

HARIJAN

Editor: PYARELAL

VOL. XI, No. 2

AHMEDABAD — SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1947

TWO ANNAS

A WOMAN'S DILEMMA

(By M. K. Gandhi)

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

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

In India since my return from South Africa, there has been conscious and constant training in non-violence with the result we have seen.

Q. Can a woman be advised to take her own life rather than surrender?

A. This question requires a definite answer. I answered it in Delhi just before leaving for Noakhali. A woman would most certainly take her own life rather than surrender. In other words, surrender has no room in my plan of life. But I was asked in what way to take one's own life. I promptly said it was not for me to prescribe the means and behind the approval of suicide under such circumstances was and is the belief that one whose mind is prepared for even suicide will have requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant will be

disarmed. I could not carry the argument any further because it does not admit of further development. It requires positive proof which, I own, is lacking.

Q. If the choice is between taking one's own life or that of the assailant, which would you advise?

A. When it is a question of choice between killing oneself or the assailant, I have no doubt in my mind that the first should be the choice.

Palla, 27-1-'47

SELF-HELP TO AVOID FOOD CRISIS

Representatives of the Krishak Samiti, Hashnabad Peoples' Relief Committee met Gandhiji on January 24th at Murayam and informed him about the way in which Hindus and Muslims of Hashnabad raised a volunteer corps of about twelve hundred strong to defend the area from an onslaught of communal riots.

Gandhiji remarked, "I have heard of Hashnabad sometime ago as the bright spot of Hindu-Muslim unity during the riot period."

The interviewers then told him of a food crisis developing in this area and asked him if he would say something about it in his speeches so as to draw the attention of the Bengal Government.

Gandhiji replied, "Though I am not saying anything about the coming food crisis, I am aware of the situation. I am trying to solve it in my own way. I do not see why the people should depend upon Government or other agencies for help. We hear nowadays people trying to secure foodstuffs from foreign countries. As a matter of fact if people will help themselves, then Government is bound to move and this is what I will call real democracy, which is built up from below. Bengal possesses rich lands. They can produce edible roots. But again it is difficult to induce people to revise their tastes and old habits. Look at these cocoanut trees. Cocoanut makes a good nutritious food. I am trying to accustom myself to it. Of course, I extract the oil from it and the remaining portion as you know, contains good protein. Then take the many kinds of roots in the soil of Bengal which belong to the potato tribe and these can be used as good food. Then again, you have abundance of fish. Fish, cocoanuts and these roots can easily take the place of rice." Incidentally Gandhiji mentioned the general supineness of the people. As an instance he mentioned the water hyacinth which, if the people *en masse* volunteered their services for a week without any aid from Government, they could get rid of within a week's time, causing a saving of thousands of rupees.

Gandhiji was asked his opinion about the *Tebhaga* Movement in Bengal. Gandhiji confessed his

ignorance about the movement and asked for a note on the subject which the questioners have undertaken to supply.

Gandhiji was asked, "Can we not build up Hindu-Muslim unity through a concrete political programme?"

Gandhiji replied, "Probably you can. But I have got my own ways. I think if people help themselves, then politics will take care of themselves."

Q. "This *Tebhaga* Movement of the Bengal Kisans expects blessings from you."

Gandhiji: "Yes, yes, all good movements have my blessings."

SHRIRAMPUR DIARY

[Up till now we were giving extracts from Gandhiji's after-prayer speeches from press reports, but Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, who is accompanying Gandhiji in his village to village tour, is now sending us corrected versions of his prayer speeches, so the reader will henceforth get authenticated versions. —Mg. Ed.]

Before proceeding with the diary we give below some extracts from his former speeches left out.

A question was put to Gandhiji at Narayanpur on the 15th January: Why cannot the apostle of non-violence, the modern Buddha stop internecine war and blood-bath in the country?

Gandhiji replying to this question, acquitted himself from the charge of being the modern Buddha. He was and claimed to be a simple man having extensive experience at his back, but on that account claimed to be no better than any member of the audience. He was an equal servant of both the communities or all the communities of India. He wished he had the power to stop 'internecine war' and consequent 'blood-bath'. Buddha or the prophets that followed him had gone the way they went in order to stop wars. The fact that he could not do so was proof positive that he had no superior power at his back. It was true that he swore by non-violence and so he had come to Noakhali in order to test the power of his non-violence. As he had repeatedly said ever since his arrival in Bengal, he had no desire to leave Bengal unless both the communities showed by their action that they were like blood-brothers living together in perfect peace and amity.

