather real knowledge outside schools and colleges. And in this connection he would commend to them the *Nai Talim* and all it meant. He further reminded them of what he had said about the validity only of those rights which were directly derived from duty well performed. They would then immediately realize that there was no such inherent right for any one to be admitted to Government colleges. But if there was such a right belonging to any boy or girl, it was his or hers who had hitherto been criminally neglected.

A *brahmana's* duty was to know God and to enable others to do likewise. And the right that was derived from the duty would be to be fed and clothed decently and honourably by the community which he served.

*Harijan*, 13-7-'47

## SECTION FIFTEEN :
## WIDOWHOOD, MARRIAGE AND WOMEN

### 217
### ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD

Sir Gangaram has published a valuable table giving the number of widows throughout India, with subsidiary tables for each province. The tables should be in the hands of every reformer.

The figures he has given us are truly appalling. "Who will not weep," he asks, "over the figures which show the misery caused by child marriages and enforced widowhood?" Here are the figures of Hindu widows according to the census of 1921 :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Widows of ages up to 5 | | 11,892 |
| ,, | from 5 up to 10 | 85,037 |
| ,, | from 10 up to 15 | 232,147 |
| | | 329,076 |

The figures are also given for the two previous censuses. The total of 1921 is a trifle higher than for the two decades. The widows of the other classes are also given. They only demonstrate still further the enormity of the wrong done to the Hindu girl widows. We cry out for cow protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the human cow in the shape of the girl widow. We would not resort to force in religion. But in the name of religion we force widowhood upon our three lacs of girl widows who could not understand the import of the marriage ceremony. To force widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly. If our conscience was truly awakened there would

be no marriage before 15, let alone widowhood, and we would declare that these three lacs of girls were never religiously married. There is no warrant in any *shastra* for such widowhood. Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice, and degrades religion.

And does not this Hindu widowhood stink in one's nostrils when one thinks of old and diseased men over 50 taking or rather purchasing girl wives sometimes one on the top of another ? So long as we have thousands of widows in our midst we are sitting on a mine which may explode at any moment. If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood. The reform must begin by those who have girl widows taking courage in both their hands and seeing that the child widows in their charge are duly and well married — not remarried. They were never really married.

*Young India*, 5-8-'26

## 218

## GIRL WIDOWS

The statistics collected by Sir Gangaram and summarized in these pages deal with widows up to 15 years only. These poor, wretched beings know nothing of *pativrata dharma*. They are strangers to love. The truer statement would be to say that these girls were never married at all. If marriage is, as it ought to be, a sacrament, an entrance into a new life, the girls to be married should be fully developed, should have some hand in the choice of companions for life, and should know the consequences of their acts. It is a crime against God and man to call the union of children a married state and then to decree widowhood for a girl whose so-called husband is dead.

*Young India*, 19-8-'26

## CURSE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins has sent me notes of a tragic case that appears to have just occurred in Madras and has arisen out of a child marriage, the girl being 13 years and the 'husband' 26. Hardly had the pair lived together for 13 days when the girl died of burning. The jury have found that she committed suicide owing to the unbearable and inhuman solicitations of the so-called husband. The dying deposition of the girl would go to show that the 'husband' had set fire to her clothes. Passion knows no prudence, no pity.

But how the girl died is beside the point. The indisputable facts are :

(1) that the girl was married when she was only 13 ;

(2) that she had no sexual desire inasmuch as she resisted the advances of the 'husband' ;

(3) that the 'husband' did make cruel advances ;

(4) and that she is now no more.

It is irreligion, not religion, to give religious sanction to a brutal custom. The *Smritis* bristle with contradictions. The only reasonable deduction to be drawn from the contradictions is that the texts that may be contrary to known and accepted morality, more especially, to the moral precepts enjoined in the *Smritis* themselves, must be rejected as interpolations. Inspiring verses on self-restraint could not be written at the same time and by the same pen that wrote the verses encouraging the brute in man. Only a man innocent of self-restraint and steeped in vice could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly periods. It should be held sinful to marry a girl for several years after the periods begin. There cannot be even the thought of marriage before the periods begin. A girl is no more fit to bear children on beginning the periods than a lad is to procreate as soon as he grows the first hair on his upper lip.

This custom of child marriage is both a moral as well as a physical evil. For it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs we recede from God as well as Swaraj. A man who has no thought of the tender age of a girl has none of God. And undergrown men have no capacity for fighting battles of freedom or having gained it, of retaining it. Fight for Swaraj means not mere political awakening but an all-round awakening — social, educational, moral, economic and political.

Legislation is being promoted to raise the age of consent. It may be good for bringing a minority to book. But it is not legislation that will cure a popular evil, it is enlightened public opinion that can do it. I am not opposed to legislation in such matters but I do lay greater stress on cultivation of public opinion. The Madras case would have been impossible if there had been a living public opinion against child marriage. The young man in question is not an illiterate labourer but an intelligent educated typist. It would have been impossible for him to marry or touch the girl if public opinion had been against the marriage or the consummation of the marriage of girls of tender age. Ordinarily a girl under 18 years should never be given in marriage.

*Young India*, 26-8-'26

## 220

## DEFENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

A reader of *Young India* writes :

"I am very much pained to read the following sentence in your article on 'Curse of Child Marriage' published in the *Young India* of the 26th August 1926: 'Only a man innocent of self-restraint and steeped in vice could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly periods.'

"I fail to understand why you could not take a charitable view of those whose opinion differs from you. One can certainly say that the Hindu law-giver was entirely wrong in prescribing child marriage. But I think it improper to say that

those who insist on child marriage are 'steeped in vice'. It seems to go beyond the limits of politeness in controversy. In fact this is the first time that I heard such an argument against child marriage. Neither the Hindu social reformers nor the Christian missionaries ever said so, so far as I am aware. Imagine therefore the shock which I received when I found this argument in the writing of Mahatma Gandhi whom I believed to be perfection itself, so far at least as charity towards opponents is concerned.

"You have condemned not one or two but probably every one of the Hindu law-givers. For so far as I know, every *Smritikara* enjoins early marriage of girls. It is impossible to hold as you have suggested that the passages enjoining early marriage are interpolations. The practice of early marriage is not confined to any province or class of society, but is practically a universal custom in India. It is also a very old practice dating from the time of the *Ramayana*.

"I shall try to give briefly what I consider might have been the reasons why the Hindu law-givers insisted upon early marriage of girls. They considered it very desirable that every girl should have a husband as a rule. This is necessary no less for the peace of mind and happiness of the girls themselves than for the welfare of the society in general. If every girl has to be provided with a husband the choice of husband should be made by the parents of the girl and not by the girls themselves. If the choice is left to the girls themselves, it will result in many girls not being married at all, not because they do not like marriage, but because it is very difficult for all girls to find out suitable husbands. It is also dangerous, for it might lead to flirtation and might cause looseness of morals. Youths who appear to be good might ruin the virtue of simple girls. Again if the choice is to be made by parents, the girls must be married young. When they are grown up, they may fall in love and may not like to marry the bridegroom selected by the parents. When a girl is married young, she becomes one with her husband and his family. The union is more natural and more perfect. It is sometimes difficult for grown up girls with fixed ideas and habits to adapt themselves in a new home.

"The chief objection to early marriage is that it weakens the health of the girl and her children. But this objection is not very convincing for the following reasons. The age of marriage is now rising among the Hindus, but the race is becoming weaker. Fifty or a hundred years ago the men and women were generally stronger, healthier and more long-lived than now. But early marriage was then more in vogue. The physique of educated girls who are married late is not generally better than the girls who receive less education and are married early.

From these facts it appears probable that early marriage does not cause as much physical deterioration as some people believe.

"You have good knowledge of both European society and Indian society. You will be able to say whether on the whole Indian wives are more devoted to their husbands than European wives; whether among the poor people the Indian husbands treat their wives more kindly than European husbands; whether there are fewer cases of unhappy marriages among Indians than among Europeans; whether sexual morality is higher in Indian society than in European society. If in these respects the Indian marriages are more successful than European marriages, then early marriage which is an essential feature of Indian marriages should not be condemned.

"I cannot believe that the Hindu law-givers were actuated by any consideration except the true welfare of society in general (including both the men and women) in laying down the injunction of early marriage of girls. I believe that early marriage of girls is one of the features of Hindu society which have maintained its purity and prevented its disruption in spite of very hostile environments. You may not believe all this. But may we not expect that you should discard your idea that all the great Hindu law-givers who have insisted on early marriage of girls were innocent of self-restraint and were 'steeped in vice'?

"The Madras case reported by you seems to be very peculiar. The jury held that the girl committed suicide. But the girl said that her husband set fire to her clothes. In these conflicting circumstances it is very difficult to hold that the facts which you consider to be indisputable are really so. There have been millions of cases of girl-wives below 13. Not one case of suicide due to cruel advances of the husband has been heard of before. Probably there were peculiar features in the Madras case and early marriage was not the principal cause of the death."

Well does the Poet say: "It costs very little to fashion a suitable philosophy in order to mitigate the rudeness of facts that secretly hurt one's conscience." This "reader of *Young India*" has gone a step further. He has not only fashioned a suitable philosophy but ignored facts and erected his argument on unsupported statements.

The charge of want of charity I must pass by, if only because I have not accused the law-givers but I have ventured to impute vice to those who could insist on marriage

at an age too tender for bearing the burden of motherhood. Want of charity comes into being only when you accuse a live person, not an imaginary being, and that too without cause, of impure motives. But is there any warrant for the writer saying that the original authors of the several *Smritis* who preached self-restraint wrote the verses enjoining marriage of little girls? Is it not more charitable to assume that the *rishis* could not be guilty of impurity or gross ignorance of cardinal facts concerning the growth of the human body?

But even if the texts ordering child, as opposed to early—for early marriage means marriage well before 25—marriage be found to be authoritative, we must reject them in the light of positive experience and scientific knowledge. I question the accuracy of the statement that child marriage is universal in Hindu society. I should be sorry to find that 'millions of girls' are married, i.e., live as wives whilst they are yet children. The Hindus would have died as a race long ago if 'millions of girls' had their marriages consummated at, say, the age of eleven.

