

HARIJAN

12 Pages

Editor: PYARELAL

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TWO ANNAS

IN CALCUTTA

After a period of nearly six months I had the privilege of seeing once again the old, familiar face, of hearing the sound of his old familiar voice when with my friend and colleague Shri Charubhushan Chowdhary I came down to Calcutta to apprise Gandhiji of the situation that was developing in Noakhali and to seek his advice. Although Calcutta was apparently in an ecstasy of communal amity, his mind, uncannily sensitive to the hidden lie in the soul, was anything but restful. After some hesitation he decided to go to Noakhali in spite of the alarming news which continued to pour from the Punjab. "Shall I start tomorrow morning or the day after tomorrow?" he asked those around him and the latter day was fixed for departure. That evening, He who keeps watch when humanity's vision fails, gave the warning signal. "My resolve to go to Noakhali has collapsed after this evening's happenings," he told me when I saw him that night. "I cannot go to Noakhali or for that matter anywhere when Calcutta is in flames. Today's incident to me is a sign and a warning from God. You have for the time being, therefore, to return to Noakhali without me. You can tell the people of Noakhali that if my colleagues for any reason cannot be there, they will find me, surely, in their midst."

And then casually he hinted that if the conflagration spread, he would have no alternative but to fast. "Have I not often said that there is yet another fast in store for me?" The next day was his day of silence. Ugly news continued to pour in. Several deputations waited on him in the course of the day to consult him as to what they should do to quench the fire. "Go in the midst of the rioters and prevent them from indulging in madness or get killed in the attempt. But do not come back alive to report failure. The situation calls for sacrifice on the part of top rankers. So far the unknown, nameless rank and file alone have been the victims of the holocaust with the one exception of the late Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. That is not enough."

Even as he uttered these words, he was cogitating within himself, as to where he came into the picture which he was presenting to them. For he added, "Of course, I cannot do today what I have told them to do. I will not be permitted to. I saw that yesterday. Everybody will protect me from harm if I went in the midst of the maddened crowd. I may drop down from sheer physical exhaustion — that is nothing. It won't do for a

soldier to be exhausted in the midst of battle." But inaction in a crisis is not in Gandhiji's nature. When a dear old friend saw him that night his mind was already made up. "You don't expect me to approve of your proposed step," remarked the friend with his usual affectionate banter as he perused Gandhiji's statement setting forth his reasons for going on a fast which the latter had kept ready against his arrival. Together they took stock of the situation thrashing out the question in the minutest detail.

"Can you fast against the *goondas*?" argued the friend.

"The conflagration has been caused not by the *goondas* but by those who have become *goondas*. It is we who make *goondas*. Without our sympathy and passive support, the *goondas* would have no legs to stand upon. I want to touch the hearts of those who are behind the *goondas*."

"But must you launch your fast at this stage?" finally argued the friend. "Why not wait and watch a little?"

To this Gandhiji's reply was that the fast had to be now or never. "It would be too late afterwards. The minority Muslims cannot be left in a perilous state. My fast has to be preventive if it is to be any good."

"I know I shall be able to tackle the Punjab too if I can control Calcutta," he continued. "But if I falter now, the conflagration may spread and soon, I can see clearly, two or three Powers will be upon us and thus will end our short-lived dream of independence."

"But supposing you die, the conflagration would be worse," argued the friend.

"At least I won't be there to witness it. I shall have done my bit. More is not given a man to do," replied Gandhiji.

The friend capitulated.

"But why add sour lemon juice to water, if you are to put yourself entirely in God's hands?" he (the friend) permitted himself to think aloud as he read that part of the statement where Gandhiji had allowed himself that latitude.

"You are right," quickly replied Gandhiji. "I allowed it out of my weakness. It jarred on me even as I wrote it. A *satyagrahi* must hope to survive his conditional fast by a timely fulfilment of the condition."

And so the portion referring to the addition of sour lime juice to water to be taken during the fast was scored out and the unadulterated venture of faith commenced.

This was on Monday night. Two days later a prominent member of the Calcutta Muslim League

waited on him to plead 'with him to give up the fast. "Your very presence in our midst is an asset to us. It is the guarantee of our safety. Do not deprive us of it," he added.

"My presence did not check the rowdies the other day. My word seemed to have lost all efficacy so far as they were concerned. My fast will now be broken only when the conflagration ends and the pristine peace of the last fifteen days returns. If the Muslims really love me and regard me as an asset, they can demonstrate their faith by refusing to give way to the instinct of revenge and retaliation even if the whole of Calcutta goes mad. In the meantime, my ordeal must continue."