Gandhiji also dealt with a question that was raised by the Muslim friends who had seen him before the prayer meeting. They had asked him how he expected friendly relations between the two communities when the Hindus agitated for the arrest and trial of those who were guilty of murders, arson and loot during the disturbances. The speaker confessed that he did not like these complaints. But he sympathized with the complainants so long as the wrong-doers avoided arrest and trial and so long as Muslim opinion in Noakhali did not insist upon guilty parties disclosing themselves. He would be glad to see Muslim opinion working actively to bring the offenders not before the courts of justice but before the court of public opinion. Let the offenders show contrition and let them return the looted property. Let them

also show to those against whom offences were committed that they need fear no molestation, that the days of frenzy were over. Muslim public opinion should be such as to guarantee that miscreants would not dare to offend against any individual and only then Hindus could be asked to return safely to their villages. The speaker was sure that such purging before the court of public opinion was infinitely superior to a trial before a court of law. What was wanted was not vengeance but reformation.

At Parkot, on the morning of the 17th Gandhiji had read a speech delivered by the Quaid-e-Azam on the occasion of the foundation ceremony of a Girls' High School by his sister Miss Fatima Jinnah. During the after-prayer speech in the evening, he translated a portion of that speech in which Mr. Jinnah is reported to have said that Muslims should develop a high sense of responsibility, justice and integrity. Wrong was not to be imitated. If after consulting one's conscience one felt that a contemplated action was wrong, one should never do it irrespective of any consideration or influence. If people acted up to this rule, no one would be able to prevent them from attaining Pakistan. Commenting upon this, Gandhiji said that as there was no question of force here and if Pakistan was going to be established by sterling qualities of character, everybody would welcome such a State, no matter by what name it was called.

Gandhiji added that they ought to remember Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah's advice and act upto it; for it was an advice confined not to any particular community but was of universal significance. The qualities which he had advised people to develop were not combativeness but a sense of justice and truth; and this implied that whenever justice was at stake, people ought to appeal to reason instead of taking recourse to barbarous methods of settling disputes whether private or public.

19-1-'47

It was Gandhiji's day of silence; so he wrote out the following on a few slips of paper:

"Whatever I have been trying to say in these days, is contained in the sayings of the Prophet. The following passages are therefore culled for our benefit:

No man is a true believer unless he desireth for his brother that which he desireth for himself.

He who neither worketh for himself nor for others will not receive the reward of God.

He is not of me, but a rebel at heart who when he speaketh, speaketh falsely, who when he promiseth, breaketh his promises and who when trust is reposed in him, faileth in his trust.

Muslims are those who perform their trust and fail not in their word and keep their pledge.

Whoever is kind to His creatures, God is kind to him.

A perfect Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands mankind is safe.

The worst of men is a bad learned man and a good learned man is the best.

When a man committeth adultery *iman* leaveth him.

He is not a Momin who committeth adultery or stealeth, or who driaketh liquor or who plundereth or who embezzleth; beware, beware.

The most excellent *jehad* is that for the conquest of self.

Assist any person oppressed, whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

The manner in which my followers become eunuchs is by fasting and abstinence.

Women are the twin halves of men.

Learned are those who practise what they know.

The most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman.

• Give your wife good counsel; if she has goodness in her, she will soon take it; leave off idle thinking and do not beat your noble wife like a slave.

21-1-'47

Gandhiji explained the reasons which actuated the twenty-five days' fast of Bibi Amtul Salam and the reasons which actuated its end. The fast was broken at 9-30 last evening after the recital of the *Al Fateha* in a powerful and melodious voice by a Muslim gentleman who happened to be in the meeting. Many Muslim friends including Abdulla Saheb and his lieutenants exerted themselves during the day to find out how the fast would be ended while Gandhiji was present in Sirandi. It was common cause that the *khada* for which the fast was said to have been undertaken could not, in spite of strenuous and honest effort by many persons, be traced. And if Amtul Salam Behn persisted in wanting the production of the *khada*, she must die. But Gandhiji had explained to her that that could not be the real object of the fast; it must be a symbol of something behind it. Gandhiji then said that the lady's whole life was devoted to a heart unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Therefore if there was a real prospect of such unity at least within the area where she was working, there was every prospect of the fast being ended. After full and complete deliberation a document was signed laying down the principle that to each one his religion was equally dear with any other person's and that therefore different religions were to be mutually respected. To this end the signatories pledged themselves. Naturally any wilful breach of the promise would implicate the speaker in the pact. On the document being interpreted to Amtul Salam Behn, the lady broke the fast as said before.

