

# HARIJAN

Editor: PYARELAL

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TWO ANNAS

## WHO CAN BE A TRUSTEE ?

(By M. K. Gandhi)

The task that the A. I. S. A. has undertaken is so vast and great that it calls for a most careful consideration of the qualifications required for a trustee of the A. I. S. A. In my opinion they should be as below :

1. No one should be a trustee merely in name or for the sake of name.

A trustee should have the faith that in a country like India where crores remain unemployed for 4-6 months in the year, everybody can easily be clad in self-spun cloth and need not touch any other if all those who are physically fit spin for a reasonable time every day, say on an average an hour per day.

2. A trustee who has this unshakable faith would spin regularly to set a good example to others and for the satisfaction of contributing his or her mite to the service of the country.

3. He or she will try his or her best to attune his or her life with the life in the villages of India.

4. India is made of villages, but our intelligentsia has neglected them. A trustee of the A. I. S. A. would try his or her utmost to remedy the handicaps from which our village life suffers. In doing so he or she should remember that village life must not become a copy or appendage of city life. The cities have to adopt the pattern of village life and subsist for the villages.

5. If a trustee's husband is connected with the mill industry, she should engage a weaver out of her personal money to weave yarn spun by herself or her friends and relatives and use the cloth thus produced.

6. A trustee should read all the literature about hand-spinning and hand-weaving and understand the economic and moral significance of these crafts. He or she should further understand how they can be universalized and explain it to others.

7. A trustee should study and understand the history of the A. I. S. A. from the beginning to date and how it has revolutionized the various processes of cloth manufacture.

These are my ideas. They cannot be obligatory unless the Sangh approves them. I shall welcome all helpful suggestions by way of amendment or addition.

New Delhi, 27-10-'46

(From the original in Gujarati)

## Notes

### Abducted Girls

Q. You have called attention to the fact that girls who are forcibly abducted have not erred and that society would be wrong in penalizing them. In further exposition of your views, would you tell us, if any ceremony purporting to be one of marriage forced on unwilling victims of such outrage, should be considered binding in any way, against the will of the girls concerned? Is it not right that both society and the family should be broad-minded enough to receive them back? In the case of unmarried girls abducted or forced to undergo such mock ceremonies of marriage, should not a special effort be made by society not only to reclaim them, but to help them to contract marriage in the normal manner and thus be completely vindicated and restored to the fold?

A. You are right. All you say follows from my remarks referred to by you. I have no doubt that girls forcibly abducted have committed no crime, nor incurred any odium. They deserve the pity and active help of every right-minded man. Such girls should be received back in their homes with open arms and affection and should have no difficulty in being suitably matched.

New Delhi, 24-10-'46

### English into Hindustani

This fortnightly attempt is proving its use. Its defects are not unknown to me. It is a labour of love for the Rajkumari. Insistence on such an effort was mine. I was anxious to give to the lovers of the blend of Hindi and Urdu something ready-made. The hope then was that the vocabulary will be the joint effort of perhaps half a dozen co-workers. But it could not be. It had to be made where I was. My lot happened to be cast in Delhi. The attempt was not to be interrupted. The Rajkumari took it up with rare passion. But she is no scholar of Hindustani. She produces every fortnight what labour of love can. When and if the labour is completed and the time comes to publish the vocabulary in book form, it will undergo revision and errors and defects will be removed. Friends will therefore please continue to send their corrections and suggestions which where acceptable will be adopted at the time of revision. The chief thing to be borne in mind is that the student may have by him a ready though not scholarly companion to refer to in case of need.

New Delhi, 25-10-'46

M. K. G.

## A TIMELY INTERVIEW

[The following is the text (as published by the Associated Press of America) of an interview which Gandhiji gave to Mr. Preston Grover on October 21, 1946 at the Sweepers' Colony, New Delhi.]

### EAST BENGAL

Mahatma Gandhi declared in an interview today that the Muslim League Ministry in Bengal should be able to control the outbreak of disorders in East Bengal in which a good few thousands have been driven from their homes and an undetermined number killed or kidnapped.

"Control will depend on the Ministry," he said, referring to the Bengal Ministry of which the Muslim Leaguer H. S. Suhrawardy is head. "If the Muslim League wanted to control it, I should think that it could." He recalled that the Muslim League "has the overwhelming percentage of Muslim voters on their side."

