

## HARIJAN

12 Pages

Editor: PYARELAL

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TWO ANNAS

## WEEKLY LETTER

Gandhiji would have liked to travel to Noakhali by ordinary third class, but the Bengal Government had arranged a special train for him. They had also deputed Shamsuddin Saheb, the Minister for Commerce, Nasrullah Khan Saheb, Parliamentary Secretary to the Chief Minister and Abdur Rashid Saheb to accompany him. To look to his convenience and ensure Government help whenever it might be required, the Chief Minister had himself intended to accompany him, but was held up in Calcutta. There were huge crowds at Kushtia, the Home of Shamsuddin Saheb, Hacpur and Goalando. At all these places Gandhiji delivered brief addresses, explaining the object of his visit.

From his early youth he had made friends with people of all communities. He had never made any distinction between Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and others. When as a boy he attended the High School at Rajkot, he did not remember a single occasion of a quarrel with a Muslim or Parsi boy in the school.

During the Khilafat days he used to say that Maulana Shaukat Ali carried him in his pocket. He did not wish to fight. At the same time he could never countenance peace at the cost of honour or self-respect. He stood for peace, honourable to both the parties. If any party did wrong, he would not hesitate to tell it plainly to their face. That was the duty and privilege of friendship. He had been a fighter all his life and he would fight oppression and wrong with his last breath, no matter who the wrong-doer was.

He recalled his previous visit to East Bengal during the Khilafat days. Those were the days of Hindu-Muslim unity, when the Muslims vied with the Hindus in claiming the Congress as their own. Congress belonged to all. But he was not going to East Bengal this time as a Congressman. He was going there as a servant of God. If he could wipe away the tears of the outraged womanhood of Noakhali, he would be more than satisfied.

They were all Indians — Hindus and Mussalmans. They could not live in Independent India as enemies. They had to be friends and brothers. He would go to Noakhali and stay there till Hindus and Muslims again lived as blood brothers that they were, and must always remain.

He was hopeful that his tour would have a good effect and the Hindu-Muslim unity of the Khilafat days would come back. In Khilafat days no one talked of dividing India. Now they did so. But partitioning, even if it was desirable, could not be so achieved. It could not be retained except by the goodwill of the people concerned. The Bengal Ministers had assured him that the Muslims did not believe in getting Pakistan through force.

At Goalando, Gandhiji took steamer and steaming down the Padma 80 miles reached Chandpur at evening. Chandpur, the native place of that super-octogenarian Congressman the late Babu Hardayal Nag, called up poignant memories. Two deputations, one of Muslim Leaguers and the other of Hindus, met Gandhiji here. But I must reserve an account of these meetings till my next. At 2 p. m. the party reached Chaumuhani where Gandhiji has fixed up his headquarters for the present.

## THE ALL-HEALING BALM

At Laksham there is a refugees' camp. And it was to the refugees that Gandhiji's words were addressed through the crowd that had assembled at the platform to hear him and have his *darshan*. "I have not come on a whirlwind propaganda visit. I have come to stay here with you as one of you. I have no provincialism in me. I claim to be an Indian and therefore a Bengali even as I am a Gujarati. I have vowed to myself that I will stay on here and die here if necessary, but I will not leave Bengal till the hatchet is finally buried and even a solitary Hindu girl is not afraid to move freely about in the midst of Mussalmans."

"The greatest help you can give me is to banish fear from your hearts," he told them. And what was the talisman that could do that for them? It was his unfailing *mantra* of *Ramanama*. "You may say you do not believe in him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishwar, Allah, God, Ahura Mazad. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master."

He touchingly described to them how as a little boy he used to be usually timid and afraid of even shadows and how his nurse Rambha had taught him the secret of *Ramanama* as an antidote to fear.

"When in fear take *Ramanama*. He will protect you," she used to tell him. Ever since then *Ramanama* had been his unfailing refuge and shelter from all kinds of fear.