Gandhiji assured the signatories that he would help to the best of his ability in the matter of preserving the just rights of each community even as he expected them actively to implement their promise.

22-1-'47

The gathering at Paniala in the evening of the 22nd instant was not only orderly but of the largest size so far encountered by Gandhiji in the course of his tour from village to village. There were no less than five thousand people. A few weeks ago the villagers had celebrated an inter-communal dinner in which the Hindus including the so-called

untouchables and the Musalmans had participated. Gandhiji had originally desired to attend that celebration but it had not been possible on account of inaccessibility. He was happy, therefore, that after all he had been able to visit the village of Paniala. But that was not enough; he would feel happier still if the Hindus and the Musalmans succeeded in establishing unity and friendship among themselves.

Amtul Salam had undertaken her fast, as they all knew, with the same object. And the assurance that the villagers in her neighbourhood had given to her should go a long way in healing the wound which tore the face of Bengal.

One problem, continued Gandhiji, which had been recently exercising him was in connection with the families of those who had lost their all in the course of the disturbances. There were many families which had lost their earning members. The survivors had to be looked after; while the children had to be educated and given adequate protection. That undoubtedly was the duty of the Government. Both he and they if they wanted heart-peace should look at the question from a broader standpoint. In his humble opinion, where the wrong was done by some Muslims, reasonable arrangements for the above purpose should be made by the Muslims of the neighbourhood.

Government would only act through force while the common citizen would act through persuasion and agreement. Through the establishment of good human relations, citizens should try to tide over the disasters which might overwhelm the social body. It was not good to depend on an organization based on force like the State for the above purpose.

Gandhiji then referred to two more matters, namely, the duty of volunteers and the rehabilitation of artisans. With regard to the volunteers his advice was that they should never discriminate between one type of duty and another, have no preferences, but should stick to their post even at the cost of their lives. It was the quality of discipline and sacrifice which made small things great in organized action. Then referring to the problem of the artisans, he continued, they ought not to depend upon charity however well-intentioned but on their own resources in order to tide over their present difficulties. In this connection he referred to his view supported by the Scriptures of the world that he, who ate his food without returning its equivalent by means of body-labour was no more than a thief. Permanent peace would come in the world only when the bond of labour shared in common held together different units of the social body.

During prayer meeting at one time rain threatened to break up the meeting. Happily it subsided and the meeting was continued in order to enable Gandhiji to deal with the questions addressed to him by Muslim Leagues in Bengali and English.

The first question was: You said that Muslim majority provinces if they so chose had Pakistan already. What did you mean by this?

Gandhiji replied that he fully meant what he had said. Whilst there was an outside power ruling

(Continued on p. 18)

HARIJAN

February 9

1947

INDIA IN ACCOUNT CURRENT WITH GREAT BRITAIN

A delegation led by Sir Wilfrid Eady, the Second Secretary to the British Treasury and Mr. C. F. Cobbold, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England along with Mr. K. Anderson, head of the Financial Department of the India Office and Mr. P. S. Beale of the Exchange Control Department of the Bank of England are visiting India to have "talks" on India's sterling balances with the representatives of the Government of India and the Reserve Bank. It would, therefore, be interesting to look at the background of the history of the financial obligations between Great Britain and India. It may be mentioned that the sterling balances, which are at present engaging the attention of this delegation, is the resultant balance of various items that have been debited to us since the British occupation, and items placed to our credit, mostly within the last 7 years, in regard to goods supplied by India for the last war. This credit in itself amounts to over Rs. 3,700 crores, of which about 430 crores have been 'set off' against our so-called old public debts and another Rs. 1,700 crores have been debited to India as her share of the cost of this war. Balance at the present time under discussion is about 1600 crores which are presumed to be represented by sterling securities in London.