He described the Bengal outbreak as "heartbreaking".

His comments on the outbreak of robbing, burning and looting in East Bengal were made in his small room in the Untouchable Colony where he has lived most of the time since the arrival of the British Cabinet Mission in March. He sat on a thin mat with a small sloping desk before him and I sat on the floor while he talked of many things including America, the New Government in India, South Africa and his own health.

He announced again his intention of visiting the troubled areas in Bengal after his meeting on October 23 with Pandit Nehru and the Working Committee where they will discuss problems created by the entry of the Muslim Group into the Central Ministry.

"The fact that I go there will satisfy the soul and may be of some use," he said.

"Will the Muslims listen to you?" he was asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't go with any expectation, but I have the right to expect it. A man who goes to do his duty only expects to be given strength by God to do his duty."

To a question as to when this type of disturbances would end in India he replied:

"You may be certain that they will end. If the British influence were withdrawn they would end much quicker. While the British influence is here, both parties, I am sorry to confess, look to the British power for assistance."

### RECONSTITUTING THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Turning to the affairs of the Interim Government, Mahatma Gandhi regretted the statement of Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan, Muslim League selection for the Central Government. To Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan's statement that the League was going into the Interim Government to fight for Pakistan, Mr. Gandhi said:

"That is an extraordinary and inconsistent attitude. The Interim Government is for the interim period only and may not last long. While it is in office it is there to deal with the problems that face the country—starvation, nakedness, disease, bad communications, corruption, illiteracy. Any one of these problems would be enough to tax the best minds of India. On these there is no question of Hindu or Muslim. Both are

naked. Both are starving. Both wished to drive out the demon of illiteracy and un-Indian education.

"There is not much time to elapse between this Government and that to be set up by the Constituent Assembly. The time will be shortened if both apply their will to the completion of the work on the Constituent Assembly.

"The Constituent Assembly is based on the State Paper. That Paper has put in cold storage the idea of Pakistan. It has recommended the device of "grouping", which the Congress interprets in one way, the League in another and the Cabinet Mission in a third way. No law-giver can give an authoritative interpretation of his own law. If then there is a dispute as to its interpretation, a duly constituted court of law must decide it."

"But if the Muslim League do not accept the court interpretation?"

"They cannot impose theirs on others. If they do, they put themselves in the wrong box. The alternative is to come to blows. We are all savages and come to blows often when we don't agree. Yet we are all gentlemen. This is so whether in America or Europe."

### MADRAS KHADI PLAN

Asked for his reaction to the decision of the Madras Ministry which has decided against any expansion of the cotton mills industry in the Province in order to promote the Gandhian plan for home spinning and weaving, the Mahatma said:

"I think it is the finest thing going. If you want to follow this logically, then you must follow it through."

Asked whether it would then be logical to 'follow through' to the extent that mills presently in the Province would be stopped, he replied that if in time, through the progressive programme, the mills came to have no customers, then they would quit—"unless they chose to sell outside India."

He assailed the Natal Sugar Mills industry as responsible for bringing indentured Indians there to work and thus creating the segregation problem.

### FUTURE OF BRITISH CIVILIANS

To a question as to what would become of Englishmen in the service of the Government of India, Gandhi said:

"I think that India has use for every one of them who is loyal to India and to Indian traditions and conditions and who will be above temptation and corruption. I don't want to say that they should be disloyal to England. That is not the point. They should not be disloyal to India. These things should not conflict, but it has happened in history. Most have come here to serve the country of their birth by exploiting India. That is hypocrisy. It is dishonest. There is no room for dishonesty in any service or outside it."

### A MESSAGE TO AMERICA

Asked if he had any message for America, he said:

"Dislodge the money God called Mammon from the throne and find a corner for poor God. I think America has a very big future but in spite of what is said to the contrary, it has a dismal future if it swears by Mammon. Mammon has never been known to be a friend of any of us to the last. He is always a false friend."

Mahatma Gandhi, who has passed 77 years of age, said today that he was "shaken" in his belief that he would live to be 125 years, as he had so often said.

He attributed his uncertainty to loss of "equanimity" a few weeks ago because of an unwarranted use of fruits which his co-workers had contemplated during a ceremony in connection with his birthday. He said that he was feeling as well as he had a right to feel, but was uncertain of attaining his goal of 125.