Nor does it follow that if the parents are to continue to make the choice of husbands for their daughters, the marriage must be contracted and consummated early. It is still less true to maintain that if girls have to make their choice, there must be courtship and flirtation. After all courtship is not universal in Europe, and thousands of Hindu girls are married after fifteen and yet have their husbands selected by their parents. Mussulman parents invariably select husbands for their grown-up daughters. Whether the choice is to be made by girls or their parents is a separate question and is regulated by custom.

The correspondent has tendered no proof to support the statement that children of grown-up wives are weaker than those of child wives. In spite of my experience of both Indian and European society, I must refuse to enter into a comparison of their morals. Granting, however, for the sake of argument that morals of European society are lower than those of Hindu society, will it naturally

follow that the lowness is due to the marriages taking place after full maturity ?

Lastly, the Madras case does not help the correspondent, but his use of it betrays his hasty judgment based upon a total disregard of facts. If he will refer to the article again he will discover that I have drawn my conclusion from proved facts. My conclusion is unaffected by the cause of death. It was proved (1) that the girl was of tender age ; (2) that she had no sexual desire ; (3) that the ' husband ' made cruel advances ; (4) that she is no more. It was bad enough if the girl committed suicide, it was worse if the husband murdered her because she could not yield to his inhuman lust. The girl was fit only to learn and play, not to play the wife and carry on her tiny shoulders the weight of household cares or the yoke of a lord and master.

My correspondent is a man occupying high position in society. The nation expects better things from those of her sons and daughters who have received a liberal education and who are expected to think and act in her behalf. We have many abuses in our midst — moral, social, economical, and political. They require patient study, diligent research, delicate handling, accuracy of statement and clear thinking on them, and sober impartial judgment. We may then differ, if necessary, as poles asunder. But we shall surely harm the country, our respective religions and the national cause, if we do not toil to discover the truth and adhere to it, cost what it may.

*Young India*, 9-9-'26

## 221

## TOUGH QUESTIONS

A fair friend who has some faith in my wisdom and sincerity asks some knotty questions which I would fain avoid for fear of raising an indignant controversy on the part of some husbands jealous of their rights. But jealous husbands would spare me, for they know that I happen to be one myself having led a fairly happy married life for the past forty years in spite of occasional jars.

The first question is apposite and timely. (The original is in Marathi. I have given a free rendering.)

> Can a man or woman attain self-realization by mere recitation of *Ramanama* and without taking part in national service? I ask this question because some of my sisters say that they do not need to do anything beyond attending to family requirements and occasionally showing kindness to the poor.

This question has puzzled not only women but many men and has taxed me to the utmost. I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching, unless in order to secure verbal agreement I were to put my own interpretation on it. In my humble opinion effort is necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results. *Ramanama* or some equivalent is necessary not for the sake of repetition but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is therefore never a substitute for effort. It is meant for intensifying and guiding it in a proper channel. If all effort is vain, why family cares or an occasional help to the poor? In this very effort is contained the germ of national service. And national service, to me, means service of humanity, even as disinterested service of the family means the same thing. Disinterested service of the family necessarily leads one to national service. *Ramanama* gives one detachment and ballast and never throws one off one's balance at critical moments. Self-realization I hold to be impossible without service of and identification with the poorest.

The second question is :

In Hinduism devotion of wife to her husband and her complete merger in him is the highest aim, never mind whether the husband is a fiend or an embodiment of love. If this be the correct conduct for a wife, may she in the teeth of opposition by her husband undertake national service ? Or must she only go as far as the husband will permit her to go ?

My ideal of a wife is Sita and of a husband Rama. But Sita was no slave of Rama. Or each was slave of the other. Rama is ever considerate to Sita. Where there is true love, the question asked does not occur. Where there is no true love, the bond has never existed. But the Hindu household of today is a conundrum. Husbands and wives when they are married know nothing of one another. Religious sanction fortified by custom and the even flow of the lives of the married people keep the peace in the vast majority of Hindu households. But when either wife or husband holds views out of the ordinary, there is danger of jars. In the case of the husband he has no scruples. He does not consider himself under any obligation to consult his partner's wishes. He regards his wife as his property. And the poor wife who believes in the husband's claim often suppresses herself. I think there is a way out. Mirabai has showed the way. The wife has a perfect right to take her own course and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right and when her resistance is for a nobler purpose.

The third question is :

If a husband is, say, a meat-eater and the wife considers meat-eating an evil, may she follow her own bent ? May she even try by all loving ways to wean her husband from meat-eating or the like ? Or is she bound to cook meat for her husband or worse still, is she bound to eat it, if the husband requires her ? If you say that the wife may take her own course, how can a joint household be run when the one compels and the other rebels ?

This question is partly answered in the answer to the second. A wife is not bound to be an accomplice in her husband's crimes. And when she holds anything to be wrong she must dare to do the right. But seeing that the wife's function is to manage the household and thus to

cook, as the husband's is to earn for the family, she is bound to cook meat for the family if both have been meat-eaters before. If, on the other hand, in a vegetarian family, the husband becomes a meat-eater and seeks to compel the wife to cook for him, the wife is in no way bound to cook what offends her sense of right. The peace of a household is a most desirable thing. But it cannot be an end in itself. For me, the married state is as much a state of discipline as any other. Life is duty, a probation. Married life is intended to promote mutual good both here and hereafter. It is meant also to serve humanity. When one partner breaks the law of discipline, the right accrues to the other of breaking the bond. The breach here is moral and not physical. It precludes divorce. The wife or the husband separates but to serve the end for which they had united. Hinduism regards each as absolute equal of the other. No doubt a different practice has grown up, no one knows since when. But so have many other evils crept into it. This however I do know that Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free to do what he or she likes for the sake of self-realization for which and which alone he or she is born.

*Young India*, 21-10-'26

## 222

## REMARRIAGE OF CHILD WIDOWS

I extract the following from a letter on the remarriage of child widows :

"In your reply to B., Agra, in the *Young India* of September 23, you say that child widows should be remarried by their parents. How can this be done by those parents who perform *kanyadana*, i. e. who give their daughters in marriage according to *shastric* injunctions ? Surely, it is impossible for parents who have most solemnly and by religious rites renounced all claims on their daughter in favour of their son-in-law, to give her in marriage after his death to another person. She may of her own accord remarry if she will, but since she was given by her parents as a gift or donation (*dana*) to her husband, no one in the world after the death of her husband has any right to give her in marriage. And for the same reason she herself does

not possess any right to remarry. She would, therefore, be faithless and a traitress to her dead husband if she remarried without his express consent given at the time of his death. From a logical point of view, it is thus impossible for a widow — be she a child, young or old — who was married according to *kanyadana* system which is prevalent amongst most *Sanatanis*, to remarry unless her husband had given her permission to do so. A true *Sanatani* husband cannot, however, brook the idea of giving such permission. He will rather fain agree to his wife's becoming *sati*, if she can, or at any rate will like her to spend the rest of her life in devotion to his memory or, which is the same thing, in devotion to God. In this he will solely be actuated by the desire or sense of duty to help the preservation of the high ideals of Hindu marriage and widowhood which are complimentary to and not independent of each other."

I regard this kind of argument as prostitution of a high ideal. No doubt the correspondent means well but his over-anxiety about purity of women makes him lose sight of elementary justice. What is *kanyadana* in the case of little children? Has a father any rights of property over his children? He is their protector, not owner. And he forfeits the privilege of protection when he abuses it by seeking to barter away the liberty of his ward. Again how can a donation be made to a child who is incapable of receiving a gift? There is no gift where the capacity to receive is lacking. Surely *kanyadana* is a mystic, religious rite with a spiritual significance. To use such terms in their literal sense is an abuse of language and religion. One may as well take literally the mystic language of the Puranas and believe in the earth being a flat dish sustained on the hood of a thousand-headed snake and Divinity lying in soft ease on an ocean of milk for his bed.

The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly out of his teens, can do, is to purge himself of his sin by remarrying the daughter when she becomes widowed. As I have said in a previous note such marriages should be declared null and void from the beginning.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26

# CORRESPONDENCE

## A Catechism

To the Editor, *Young India*

Sir,

I have been following with keen interest your articles on social reforms amongst the Hindus. I have however not been able to follow the exact line of argument adopted by you on some points, and the conclusions arrived at in some cases have, in my opinion, some doubtful points which require further elucidation. I shall be glad if you will find space in *Young India* to give your views on these points which I briefly mention below:

### 1. Concerning Widows

You have constantly been pleading widow-remarriage but only for girls up to a limited age, probably 15. In *Young India* dated August 19th, you wrote, 'I have never advocated widow-remarriage on a wholesale scale. The statistics by Sir Gangaram summarized in these pages deal with widows up to 15 years only.' I take these lines to mean that you advocate remarriage of widows up to 15 years of age? But what do you advocate about widows of slightly bigger age than 15, say 16, 17, 18, 20 and 22 years of age? If your limit be accepted as any test of fitness for remarriage, obviously the cases quoted shall have to be termed 'undeserving', no matter even if the widow feels unhappy and miserable at her lot and is an object of persecution (as I painfully realize she is in average Hindu family). Please do let us know clearly, if knowing all this you really advocate an age-limit. It were another thing if you were to advocate the limited reform with a view to prevailing upon Hindus, the majority of whom are dead against widow-remarriage. But my belief is that you do not limit a good thing for fear of getting unpopular or the reform getting unpopular and thus not having a fair chance of success.

Whilst I think all reformers in this direction may have had in their minds mostly the innocent child widows, when advocating widow-remarriage, they did not (in my opinion wisely) fix an age-limit for such remarriages, as that would have created a *really* awkward barrier in a good many deserving cases as well. Please do make clear what you have in your mind about such widows.

Whilst replying to this, I hope you would not forget such a case as that of a girl marrying at an advanced age, say, 20 or 22

years and becoming a widow the next day or three months after marriage and the fact that such cases do occur. Would such girls lose the right of remarrying simply because they are above the age limit and can understand the sanctity of marital relations?