The friend retired with a heavy heart. Added Gandhiji after he had left, "Let the evil-doers desist from evil, not to save my life, but as a result of a true heart change. Let all understand that a make-believe peace cannot satisfy me. I do not want a temporary lull to be followed by a worse conflagration. In that event I shall have to go on an unconditional fast unto death."

Then the miracle happened. As the leaden hours crept by and drop by drop strength ebbed out of the frail little man on the fasting bed, it caused a deep churning up in the hearts of all concerned, bringing the hidden lie to the surface. People came to Gandhiji and confessed to him what they would not have uttered to any living ear. Hindus and Muslims combined in an all-out effort to save the precious life that was being offered as ransom for disrupted peace between brother and brother. Mixed processions, consisting of all communities, issued forth and paraded through the affected parts of the city to restore communal harmony. A group of about fifty people, credited with the power to control the turbulent elements in the city, saw Gandhiji on the 4th instant and gave an undertaking that they would immediately bring the trouble-makers under check. They told Gandhiji that they had already traced and put under restraint the ringleaders who had organized the rowdyism in his camp on Sunday last, including the person who had hurled the stick that had narrowly missed hitting him. They would all surrender themselves to him and take whatever punishment might be meted out to them. Would not Gandhiji on the strength of that assurance now break his fast, so that they might be able to go to work unburdened by the oppression of the fast? they asked. If not, what was his condition for breaking the fast? In reply Gandhiji told them that he would break his fast only when they could assure him that there would never again be recrudescence of communal madness in the city even though the whole of West Bengal and, for that matter, India might go forth into a blaze and the Muslims themselves would come and tell him that they now felt safe and secure and, therefore, he need not further prolong his fast. He did not expect, he proceeded to explain, to be able to control all the *goondas* in the city, though he would love to, as he had not the requisite degree of purity, detachment and steadfastness of mind. But if he could not even make them purge themselves of the communal virus,

he would feel that life was not worth living and he would not care to prolong it. They had referred to the oppression of his fast. He could not understand that. Why should they have a feeling of oppression if what they had told him came right from their hearts? If a single step is taken under pressure of the fast, not from conviction, it would cause oppression; but there should be no oppression if there was complete co-operation between the head and the heart. "The function of my fast is to purify, to release our energies by overcoming our inertia and mental sluggishness, not to paralyse us or to render us inactive."

"My fast isolates the forces of evil; the moment they are isolated they die, for evil by itself has no legs to stand upon. I expect you therefore," he concluded, "to work with even greater vigour under the instigation of my fast, not to feel its oppression."

The deputation went back realizing that it was not fair to ask him to give up his fast unless they could deliver the goods. Later in the afternoon a number of those who had led the disturbances in his camp on Sunday night, came to him and made their surrender with what to all intents appeared to be genuine contrition.

That evening, another deputation of prominent citizens of Calcutta representing all communities, including Shaheed Saheb, Shri N. C. Chatterjee and Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib, waited on him. They told him that they had been to all the affected parts of the city and there was quiet everywhere. They had every reason to hope that there would be no recrudescence of trouble which was not communal really but was the work of the *goondas*. They requested him to break his fast. Gandhiji mildly rebuked them for the habit of taking refuge behind moral alibis by blaming it all on the *goondas*. It was a dangerous expedient. He showed by citing personal experiences of the days of his boyhood how it is the cowardice or passive sympathy of the average citizen or the "man with a stake" that gives the so-called *goondas* the power to do mischief. "My fast should make you more vigilant, more truthful, more careful and precise in your speech," he remarked.

Taking up next their request to break his fast, he asked them two straight questions. Could they in all sincerity assure him that there would never be any more recrudescence of communal madness in Calcutta? Could they say that there was a genuine change of heart among the citizens of Calcutta so that they would no longer foster or tolerate communal frenzy? They should let him continue his fast if they could not give him that guarantee for, in the event of the present communal outbreak being followed by another, he would have to undertake an irrevocable fast unto death. "But supposing there is another communal outbreak in spite of your assurances, since you are not omniscient," he resumed, "would you give your word of honour that you would in that event suffer to the uttermost before a hair of the minority community is injured, that you would die in the attempt to put out the conflagration but not return alive to report failure? And I want this from you in writing." If they could

give that guarantee, he would break his fast. "But mind you," he added, "My blood will be upon your head if you say one thing and mean another; rather than thoughtlessly hurry, let me prolong my fast a little longer. It would not hurt me. When a man fasts it is not the gallons of water he drinks that sustains him, but God."