"I am shaken in that belief, although not because it is illegitimate. But there are well defined limits to the fulfilment of that wish. If you do not fulfil those limits, then you may not attain the wish. For the time being, I feel dislodged. I have not attained the necessary equanimity. I don't want to live 125 years or even one year on nostrums, medicines and that kind of thing. I want to live a life of service in my present way.

"That is possible provided you have equableness under every circumstance. Nothing should irritate you. I am not able to say today that nothing irritates me, or has irritated me."

He said he had thought calmly of living until 125 "until a few days ago," when he had a "rude shock". It was on the occasion of his birthday by the Hindu calendar, which came this year ten days ahead of October 2, the day of his birthday by the ordinary calendar. Rajendra Prasad, the Food Member in the Cabinet, had come to preside at a flag raising in connection with the birthday, and on that occasion, I was told, "monkey nuts, raisins etc. were to be served to the Harijan children and volunteers in the camp."

"I flared up, madly," the Mahatma said. "I lost my balance. You can use any adverb or adjective you like to describe it."

He said he considered it an insult to the Food Minister to give food needlessly in his presence to children and others "who were not in need."

"It was then I discovered my failure. This loss of self-control has cost some years of my life—which it will be possible to regain if I regain my equanimity—or gain it. That is the humbler way to say it."

His anger flared up, he said, because "every morsel of food has to be husbanded. If we do it, there will be no shortage."

"India is the last country in the world that should be short of food if our rulers knew their business—and there was no black-marketing."

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## SINDH BANS SATYARTH PRAKASH

(By M. K. Gandhi)

One had thought that the ban on *Satyarth Prakash* had lapsed, never to be renewed. But the hope was a dupe. Here is the renewed ban:

"Whereas it appears to the Government of Sindh that Chapter XIV of the book in Sindh entitled "*Satyarth Prakash*" contains matter which promotes feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects—

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 99 A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the Government of Sindh hereby declares to be forfeited to His Majesty every copy wherever found of the book in Sindh entitled "*Satyarth Prakash*" written by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and published by Professor Tarachand D. Gajra, M. A. on behalf of the Pratinidhi Sabha, Sindh, Karachi, and all other documents containing copies, reprints or translations of, or extracts from Chapter XIV of the said book on the grounds that in the said chapter the author,

(a) ridicules some of the religious beliefs of the Muslims;

(b) misrepresents and reviles the teachings of the Quran;

(c) attacks and belittles the authority of the Prophet Mohammed; and

(d) generally contains matter calculated to hurt and which hurts, the religious susceptibilities of Muslims."

It is wider in application than before. The lapsed ban made it criminal to print or publish the book containing Chapter XIV. The renewed ban makes the possession of such a copy a crime. I cannot help feeling that the ban is senseless and is calculated to wound the susceptibilities of the Arya Samajists all the world over. *Satyarth Prakash* enjoys the same status for the Arya Samajists as the Quran for the Muslims and the Bible for the Christians. It is possible to understand a ban on contemporaneous controversial literature, though at this time of the day popular Governments are reluctant even then to use their power. But it seems to be mischievous to ban a scriptural book. I would, therefore, urge the Sindh Government to withdraw the ban in question. The Sindh translation of *Satyarth Prakash* is not a new publication. Is it to be contended that a book that has passed through so many editions and has been translated in most of the languages of the world has been now found to contain matter "which promotes feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects"? The virtue of toleration is never strained, especially in matters of religion. Differences of religious opinion will persist to the end of time; toleration is the only thing that will enable persons belonging to different religions to live as good neighbours and friends. Religion never suffers by reason of the criticism fair or foul of critics; it always suffers from the laxity or indifference of its followers.