At the same time if an age-limit for widow-remarriage is really felt to be necessary in the welfare of society, should it not be equally necessary to fix an age-limit for remarriage of widowers? Simply because man happens to be stronger than the female sex, let him not always frame laws that may not be just but suit his convenience. Besides the practice of old men's marriages to young girls in their teens is as much a cause of the increasing number of widows in society and as horrible a practice as that of child marriage. Why should you not advocate men not being allowed to remarry beyond a certain age, say 30? Of course such limits should not be necessary in case no limit is fixed for widow-remarriage, for under such conditions an old widower can marry an old widow without causing much loss to society.

* * *

Yours etc.,
"Assistant Executive Engineer."

I gladly publish this catechism. But I must not enter into a long reply even though I should fail to satisfy the able catechist.

1. What I have pleaded for is that parents who commit the sin of 'marrying' their daughters of tender age should expiate for the sin by remarrying these daughters, should they become widowed while they are yet in their teens. If the girls become widowed at a ripe age, it is their concern whether they would remarry or remain widowed. If I were called upon to state what the rule should be, I should say the same rule should apply to women as to men. If a fifty-year old widower may remarry with impunity, it should be open to the widow of that age to do likewise. That in my opinion both will be sinning by remarriage is quite another matter. I should any day subscribe to a reform in the Hindu Law making sinful the remarriage of a widow or a widower who voluntarily married after maturity.

*Young India*, 14-10-'26

# WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

A correspondent writes :

"I have carefully read the correspondence 'A Catechism' and your replies published in the *Young India* dated 14th October 1926. While answering the first question of the correspondent you say 'I should any day subscribe to a reform in the Hindu Law making sinful the remarriage of a widow or a widower who voluntarily married after maturity.'

"In my opinion a reform of this kind in the Hindu Law will be disastrous and to a large extent affect the moral standard of the society as a whole. For instance if a man or a woman married after maturity and unfortunately happens to lose either his wife or her husband after some days of married life, do you mean to say that the man or woman should not be allowed to remarry even though a great desire of enjoying married life is left unfulfilled, for the only reason that the man or woman concerned married after maturity? If a reform of this kind is made in the Hindu Law I am afraid the man or the woman will find out some immoral way of gratifying his or her unsatisfied desire, and there will be a wholesale moral corruption in the society. I therefore think that this question should entirely be left to the discretion of the man or woman concerned."

My reply to the catechist was a challenge to Man who is the law-giver. He will not allow his liberty to be restricted. My reply, therefore, is an attempt to show that what is considered desirable for man should be equally so for Woman, and that therefore a widow should have the same discretion as a widower about remarriage. Moreover, the Hindu Law is not inelastic like the laws made under the British constitution. It will be noticed that I have deliberately used the word 'sinful' instead of criminal. A crime carries with it punishment imposed by a man-worked State. A sin is punishable only by God or one's conscience. And I do think if Hindu society would rise to the level I have aimed at in my answer it will be a great gain for it and humanity.

*Young India*, 18-11-'26

## BRAHMANISM OR ANIMALISM

A learned Tamilian has written to me to address students on child-widows. He has said that the hardships of child-widows in this presidency are far greater than those of child-widows in other parts of India. I have not been able to test the truth of this statement. You should know that better than I do. But what I would like you, young men around me, to do is that you should have a touch of chivalry about you. If you have that, I have a great suggestion to offer. I hope the majority of you are unmarried and a fair number of you are also *brahmacharis*. I have to say 'a fair number' because I know students; a student who casts his lustful eyes upon his sister is not a *brahmachari*. I want you to make this sacred resolve that you are not going to marry a girl who is not a widow, you will seek out a widow girl and if you cannot get a widow girl you are not going to marry at all. Make that determination, announce it to the world, announce it to your parents if you have them, or to your sisters. I call them widow-girls by way of correction because I believe that a child ten or fifteen years old, who was no consenting party to the so-called marriage, who having married, having never lived with the so-called husband is suddenly declared to be a widow, is not a widow. It is an abuse of the term, abuse of language and a sacrilege. The word *widow* in Hinduism has a sacred odour about it. I am a worshipper of a true widow like the late Mrs. Ramabai Ranade who knew what it was to be a widow. But a child 9 years old knows nothing of what a husband should be. If it is not true that there are such child-widows in the presidency, then my case falls to the ground. But if there are such child-widows, it becomes your sacred duty to make the determination to marry a girl widow if you want to rid ourselves of this curse. I am superstitious enough to believe that all such sins that a nation commits react upon it physically. I believe that

all these sins of ours have accumulated together to reduce us to a state of slavery. You may get the finest constitution that is conceivable dropping upon you from the House of Commons. It will be worthless if there are not men and women fit enough to work that constitution. Do you suppose that we can possibly call ourselves men worthy of ruling ourselves or others or shaping the destiny of a nation containing 30 crores so long as there is one single widow who wishes to fulfil her fundamental wants but is violently prevented from doing so? It is not religion, but irreligion. I say that, saturated as I am with the spirit of Hinduism. Do not make the mistake that it is the Western spirit in me that is speaking. I claim to be full to overflowing with the spirit of India undefiled. I have assimilated many things from the West but not this. There is no warrant for this kind of widowhood in Hinduism.

All I have said about child-widows necessarily applies to child-wives. You must be able surely to control your lust to this extent, that you are not going to marry a girl that is under 16 years of age. If I could do so I would lay down 20 as the minimum. Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of 20 who are pure and undefiled and able to stand the storm that may rage round. Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves. Some *brahmana* students tell me that they cannot follow this principle, that they cannot get *brahmana* girls sixteen years old, very few *brahmanas* keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the *brahmana* girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then I say to the *brahmana* youth, "Cease to be a *brahmana*, if you cannot possibly control yourself. Choose a grown up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a *brahmana* widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of the Hindus will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your

heart is not pure and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to live up to the name of the premier institution which must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character, and what is character without elementary personal purity? *Brahmanism* I adore. I have defended *Varnashrama Dharma.* But *Brahmanism* that can tolerate untouchability, virgin widowhood, spoliation of virgins, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of *Brahmanism.* There is no knowledge of *Brahma* therein. There is no true interpretation of the scriptures. It is undiluted animalism. *Brahmanism* is made of sterner stuff. I want these few remarks of mine to go deep down into your hearts. I have not come to appeal to your intellects but to your hearts. You are the hope of the country and what I have said is of primary importance for you.

*Young India*, 15-9-'27

## 226

## "AN INDIGNANT PROTEST"

The Headmaster of a Bengali school writes:

"Your advice and utterances to students at Madras, asking them to marry widowed girls only, have horrified us, and I send forth my humble but indignant protest.

"This kind of advice will tend to destroy the tendency of the widows to observe lifelong *brahmacharya* which has given Indian womanhood the greatest or rather the highest place in the world, and destroy their chances of attaining salvation through *brahmacharya* in a single birth, throwing them on the filthy path of worldly happiness. Thus this kind of keen sympathy for widows will do a great disservice to them and an injustice to the maidens whose marriage problem has become at present one of complexity and difficulty. Your theory of marriage will overturn the Hindu theory of transmigration, rebirth and even *mukti*, and will bring down Hindu society on the same level with other societies which we do not like. Our society has been demoralized no doubt, but we must have our eyes

open to Hindu ideals and try to go up as far as we can and not be influenced by the examples of other societies and ideals. Examples of Ahalyabai, Rani Bhavani, Behula, Sita, Savitri, Damayanti will guide the Hindu society and we must direct it according to their ideals. I beg most humbly, therefore, that you will refrain from giving your opinions on these knotty questions and allow the society to do what it thinks best."

This 'indignant protest' leaves me unconverted and unrepentant. My advice will not wean from her purpose a single widow who has a will of her own and who knows *brahmacharya* and is bent upon observing it. But if the advice is followed, it will certainly bring great relief to those girls of tender age who knew not the meaning of marriage when they were put through the ceremony. The use of the term *widow* in their connection is a violent abuse of a name with sacred associations. It is precisely for the very object that my correspondent has in view that I advise the youth of the country to marry these so-called widows or not at all. The sacredness of the institution can be preserved only when it is purged of the curse of child widowhood.

The statement that the widows attain *moksha* if they observe *brahmacharya* has no foundation whatsoever in experience. More things are necessary than mere *brahmacharya* for the attainment of the final bliss. And *brahmacharya* that is superimposed carries no merit with it, and often gives rise to secret vice that saps the morals of the society in which that vice exists. Let the correspondent know that I am writing from personal observation.

I should be glad indeed if my advice results in elementary justice being done to the maiden widows, and if for that reason the other maidens instead of being prematurely sold to man's lust are given an opportunity of waiting for maturity in age and wisdom.

I have no theory of marriage that is inconsistent with a belief in transmigration, rebirth or *mukti*. The reader should know that millions of Hindus whom we arrogantly describe as belonging to the lower order have no ban on widow-remarriage. And I do not see how if remarriage of old widowers does not interfere with that belief, real

marriage of girls wrongly described as widows can interfere with that great belief. I may mention for the edification of the correspondent that transmigration and rebirth are not mere theories with me but facts as patent as the daily rise of the sun. *Mukti* is a fact to realize which I am striving with all my might. And it is the contemplation of *mukti* which has given me a vivid consciousness of the wrong that is being done to these maiden widows. Let us not in our emasculation mention in the same breath as these modern injured maiden widows the immortal names of Sita and others referred to by the correspondent.

Lastly, whilst there is, and very properly, glorification of real widowhood in Hinduism, there is so far as I am aware, no warrant for the belief that in the *Vedic* times there was any absolute ban upon remarriage of widows. But my crusade is not against real widowhood. It is against its atrocious caricature. The better way is not to regard as widows at all the girls I have in view and whom every Hindu who has a spark of chivalry in him is bound to relieve from their intolerable yoke. I therefore humbly but emphatically repeat the advice to every young Hindu to refuse to marry any but these maidens miscalled widows.