WAYS OF ACQUIRING "CREDIT"

If an individual wants to take advantage of another man's possessions and casts his eyes greedily on property which does not belong to him, he usually resorts to a number of devices according to the circumstances in which he is placed. (1) The simplest is the "Hold up" method. By merely terrifying the victim, the victim is made to part with his wealth. (2) The next one is "embezzlement" by which a person misappropriates amounts belonging to another which have been given to him for keeping. (3) Often cashiers resort to "Falsification of accounts", i. e. by placing expenditure under capital items or debiting expenses to long term costs. The moneys that have been withdrawn, or wrongly dealt with, are kept out of the scrutiny of the proprietor. (4) Again an employee may take the valuables of his employer and pawn it for a song or (5) a trustee may commit misfeasance by utilizing the trust property for his own personal use. These are some of the types of financial crimes committed by crooks in the history of private property.

HISTORY

The British connection in India will reveal that full advantage has been taken of all these types of dishonest methods and they have forged some novel

ones besides. In the days of Clive the "hold up" method was rampant. According to William Digby's computation between Plassey and Waterloo probably about 1000 million pounds sterling were transferred from Indian hoards to British banks.

Then we come to the period of "embezzlement" by the honourable East India Company. The company was too honourable to make use of the "hold up" method. What they did was they bought Indian goods out of tax revenues and exported them to Europe for sale on their own account. According to the "Minutes of Evidence on the Affairs of the East India Company" the revenues so embezzled between 1793 to 1812 amounted to 260 million pounds sterling.

As we approach the Victorian age, Great Britain was again too respectable to stoop to the bare-faced loot of Clive or to the commercial dishonesty of the East India Company. They wished to have the booty but were anxious to appear honest and above board. Here, they resorted to a wholesale falsification of accounts. Several items of expenditure unconnected with India, such as the costs of wars in Afghanistan, Burma, China, Persia and far away Egypt and Abyssinia, were debited to Indian revenues to the extent of over 700 crores. One need only delve into the Welby Commission's Report to find several disgraceful records of many such false debits.

In old Jewish tradition there was a custom by which a son may keep his property from being used by the parents if he called it "corban"—i.e. a gift. From that time forwards the son will be released from all obligations of supporting the parents. This is a kind of self-constituted release from obligations. Some such devices had to be found by Great Britain to meet the possibility of exposure in the lime light of the twentieth century. During the world War No. 1. Great Britain had to incur enormous expenditures in India but the British Treasury was not prepared to shoulder the burden. So they asked their subordinate agents at Delhi to declare that amount as a gift from India to Great Britain. This so-called "gift" has been challenged by the Congress Select Committee on the financial obligations between Great Britain and India on which two distinguished ex-Advocates General of the Bombay Government served. In their opinion, according to the report published in 1931, the Government of India under the statutes by which it is regulated had no power whatsoever to make a gift to Great Britain out of the revenues of India. Therefore, such gifts were illegal transactions. But then what law or order can deter Great Britain from doing what she wants? Is she not a first class world power maintaining world security and collaborating with America the atom bomb maker? Hence it follows that she is above all law, and she can do no wrong!

STERLING SECURITIES

In the last war she went one step further. She wanted resources for fighting a most destructive world war. Great Britain had sold away thousands

of millions of her assets already and was drifting rapidly towards bankruptcy. Hence it was a great temptation to cast greedy eyes on the resources of India. It was not long before they stretched out their powerful arms and carried away crores worth of food grains and other exchangeable commodities and left behind waste paper in the form of I. O. U. which they were pleased to term "sterling securities". This again was a legal and a moral fraud. Under the Reserve Bank of India Act, Section 33, sub-section 2 dealing with the currency backing, it is provided that "of the total amount of assets not less than two-fifths shall consist of gold coin, gold bullion or sterling securities." Here, it would appear that when the Reserve Bank Act was passed in 1934 the framers had in mind sterling securities which were more or less as good as gold, i. e. which had marketable value realizable at about par. But the present so-called sterling securities have no backing at all and they are "sterling securities" simply because they are termed such. If England had been on the Gold or the Gold Exchange Standard and the Treasury bills had been deposited against notes issued in India there would have been some value attached to the sterling securities. That this view is correct is borne out by a provision under section 41, an intelligent reading of which would carry the idea that the intention was that no person shall be entitled to receive payment in India unless an equivalent purchasing power had been deposited in sterling in London. This being so, by no stretch of imagination can we say that the kind of sterling securities deposited by His Majesty's Government possessed any purchasing power at all. This is definitely a moral fraud though the position may be legally and literally maintained. It would seem that one of the first acts that a free national government of India should do is to rectify section 33 by deleting the words "or sterling securities".