New Delhi, 26-10-'46

# HARIJAN

November 3

1946

## A WISE STEP

(By M. K. Gandhi)

Shri G. D. Tapase, Minister for Backward Classes (Bombay) has sent me a copy of the Bombay Harijan (Removal of Social Disabilities) Act just passed by the Bombay Legislature. I give below the most relevant clauses :

"3. Notwithstanding anything contained in any instrument or any law, custom or usage to the contrary, no Harijan shall merely on the ground that he is a Harijan —

(a) be ineligible for office under any authority constituted under any law; or

(b) be prevented from —

(i) having access to or using any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water-tap or any bathing place, burial or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, any road, or pathway which the members of all other castes and classes of Hindus have a right to use or have access to;

(ii) having access to or using any public conveyance licensed by the Provincial Government or any local authority to ply for hire;

(iii) having access to or using any building, well, cistern or place used for charitable or public purposes maintained wholly or partially out of the revenues of the Province or the funds of a local authority;

(iv) having access to a place of public amusement or a place of public entertainment;

(v) having access to a shop which the members of all other castes and classes of Hindus have a right to have access to;

(vi) having access to or using any place set apart or maintained for the use of Hindus generally but not for the use of any particular section or class thereof;

(vii) enjoying any benefit under a charitable trust created for the benefit of Hindus generally but not for the benefit of any particular section or class thereof.

"3A. No person in charge of any of the places referred to in sub-clauses (i), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi) or any conveyance referred to in sub-clause (ii), or clause (b) of section 3 shall impose any restrictions on a Harijan or act in a manner as to result in discrimination against him.

"4. No court shall in adjudicating any matter or executing any order recognize any custom or usage imposing any civil disability on any Harijan merely on the ground that he is a Harijan.

"5. No local authority shall in carrying out the functions and duties entrusted to it under any law recognize any custom or usage referred to in section 4.

"6. Whoever —

(a) prevents any person, by reason of his being a Harijan, from having access to or using any of

the places referred to in sub-clauses (i), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi) or any conveyance referred to in sub-clause (ii) of clause (b) of section 3 or from enjoying any benefit under a charitable trust referred to in sub-clause (vii) of clause (b) of the said section or abets the prevention thereof; or

(b) imposes any restriction on a Harijan or acts in a manner so as to result in discrimination against him or abets any person to impose such restriction or to act in such manner

shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months or with fine which may extend to Rs. 200 or with both.

"7. If any person who has been convicted of any offence punishable under this Act is again guilty of the same offence he shall be punished on the second conviction with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to Rs. 500 or with both and if he is again so guilty shall be punished on the third or any subsequent conviction with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year and shall also be liable to fine which may extend to Rs. 1,000."

The author of the measure has kindly supplied me with the text of his speech delivered on his introducing the measure. From it I note below the most poignant passages.

"This untouchability amounts to irrationality. As soon as a Harijan is born, untouchability applies to him. . . . As a Harijan he is born, as a Harijan he lives all through his life and as a Harijan he dies. . . . However clean he may be, however wise he may be, however superior he may be, to the so-called orthodox Hindus he is not a superior being. The worst of it is that even after his death his dust and ashes are not allowed to mingle with the dust and ashes of the others. . . . The agonies of the Untouchable are further aggravated by the fact that he is treated as an Untouchable not only by the caste Hindus but even by Christians, Muslims and others. . . . To my mind the Bill gives a *sanad*, a charter, to the Harijans for the exercise of certain social, civic, fundamental rights."

It is worthy of note that the Bill was passed without opposition worth the name from the Hindu side. That is a good augury for the successful working of the Act. And yet it would not do to be over-sanguine about it. Unfortunately for us, we know that we pass resolutions by acclamation and allow them to become dead letter. The greatest vigilance will have to be exercised by the Government and the reformers in the strict enforcement of the law.

It is no use blinking the fact that the reign of irrationality referred to by the author of the relief bill is still very much to the fore in India. It is not merely in regard to untouchability but many other things. Reformers, therefore, have to watch the demon and utilize their watchfulness, courtesy and tact in dealing with those who are possessed by the demon.

New Delhi, 25-10-'46

## PLUCKY STAND

(By M. K. Gandhi)

Papers received from Natal contain among other things a remarkable correspondence between the Mayoral Secretary of Durban and the Natal Indian Congress Secretary. A committee has been formed for making arrangements for the royal visit to Durban proposed to take place in the month of March next year. The main committee has established a sub-committee to deal with the question of joining the coloured and non-European sections of the population of Durban. For the purpose, the Committee invited the Natal Indian Congress to appoint two representatives to serve on the sub-committee so as to give their advice and assistance to enable the Indian community to see Their Majesties and the Royal Princesses.