He spoke with deep passion. A pin-drop silence followed. Shaheed Saheb broke the ice. Gandhiji had said that he would break the fast when Calcutta would return to sanity. That condition had been fulfilled. Was he not imposing fresh conditions by asking them to sign that declaration? To this "legal argument" Gandhiji replied that there was no fresh condition imposed. All that was there implied in the original terms of the fast. "What I have spoken now is only a home truth to make you know what is what. If there is complete accord between your conviction and feeling, there should be no difficulty in signing that declaration. It is the acid test of your sincerity and courage of conviction. If, however, you sign it merely to keep me alive, you will be encompassing my death."

Everybody realized the solemnity of the warning. Rajaji and Acharya Kripalani, who had arrived during the latter part of the discussion, proposed that they might leave Gandhiji alone a little while and retire to the adjoining room to confer together. Shaheed Saheb endorsed the suggestion. They were about to retire when an appeal signed by about 40 representatives of the Hindus and Mussalmans, residents of Narkel Danga, Sitlatala, Manicktola, and Kankirgathi areas was brought in. In that appeal, the signatories swore that they would not allow any untoward event or incident in that locality which was the worst affected during the previous riots and earnestly prayed to Gandhiji to break his fast. "It may also be reported," continued the signatories, "that no incident occurred in this mixed area since 14th of August 1947." "So our effort has not been in vain," remarked Shaheed Saheb, as he read out the appeal. "Yes, the heaven is at work," Gandhiji added.

Shaheed Saheb resumed, "Now that even the Muslims have joined in the appeal, won't you break your fast? This shows that they have fully accepted your peace mission although they are the aggrieved party in the present riots. It is all the more strange because at one time they looked upon you as their arch enemy. But their hearts have been so touched by the services you have rendered them that today they acclaim you as their friend and helper."

It was a graceful thing, gracefully uttered. Rajaji, not to be beaten in a tournament of chivalry, quickly added, "If I may vary the language, I would say that he is safer today in the hands of the Muslims than in those of the Hindus."

Gandhiji followed with interest this contest of chivalry and picked out for his comments only the portion of Shaheed Saheb's remarks in which he had referred to the Muslims as the aggrieved party. He did not like the "aggrieved party" language. "Do not think of Muslims as the aggrieved party," he remarked. "The essence of our present peace mission is that we are to forget the past. I do not want the Muslims to feel that in West Bengal they are the underdog. Unless we can forget the distinction, we will not have done solid work."

They then all retired to the next room and Gandhiji who had an attack of weakness and nausea during the latter part of the talk was left alone to rest.

In the deliberations that took place in the adjoining room Shaheed Saheb was cautious and circumspect, which only showed his sincerity and sense of responsibility. Acharya Kripalani was cynical and full of sardonic humour as ever; Rajaji, tactful and persuasive and full of practical wisdom, concealing his emotion under a mask of ratiocination. The discussion was brief but unhurried. Rajaji dictated the draft of the pledge which was signed by Shri N. C. Chatterjee first, then by Shri Deven Mukerjee followed by Shaheed Saheb Suhrawardy, Shri R. K. Jaidka, and Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib to be followed later by others. A car load of hand grenades and arms had in the meantime arrived to be surrendered to Gandhiji as a token of repentance on the part of those who had taken part in the savagery of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Without any loss of time the signatories then returned to Gandhiji with the document.

"But sir, is it any good my signing this document?" remarked Shaheed Saheb to Gandhiji, "I may any time be called to Pakistan and then what happens to my pledge?"

"You must in that event have confidence that those whom you leave behind will deliver the goods," replied Gandhiji. "Moreover, you can come back."

"I have no desire to hoodwink you and I never will do so deliberately," remarked Shaheed Saheb in reply, explaining his extreme cautiousness, which Gandhiji greatly appreciated.

"Well, I will break this fast now," said Gandhiji at last, "and leave for the Punjab tomorrow. I shall now go there with far greater strength and confidence than I could have three days back."

Shaheed Saheb interposed, "You cannot leave tomorrow. Your presence is necessary here at least for a couple of days yet to consolidate the peace." Others supported him. They did not tell him what was uppermost in their minds besides, that they were deeply concerned at his undertaking a railway journey in his present state of health. The unruly crowds in Bihar and all along the line would tear him to pieces in their blind adoration.

So, Saturday was provisionally fixed for his departure.

Dr. Dinshah Mehta had in the meantime hurried away to get orange juice ready. Before breaking the fast Gandhiji, according to his usual practice, had prayer recited. But neither I nor my friend Shri Charubhushan Chowdhary could stay on to witness the final happy scene. We had our assignment with which Gandhiji had charged us to fulfil at Dacca. "We shall be blown sky high if we miss our train," I whispered to my friend who was still tempted to linger on. And so we hurried to the car that was waiting to take us to Sealdah Station as the singing of the Poet's song:

"When life is dry and parched up,

Descend Thou in a shower of mercy" followed by *Ramadhun* filled the air.