TYPE OF CURRENCY WE NEED

India is an agricultural country. Any currency suitable to our needs must represent non-fluctuating purchasing power both for exchange and hoarding. An agriculturist harvests his production once a year and the purchasing power that he gets at that time will have to stand him in good stead for the next 12 months. Therefore not being speculative, he is not interested in the enhancement or depreciation of his purchasing power. He is perfectly satisfied if he gets back what is due to him even without any question of interest. Our future currency, therefore, will have to take this aspect of the question into consideration. It is necessary for the agriculturist to have a reliable and stable medium of exchange and at the same time a means of storing his purchasing power. In our country banking habits have not reached the remote villages. Hence it is necessary to resort to gold which, through the ages, has shown very little fluctuation in its exchange value. Hoarding of gold in India, therefore, is not due to the perversity of

the farmer but it is a financial necessity of the prudent. Our currency has to provide gold backing and reserves sufficient to meet any contingency. Worthless paper, from whoever it may be, should not be accepted as adequate security.

THE DOLLAR POOL

Not satisfied with pledging their waste paper as sterling securities and drawing to the extent of 3700 crores Great Britain had also resorted to misappropriating all dollar and non-sterling assets held by private individuals in India. These were all compulsorily taken over to put into a dollar pool in London for the benefit of Great Britain. To this day we are not aware of the extent of the commandeered dollar finances ransacked from India.

SPONGING

Apart from these financial relations Great Britain which holds herself as a trustee for India has been attempting to use the trust property to serve her own ends. The I. C. S. and the I. P. S. have been the Imperial Government's agents in India. They have all been paid a salary in keeping with the emoluments got by the ransackers of Clive's regime. These enormous salaries are altogether out of keeping with the income of our people in our land; but now, when there is a national government in the offing, these agents of British Imperialism are getting nervous and are unwilling to serve the Indian National Government. Their principals from Whitehall wish to compensate them for losing the patronage of imperial Great Britain! But again, in keeping with their tradition, such compensation as they may decide on they are striving to make India pay rather than bear it themselves. The last war was one from which India desired to keep out, yet millions of our men were enticed away to fight under the British flag. These men are now being demobilized—who should reward them, Great Britain or India? But India is powerless before its mighty "trustee" and therefore, Indian lands are being given in exchange for services rendered to Great Britain by these soldiers. One wonders why the extensive lands of Canada and Australia cannot come in as a source of reward rather than the over-populated strips of holdings in India itself.

CAPACITY TO PAY

In regard to the capacity of Great Britain to pay we may point out that there is no comparison between impoverished India's ability to bear this enormous burden as she has done in the last 7 years and Great Britain's capacity to repay. Great Britain's income is over 9000 million pounds per annum and her debt to us will only be a fraction of this. We have got to remember that these credits of 3700 crores have been built up by their own British agents at their own valuation and controlled rates much below the market rates prevailing in India. In many cases, the goods have been merely commandeered by the autocratic

power vested in the Governor General during the war period, and it also does not take into account the tremendous wear and tear of capital goods, such as railways used by the Government during the war period. When the goods were compulsorily taken even the mere necessities of the people in India were not provided for. The Bengal famine of 1943, in which over three million lost their lives, will bear witness to this. If a poor country like ours can be made to build up a credit, at the lowest values of commodities and under compulsion, to the extent of 3700 crores at the lowest computation in the course of 7 years, how can Great Britain with its national annual income of 9000 million pounds claim for a long term settlement? As Professor G. D. H. Cole says, "it is a strange world in which a rich and advanced country had to plead with a much poorer country to scale down its debt or even to spread the payment over a long period of years."