To this invitation the Joint Hon. Secretary of the Natal Indian Congress (Meer Saheb) sent the following plucky reply on the 11th September last :

"I am directed by my Executive to state that while the Indian community has the greatest respect for Their Majesties and the Royal Princesses, it must be noted that the Indians of South Africa are at the present moment passing through the most critical period in their history. A series of colour discriminatory Acts depriving us of our elementary human rights during the last half century has culminated in the passing of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, 1946, passed in the teeth of the strongest opposition ever voiced by our community. The action of the Union Government in thus oppressing a voteless section of its population has plunged the whole Indian community in a state of grave unrest. Recent trends in colour legislation leave no room for doubt as to what is in store for people of colour in this country. The colour of a man's skin has become the sole criterion of judging human qualities.

"As a result of all this the Indian community of South Africa resolved on the 13th June 1946 to launch a campaign of passive resistance against colour discrimination in the laws of this country. This peaceful protest still goes on and 627 of our people, including National leaders like Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and Dr. G. M. Naicker have been sent to jail where they are treated like common criminals. Some of them have served their sentences and have been released after being subjected to inhuman treatment, but hundreds still remain behind prison bars and many more continue to be sent to prison daily.

"While the Indian community finds itself in such an unhappy situation in a part of His Majesty's Empire, it is most unreasonable to expect Indians to participate in any rejoicing or celebrations in honour of Royalty. In the circumstances we cannot but suggest that you advise Their Majesties to postpone their visit until such time as there is peace and goodwill in South Africa between the rulers and the ruled, the White and the non-White, the represented and the unrepresented, the privileged

and the under-privileged, so that all who constitute the South African nation can equally share, not only its burdens, but also its rewards."

The Natal Indian Congress Executive is to be congratulated on the reply. The Royal visit can evoke no feeling of joy among those who are fighting for their self-respect in South Africa in the making of which they have had no mean share. Let us hope that the Royal visit will be postponed to a more propitious time when the colour bar has become a thing of the past. Such self-denial on the part of Their Majesties will be quite in keeping with the direction which the King and Queen recently issued to substitute in the National Anthem the following new verses :

"Nor on this land, but be God's mercies known,  
from shore to shore.

"Lord make the nations see, that men should  
brothers be,

and form one family, the wide world over."

for the antiquated and indefensible verses :

"Oh, Lord our God arise, scatter his enemies,  
and make them fall.

"Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish  
tricks.

"On Thee our hopes we fix, God save us all."

New Delhi, 25-10-'46

## UN-ISLAMIC

(By M. K. Gandhi)

Sheikh Saheb Hassan-ud-Din, former President of the All India Majlis-e-Ahrar has issued the following to the Press :

"The news of awful and inhuman occurrences which are coming from East Bengal cannot be welcomed by any true Muslim nor can these deeds be considered praiseworthy or Islamic. Compare the actions of the majority of the Muslims of this territory with the injunctions given to the Chief Commander at the time of leaving Medina by the first Caliph. In these the protection of the civil population, the respect for the chastity of the non-Muslim women and the veneration of the places of worship is dwelt upon. On the other hand abundance of slaughter, arson and forcible conversion of young women and their shutting up in the harems are such shameful actions as cannot be tolerated by any civilized people. I really feel a heart-felt sorrow that this state of affairs is the consequence of political dishonesty and bungling by which, for the attainment of a particular end, the emotions of a people have been infuriated, but eyes have been shut as to the responsibility regarding their control. Certainly no Government can tolerate such a state of affairs for any length of time.

"A question arises at this stage whether the power of the army and the police is its remedy or the mutual respect, confidence and co-operation between the people living in a country. I consider that for the creation of a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere in Bengal, the Muslims of India generally and the Muslims of Bengal especially should come to the front as there is a Muslim majority in the

province. To keep the minority satisfied and to prepare them for a life free from worry and tension is the first duty of the Muslim majority.

"Unfortunately in Bengal the leadership of the Muslims has fallen to the lot of a group dissociated from moral virtues and gentlemanliness. In the light of the golden principles inculcated by Islam, other Muslims should come forward and face all the dangers to wean the misled and excited brethren in this region into good and sympathetic neighbours. It is emphasized that the work cannot be accomplished by a free use of rifles and machine guns, nor by turning the non-Muslim houses into forts for protection in self-defence. The common people must be freed from the dominance of the *goonda* element and the people made to live a peaceful and gentle life by softening their hearts by reason. This can be accomplished better by the Muslims themselves.