Calcutta and Dacca,

5 and 6 September, 1947

PYARELAL

HARIJAN

September 14

1947

RIGHT OR WRONG ?

(By M. K. Gandhi)

Among my correspondence there is a typical letter in Gujarati from which I give below the following summary :

"In the *Young India* of 15th September, 1927 A. D., in your Madras speech reported therein, you have said that that which is opposed to true economics is not religion and that economics which are inconsistent with religion are not true and should, therefore, be denounced.

"I am aware that you have held the view for many years, but it has not commanded universal acceptance. Therefore, it seems to me that your devoting your time and energy to the abatement of atrocities being committed in the name of religion is not proper. Where is your constructive programme today? The National Congress has the reins of Government in the best part of India. Complete political independence is in our hands. The British power has quitted. In such a case, is it not well that you should devote your energy to the prosecution of the constructive programme and through it demonstrate to the country that religion and economics are not two opposites? . . . You write nothing against the unmoral economics of India. The consequence is that credulous people have begun to believe that you are behind the present economic policy of the Congress Government. I have begun to believe that you, who are the creator of constructive programme, are now destroying it. So far as I know, there is not a single institution about *khadi* or village industries which are based on true economics and on principles of self-sufficiency."

This writer has written in a moment of excitement. Therefore, he has not been able to express the whole truth. The main fact is that communal unity is a vital part of my being. It was so when *khadi* and all the village industries were not even conceived by me. At the time communal unity possessed me, I was a lad twelve years old, just a beginner in English. It was then that I had realized that all Hindus and Muslims and Parsis were sons of the same soil and, as such, were pledged to complete brotherhood. This was before 1885 when the Congress was born. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that communal unity is itself an integral part of the constructive programme. For it I have run many a risk. It is my conviction that if that unity is not achieved, the constructive programme cannot make substantial progress, at least not at my hands. For, I should not know how to prosecute it in the midst of communal disturbances. The logical consequence of my correspondent's argument will be that I should not have hastened to Noakhali and thence to Bihar. That is to say,

the work that I know how to tackle and which I have been doing for years, I should neglect in the nick of time. Surely, this is impossible for me to do. To neglect it for the sake of the other items of the constructive programme would be tantamount to neglect of immediate duty. The result would be, I would have given up what was in my hands and got nothing for the manifest breach of duty.

Those who are in charge of the Congress Government are my fellow workers. It is possible to say that they flourished in company with me in the Congress and now occupy top places. If I have failed to convince them of the soundness and feasibility of the economics referred to by the correspondent, how should I expect to convince others? They do not feel that they would be able to carry the people of India with them in the prosecution of what may be summed up as the '*Khadi Economics*' and to renovate the villages of India through village industries.

He (the correspondent) rather suggests that I should prepare Shri Jajuji, Shri Kumarappa and such like to take the reins of Government in their hands. What hallucination is this? What right have I so to prepare people? Government of the people, by the people and for the people cannot be conducted at the bidding of one man, however great he may be. Again, who are more capable or penetrating than the present holders of the reins of Government? When more capable men are found, I am sure they will give place to their betters. As far as I know them they are not place hunters. Therefore, without being told by anybody they will of their own accord give place to abler hands and feel grateful for what will amount to a relief for them.

Let no one make the mistake of thinking that I can replace any one of them. I know that they will welcome me if I was ready to shoulder the burden. But I must confess that I have not unlimited capacity in me. That belongs to God, whom I love to invoke as Rama. But I am only His humble devotee. His devotees cannot claim to be He. They have got to dance to His tune.

It is worthy of note, too, that they themselves are giving the best part of their time to the very work of communal harmony, which I try to do. I in my own way, they in theirs. For, they, too, believe with me that so long as this question is not satisfactorily settled and peace does not reign in India, nation-building works can make little or no progress.

Finally, those who think like my correspondent should realize that the constructive programme, to be of any use, has to be reduced to practice by the millions of India. For that purpose we need thousands of workers. It is of little consequence that it was conceived by one brain. It has been before the country for years. The All India Spinners' Association, the Village Industries Association, the Goseva Sangh, the Talimi Sangh, the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, the Adivasi Seva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh and such others which might have escaped my memory, came into being for that very

purpose and are still working according to their capacity. All of them have realized the necessity and beauty of the relation between religion and economics. Whilst I am doing communal work, my interest in other constructive activities has not flagged. Whenever I can, I take part in their deliberations too. More should not be expected of me. I dare not leave the work in hand, being tempted to run after another, probably better. Hence, the warning that the correspondent has given me should really be taken to heart by himself and those who think alike and they should wholeheartedly devote themselves to the service of the nation in which they may be engaged.