INVESTIGATION CALLED FOR

This short survey will show that Great Britain had resorted to dubious ways in her financial dealings with India and that the so-called sterling securities amounting to 1600 crores sought to be settled now, is not a determined and liquidated balance at all. It is the balance on a current account kept by Great Britain away from the scrutiny of our people in India. Therefore, before any financial responsibility for this account can be assumed, it will be essential for this running account itself to be thoroughly scrutinized by an impartial tribunal. This current account starts from the days of Clive and has never been subjected to popular scrutiny. Hence, we hope that a free national government of India, before it takes over any assets from Great Britain or agrees to, any further liabilities in connection with the Imperial Services, will appoint an impartial tribunal to scrutinize this current account thoroughly. The appointment of such an impartial tribunal was the recommendation made by the Congress Select Committee of 1931.

The amounts finally decided upon as due to India can be liquidated by transfer of some or all of the gold that was taken from India within the last 20 years and by partially making over some of the British owned assets in India. There are great many irrigation schemes totalling up to about 450 crores, a good deal of machinery and material may have to be imported. These may be also supplied by Great Britain. At all events, we must take care that whatever credits we get, such are held in trust for the villages of India. The money should be spent, not in building enormous industries in the cities, but for relieving the distress of rural India in the form of irrigation schemes, drinking water supply, building canals, waterways, etc. These and other such points arising out of the terms of settlement may also be referred to the above suggested impartial tribunal.

J. C. KUMARAPPA

SHRIRAMPUR DIARY

(Continued from p. 15)

India there was neither Pakistan nor Hindustan but bare slavery was their lot. And if anybody maintained that the measure of provincial autonomy they enjoyed was equal to independence, they were unaware of the contents of independence. It was true that the British Power was certain to go. But if they could not patch up their quarrels and indulged in blood-baths, a combination of powers was certain to hold them in bondage. Those powers would not tolerate a country so vast and populous as India and so rich in potential resources to rot away because of internal disturbances. Every country had to live for the rest. Days when they could drag on the frog-in-the-well existence were gone. Even before the Congress had taken up non-violent non-cooperation as the official policy for the whole of India, that is, before 1920, a resolution to that effect was passed in Gujarat under the chairmanship of the late Abbas Tyebji Saheb. The speaker had said that it was open even to one province to vindicate its position and become wholly independent of the British Power. Thus supposing that following the prescription Bengal alone became truly and completely independent, there would be complete Pakistan of his definition in Bengal. Islam was nothing if it did not spell complete democracy. Therefore there would be one man one vote and one woman one vote irrespective of religion. Naturally, therefore, there would be a true Muslim majority in the province. Had not Jinnah Saheb declared that in Pakistan minorities would, if possible, be even better off than the majority? Therefore there would be no underdog. If Pakistan meant anything more, the speaker did not know and if it did, so far as he knew, it would make no appeal to his reason.

The second question was: How did your *ahimsa* work in Bihar? Gandhiji said that it did not work at all. It failed miserably. But if the reports received by him from responsible quarters were to be relied upon, the Bihar Government was making full amends and that the general population in Bihar also had realized the heinousness of the crimes committed by large masses of Biharis in certain portions of that province.

The third question was: Why are you silent about the eviction of Bengalis by the Assam Government? Gandhiji said that he was not deliberately silent. The question was not new for him. When some years ago he went to Assam he was taken to the very spot where Muslims from Mymensingh had migrated and taken possession of vacant lands. He had then given his opinion and held it even now that it was not open to persons to usurp vacant land wherever it may be, that is, whether in their own province or in another. For him it was not a Hindu-Muslim question. What he had said was of universal application. If Assam attempted to evict lawful possessors, it would be guilty of crime against humanity. What he had heard was quite the contrary. But if there was a question of unlawful eviction, the Assam Government would not be above law and it was

open also to the Bengal Government to vindicate the position of evicted Bengalis, here happening to be Muslims.

The next question was : What in your opinion is the cause of communal riots ? Gandhiji said that in his opinion the riots were due to the idiocy of both the communities.

The fifth question was : Do you think that you would be successful in bringing peace at Noakhali without having it at the Centre ? Gandhiji replied that if by the Centre was meant a pact between Jinnah Saheb, President of the Muslim League and Acharya Kripalani, President of the Indian National Congress, he certainly held that such a pact was not necessary in order to bring about harmonious relations between the Hindus and the Muslims in Noakhali. So far as he knew neither the President of the Congress nor the President of the Muslim League desired discord between the two. They had their political quarrel. But the disturbances in India whether in Bengal, Bihar or elsewhere were insensate and hindered political progress. He, therefore, felt that it was open to the Hindus and the Muslims in Noakhali to behave like men and cultivate peaceful relations among themselves.