"He resided in the heart of the pure always. Tulsidas, that prince of devotees, whose name has become a household word among the Hindus from Kashmir to Cape Comorin as Shri Chaitanya's and Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa's in Bengal, has presented the message of that name to us in his immortal Ramayana. If you walk in fear of that name, you need fear no man on earth, be he a prince or a pauper." Why should they be afraid of the cry of 'Allaho Akbar'? The Allah of Islam was the protector of innocence. What had been done in East Bengal had not the sanction of Islam as preached by its Prophet.

Who could dare to dishonour their wives or daughters, if they had faith in God? He, therefore, expected them to cease to be afraid of Mussalmans. If they believed in *Ramanama* they must not think of leaving East Bengal. They must live where they were born and brought up and die there if necessary, defending their honour as brave men and women. "To run away from danger, instead of facing it, is to deny one's faith in man and God and even one's own self. It were better for one to drown oneself than live to declare such bankruptcy of faith."

Why should they feel secure only under the protection of the police and the military? "If you ask the military, they will tell you that 'God' is their protector. I want you, therefore, to be able to tell Shamsuddin Saheb that you no longer need the protection of the police and the military which may be withdrawn, but would rather put yourself under the protection of Him, whose protection they all seek."

#### CHAUMUHANI

Chaumuhani has normally a population of not more than 5,000. But at the evening prayer gathering that was held here in the compound of the Hindu Vidya Mandir on the first day of Gandhiji's arrival, there was a gathering of not less than 15,000. Large numbers had come from places round about Chaumuhani. About eighty per cent of these were Muslims. The town itself has remained free from the worst communal excesses, but round about it the whole area has been ablaze. Speaking after the prayer Gandhiji poured out his soul to the gathering, particularly to the Muslim section, for over twenty minutes. He told them how he had toured East Bengal in the company of the Ali Brothers during the Khilafat days. In those days the Muslims felt that all that he said was right. If the Ali Brothers went into a women's meeting they went blindfolded. He was allowed to go with his eyes open. Why should he blindfold himself when he went to his mothers and sisters? He had no desire to go among the purdah ladies. But the Ali Brothers insisted that he must go. The women were eager to meet him and they were sure that his advice would do good to them. In South Africa he had lived in the

midst of Muslim friends for twenty years. They treated him as a member of their family and told their wives and sisters that they need not observe purdah with him. He had become a barrister in England but what was a dinner barrister worth? It was South Africa and the struggle that he had launched there that had made him. It was there that he discovered Satyagraha and civil disobedience.

He had come to them in sadness. What sin had Mother India committed that her children, Hindus and Muslims, were quarrelling with each other? He had learnt that no Hindu woman was safe today in some parts of East Bengal. Ever since he had come to Bengal, he was hearing awful tales of Muslim atrocities. Saheed Saheb, their Prime Minister, and Shamsuddin Saheb had admitted that there was some truth in the reports that one heard.

"I have not come to excite the Hindus to fight the Mussalmans. I have no enemies. I have fought the British all my life. Yet they are my friends. I have never wished them ill."

He heard of forcible conversions, forcible feeding of beef, abductions and forcible marriages, not to talk about murders, arson and loot. They had broken idols. The Muslims did not worship them nor did he. But why should they interfere with those who wished to worship them? These incidents are a blot on the name of Islam. "I have studied the Quran. The very word Islam means peace. The Muslim greeting 'Salaam Alaikum' is the same for all whether Hindus or Muslims, or any other. Nowhere does Islam allow such things as had happened in Noakhali and Tipperah." Saheed Saheb and all the Ministers and League leaders who met him in Calcutta had condemned such acts unequivocally. "The Muslims are in such overwhelming majority in East Bengal that I expect them to constitute themselves the guardians of the small Hindu minority. They should tell Hindu women that while they are there, no one dare cast an evil eye on them."