I have repeated times without number that for national work it is not necessary that national workers should have political power. But it is necessary for the people to keep in constant touch with those whom they put in power. These can easily be counted. They are too few. But if the people were to realize their power and use it wisely and well, things would right themselves. Our independence is a new born baby eighteen days old. It is inconceivable that things would of themselves be arranged harmoniously. Moreover, those who have been placed in power are themselves new to this vast administrative work. They are assiduously adapting themselves to it.

Calcutta, 4-9-'47

(Adapted from the original in Gujarati)

SMRITISH BANERJEE

Peace has taken its toll, and it is good that men have not been found wanting who gave their lives to it.

Shri Smritish Banerjee with a few friends was returning from some work on the 3rd of September when they came across a peace procession of school boys and girls who were proceeding towards Park Circus. Smritish sensed danger, for the atmosphere all over Calcutta was still very tense. He preceded the procession in a car and reached the junction of Circular Road and Park Street a few minutes ahead of the school children. Smritish and his friends got down, spoke to some Muslims assembled there; and finding that the atmosphere was hostile, sent word to the boys and girls across the street not to proceed any further.

At about this time the procession was attacked, and the boys and girls began to run away. Smritish and Sushil Dasgupta tried to protect the girls. The last that was seen of him was that he was trying to hurry away a few girls to some place of safety, and on his shirt there was an ugly patch of blood. Later on Smritish's body was brought back to hospital, while Sushil was found with five stab wounds, which have left him in a precarious condition till today.

Smritish was 38 years when he died. He had been in the political movement ever since he was 18 years of age. He was actively connected with the peasant movement in Bengal and was a member of the Peasant Sub-Committee of the B. P. C. C.

Smritish had been imprisoned twice, but the height of his sacrifice was reached when peace and communal harmony exacted from him the heaviest sacrifice of which he was capable.

Calcutta, 7-9-'47

N. K. BOSE

A PURE SACRIFICE

Communal frenzy in Calcutta has exacted the first toll of pure sacrifice, so far as I am aware, in Shri Sachin Mittra, who dared to live up to the creed of non-violence and pay the price.

With his record of peace activity as a member of the Gandhi Shanti Seva Dal during the upheavals that shook Calcutta in August and November last year, he could not sit still during the present disturbances and on Friday last, he set forth with three Hindu colleagues with the determination to do his bit to put out the conflagration. They took along with them a number of Muslim friends whom they met on the way and at their invitation proceeded in the direction of Nakhuda Masjid which was reported to be a danger spot. At the crossing of the Chitpur Road and Canning Street, however, the peace party was surrounded by a hostile crowd of Muslims. Sachin Mittra and his other Hindu colleagues were pulled out of the peace party. Sachin Mittra was stabbed and his colleagues severely assaulted by the maddened crowd. Their Muslim colleagues tried to protect them. They were overpowered. Some of them even received injuries. Sachin Mittra was removed by the Muslim friends in a police jeep car to the hospital where he was reported to be progressing satisfactorily. But yesterday in the afternoon his condition began to deteriorate. This morning (the 3rd instant) Gandhiji had asked the two girls who have accompanied him to Calcutta to go and see him in the hospital; but before they could do so the news arrived that the patient had succumbed to his injuries.

He was only 38. He had dedicated himself wholly to service. An M. A. of the Calcutta University, he was an active member of the 'Congress Sahitya Sangha', an association for the production of Congress literature. In 1942 he plunged into the 'Quit India' movement and on his release helped to found the 'Bangiya Chhatra Sansad', a students' organization for promoting the constructive activity of the Congress. He often held spinning demonstrations in *bustees*. Till April last he was working in Thakkar Bapa's camp at Haimchar in Tippera District. He was gifted with a keen aesthetic sense. By nature amiable, he had endeared himself to all his friends whom he loved to render the meanest service.

Sachin Mittra's sacrifice reminds one of the sacrifice of the late Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. Many more shall have to offer such sacrifice if Indian independence is to live.

As Gandhiji remarked in a Hindustani message that he sent to his widow, Sachin Mittra has become immortal. "Such a death," ran the note, "should not be an occasion for sorrow, but rather of joy.

You can demonstrate your affection for him by following in his footsteps."

This example should open the eyes of those who, in their ignorance, murdered their own friend and helper; it shows how blind fury never does the slightest good to anybody and often results in irreparable harm as in the present case.