The last question was : Who according to your opinion have saved the Hindus and Hindu property in Noakhali ? Do you not think that Muslim neighbours saved them ? Gandhiji replied that the question assumed a subtle pride. What was wanted was a spirit of humility and repentance that there were enough Muslims found in Noakhali who had lost their heads to the extent of committing loot, arson and murder and resorting to forcible conversions etc. If more mischief was not done, God alone was to be thanked, not man. At the same time the speaker was free to confess that be it said to their honour, there were Muslims who afforded protection to Hindus.

23-1-'47

Gandhiji announced at the prayer meeting at Dalta that the Chowdharis of the village had decided to give him the plot of ground on which the meeting was being held. He congratulated the Chowdharis on their generous action. The gift to him carried no meaning beyond this that it was presented for public use irrespective of caste or party. Naturally there would be a proper document setting out the grant. He hoped that the donors would carry out the full purpose of the gift. The further cause for congratulation was that he was accommodated in the house of Rai Mohan Mali. He did not consider himself to belong to any caste. He belonged to the lowest rung of the Hindu ladder. In reality there was no ladder; no high, no low. All were equal in the eyes of God as of law and it was a happy conjunction of events that it happened to be Netaji's birthday. What could be happier than that on the auspicious day the Chowdharis were actually to make their gift and that a Scheduled Class friend, Rai Mohan Mali, had chosen to give him habitation ? In the speaker's opinion the great and most lasting act of Netaji was that he abolished all distinctions

of caste and class. He was not a mere Hindu, not a mere Bengali, he never thought himself to be a caste Hindu. He was Indian first and last. What was more, he fired all under him with the same zeal so that they forgot in his presence all distinctions and acted as one man.

No doubt, there was much else to be credited to Netaji. Thus he had sacrificed a brilliant career for the sake of the country's service and enlisted himself under the late Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. He suffered various imprisonments, twice became President of the Congress and at last by great strategy gave the slip to the guard put over him by the then Government of Bengal and by sheer courage and resourcefulness reached Kabul and passed through European countries and finally found himself in Japan, collected from scattered material an army of brilliant young men drawn from all communities and from all parts of India and dared to give battle to a mighty Government. A lesser man would have succumbed under the trials that Netaji went through; but he in his life verified the saying of Tulsidas that "all becomes right for the brave".

Gandhiji ended by saying that the Hindus should progress by forgetting all distinctions of caste and both the communities should develop unity of heart. He was reminded of a saying of the Prophet in which it was said that a man would be judged on the Day of Judgment not by what he professed by his lips, nor by whom he followed, but by what he had himself done to implement the teachings received by him.

24-1-'47

In the prayer meeting at Muraim the District Magistrate was present, having walked for two hours and having the prospect of walking for another two hours. Gandhiji and party were housed in the Badi of Habibullah Saheb Patwari. He therefore began by saying that he felt much pleasure in being housed in a Muslim house. He and his party had received every attention. The Muslim friends went so far as to find a *maidan* large enough to hold the largest number of visitors possible. And it so happened that the meeting was the largest of all during his pilgrimage. He attributed the increasing largeness of the meeting to the fast of Bibi Amtul Salam which had a happy ending because of the sincere labours of Abdullah Saheb and his assistants and the leading Muslims of the villages concerned. Whether his inference was justified or not, he flattered himself with the belief he had expressed.

He was sorry that there was poison administered to the public by some newspapers. Newspapers today had almost replaced the Bible, the *Quran*, the *Gita* and the other religious scriptures. It was wrong but the fact had to be faced. Such being the case, he held it to be the duty of newspapermen to give nothing but facts to their readers.

He was also of opinion that the movement of minorities to the majority provinces was an impracticable proposition. He knew the time when

the late two Imam brothers and the late Mazharul Haq Saheb led both the communities and the leading Hindus, such as the late Brajkishor Prasad and Dr. Rajendra Prasad gladly worked under them. Muslims of that Bihar must not leave Bihar. It was true that some Bihar Hindus had acted inhumanly but that aberration ought not to deflect the Muslims from their clear duty bravely to stick to their homes which were theirs by right. And the Bihari Hindus had to make all possible amends for the misdeeds of the Hindus who had become insane. Similarly he would say to the Noakhali Hindus and Muslims. It was therefore a good omen that there were Muslims in the village to harbour him. It was their duty to make even a solitary Hindu absolutely safe in their midst and Hindus should have faith enough to stay in Noakhali.