It was time for *namaz* when Gandhiji finished speaking. As usual his address was going to be explained to the gathering in Bengali when there was a clamour from the Muslim section of the audience for a brief recess to enable them to perform their *namaz* and come back in time to hear the translation in Bengali. This was done. The *namaz* was performed in one corner of the compound after which they all came and heard the address rendered into Bengali by Shri Satish Babu.

#### A MUSLIM SPEAKS

Shamsuddin Saheb addressed the gathering after the prayer on the next day. He spoke in forceful Bengali for over half an hour. He warned them that if the issue of Pakistan *versus* Hindustan was going to be settled by mutual slaughter of the Hindus where Muslims were in a majority and *vice versa* there would be neither Pakistan nor Hindustan, but only slavery. If they really wanted Pakistan, it was up to the Muslims of Noakhali who constituted seventyfive per cent of the population to guarantee the safety and security of the

twentyfive per cent Hindu minority living in their midst. No Government that was worth its name could stand silently by and let the majority community oppress or exterminate the minority community. Neither the Muslim League Government of Bengal nor the Congress Government of Bihar could tolerate what had happened of late in these provinces respectively. By doing what they had done in Bengal they had driven the Muslim League Ministry to employ the military against the civil population of East Bengal with all that it implied. The Muslim League has never sanctioned arson, looting, abduction, forcible conversion or forcible marriages. All that was un-Islamic. The Quran clearly stated that there can be no compulsion in religion. He was there to declare to them that a forcible conversion was no conversion at all nor had a forcible marriage any validity and these mock marriages and conversions should be deemed to have made no difference whatsoever in the *status quo* of the persons concerned. Force settled nothing. America had devised the Atom Bomb and with its help crushed its opponents. But had it brought peace to the world? In Noakhali it was the Mussalmans who had oppressed the Hindus and it was up to them to wipe off that blot from the fair name of Islam. He appealed to the Mussalmans of Noakhali to set the Hindus at their ease and restore confidence to them so that they might return to their homes with a feeling of security. They could have no heart to cast their lot with the miscreants who must pay the penalty for their crimes and it was the duty of the Muslims in general to help the authorities to trace them and bring them to book. What was done was done. He hoped that out of the ashes of the conflagration the edifice of abiding Hindu-Muslim unity would be rebuilt in Bengal.

That night Shamsuddin Saheb with his colleagues from Calcutta and some local prominent Muslims saw Gandhiji and discussed the question of refugees, particularly the question of persuading them to return to their respective villages. One of the friends suggested that in order to restore confidence Hindu leaders should reinforce the appeals of the Muslims to the refugees to go back to their villages. Gandhiji replied that that was not the right way to dispel the apprehension and distrust of the Hindus which was well-grounded. He would not be able to advise them to return to their homes unless there was at least one good Hindu and one good Mussalman for each village who would stand guarantee for their safety and security and who would be prepared to immolate himself before a hair of their head was touched. It was for the Muslim League leaders who were also members of the Government to say whether such men would be forthcoming. There was no other way to restore confidence after all that had happened. They all agreed with Gandhiji's suggestion and said that they would do their best to give effect to it.

Chaumuhani, 10-11-'46

PYARELAL

## STORY HOUR

(Concluded from page 302)

[For IV I am indebted to Spanhoofd's *Lehrbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Heath) V. G. D.]

### IV

One pleasant morning in spring a merry shepherd boy was tending sheep in a valley and singing and dancing for joy. The King who was hunting in the neighbourhood saw him and asked him how it was that he was so merry. The boy did not recognize the King and answered, "Why should I not be merry, since our King is not richer than I am?"

"Really?" exclaimed the King. "Tell me then all the things you possess."

"The sun we see every day in the beautiful blue sky," said the boy, "shines for me as brightly as for the King. Mountains and valleys display the same beautiful green, the same lovely flowers bloom for me as well as for him. I have enough to eat every day. I have clothes which cover me and I earn as much as I need. Can you tell me what more the Prince has?"