"For this end the All India Majlis-e-Ahrar-e-Islam is ready to send its parties of disciplined volunteers at once to the affected places so that the misguided brethren may be brought round to the right path as early as possible and the foundations of a permanent peace be laid in the province.

"I know that in this path there are various difficulties to be faced, but to true Muslims in the carrying out of the duty hardships and tribulations have never counted nor would now be any obstacles. For the accomplishment of necessary arrangements I have started talks with Maulana Ataullah Shah Bukhari, President, All India Majlis-e-Ahrar, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madni, President, All India Jamiat-ul-ulema-i-Hind. By the grace of God the first batch would be leaving Delhi very soon."

Maulana Saheb himself issued the following four days ago:

"Hopes that Bengal would be able to recover early from the tragedy of the Great Calcutta Killing have been shattered by the terrible events now taking place in Eastern Bengal. The non-official report of arson, murder, pillage and oppression makes horrible reading. The Government communique states that incidents have taken place but does not accept all the details contained in the non-official report.

"The Government account is bad enough, but if these details are proved, it constitutes a terrible indictment of the people responsible for the outrage. All civilized society is based on the protection of the life, property and faith of its members. This applies even more to the protection of the honour of women. Anybody who fails to respect women's honour condemns himself to the charge of bestiality. Minorities have a special claim in all these respects, and it is the duty of the majority so to act that all fears of the minority are allayed. There is neither bravery nor credit if a majority tyrannizes over a minority.

"What is most regrettable is that the name of religion has been dragged in for committing atrocious deeds. There are reports of forcible conversions and forced marriages. No religion, least of all Islam,

permits the use of force and violence in matters of faith. The days of the early Caliphs who represented the spirit of Islam in its pristine purity were remarkable for toleration, security and protection guaranteed to minorities like the Jews and the Christians. In fact, the Jews who were prosecuted in all the Christian countries of Europe throughout the Middle Ages, could find safety and security in the Muslim kingdom of Spain and later in Turkey.

"Calumniators of Islam have at times tried to suggest that its phenomenal expansion was due to the use of compulsion and force, but they are refuted by the unequivocal injunction of the Quran that there shall be no compulsion in the matter of faith. Those who act against that teaching are, therefore, guilty of the worst possible disservice to the cause of Islam and the Mussalmans.

"I would urge all Mussalmans and Hindus who love their country and community to ponder calmly and dispassionately on the situation. They have to live together in this land and no Government can tolerate lawlessness and disorder for long. If there are any communal riots, sooner or latter the Government would put them down by the use of the police and if necessary the army. But this would only suppress the disease, not cure it.

"The only method of eradicating these evils is for the majority in an area to guarantee the security of the minority. If, instead of waiting for the police and the army to come and forcibly suppress disorder, responsible men of the major community stand against the miscreants and protect the life, property and honour of the minority in that area, the whole atmosphere of the country will change.

"I would make a special appeal to Muslim brethren in East Bengal. Islam enjoins the protection of one's neighbour as one's religious duty. In Noakhali and other districts of Eastern Bengal, Muslims are in an overwhelming majority. Let men of goodwill in these areas unite and declare that they will protect their neighbours with their lives, and that nobody shall harm a single Hindu except over their dead bodies."

The value of these statements lies not so much in the numbers of Muslims supporting it, but in the fact that these Muslims of undoubted repute in Islam have no hesitation in condemning in unmeasured terms the nefarious deeds of the Muslims in East Bengal. It would be wrong to stigmatize the doers as *goondas*. These perpetrators of wrong are undoubtedly misled by men who should know better. There is little wonder that the atrocities have taken place when one bears in mind the poison that is instilled into the credulous minds of simple-minded Muslims.

In order to meet the evil, the sane element in Islam must not only speak out its mind, but act accordingly and promptly. It would be interesting to know whether the former President of the All India Majlis-e-Ahrar has been able to send the contemplated body of volunteers to undo the mischief.