*Young India*, 6-10-'27

## 227

## A YOUNG MAN'S DILEMMA

A *Patidar* young man writes :

"My parents want me to be married this very year and insist on my obeying their wishes in this respect.....In my community no one can secure a bride without conforming to the condition of *sata*, i.e., without offering a girl of one's family in exchange. Child marriage is the rule. In my case two girls of nine or ten years of age only are available and that too on the condition that we conform to the conditions of *sata*. My father says that even this may not be possible afterwards, if we miss the opportunity this year. If I say 'no' my mother weeps and creates no end of trouble in the family. I am a *Patidar*

young man of 22 years of age. My parents will not hear of my marrying a widow or outside my caste. What am I to do in the circumstances?"

I know many a young man who is in the same dilemma as this *Patidar* youth. According to our *shastras*, a boy of 16 years and over should be regarded by his parents as a friend whom they should take in their confidence and not as a child whom they can coerce. But some parents in our country seem to think that even their grown up children are bound to follow every wish of theirs — especially when it relates to such things as marriage — as if they could have no will of their own in the matter. And if this is the attitude with regard to the sons, the plight of the daughters may well be imagined. It seems to me that in all such contingencies, it is not only the right but the religious duty of young men and young girls not to be afraid of the parents' wrath. It has been my experience that when a grown up boy or girl takes up a just and right position and adheres to it with absolute firmness there is the least amount of difficulty created by the parents. When once they realize that the resolution of their children is absolutely unalterable, they get reconciled to it. For behind the parents' insistence there is always the ultimate hope that it would bring their children to their viewpoint. But when this hope is destroyed further insistence becomes meaningless and is therefore given up. My advice to the young man in question, therefore, is to refuse to be party to the double sin of marrying a child girl and of conforming to the evil practice of *sata*. He must not mind how much domestic trouble he has to face as a result of his refusal. He should consider it a virtue to marry outside his subcaste or to marry a widow, subject to the necessary limitations.

*Young India*, 11-4-'29

## SIMPLIFYING MARRIAGE

A correspondent sends me an account of a marriage ceremony performed in Karachi. At the time of the marriage of a girl 16 years old, the daughter of a moneyed man Sheth Lalchand, the father is reported to have curtailed the expenditure to a minimum and given the marriage ceremonial a religious and dignified form. The report before me shows that the whole ceremony did not take more than two hours, whereas generally it involves a wasteful expenditure spread over many days. The religious ceremony was performed by a learned *brahmana* who explained to the bride and the bridegroom the meaning of what they were called upon to recite. I congratulate Sheth Lalchand and his wife who actively supported her husband upon initiating this belated reform, and hope that it will be copied largely by other moneyed men. This marriage ceremony calls to my mind the scene I witnessed at the Agra students' meeting. They confirmed the information that was given to me by a friend, that in the United Provinces young men studying in the colleges and schools were themselves eager to be married early and expected their parents to go in for lavish expenditure involving costly gifts, and equally costly and sometimes even more costly entertainments. My informant told me that even highly educated parents were not free from the pride of possession, and that so far as expenses went they beat the comparatively uneducated wealthy merchants. To all such the recent example of Sheth Lalchand and the less recent example of Sheth Jamanalal Bajaj should serve as a stimulus in cutting down expenditure. But more than the parents it is the duty of young men firmly to resist premature marriage, more especially marriage during student life, and at all cost resist all expenditure. Indeed not more than Rs. 10 should be required for the performance of the religious ceremonial, and nothing

beyond the ceremonial should be considered a necessary part of marriage rites. In this age of democracy, when the distinction between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, is sought to be abolished, it is for the rich to lead the poor to a contented life by exercising self-restraint in all their enjoyments and indulgences, and let them remember the verse in the Bhagawadgita, "Whatever leaders of society do, the others will follow." The truth of this statement we see daily verified in our experience, and nowhere more vividly than in marriage ceremonies and rites in connection with the dead. Thousands of poor people deprive themselves for this purpose of necessaries of life, and burden themselves with debts carrying ruinous rates of interest. This waste of national resources can be easily stopped if the educated youths of the country, especially sons of rich parents, will resolutely set their faces against every form of wasteful expenditure on their account.

*Young India*, 26-9-'29

## 229

## INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES

*Q.* You say that you are in favour of inter-religious marriages but at the same time you say that each party should retain his or her own religion and, therefore, you said, you tolerated even civil marriages. Are there any instances of parties belonging to different religions keeping up their own religions to the end of their lives; and is not the institution of civil marriage a negation of religion and does it not tend towards laxity of religion?

*A.* Gandhiji said that the questions were appropriate. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths up to death because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. But he would go so far as to

say that they need not wait for the discovery of past instances. They should create new ones so that timid ones may shed their timidity.

As to civil marriages he did not believe in them but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much-needed reforin for the sake of reform.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47

## 230

## INVIDIOUS AND UNFAIR

A correspondent writes :

"There are at present in Cutch in our midst several otherwise respectable gentlemen, upright, munificent, deeply religious and high-minded but without any scruple about remarrying merely for the sake of begetting male offspring. I would entreat you to express your opinion as to whether you approve of this practice among the Hindus of deploring the birth of a daughter. Do you too hold with the orthodox that one cannot go to Heaven without a son ?

"A man noted for his charities has three wives. But he has no male offspring. He has now married for the fourth time. A few months ago he performed a *yajna* when five hundred *brahmanas* were fed daily. Over a *lakh* of rupees were spent over this ceremony. I can multiply such instances."

Unfortunately this hankering for male offspring is almost universally prevalent in Hindu society. It is not necessary to trace its origin. It is enough that in the present age of sex equality, this sort of invidious discrimination against the female sex is an anachronism. I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live, and are equally necessary to keep the world going. But such age-old and deep-rooted practices cannot be eradicated all of a sudden. They can be dealt with only by an awakening of the social conscience, and a proper recognition of the true status and dignity of woman. Today both husband and wife are found to be equally agreeable to the former remarrying when they cannot beget a male offspring. Reformers like

my correspondent have to cultivate patience and not be angry over such unfortunate occurrences nor lose heart. They have to have faith in the cause and work away in the hope that society will one day realize the evil of making unmeaning and invidious distinction between male and female offspring.

*Harijan*, 28-5-'38

## 231

## THE HINDU WIFE

The following is a summary of a long letter of a brother describing the miseries of his married sister :

> "Some time ago my sister was married to a man whose character was hidden from us. This man has been discovered to be a rake, and no amount of dissipation and debauchery can satiate him. He has no sense of honour. My unfortunate sister found soon after her marriage that her 'lord' was sinking down more and more deeply day by day. She remonstrated. The man could not brook this, and in order to 'teach her a lesson' indulged in his excesses in front of her. He would also whip her, make her stand, starve her etc. She was tied to a post to compel her to witness his debaucheries. My sister is heart-broken. Her lamentations make us feel wretched. We are helpless. What would you advise her and us to do ? This is one of the most shameful aspects of Hinduism, where woman is left entirely at the mercy of man and has no rights and privileges. If a man chooses to be cruel and heartless, there is no remedy left to the unfortunate woman. The man may go on making random alliances, and not a little finger can be raised against him ; but a woman once married is at the utter mercy of her lord. Thousands of such women are groaning and weeping. As long as Hinduism is not purged of these and such like evils, can there be any hope of progress ?"

The writer is an educated man. His is a much more graphic description than the summary is of his sister's distress. The correspondent has sent me his full name and address. His condemnation of Hinduism, though pardonable under intense irritation, is based on a hysterical generalization from an isolated instance. For millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in their

own homes. They exercise an authority over their husbands which any woman would envy. It is an authority which love gives. The case of cruelty brought to light by the correspondent is an illustration not of the evil in Hinduism, but of the evil in human nature which has been known to express itself under all climes and among people professing different faiths of the world. The facility for divorce has proved no protection against a brutal husband for a pliant wife incapable of asserting, and at times even unwilling to assert, herself. It is therefore in the interest of reform for reformers to avoid hysterics and exaggerations.

Nevertheless the occurrence to which this article draws attention is not an altogether uncommon occurrence in Hindu society. Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, and has insisted on the complete merging of the wife in the husband. This has resulted in the husband sometimes usurping and exercising authority that reduces him to the level of the brute. The remedy for such excesses therefore lies not through the law but through the true education of women as distinguished from unmarried girls, and through cultivating public opinion against unmanly conduct on the part of husbands. In the case in point the remedy is incredibly simple. Instead of the brother and other relatives feeling helpless and weeping with the distressed girl, they should clothe her with protection, educate her to believe that it is no part of her duty to placate a sinful husband or to seek his company. It is quite evident that the husband himself does not care for the wife. She may therefore without breaking the legal tie live apart from her husband's roof and feel as if she had never been married. Of course there are two legal remedies open even to a Hindu wife for whom a divorce is unobtainable, and that is to have the husband punished for common assault and to insist upon his supporting the wife. Experience tells me that this remedy is in most cases if not in all worse than useless, and it never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman and makes the question

of husband's reform more difficult if not impossible, which after all should be the aim of society, more so of every wife. In the present instance the girl's parents are well able to support her, but where it is not possible, the number of institutions that would give shelter to such ill-treated women is growing in the country.

There still remains the question of the satisfaction of the sexual appetite on the part of young women thus leaving the inhospitable roofs of their husbands or being actually deserted by them when the relief given by divorce is unobtainable. But this is really not a serious grievance in point of numbers, for in a society in which custom has discountenanced divorce for ages, a woman whose marriage proves unhappy does not want to be remarried. When public opinion in any social group requires that particular form of relief, I have no doubt that it will be forthcoming. So far as I understand the correspondent's letter, the grievance is not that the wife cannot satisfy her sexual appetite. The grievance is the gross and defiant immorality on the part of the husband. For this, as I have said, the remedy lies in a revision of the mental attitude. The feeling of helplessness is imaginary as most of our ills are. A fresh outlook, a little original thinking is enough to dispel the grief brought about by defective imagination. Nor should friends and relatives in such cases be satisfied with the mere negative result of isolating the victim from the zone of tyranny. She should be induced to qualify herself for public service. This kind of training would be more than enough compensation for the doubtful privilege of a husband's bed.