25-1-'47

In the prayer meeting at Hirapur Gandhiji first drew attention to the fact that the *tal* given was out of tune. He suggested that all they did in the name of God should be in tune. If they were out of tune outside, they were likely to be out of tune within. He then alluded to two telegrams received from the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam* in Madras and Bombay respectively. They said that he an unbeliever had no right of interference in the Islamic law. He submitted that the telegrams were based on ignorance of facts. He had not interfered at all in the practice of religion. He had neither the right nor the wish to do so. All he had done was to tender advice and that based on his reading of the Prophet's sayings etc. What was more, he had observed in many cultured Muslim families total disregard of the *purdah* as it is observed today. But that did not signify less observance of the *purdah* of the heart, which was the reality, in his opinion, aimed at by Islam. Whatever it was, it was open to the Muslim hearers to reject his advice if they felt that it was in conflict with the tenets of Islam. The critical telegrams received by him betrayed, in his opinion, grave intolerance of other opinion than that of the critics. Let them not forget that the Courts of Law including the Privy Council, which were often composed of non-Muslims, interpreted the Islamic law and imposed its interpretation on the Islamic world. He, on the contrary, sought merely to give an opinion. If he could not do so for fear of criticism or even physical punishment, he would be an unworthy representative of non-violence and truth.

26-1-'47

The day of the prayer meeting at Bansa being Independence Day, Gandhiji devoted his speech to the question of Independence. The song sung was the famous song composed years ago by the late Rabindra Nath Tagore. He briefly traced the history of the Independence Movement. It took definite shape with the birth of the Congress. It began to

penetrate the villages after 1916 and after, till at last the Independence Resolution was taken and ever since, 26th January has been celebrated all over India. Lakhs of people had taken part in the movement. If the fates were not against India and she was not divided within, the present meeting would have seen the tricolour flag proudly flying in their midst. But he asked his friends not to fly it as they were divided amongst themselves. It was a flag that belonged to the whole of India. But today unfortunately their Muslim brethren did not take pride in it. They even resented it. He would not flaunt it in their face. The fruit was almost within their grasp. But if they were foolish, they would let it slip out of their hands. Not even the Constituent Assembly would be able to vindicate Independence if ultimately all Indians did not wish and were not ready to fight for Independence. It was true, he held, that even one Province could seize Independence. He had in mind the Independence of the whole of India. He, therefore, hoped that the whole of India with one mind would yearn and work for Independence. He mentioned too that whilst the flag was not in evidence at the meeting, it was flown in the morning in the quarters that were assigned to him. Let them remember the great Netaji and many others who had devoted their lives to the glorious work of Independence.

Behn Amtul Salam

The reader would like to know a few details about Behn Amtul Salam, referred to in the Shrirampur Diary under date 21st January.

She belongs to a distinguished Muslim family of the Patiala State. Her widowed mother is still alive and her brothers are all well-occupied. She lost one of them only recently in the person of Rashid Khan, the late Chief Justice of Indore and, at the time of his death, Confidential Secretary of the Maharaja. One of her nieces married the Nawab of Chhatari's son. Behn Amtul Salam joined the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati years ago when Gandhiji was serving his imprisonment in the Yeravda Jail and has never wavered in her faith. She is a staunch believer in non-violence and Hindu-Muslim unity.

She is a devout Muslim, never omitting the yearly *Ramzan* fast, and never sleeps without the *Quran* by her side, some portion of which she reads every day. During her fast she had always both the *Quran* and the *Gita* read to her every day. Her Islam is broad enough to cover respect for Hinduism, Christianity and other great faiths of the world.

CONTENTS		PAGE
A WOMAN'S DILEMMA	... M. K. GANDHI	13
SELF-HELP TO AVOID		
FOOD CRISIS		13
SHRIRAMPUR DIARY		14
INDIA IN ACCOUNT CURRENT		
WITH GREAT BRITAIN	... J. C. KUMARAPPA	16
NOTE :		
BEHN AMTUL SALAM		20