Calcutta, 3-9-'47

PYARELAL

GANDHIJI'S PRESS STATEMENT

I regret to have to report to you that last night some young men brought to the compound a bandaged man. He was reported to have been attacked by some Muslims. The Prime Minister had him examined and the report was that he had no marks of stabbing, which he was said to have received. The seriousness of the injury, however, is not the chief point. What I want to emphasize is that these young men tried to become judges and executioners.

This was about 10 p. m. Calcutta time. They began to shout at the top of their voices. My sleep was disturbed but I tried to lie quiet, not knowing what was happening. I heard the window panes being smashed. I had lying on either side of me two very brave girls. They would not sleep but without my knowledge, for my eyes were closed, they went among the small crowd and tried to pacify them. Thank God, the crowd did not do any harm to them. The old Muslim lady in the house endearingly called Bi Amma and a young Muslim stood near my matting, I suppose, to protect me from harm.

The noise continued to swell. Some had entered the central hall, and began to knock open the many doors. I felt that I must get up and face the angry crowd. I stood at the threshold of one of the doors. Friendly faces surrounded me and would not let me move forward. My vow of silence admitted of my breaking it on such occasions and I broke it and began to appeal to the angry young men to be quiet. I asked the Bengali grand-daughter-in-law to translate my few words into Bengali. All to no purpose. Their ears were closed against reason.

I clasped my hands in the Hindu fashion nothing doing. More window panes began to crack. The friendly ones in the crowd tried to pacify the crowd. There were police officers. Be it said to their credit that they did not try to exercise authority. They too clasped their hands in appeal. A *lathi* blow missed me and everybody round me. A brick aimed at me hurt a Muslim friend standing by. The two girls would not leave me and held on to me to the last. Meanwhile the Police Superintendent and his officers came in. They too did not use force. They appealed to me to retire. Then there was a chance of their stilling the young men. After a time the crowd melted.

What happened outside the compound gate I do not know except that the police had to use tear gas to disperse the crowd. Meanwhile, Dr. P. C. Ghosh, Ananda Babu and Dr. Nripen walked in and after some discussion left. Happily, Shaheed Saheb had gone home to prepare for tomorrow's proposed departure for Noakhali. In view of the above ugly incident, which no one could tell where it would lead to, I could not think of leaving Calcutta for Noakhali.

What is the lesson of the incident? It is clear to me that if India is to retain her dearly-won independ-

ence all men and women must completely forget lynch law. What was attempted was an indifferent imitation of it. If Muslims misbehaved, the complainants could, if they would not go to the ministers, certainly go to me or my friend, Shaheed Saheb. The same thing applies to Muslim complainants. There is no way of keeping the peace in Calcutta or elsewhere if the elementary rule of civilized society is not observed. Let them not think of the savagery of the Punjab or outside India. The recognition of the golden rule of never taking the law into one's own hands has no exceptions.

My Secretary, Dev Prakash, in Patna, wires: 'Public agitated Punjab happenings. Feel statement necessary impressing duty of public and the Press.' Shri Dev Prakash is never unduly agitated. There must be some unguarded word by the Press. If that is so, at this time when we are sitting on a powder magazine, the Fourth Estate has to be extra-wise and reticent. Unscrupulousness will act as a lighted match. I hope every editor and reporter will realize his duty to the full.

One thing I must mention. I have an urgent message calling me to the Punjab. I hear all kinds of rumours about recrudescence of trouble in Calcutta. I hope they are exaggerated, if not quite baseless. The citizens of Calcutta have to reassure me that there would be nothing wrong in Calcutta and that peace, once restored, will not be broken.

From the very first day of peace, that is August 14th last, I have been saying that the peace might only be a temporary lull. There was no miracle. Will the foreboding prove true and will Calcutta again lapse into the law of the jungle? Let us hope not, let us pray to the Almighty that He will touch our hearts and ward off the recurrence of insanity.

Since the foregoing was written, i. e., about 4 o'clock, during silence, I have come to know fairly well the details of what has happened in various parts of the city. Some of the places which were safe till yesterday have suddenly become unsafe. Several deaths have taken place. I saw two bodies of very poor Muslims. I saw also some wretched-looking Muslims being carted away to a place of safety. I quite see that last night's incidents so fully described above, pale into insignificance before this flare-up. Nothing that I may do in the way of going about in the open conflagration could possibly arrest it.

I have told the friends who saw me in the evening what their duty is. What part am I to play in order to stop it? The Sikhs and the Hindus must not forget what the East Punjab has done during these few days. Now the Muslims in the West Punjab have begun the mad career. It is said that the Sikhs and the Hindus are enraged over the Punjab happenings.