*Young India*, 3-10-'29

## TEAR DOWN THE PURDAH

Whenever I have gone to Bengal, Bihar or the United Provinces, I have observed the *purdah* system more strictly followed than in the other provinces. But when I addressed a meeting at Darbhanga late at night and amid calm surroundings free from noise and bustle and unmanageable crowds, I found in front of me men, but behind me and behind the screen were women of whose presence I knew nothing till my attention was drawn to it. The function was in connection with the laying of the foundation-stone of an orphanage, but I was called upon to address the ladies behind the *purdah*. The sight of the screen behind which my audience whose numbers I did not know was seated made me sad. It pained and humiliated me deeply. I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced, had now become totally useless and was doing incalculable harm to the country. All the education that we have been receiving for the past 100 years seems to have produced but little impression upon us, for I note that the *purdah* is being retained even in educated households not because the educated men believe in it themselves but because they will not manfully resist the brutal custom and sweep it away at a stroke. I have the privilege of addressing hundreds of meetings of women attended by thousands. The din and the noise created at these meetings make it impossible to speak with any effect to the women who attend them. Nothing better is to be expected so long as they are caged and confined in their houses and little courtyards. When therefore they find themselves congregated in a big room and are expected all of a sudden to listen to some one, they do not know what to do with themselves or with the speaker. And when silence is restored it becomes difficult to interest

them in many everyday topics, for they know nothing of them having been never allowed to breathe the fresh air of freedom. I know that this is a somewhat exaggerated picture. I am quite aware of the very high culture of these thousands of sisters whom I get the privilege of addressing. I know that they are capable of rising to the same height that men are capable of, and I know too that they do have occasions to go out. But this is not to be put down to the credit of the educated classes. The question is, why have they not gone further? Why do not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?

Chastity is not a hothouse growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the *purdah*. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their womenfolk, even as the latter are compelled to trust them. Let us not live with one limb completely or partially paralyzed. Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent even as he was himself. But for robust independence Draupadi is perhaps a better example. Sita was gentleness incarnate. She was a delicate flower. Draupadi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhima himself to her imperious will. Bhima was terrible to every one, but he was a lamb before Draupadi. She stood in no need of protection from any one of the Pandavas. By seeking today to interfere with the free growth of the womanhood of India we are interfering with the growth of free and independent-spirited men. What we are doing to our women and what we are doing to the 'untouchables' recoils upon our heads with a force thousand times multiplied. It partly accounts for our weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us then tear down the *purdah* with one mighty effort.

*Young India*, 3-2-'27

233

## DEVADASIS

After his talk with the *devadasis* at Mayavaram, Gandhiji remarked :

As I was talking to them and understanding the hidden meaning of the thing, my whole soul rose in rebellion against the custom of dedicating minor girls for immoral purposes. Calling them *devadasis* we insult God Himself in the name of religion, and we commit a double crime in that we use these sisters of ours to serve our lust and take in the same breath the name of God. To think that there should be a class of people given to this kind of immoral service, and that there should be another class who should tolerate their hideous immorality, makes one despair of life itself. And I assure you that as I was talking to them I saw that there was no evil in their eyes, and they were as capable of fine feelings and fine character as any other women. What difference can there be between them and our own blood-sisters ? And if we do not allow our own sisters to be used for immoral purposes, how dare we allow these to be so used ? Let Hindus who are in any way whatsoever connected with these things purge society of this pest. The majority of them have promised to retrace their steps, if I fulfil the promise I have made to them. But if they cannot, I shall blame not them but the society in which they are passing their lives. It is up to you to extend the hand of fellowship to these sisters, it is up to you to see that they are reclaimed from their life of shame. I know that when they are again face to face with temptation it will become difficult for them to resist it. But if man will restrain his lust and society stands up against the evil, it will be easily possible to rid society of the evil.

*Young India*, 22-9-'27

# THE DEVADASI

The indefatigable Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi writes:

"As you have been openly denouncing the *devadasi* system in the Hindu temples, I make bold to appeal to you for help in the great task of getting rid of that evil. In this Presidency, I find it an uphill task, as the so-called educated men and even some of the most prominent Congressmen oppose my reform measures and defend that infamous institution.

"My *Devadasi* Bill, which has now become an Act, deals only with the *Inam*-holding *devadasis*, but there is a section of that community which practise dedication under the cloak of religion simply to make a living out of prostitution. This is nothing but traffic in children; because children are even bought and adopted (adoption by *devadasi* is allowed by our Hindu Law), and at an age when they are innocent and cannot judge or act for themselves, are led into this abominable life from which they rarely escape. I have had many memorials and petitions from the enlightened section of that community asking me to bring about legislation to punish such wicked people who trade upon the children's souls and bodies.

"The Penal Code Sections 372 and 373 have proved ineffective. Hence, I have given notice of another Bill for the success of which I want your blessings. Some may argue that legislation is no good so long as the people do not realize the evil in that custom; but my contention is that a good section of our people perceive the injustice. Now I myself feel that I could rescue many of these girls if I had some legal power to take away children from such criminal parents.

"Among the *devadasi* community itself there is a great awakening, and they have been doing propaganda on a large scale, but I am pained to observe that the high-caste people do not help them in that community's efforts to reform themselves. And further, our laws for the protection of children are almost nil in this Presidency compared with the protection that exists for the children of other countries and even the children of other provinces such as Bombay and Bengal.

"We know that in the advanced countries, health and moral reform always preceded the formation of public opinion in their favour as they were themselves educative factors. In this Presidency, we cannot blame the Government so much as the high-caste people who do not sufficiently realize that all children, irrespective of caste or creed, need our care and sympathy, and in

this matter of rescuing innocent children from the prospect of a dreadful life, they should rise above their communal and caste prejudices."

I heartily endorse the writer's proposal. Indeed I do not think that the proposed legislation will be in advance of public opinion. The whole of the enlightened public opinion that is vocal is against the retention of the system in any shape or form. The opinion of the parties concerned in the immoral traffic cannot count, just as the opinion of keepers of opium dens will not count in favour of their retention, if public opinion is otherwise against them. The *devadasi* system is a blot upon those who countenance it. It would have died long ago but for the supineness of the public. Public conscience in this country somehow or other lies dormant. It often feels the awfulness of many a wrong, but is too indifferent or too lazy to move. But if some active spirit like Dr. Reddi moves, that conscience is prepared to lend such support as indifference can summon up. I am therefore of opinion that Dr. Reddi's proposal is in no way premature. Such legislation might well have been brought earlier. In any case I hope that she will receive the hearty support of all lovers of purity in religious and general social life.

*Young India*, 29-8-'29

## POSITION OF WOMEN

I do not need to be a girl to be wild over man's atrocities towards woman. I count the law of inheritance among the least in the list. The Sarda Bill deals with an evil far greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. But I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. As women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.

But to remove legal inequalities will be a mere palliative. The root of the evil lies much deeper than most people realize. It lies in man's greed of power and fame and deeper still in mutual lust. Man has always desired power. Ownership of property gives this power. Man hankers also after posthumous fame based on power. This cannot be had, if property is progressively cut up in pieces as it must be if all the posterity become equal co-sharers. Hence the descent of property for the most part on the eldest male issue. Most women are married. And they are co-sharers, in spite of the law being against them, in their husband's power and privileges. They delight in being ladies this and what not simply for the fact of being the wives of particular lords. Though therefore they may vote for radical reform in academic discussions over inequalities, when it comes to acting up to their vote, they will be found to be unwilling to part with the privileges.

Whilst therefore I would always advocate the repeal of all legal disqualifications, I should have the enlightened women of India to deal with the root cause. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent to public life should therefore result in purifying it, in

restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property. Let them know that millions of men have no property to transmit to posterity. Let us learn from them that it is better for the few to have no ancestral property at all. The real property that a parent can transmit to all equally is his or her character and educational facilities. Parents should seek to make their sons and daughters self-reliant, well able to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of their brow. The upbringing of minor children will then naturally devolve upon the major descendants. Much of the present imbecility of the children of the wealthy will go, if the latter could but substitute the worthy ambition of educating their children to become independent for the unworthy ambition of making them slaves of ancestral property, which kills enterprise and feeds the passions which accompany idleness and luxury. The privilege of the awakened women should be to spot and eradicate age-long evils.

That mutual lust too has played an important part in bringing about the disqualifications of the fair sex hardly needs any demonstration. Woman has circumvented man in a variety of ways in her unconsciously subtle ways, as man has vainly and equally unconsciously struggled to thwart woman in gaining ascendancy over him. The result is a stalemate. Thus viewed, it is a serious problem the enlightened daughters of *Bharata Mata* are called upon to solve. They may not ape the manner of the West which may be suited to its environment. They must apply methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Theirs must be the strong controlling, purifying, steadying hand, conserving what is best in our culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis, not of amazons and prudes.

*Young India*, 17-10-'29

## WOMAN IN THE SMRITIS

A correspondent sends me an issue of *Indian Swarajya* published at Bezwada. It contains an article on the place of woman in the *Smritis*. From it I copy the following few extracts without any alteration :

The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities (*Manu*, 5-154).

Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty (*Yajnavalkya*, 1-18).

A woman has no separate sacrifice, ritual or fasting. She gains a high place in heaven by serving the husband (*Manu*, 5-145).

She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the husband. She goes to hell. A woman who is after the sacred waters should wash the feet or the whole body of the husband and drink the water ; and she attains the highest place (*Atri*, 136-37).

There is no higher world for the woman than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displease the husband (*Vasishtha*, 21-14).

That woman who prides in her father's family and disobeys the husband should be made by the king a prey to the dogs in the presence of a big assembly of people (*Manu*, 8-371).

None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is to be known as a sensualist (*Angiras*, 69).

If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then, for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away (*Manu*, 10-78).