The King was pleased with the answer and said, "You are right, my boy, and you can tell other people that the Prince himself told you so."

### V

When Socrates was kicked by a rude citizen in the presence of his friends, one of them expressed surprise at his not resenting the insult. Socrates replied, "Shall I then feel offended and ask the magistrate to avenge me if I also happen to be kicked by an ass?"

## A WIFE SPINNING FOR HER HUSBAND

Pandit Banarasidas Chaturvedi, the veteran journalist, has been editing an excellent Hindi magazine *Madhukar* devoted to the conservation of Bundelkhand folk-lore and to the prosecution of the Constructive Programme. In its issue No. 4, volume III, *Madhukar* quotes from *Swatantra* an old song of Bundelkhand in which a wife whose husband is away from home addresses her friend as follows:

अजु वे न मिले नदीके बीरना  
खोबी डारी वयस हमार ।  
अपने अँगनवामें रहँटा धरौती  
कतती नन्हो सूत ।  
अपने पियाको पगरी बनौती  
जैसो कमलको फूल ।  
भरी सभामें सोहे स्वामीकी पगरी  
सेजियामें बिन्दिया हमार ॥

"Friend, I do not meet my sister-in-law's brother and my life is ebbing away. If he was here, I would place my wheel in the courtyard and spin fine yarn. This yarn I would get woven into a turban for my beloved, as beautiful as the lotus flower. With that turban on his head he would make his mark in the King's court, and the auspicious *tilak* (mark) on my forehead would thus become fully significant."

Hardly a hundred years ago wives not only fed their husbands, they also clothed them. As Shri

Muralidhar .of Dinod in Hissar District tells us (Madhukar IV, 23-24), in his childhood he had seen all the girls of the neighbourhood meet together and spin while basking in the sun in the cold season. These meetings were called *dhupia* from *dhup* (heat), and the girls sang as they plied their wheels. They held similar meetings at night at other times of the year and these evening sessions were called *suratia* (सुरतिया). Even now a spinning wheel is an essential part of the bride's dowry in Hissar, and the bride is dressed in hand-spun and hand-woven cloth.

V. G. D.

## HARIJAN

November 24

1946

### A VENTURE IN FAITH

Early in the morning on Wednesday last Gandhiji announced to his party an important decision. He had decided to disperse his party detailing each member, including the ladies, to settle down in one affected village and make himself or herself hostage of the safety and security of the Hindu minority of that village. They must be pledged to protect with their lives, if necessary, the Hindu population of that village. His decision was not binding on any one of his party, he said. Those who wanted to, were free to go away and take up any of his other constructive activities. "Those who have ill-will against the Mussalmans or Islam in their hearts or cannot curb their indignation at what has happened should stay away. They will only misrepresent me by working under this plan."

So far as he was concerned, he added that his decision was final and irrevocable and left no room for discussion. He was going to bury himself in East Bengal until such time that the Hindus and Mussalmans learnt to live together in harmony and peace. He would deprive himself of the services of all his companions and fend for himself with whatever assistance he could command locally.

That evening he explained his idea further to the party. A discussion followed in which Shri Thakkar Bapa and Shrimati Sucheta Kripalani also took part. His *ahimsa* would be incomplete, he argued, unless he took that step. Either *ahimsa* is the law of life or it is not. A friend used to say that the *Ahimsa Sutra* in Patanjali, *Ahimsa Pratishthayam Tatsannidhau vairatyagah* (अहिंसा-प्रतिष्ठायां तत्संनिधौ वैरत्यागः) was a mistake and needed to be amended and the saying *Ahimsa Paramodharmah* (अहिंसा परमो धर्मः) ought to be read as *Himsa paramodharmah* (हिंसा परमो धर्मः); in other words, violence, not non-violence was the supreme law. If at the crucial moment he lost faith in the law of non-violence, he must accept the deceased friend's amendment which appeared to him to be absurd.