New Delhi, 23-10-'46

## WEEKLY LETTER

## FORCIBLE MARRIAGES AND CONVERSIONS

"What about those who have been abducted or forcibly converted or married under duress against their will?"—the question has been deeply exercising Gandhiji's mind as it must have been of thousands of people. Replying to questions that had been put to him on this subject during the last 24 hours Gandhiji in his prayer address on Sunday the 20th of October said that he had no hesitation in maintaining that forcible conversion was no conversion at all nor abduction a bar to the return to her home of the abducted girl. He held that no purification or penance was necessary in such cases. Hindu society was wrong when it imposed penance on such persons. They had not erred. He had lived for years among Muslims and Christians. They had all assured him that there could be no compulsion in religion. Those who resorted to it did not deserve to be called men of religion. In one sense he and his audience who believed that God was one and that there was no other and who believed that Mohammed was one of His messengers were Muslims. But if any one forced them or him to recite the *Kalma* they would flatly refuse to obey and take the consequences.

It was his fervent hope that all good Muslims would stand up against the practices reported from the affected area in East Bengal.

## A HYSTERICAL DEMONSTRATION

Excitement is natural when passion runs high. But let not our indignation, however righteous, get the better of our logic and reason and lead us into self-contradictory courses. Just before the evening prayer on Thursday last, a crowd of excited youngmen carrying placards and shouting slogans, came to demand redress for East Bengal and invaded the prayer ground in the Sweepers' Colony. They wished their voice to reach the members of the Working Committee which was meeting in his room. Gandhiji told them that it had already reached them. His own place, he knew, was in Bengal. He assured them that the heart of every man and woman who believed in God was bleeding for Bengal. He admonished them for creating a disturbance at prayer-time and asked them to be clam and join in the prayers.

Somebody shouted that they could not pray when their house was burning. Gandhiji made that the subject of his prayer address.

The regular prayer was not recited. Gandhiji said their minds were not calm enough for it. *Ramadhuna* was sung and as usual had a calming effect on the gathering. Although the regular prayer had to be given up it was in his heart, said Gandhiji, and he was sure it would reach God.

Referring to the remark of the young man who had used the metaphor of a house on fire, Gandhiji said that the duty of the owner of the house or his servant was that when the house was burning he should concentrate on putting out the fire and not lose his head. He alluded to the legend about King Janaka who remained calm and unperturbed

when the report was brought to him that his capital was burning, because he had done all he possibly could before and after the accident and therefore could rest secure in his faith in God. If he had lost his head and run to the place of accident he would only have assisted the flames by distracting attention. They were pained at the news of women's suffering in East Bengal, said Gandhiji. But they had so lost their heads that they had themselves failed to be considerate towards the women in the audience. They had scared them away from the prayer ground. They had occupied the place where women sat every day. It was a strange way of demonstrating their sympathy with the outraged womanhood of East Bengal. He hoped that they would see the irony and inconsistency of it.

Our women were easily scared away. It was so more or less all the world over. He wanted our women to learn to be brave. His advice to them to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be dishonoured had been much misunderstood. They could keep a dagger for self-defence if they wished to. But a dagger was no use against overwhelming odds. He had advised them to take poison and end their lives rather than submit to dishonour. Their very preparedness should make them brave. No one could dishonour a woman who was fearless of death. They had two ways of self-defence—to kill and be killed or to die without killing. He could teach them the latter, not the former. Above all he wanted them to be fearless. There was no sin like cowardice.

But there was a moral code even for those who believed in violence. He did not wish them to copy the methods said to have been adopted in East Bengal. They must have read Maulana Saheb's statement and the statement issued by the ex-President of the All India Majlis-e-Ahrar. They had said that Islam did not permit forcible conversions or abduction and molestation of women.

## A SERMON ON FAKIRI

Thakkar Bapa, the near octogenarian, and Shri Balasaheb Kher, the Premier of Bombay, have more than one thing in common. Both have dedicated themselves to the service of lost causes—Harijans, *Bhils*, *Dublas* and other *Adivasis* and so on. Few people are perhaps aware that even while he was practising as a solicitor Shri Balasaheb Kher was rendering yeoman service to the tanners and leather-workers in the suburbs of Bombay. He is also associated with the activities of the *Adivasi Seva Mandal* in Bombay. Both of them attended Gandhiji's prayer gatherings and at Gandhiji's request sang hymns after the prayer. Shri Thakkar Bapa who seems to have stolen the secret of perennial youth and refuses to allow years to dry up the "genial current of his soul", sang a *bhajan* whose refrain was: "My mind is set on *fakiri*." Using that as text of his after-prayer address Gandhiji remarked that if they were to follow out what he had been saying during the two previous evenings and prefer death to dishonour, they had