It is sad to think that the *Smritis* contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race ; sadder still to think that a newspaper published on behalf of orthodoxy should publish such texts as if they were part of religion. Of course there are in the

*Smritis* texts which give woman her due place and regard her with deep veneration. The question arises as to what to do with the *Smritis* that contain texts that are in conflict with other texts in the same *Smritis* and that are repugnant to the moral sense. I have already suggested often enough in these columns that all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word. But every one cannot decide what is good and authentic and what is bad and interpolated. There should therefore be some authoritative body that would revise all that passes under the name of scriptures, expurgate all the texts that have no moral value or are contrary to the fundamentals of religion and morality, and present such an edition for the guidance of Hindus. The certainty that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority need not interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance.

*Harijan*, 28-11-'36

## 237

## ABDUCTED WOMEN

Several thousand Hindu and Sikh girls had been taken away by Muslims. The whereabouts of a few were known, but there were large numbers about whom we knew nothing. When contacted some were reported to have said that they did not wish to return. They were afraid that they would not be accepted back by their society. Their husbands, parents and friends would look down upon them. Gandhiji wanted to say, with all the emphasis at his command, that society should welcome those girls back. Some of them were pregnant. It was no fault of theirs. Their children, when born, should be treated with the same regard and respect as any other children. The religion of these children would be that of the mother. On growing up they were to change it if they wished. If any such girl came to him she would be treated by him as any other girl in his party. To castigate these girls, for having fallen a victim to the lust of some monster, was less than human. No shame attached to them.

*Harijan*, 4-1-'48

# INDEX


*Adhikara*, 291
Adi Shankara, avoids a *chandala*, 23
*Advaitism*, 62-4
Age of consent, legislation to raise, 399
*Ahimsa*, all-conquering, 232, 280; and *goshala*, 237-8; and non-vegetarianism, 241; and vegetarianism, 240; becomes a part of Gandhiji's life, 223; defined, 198-200; impossible if fear is not shed, 232; impossible without utter unselfishness, 252; its breach when no non-violent effort is made to prevent cruelty, 215; its pathway has often to be treaded alone, 217; its votaries made a fetish of, 218; motive is the crucial test in, 227; regarding deer overrunning fields, 238; regarding insect pests, 238; showing new implications, 228; some posers, 233-9; *v. himsa*, 217-21; *v.* utilitarianism, 209. See Non-violence
Ambedkar, Dr., his challenge to Hinduism, 317; his indictment, 317-8; on caste, 357-9; threatened conversion, 353
*Anasakti*, transcends *ahimsa*, 180
Animal sacrifice, 9, 21, 93-6, 235-6
Appeal, by self-purification i.e. by fast, 110
Arjuna, his role in *Mahabharata*, 176
Arya Samaj, change to, by Harijans, 349-50; copied Christianity in planning propaganda, 16; represents militant Hinduism, 269
*Ashrama*, 362-3, 378-81; Hindus' unique contribution, 55; secret of success of Hinduism, 363
Atheism, cannot flourish in India, 285
Atom bomb, compared to *Ramanama*, 132
Attachment, freedom from, is God-realization, 251
Authoritative body, should present a modern edition of *Smriti* for Hindus, 431
*Ayurveda*, gives ample testimony of *Ramanama*, 129
Beef, 96, 308-9; not a national food of the Muslims, 308
*Bhagawata*, 22, 44
Bhishma, delivering discourse from his death-bed, 172
Birth-control, by artificial means must result in imbecility and nervous prostration, 142; with self-control, 142
Blazer, Dr., killing his imbecile daughter, 207
Blowing, used in milking cows, 300
Boycott, social, 184-6; is unpardonable violence, 185
Bradlaugh, his atheism, 67, 122
*Brahmacharya*, 137, 251-4; its protecting walls, 146; means control of all senses 253; rules for, 146-7; steps to, 143-4
*Brahmanas*, 364; calling themselves a minority, 394-5; exhibiting *Brahma* in one's life, 393; not acting according to *shastras* are not *brahmanas*, 393; rose against corruption and purged society, 391; trying to protect Hinduism, 390
*Brahmana*–non-*Brahmana*, 289-95
*Brahmanical* spirit, 337
*Brahmanism*, 392; culmination of other *varnas*, 370; synonymous with Hinduism, 372; unadulterated wisdom, 391; virgin widowhood is undiluted animalism in, 413

British Courts, in India had recognized untouchability, 324
Buddha, broadened base of Hinduism, 271; followed by Hindus who were saturated with *Vedic* law, 270; his essential teachings form an integral part of Hinduism, 270; his greatest contribution is regard for all life, 272; insisted upon the law of cause and effect, 273; reinstated God in the right place, 272
Buddhism, found its full fruition in India, 270; has not gone out of India, 371
Bullock, necessary for handicraft civilization, 310; part of our life and civilization, 310; its torture, 214-5

Carnal desire, its control difficult without control of palate, 139
Caste, best possible adjustment, social stability and progress, 322; does not base itself on wealth, 322; does not connote superiority or inferiority, 323; drag upon Hindu progress, 364; extension of the principle of family, 322; no part of Hinduism, 351; *v.* class, 322-4
Caste-Hindus, have to open temples to Harijans, 326; responsible for the present condition of the Harijans, 328; should become Harijans, 347
Cattle-breeding, 312
Ceremonies, old, must be given new forms, 30
Change, of life is not change of religion, 259
*Charkha*, added lustre to one's own religion, 383; is presented to all Indians irrespective of religion, 383
Chastity, 229; not a hothouse growth, 424
Child marriage, 21; should be declared null and void, 407
Child widows, 411-3; should be married, 396-7
Child wives, 412
Christian civilization, still groaping for its great secret, 363
Christian Missions, flirting with Harijans in Travancore, 335; their attitude to Hinduism, 262
Christianity, describes a duel between God and Satan within man, 121; militant or muscular, 74
Civilization, consists in voluntary reduction of wants, 255; handicraft, and bullocks, 310
Clinging to life, in all circumstances is *himsa* and height of selfishness, 230-1
Collegians, from U. P. eager to marry lavishly, 417
Communism, in the first verse of *Ishopanishad*, 388
Communists, philosophical, their cravings, 47
Consciousness, of living presence of God is first requisite of non-violence, 190
Conversion, error and greatest impediment to peace, 261; its threats, 353; of Englishmen or driving them out of India, 188
Cousins, Margaret E., 398
Cow, ceasing to give milk should be put to the plough, 302; has become the cheapest for slaughter, 307; how to save her? 312-3; killing, practised in Gujarat, 300
Cow-protection, 9, 297-313; and Muslims, 305-7; by Muslim friendship only, 305; by *tapasya* and self-purification, 298; central fact of Hinduism, 297; gift of Hinduism to the world, 298; not by killing human beings, 298; not purely out of selfishness, 304
Cow-slaughter, on behalf of Englishmen, 306; should be made economically impossible, 307
Cow-worship, 55; unique contribution of Hinduism, 6

Cowardice, comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes, 120; greatest vice and violence, 120
Cure, with the aid of the elementals, 131
Customs, vicious, though justified in *Ramayana*, should be rejected, 154
*Darshan*, of idol, is encouragement to right doing, 80
Death, its fear is greatest obstacle to realizing true *ahimsa*, 225
Defence, through violence if necessary, 189
Depressed classes, their revolt against prevalent Hinduism, 98
Destruction, of rabid dog is minimum violence, 194; taught man that truth was within him, 249
*Devadasi*, 425-7; Bill, 426-7, is not in advance of public opinion, 427
Diet, powerful factor in formulating character, 192
Discrimination, against female birth is anachronism, 419
Divine grace, 172-3
Draupadi, example of defiant chastity, 424
Duty, of castrating stray dogs, 193; of killing rabid dogs, 193; of taking child's life if no hopeful remedy is found, 203; to meet certain occasions by laying down life, 218
Education, right, including workable knowledge of Sanskrit, 90
Equality of all, 44-5, 47
Eternal verity, summed up in the first verse of *Ishopanishad*, 343
European civilization, its adoption would ruin India, 60
Ezhavas, 343
Faith, becomes self-propagating, 5; living, wideawake consciousness of God within, 117
Family, God-ordained institution, 322
Fast, and coercion, 112-5; and prayer, 102; great weapon in the armoury of Satyagraha, 115; hoary institution, 102; integral part of Gandhiji's life, 112; integral part of Hinduism, 103; intended to influence both caste Hindus and Harijans, 113; its chain would touch hearts of all Hindus, 110, 115-6; its invisible effect far greater than visible one, 110; of Nineveh people, 104; of 1933 meant for purification of all Harijan workers, 110; spiritual, is *tapas*, 114; unto death is not suicide, 104
Feeding, beggars and stray dogs is sin, 197
Gandhiji, accepts all names connoting one formless God, 134; acknowledges Muhammad as one of the Prophets, 279; advises *brahmana* youths to marry out of caste, 412; advises patience to untouchables for converting orthodox Hindus, 321; against animal sacrifice, 33; and Ahmedabad Humanitarian League, 193-4; and the *Statesman*, 174-6; answers Jain questions, 229-32; appeals to impure people to leave Harijan work, 107; as an orthodox Hindu, 32; asks students to marry only girl-widows, 411; aspires to see through the removal of untouchability a complete regeneration of humanity, 392; begins crusade against untouchability in 1915, 347; begins fast as an instrument of reform in 1913, 114; believes all men are born equal, 360; believes himself saturated with *ahimsa*, 195; believes India has a mission for the world, 184; believes in rebirth and transmigration as facts, 139, 415; believes in the institution of *gurus*, 8; believes in *Varnashrama Dharma*, 360; believes snakes and tigers are God's answers to man's wicked thoughts, 213; believes that chain of fasts would touch