I have adverted above to an urgent call for me to go to the Punjab. But now that the Calcutta bubble seems to have burst, with what face can I go to the Punjab? The weapon which has hitherto proved infallible for me is fasting. To put an appearance before an yelling crowd does not always work. It certainly did not last night. What my word in person cannot do, my fast may. It may touch the hearts of all the warring elements in the Punjab if it does in Calcutta. I therefore, begin fasting from 8-15 to-night to end only if

and when sanity returns to Calcutta. I shall, as usual permit myself to add salt and soda bicarb to the water I may wish to drink during the fast.

If the people of Calcutta wish me to proceed to the Punjab and help the people there, they have to enable me to break the fast as early as may be.

Calcutta, 1-9-'47

THE FAST

Gandhiji began his fast for allaying the communal frenzy and restoration of sanity in Calcutta at 8-15 p. m. on the 1st of September, 1947, and broke it at 9-15 p. m. on the 4th instant with a glass of sweet lime juice which Mr. Suhrawardy served to him.

It is necessary to go back into the history of the fast, in order to prepare the background of the story as to how and under what conditions it was finally broken.

From the 14th of August till the 31st, peace reigned. That evening there was a demonstration against Gandhiji's peace mission. On the following morning communal frenzy, in a very intense form, once more swept over several parts of the city. There were already indications in the morning that Gandhiji might fast; but the final decision was taken at eleven in the evening when, according to him, friends had failed to show any satisfactory reason why he should not take the contemplated step. The last sweet drink was taken at 7 p. m. He made the provisional decision at 8-15 p. m.

Any way, the fast was taken and perhaps partly on account of it and partly also because the common citizen, who had tasted peace after one year's life in the trenches, did not want the recrudescence, the riots rapidly cooled down, so that on the 4th the Government as well as the public could come and report to Gandhiji that not one incident had taken place during the last twentyfour hours. Parties after parties came to Gandhiji either with reports or with promises, and in spite of his weak state, he insisted on speaking in his feeble voice to every batch of interviewers. Dr. Sunil Bose, the celebrated physician and brother of Netaji, came to Gandhiji with a request that he must take plenty of rest and not talk at all. But Gandhiji told him he could not exclude relevant talk. Such necessary loss of energy was inevitable. He was certainly desirous of living, but not at the cost of work that duty demanded. "I can't interrupt the work," he said to Dr. Bose, "which has made me fast and which makes me live. If my life ebbs away in the process, I would feel happy."

This was at half past eleven in the morning. A few minutes afterwards a batch of twentyseven friends belonging to Central Calcutta came to see him. During the communal disturbance of the last year, resistance groups had grown up here and there, and the present party represented such a group in Central Calcutta which had become the focus of the recrudescence on Monday. They had come to Gandhiji with the promise that henceforth there would be no more incidents in their part of the city and he should, therefore, break his fast

now, otherwise all of them were prepared to go on a sympathetic fast with him. Gandhiji argued long with them, and what he said in substance was this. The present occasion was not one in which there was scope for a sympathetic fast. Hindus and Mussalmans had fought for one whole year, at the end of which the major parties had agreed that India should be divided into two States. Both had Hindu and Muslim subjects. It was now time for every one to create the sense of common citizenship, to rebuild the land so that men might taste the fruits of freedom. To this end all should work. Gandhiji said that if the friends had come to him only for the sake of saving his life, it was nothing.

Referring to the Poona Fast which ended with the desired amendment of the Communal Award, it was suggested by some that though the amendment was not to their desire, they accepted it for the sake of saving his life. This was a wholly wrong approach. Such fasts were intended to stir the conscience and remove mental sluggishness. Truth could not be sacrificed even for the sake of saving a life, however precious it was. Gandhiji, therefore, warned the present company that they should create real Hindu-Muslim unity by educating the people in a sense of common citizenship of the State, where every single man enjoyed perfect equality of rights which flowed from duty performed. If they worked with this aim in view, and succeeded after a few days' effort in making the Muslims in Calcutta feel safe where they now did not, it would be time for him to break the fast. Gandhiji was clearly of opinion that although his work was now confined to Calcutta, yet his one aim with respect to the Hindu-Muslim question was that the solution would be complete only when the minority, whether in the Indian Union or in Pakistan felt perfectly safe even if they were in the minority of one. There would be no favoured and no depressed community anywhere. All should forget their religious affiliations. He was working to this end. He was working in such a manner that the majority community in each State should go forward and create the necessary conditions of freedom.