to have the heart of a *fakir*, not the *fakir* of old who went about with a staff and a beggar's bowl. That was a time when there were rich and poor. Then there was room for beggars. Society's thought had advanced since, though practice had not kept pace with the thought. The society of the future was to be a society in which there was to be no distinction between rich and poor, or colour and colour, or country and country. In that society what was needed was purity of heart and purity of the spirit. Thakkar Bapa was such a *fakir* who had dedicated his life to the 'down-trodden classes, Harijans and *Adivasis* such as *Bhils*, *Santhals*, *Khasis* and those who were described as aboriginals. If the audience could imbibe that spirit, they would never be found guilty of suffering dishonour. He did not have in mind merely the dishonour of women. He would want them to regard black-marketing and cheating the poor also as a species of dishonour and would like them to prefer suicide to dishonour. He knew he horrified some people by expressing these views. But he would be guilty of wrong-doing if he suppressed from them what he believed implicitly. They could not defend their honour, if they had not the purity and austerity of which Bapa had sung so soulfully and of which he was an incarnation.

Equally characteristic of the singer was Tukaram's hymn sung by Shri Balasaheb Kher the evening following. In it the devotee says that he would prefer blindness to vision which could enable him to harbour evil thoughts. Similarly, he would prefer deafness to hearing evil speech. The devotee winds up by saying that his soul yearns only for one thing namely, the name of God.

#### A DARK DIWALI

The festival of *Diwali* has come upon a people in mourning. Thousands of homes in Bengal have been darkened by arson, pillage, death of near and dear ones and worse. Fratricide has degenerated to a sub-human level. Things have been done in the name of religion which make one hang down one's head in shame and lose faith in human nature itself. How could there be feasting or illuminations when the atmosphere is rent with wailing, lamentation and woe of helpless and martyred innocence? Starvation and nakedness stalked the land, Gandhiji grimly remarked, in his written message to the prayer gathering on Monday last. On top of that they were quarrelling amongst themselves. He had written and said enough on the subject. Yet he could not help repeating that in these days those who were pure should become purer, those who were sinners should wash off their sins. All should save as much food as possible and spin as much as they could, so that there might be more cloth. To save food was as good as producing it. To spin was to help reduce the nakedness of India. He who was truthful took the world a step forward. "Let these things engage all our energies," he concluded. "It should

be clear to us that these are not days of festivity or merry-making."

#### A NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

He followed it up with New Year's message on Friday following. "India is passing through a difficult time," he remarked. "As a matter of fact the whole world is passing through a crisis and India is no exception.

"What help do we need to meet this crisis?" he asked. According to the teaching of the Gita the first requisite for spiritual conduct was fearlessness. On New Year Day people made some good resolve. He wanted them to make a firm resolve to shed all fear. Without fearlessness all other virtues were turned into dust. Attainment of truth or non-violence was impossible without fearlessness.

Fearlessness did not mean arrogance or aggressiveness. That in itself was a sign of fear. Fearlessness presupposed calmness and peace of mind. For that it was necessary to have a living faith in God.

In the song that had been sung before them, Gandhiji concluded, the devotee says that divorced from God, he is a most worthless creature. God is his refuge all along. He who takes refuge in God has no fear.

#### "EKLA CHALO"

He again emphasized that moral after the evening prayer yesterday, the text for his discourse being provided by Mrs. Nandita Kripalani who tunefully sang Gurudev's celebrated song "*Ekla Chalo Re*." The burden of that hymn, commented Gandhiji, was that the devotee should have the strength to walk alone in the face of difficulties however great. If he realized that God was ever with him, he would not feel lonely. The *bhajan* was not meant for evil-doers. They could not walk alone.

The League members, he continued, had come into the Cabinet. He hoped that they had come with the firm resolve to make a success of their business. The Government of the country lay in the hands of these fourteen men. They had to find food and clothing, provide for the education of the crores and fair transport facilities for them and be responsible for peace and order in the country. "Let us all pray that they will be able to work as one team, all their dealings will be above board and corruption and jobbery will be things of the past."

New Delhi, 27-10-'46

PYARELAL

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