hearts of all Hindus, 110; believes that sins committed by a nation react upon it physically, 411; both an idol-worshipper and idol-breaker, 73, 243; called a Christian in disguise, 187; calls *Gita* his spiritual dictionary, 182; claims to be full with the spirit of India undefiled, 412; claims to have applied eternal truths in life, 3; claims to have understood spirit of Hinduism, 314; claims to hear God's voice, 105-8; claims to represent *Sanatana* Hindu *Dharma*, 331; defines removal of untouchability, 321; defines *Sanatana* Hinduism, 7-10; derives *Varna Dharma* from *Gita*, 369; develops chain of purificatory fasts, 115; discovers he has not adequate detachment, 172; discovers non-violence in his pursuit of Truth, 3; does not believe in State religion, 294; does not envisage wife following independent avocation, 386; does not find in *Shankarasmriti* passages closing roads to *avarna* Hindus, 342; does not share Dr. Ambedkar's opinion regarding caste, 358; does not subscribe to prohibition of *shudras* to learn *Vedas*, 10; does not want to leave any sect after him, 3; encourages others to study more their and others' faiths, 258; explains Inner Voice, 105-8; favours retention of old Sanskrit *mantras*, 119; feels that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect *ahimsa*, 164; finds Hindu scriptures satisfy needs of the soul, 267; finds it difficult to efface past *sanskaras*, 139; finds it impossible to reconcile to idea of conversion, 261; freely associates with meat-eaters, 191; Harijan by choice, 352; has no feeling to save animals who hurt men, 242; has not controlled thought at all stages, 138; his claim to Hinduism is rejected, 187; his conviction that even venomous creatures may not be killed, 151; his fast for Harijans is purely religious, 107; his national service part of his spiritual training, 14; his regard for others' scriptures consistent with his claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, 267; his religion has no geographical limits, 184; his spiritual food, 11; in favour of using cows for draught purposes, 302; invites Dr. Ambedkar to join Harijan movement, 359; is by instinct truthful but not non-violent, 3; learnt a great deal from the West, 204; on *brahmacharya*, 173; on chief value of Hinduism, 39-40; on Danish law regarding killing, 210; on Dayanand Saraswati, 15; on faith, 117; on *Gita*, 178-80, 288; on Hindus and Hinduism, 257; on his mission, 14; on *Ishopanishad*, 41-8; on Krishna's life, 157-8; on Malaviyaji, 295-6; on *Manusmriti*, 369-70; on model temple, 87-8; on prayer, 116-26; on Shraddhanandji, 15; on social boycott, 184-6; on *upanayana*, 91-2; on why he is a Hindu, 5-6; opines sins of touch and sight have no place in *Vedas*, 316; opposed to State aid to religious bodies, 294; pleads for true understanding of mutual religions, 282; pleads inability to guide in *himsa*, 238; puts a logical interpretation on *Gita*, 177; puts 20 as marriage age for girls, 412; quotes his experience of 40 years regarding prayer, 121; realized potency of *Ramanama* in Uruli-Kanchan, 149; recognized truth by the name of Rama, 81; refrains from visiting temples not open

to Harijans, 71; says he is an *advaitist* and also *anekantavadi* or *syadvadi*, 62; staunch vegetarian and food-reformer, 190; suggests schools for training priests, 92, 339; tries to establish a chain of fasts, 110; tries to live Hinduism as interpreted in *Gita*, 176; uncompromising regarding women's rights, 428; welcomes institution of civil marriage, 419; would not be sorry if *varna* goes in the removal of untouchability, 371; would not feed ants, monkeys or dogs, 242; would not touch temples till animal sacrifices are stopped, 95; would restore spiritual culture for self-defence, 18

Gandhism, no such sect as, 3

Gangaram, Sir, 396-7

*Gayatri*, 11, 41; its *japa* becomes potent, 102

Girl, under 18 should never be married, 399; widowed at a ripe age is free to choose whether to remarry or not, 409

*Gita*, accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative, 36, 288; and action, 161-2; and non-violence, 150-6, 178-80; and war, 163; book of universal religion, 293; canons of its interpretation, 151; has never failed to comfort Gandhiji, 165; its appeal is universal, 182; its central teaching is *anasakti*, 180; its ideal of equality between a *brahmana* and a *bhangi*, 315-6; its message, 158-65, 182; its reciters, 170-1; its teaching is peace at the price of life, 178; *Jayanti*, 181-2; *Kamadhenu* to Gandhiji, 41; not a theoretical treatise but a living guide, 176-7; satisfies socialist, communist, philosopher and economist, 42; shows way to *ahimsa* out of *himsa*, 156; teaching cannot be made compulsory for even Hindus, 293

*Grihasthashrama*, dominant among all *ashramas*, 366; its duties, 378

Guruvayur Temple, 330-2

Hand-weaving, as a bread-winning occupation, 385

Harijan, best name for untouchable, 348; movement led by *brahmanas*, 391; reform should not follow but precede *Swaraj*, 319; Sevak Sangh, 334, 354; workers, their majority are *brahmanas*, 392

Harijans, how to fraternize with, 319; must not use threats, 355; shall enter temples subject to the same conditions as other Hindus, 329; should be free to give up Hinduism, 354; should be invited to State functions, 339; should be lifted up economically, 339; should not seek material betterment under threat of conversion, 355; their reconversions, 356; their wonderful loyalty to Hinduism, 354

High-and-lowness, 329, 344, 348; corroding Hinduism, 358

*Himsa*, all life in flesh exists by, 220; defined, 198-200, 220

Hindu, boy must have a workable knowledge of Sanskrit, 286; culture has erred on the excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, 421; *pani* and Muslim *pani*, 276-7; States, may not prohibit cow-slaughter, 307, must follow Travancore in temple entry, 336

Hindus, in thousands doing penance for removal of untouchability, 353; non-violent essentially, 17; organizing for self-protection, 19; ought to have been least affected by idea of death, 224; will be judged by their ability to protect the cow, 298

Hinduism, and Buddhism, 33; and obscenity, 27; and other religions are being weighed in balance, 22; as practised today

has not condemned war as Gandhiji, 177; assimilated best of Buddhism, 33; bound to perish if untouchability is not removed, 330; created a band of reformers, 100; does not allow to kill a fellowman even to save a cow, 305; does not basically believe in caste, 387; does not permit drink, 36; enables to assimilate good of other religions, 6; excludes all exploitation, 40; gives shelter to Christians, 177; gives shelter to Christians, Jews and Parsees, 257; has devised a system of relief to the poor, 100; has no proselytism, 16; has room for Jesus, Muhammad, Zoroaster and Moses, 261; insists on brotherhood of all that lives, 38; is ever-growing, 20-2, 177; its contributions, 54-5; its conversion movement, 16-7; its creed is search after Truth through non-violence, 4; its theory of incarnation, 81; lays down four *ashramas*, 378; leaves individual free for self-realization, 406; loses universal appeal if it closes temples to Harijans, 85; made marvellous discoveries in religion, spirit and soul, 54; most tolerant, 4, 5, 257, 278; not a matter of outward observances, 13; not a missionary religion, 9; on unity of all life, 39; reasons of its survival, 54; reduced *varnashrama* to science, 374; regards husband and wife as equal, 406; sets apart a class for exclusive pursuit of divine knowledge, 391; through, nationhood, 56; will not perish by mass conversions, 355; will perish by denying justice to Harijans, 355; would commit suicide if it thinks of eradicating other religions, 268; would not hold Gandhiji if found untouchability is supported by scriptures, 345

Humanity, and beggary, 196

Hunger strike, against opening of Vithoba temple to Harijans, 341

Husband, and wife as equal, 406; professing and clinging to their respective religions, 418

Hydrophobia, 202

Ideal, its virtue consists in its boundlessness, 240

Identity, with dumb creation is unique contribution of Hinduism, 54

Idolatry, in form of fanaticism, 73

Idol-worship, 8; plays important part in the uplift of human race, 73

India, has a soul that can defy the physical combination of a whole world, 184; her special mission is to resist materialism, 54; imbibed most of spirit of Buddha, 371; in deadly coil of mercantile cobra, 384; mother of Religion or religions, 261; sound at the foundation, 57

Indian civilization, 57-60

Indian culture, neither Hindu nor Islamic nor any other but a fusion of all, 60

Indian villages, compare favourably with any villages of any country, 100

Indians, content with a lofty ideal and are lazy in its practice, 203; of whatever religion are of the same soil, 279

Indulgence, has no place in life, 51

Intention, chief ingredient of moral conduct, 113

Inter-dining, 373; and inter-marriage, their prohibition essential for rapid evolution of soul, 375

Interpretation, of the scriptures conflicting with Truth is not right, 153

Irreducible minimum, of the communal demands, 274

Irreligion, to sanction a brutal custom of child marriage, 398

Islam, 60, 121, 275

Islamic civilization, groping for its great secret, 363

Iyer, Ranga, his anti-untouchability bills, 325
Jain *ahimsa*, 227-32
Jainism, 201, 206, 227
Janaka, King, 243
*Kanyadana*, mystic, religious rite with a spiritual significance, 407
Kashi Vishwavidyalaya, must reflect true Hindu *Dharma*, 295
Kasturba, her attitude towards 'untouchable' child adopted by Gandhiji, 321
Killing, of an ailing calf at the Sabarmati Ashram, 215-21
Koran, 7, 37, 277
Krishna, 19; of *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified, 159; speaks in *Gita* of a spiritual fight, 179
Kurukshetra, is our body, 170
Lawyer, his profession was honorary in Cicero's time, 367
Legislation, regarding temple-entry is permissive and corrective, 327
Life, all, is equal and one, 364
Living, spiritual life is best advertisement, 182; up to 125, 48
Loin-cloth, 59-60
*Mahabharata*, 19-20, 36; describes eternal duel between forces of light and darkness, 178; has shown the futility of war, 174; history of spiritual fight of man, 175, 179; religious work, 168
*Mahajan*, may undertake organizing beggars, 196
Malaviyaji, his greatest creation is Kashi Vishwavidyalaya, 295
Man, his greed of power and fame is root of woman's disqualifications, 428; inherits characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, 361; must follow profession of his father, 367; will befriend lower animals when he knows himself better, 197
Manifest, and unmanifest, their worshippers, 166
Mankind, its thirst for symbolism, 243
*Mantra*, will light one's life, 141
Manu, his code, 3
Marriage, intercommunal, 418-9; like birth is a fall, 375; must not be before 15 in case of girls, 397; must take place several years after monthly periods begin, 398; symplifying of, 417-8
*Maryada Dharma*, 320
Minority, its rights, 332-3; should have special hours for worship in temples free from intrusion of Harijans, 333
Mirabai (Madeleine Slade), not embraced Hinduism, 258
Missionary institutions, having non-Christian aid, 101
Missionary work, compared with service by temples and *muths*, 97
*Modern Review*, on Gandhiji's fast, 111-5
Money, disruptive force in the world, 322; taken must be returned in form of service, 98
Monkey question, 219-21, 242
Mortification of flesh, condition of spiritual progress, 103
Music, before mosques, 273-4
Mussulman, has as a class developed into a bully, 17; should have full freedom to slaughter cows, 308
*Muths*, their heads, 97
Mutual lust, root of woman's disqualifications, 428
Nationality, which is in India unknown in any other part of the world, 56
Nature Cure, and *Ramanama*, 129
New Testament, gives solace to Gandhiji, 37; its reading in Gujarat National College, 266
*Nirvana*, utter extinction of the base in us, 272
Non-co-operation, movement, highly religious, 185; with mind in its evil wanderings, 253