Some one asked him: Was it possible that his fast would have any effect on the anti-social elements in society? Today, i. e., during the present recrudescence, it was this element which had gained the upper hand. Could their hearts be converted by Gandhiji's crucifixion? Gandhiji's answer was very clear and emphatic. He said that *goondas* were there because we had made them so. During one year of past anarchy, it was understandable how these elements in society had gained respectability. But the war between Pakistanis and those for Undivided India had ended. It was time for peace-loving citizens to assert themselves and isolate *goondaism*. Non-violent non-co-operation was a universal remedy. Good was self-existent, evil was not. It was like a parasite living on and round good. It would die of itself when the support that

good gave was withdrawn. The heart of the antisocial elements may or may not be changed; it would be enough if they were made to feel that the better elements of society were asserting themselves in the interests of peace and in the interests of normality.

To the interviewers from Central Calcutta Gandhiji's advice, therefore, was that they should desist from a sympathetic fast, go forth among the oppressed in each quarter, assure them that they were safe, and rebuild life so that safety would be a permanent feature of the new State of India. He would personally have loved to move about from quarter to quarter in Calcutta in order to place his views before the various bodies, but his physical condition would not permit it. If others worked, how could he rest? Yet he was bound to make his contribution. He felt that it should be in the shape of a fast.

The friends from Central Calcutta were followed by others. There came a deputation from the Bar Association of Calcutta with the promise that its members would do all that lay within their power to restore peace. Friends from Belliaghata, who had a few weeks back looked upon Gandhiji's peace mission with suspicion, had been electrified by the fast. They had appreciated now the full significance of the mission and had, with all their energy, set about the task of rehabilitating the deserted Muslim *bustees*. Pressmen who had met the evacuees who had returned home testified to the sincerity and solicitude with which those who had driven them away a few weeks back, now treated them. All this was good news for Gandhiji, but yet he did not reach the point when the fast could be broken.

Towards evening, Sjt. N. C. Chatterjee, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, Debendra Nath Mookerjee, its Secretary, Sirdar Niranjan Singh Talib, Editor of the *Desh Darpan*, Dr. G. Jilani of the Muslim League, Dr. Abdur Rashid Chowdhury and Mohibur Rahaman of the Pakistan Seamen's Union came accompanied by some other friends to report on the quiet and with their request to Gandhiji to break his fast. Rajaji, the Governor of West Bengal, Acharya Kripalani, Dr. P. C. Ghosh and Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy were also there. They had a long discussion with Gandhiji which left him rather worn out. Gandhiji heard what they said and did most of the talking. This is what he had to say.

He said that ever since the 14th of August, although he had relished the fraternization between the Hindus and the Mussalmans, yet he looked on the ebullition of emotion with caution and reserve. If the feeling was due entirely to friendship new found, to the sense of brotherhood through common citizenship newly attained, there would be more signs of it e.g., in intensified efforts for rehabilitation. That sign was lacking. The recrudescence had then come. Therefore, Gandhiji felt he must fast. God had at least given him the capacity to work and

die for communal peace. If there were anti-social elements in society, where a rowdy or a *goonda* plundered or killed a man whether Hindu or Muslim, his fast might not affect him. He knew his limitations. He fasted for the restoration of communal harmony. The sanity that had been in evidence for the last twentyfour hours was not enough for him. If the present company was going to assure him that it was a sincere affair and was going to be permanent, he would expect them to give him something in writing. It must state that supposing Hindu-Muslim riots broke out once more in Calcutta, they should assure him that they would give their lives in the attempt to quell the riots. If they agreed, that would be enough. They must so work from tomorrow that real peace and common citizenship was created as a feature of Calcutta life, no matter what happened elsewhere. Communal peace should be their prime occupation. Their other occupations or avocations must henceforth occupy a second place.

There was another matter, but that was a condition which automatically attached itself to the situation. As in Bihar, as in Noakhali, so also in Calcutta, he wanted to tell the friends who were making themselves responsible for the break of his fast, that if communal frenzy broke out in Calcutta again, Gandhiji might have to go on an *irrevocable* fast. The present fast was meant to activate the better, peace-loving and wise elements in society, to rescue them from mental sluggishness and make goodness active.

Realizing their responsibility, the friends retired to another room. Free and frank discussions took place between them. Suspicions were freely expressed, fears that the signatories might not rise to the heights demanded of them were discussed in an atmosphere of frankness, and finally came the decision to sign the document with all its implications.

Gandhiji felt glad. He took the signatories at their word, prayed that God might give them the courage and strength to implement their promise in daily life from the following morning; and with that prayer on his lips, he broke his fast last night. A heavy responsibility now lies upon the people of Bengal who have to implement the promise made sacred in Gandhiji's presence. May we have the requisite wisdom, strength and perseverance to see it through.

Calcutta, 5-9-'47

N. K. BOSE

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