Non-Hindus, their sufferings on behalf of 'untouchables' would leave Hindus unmoved, 319
Non-possession, or poverty, 254-6
Non-violence, end of all religions, 187; goodwill towards all life, 186; in India dictates man to die for lower animals, 209; in West stops at man, 208; its practice in India reduced to a science, 243; law of our species, 183; matured fruit of Truth, 153; means conscious suffering, 183; root of Hinduism, 184
Non-violent person, his duties, 186-7
Obstructive demonstrations, in Gandhiji's tour, 330-1
Occupations, for self-advancement lead to confusion of *varnas*, 376
*Padmanabhadasa*, applied to the Maharajas of Travancore, 340
Palate, its control necessary for *brahmacharya*, 254
Parents, get reconciled with resolute children, 416; idea of respecting their memory should not be given up, 30
Paris, actress killing her lover, 207
Penance, vicarious, 116
Persuasion *v.* compulsion, 327
*Pinjrapoles*, 298, 301, 312; and *goshalas*, proof of our spiritual inertia, 219
Politics, bereft of religion is a death-trap, 14
Pollution distance, 364
Polyandry, 21
Poverty, its dignity, 52-3
Prayer, 116-8; inward communion with God, 123; its efficacy can be realized only after illimitable patience, 121; man of, is at peace with all, 124; most potent for overcoming cowardice, 120; necessary spiritual discipline, 125; without fast is incomplete, 109; yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, 118
Priest, ideal, 86
Proclamation, of Travancore, 45; must be backed up by State action, 337
Proselytization, Hinduism is free from, 55; means no peace in the world, 260
Prostitution, 9, 34
*Purdah*, 423-4; retained because not being manfully resisted, 423
Purification of mind, an inward process, 316; and devotional mind necessary for proper understanding of religious books, 292
Rajachandra, 205
Rama, his victory over Ravana due to faith and purity, 189; perfect being of Gandhiji's conception, 9
*Ramanama*, 37; alchemy that transforms body, 131; and *ayurveda*, 129; and *jantar mantar*, 132; cannot be a substitute for national service, 404; contains all power attributed to it, 128; far superior to atom bomb, 132; gives detachment and ballast, 404; golden means to attain *brahmacharya*, 149; infallible remedy, 129-30; in Nature Cure, 129; more potent than Rama, 134; must become as natural as heart-beat, 128
*Ramayana*, of Tulsidas, 24-5, 37, 153; of Valmiki, 36, 178
Reddi, Dr. Muthulakshmi, 426-7
Reformers, must insist on full justice being done to Harijans, 354; never discarded temples, 84
Religion, can be defended by *tapashcharya*, 330; compared to marriage tie, 350; does not teach to kill neighbours, 244; has source from God within, 343; is service of the helpless, 11, 17; its change would not help Harijans, 349; its quintessence is to befriend one who regards himself as your enemy, 280; must rule even worldly pursuits, 163; not a matter of

barter, 353; teaches how to overcome evil by good, 120
Religions, all, have common fundamentals, 282; as many as minds, 294; of the world must be studied as a sacred duty, 267
Religious education, 285
Religious equality, 259-65; lies in each being best for its respective adherents, 265; of Harijans would bring economic and political betterment, 326
Religious ideal, its value is in the fact that it cannot be completely realized in flesh, 239
Religious neutrality, ought not to mean religious stagnation and hindrance to reform, 326
Renunciation, means detachment from action, 160, 162, 232; of flesh essential for realizing Truth, 153; secret of happy life, 48, 51
Restraint, law of life, 380; *v.* retaliation, 186
Rich people, should lead the way in simplifying marriage, 418; should take initiative in dispossession of wealth, 255
***Rishis***, discovered law of non-violence, 183; laboured in forests, 384
Roads, leading to temples were barred against *avarna* Hindus, 342
Sacred name, its utterance is enough to ensure benediction of God, 91
Sacred thread, symbol of consecration, 356
Sacrifice, 49, 164, 178; of baser self, 178; killing for, is *himsa*, 194; undergoes a process of evolution, 228
*Sannyasa*, 164
Sanskrit, its knowledge necessary for every Hindu boy or girl, 286; study should be encouraged, 36
*Satya*, only correct and significant name of God, 247
Satyagraha, designed as an effective substitute for violence, 115
*Satyarthaprakash*, 15
*Savarna* Hindus, 343, 354
Self-purification, comes by fast and prayer, 106
Self-realization, impossible without service and identification with the poorest, 404
Service, 47, 50; becomes staff of life, 255
*Shastras*, are ever-growing, 20; have no authority in them for untouchability, 286; measured by truth, 24; on necessity of a *guru*, 153; on *shudras*, 152
Sheppard, Canon, 174, 176-7
*Shraddha*, 29-30
*Shuddhi* movement, 16, 356; with *Ramanama*, 356
*Smritis*, and *Puranas* produced in response to the want of those times, 342
Social service, cannot be denied, 185
Society, should welcome abducted women back, 423
Sons and daughters on footing of perfect equality, 428
Spinning, 117, 157, 385
Spirits, communication with, 28
State, may undertake organizing beggars, 196; schools can give ethical teaching, 294
*Statesman*, the, 174-5
*Sthitaprajna*, verses, key to *Gita* interpretation, 152
Superstitions, 47
*Tabligh* movement, 16
Temple entry, 72, 80, 324-7; and depressed classes, 97-101; message of freedom to Harijans, 327; resolution, 324
Temple, going for purification of soul, 81; model, 86-8; of Gandhiji is gross idolatry, 77; of Kali, 95; priest, 94-5; reform, 72, 85-9, 95-6; worship, 71-3, 80-2, 89
Temples, bridges between Unseen and ourselves, 71; have ceased to be repositories of Hinduism,

338; integral part of Hinduism, 72; must be opened to Harijans on the same terms as caste Hindus, 334
Terrorist, quotes *Gita* in defence, 174
Thieves, as kith and kin, 250
Thought, surcharged with correct conduct, more powerful than mightiest dynamo, 87
Touch, drink, food and marriage are progressively private affairs, 323
Tradition, its uprooting brings impurity in life, 290
Transmigration, 6; Hinduism's contribution, 55
Travancore, 268; its proclamation on temple entry, 335
Tree-worship, symbolizes true reverance for entire vegetable kingdom, 78
Truth, impossible without *ahimsa*, 251; is God, 66-8; way of its realization, 248
Tulsidas, 24-6
Unanimity, should be secured for temple-entry by Harijans, 334
Untouchability, 9, 10, 40; and intermarriage and interdining, 320-2; as practised today has no warrant in *shastras*, 332, 345; blot on Hinduism, 326; excrescence upon *varnashrama*, 364; has invaded every form of society, 346; hatefulest expression of caste, 34; its liquidation cannot be attained by conversion, 352; its removal higher than social or economic reform, 110; its removal would influence the whole world, 344; its removal would purify caste system, 359; not a part of Hinduism, 314
Untouchable, denied fruits of social life, 324; man to man is not inferior to touchable, 286
*Upanayana*, 91-2
Uruli-Kanchan, where Gandhiji realized potency of *Ramanama*, 149
*Vaishya*, dominant *varna* today, 366
*Varna*, defined, 362, 365; *dharma*, 34, 359; does not connote rights but duties, 387; enabled Hindus to achieve in spiritual field what no nation could, 365; is class, not caste, 351; its revival means true democracy, 382; law of conservation of energy, 388; law of heredity, 365; law of life, universally governing human life, 362, 379; necessary for Christianity and Islam, 363; of *shudra* alone exists at present, 386; *v.* caste, 34
*Varnas*, compared to four members of the body, 381; had no watertight compartments in ancient times, 380, 384
*Varnasankara*, 382-5
*Varnashrama*, 362-4; and interdining, 374-6; as practised today is a monstrous parody, 361
*Varnashrama Dharma*, 55, 361, 389-90; law which cannot be abrogated, 361; magnificent result of search of Truth, 6; obviates economic competition, 376-7; satisfies religious, social and economic needs, 376
*Vedas*, 7, 11, 15, 21
Vegetarian, has no right to impose his cult, 242
Vegetarianism, its practice best way to spread it, 242; priceless gift of Hinduism, 190-2
Vinoba, 145, 182, 384
Violence, lowered India's morale, 191
Virtues, cardinal and casual, 21
*Vishnusahasranama*, 39
Vithoba temple, opened for Harijans, 341
Vows, 246
Vyasa, proved futility of war in *Mahabharata*, 154, 158
Widow, in Hinduism has sacred odour, 411

Widowhood, enforced, 396-7
Widows and widowers, 410
Wife, has an independent right to take her course for a nobler purpose, 405
Woman, has circumvented man in a variety of ways, 429; should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man, 428; Women, abducted, 432; in *Smritis*, 430-1
Worship, blind, of authority, is a sign of mental weakness, 191; mute, brings an unfailing answer, 81
Yajna, 49-50; see Sacrifice
*Yamas*, 291; and *niyamas*, 152
Yeravda Pact, 327
Yudhishthira, had to suffer for untruth, 23
Zorostrianism, 121

GRAMASEVAKS TRAINING CENTRE
27 SEP 1955