"I know the women of Bengal better than probably the Bengalis do. Today they feel crushed and helpless. The sacrifice of myself and my companions would at least teach them the art of dying

with self-respect. It might open too the eyes of the oppressors and melt their hearts. I do not say that the moment my eyes are closed theirs will open. But that will be the ultimate result, I have not the slightest doubt. If *ahimsa* disappears, *Hindu Dharma* disappears."

"The issue is not religious but political. It is not a movement against the Hindus, but against the Congress," remarked one member of the party.

"Do you not see that they think that the Congress is a purely Hindu body? And do not forget that I have no water-tight compartments such as religious, political and others. Let us not lose ourselves in a forest of words. How to solve the tangle—violently or non-violently—is the question. In other words, has my method efficacy today?"

"How can you reason with people who are thirsting for your blood? Only the other day one of our workers was murdered," said another of the company.

"I know it," replied Gandhiji. "To quell the rage is our job."

Another member asked whether it was right to invite people to return to their villages under the prevailing conditions which involved a considerable amount of risk. Gandhiji's reply was that there was no harm in asking them to return to their villages if the Muslims of that village collectively guaranteed their safety and their guarantee was backed by one good Hindu and one good Mussalman, who would stay with them in that village and protect them by laying down their lives, if necessary. If there was that much guarantee, the refugees ought to return to their homes and face whatever risk there might be. If they had not the courage to live on these terms, Hinduism was doomed to disappear from East Bengal. The question of East Bengal is not one of Bengal alone. The battle for India is today being decided in East Bengal. Today Mussalmans are being taught by some that Hindu religion is an abomination and therefore forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam a merit. It would save to Islam at least the descendants of those who were forcibly converted. If retaliation is to rule the day, the Hindus, in order to win, will have to outstrip the Mussalmans in the nefarious deeds that the latter are reported to have done. The United Nations set out to fight Hitler with his weapons and ended by out-Hitlering Hitler.

"How can we reassure the people when the miscreants are still at large in these villages?" was the last question asked of Gandhiji.

"That is why," replied Gandhiji, "I have insisted upon one good Mussalman standing security along with a good Hindu for the safety and security of those who might be returning. The former will have to be provided by the Muslim Leaguers who form the Bengal Government."

In a letter to a friend Gandhiji wrote from Dattapara: "The work I am engaged in here may be my last act. If I return from here alive and unscathed, it will be like a new birth to me. My *ahimsa* is being tried here through and through as it was never before."

Khajirkhil, 16-11-'46

PYARELAL

## OVERPROOF IS ADMISSION

It was at Chandpur too that Gandhiji first directly contacted the local Muslim mind in regard to the East Bengal happenings. A deputation consisting of several prominent Muslim Leaguers of Tipperah District met him at Chandpur on board the *Kivi* before he entrained for Chaumuhani on the morning of the 7th November.

One of them remarked that no disturbances had taken place in Chandpur Sub-Division. The rush of refugees to Chandpur was due to panic caused by false press propaganda. The number of Hindus killed by the Muslims was only 15 while double that number of Muslims had died as a result of firing by the military who were mostly Hindus.

Another member of the deputation who is an M. L. A. was even bitter about the fact that the Hindus were still evacuating and their rehabilitation was being 'obstructed' by the Hindu workers who encouraged them to migrate in order to discredit the Muslim League Government and paralyse the administration.

Shamsuddin Saheb who was present at the meeting along with Nasrullah Saheb and Abdul Rashid Saheb interposed that it was no use isolating Chandpur Sub-Division and ignoring what had taken place elsewhere in the district. Equally irrelevant to their present argument was their reference to the military firing.

When they had finished, Gandhiji replying remarked that if what they had said was to be taken at its face value, then it amounted to this: that the Muslims had committed no excesses. The mischief had all been provoked by the excesses of the police and the military who were harassing the Mussalmans and it was they, therefore, who together with the panic-mongering Hindus were the real culprits. That was too big a pill for anybody to swallow. Why had it become necessary to call the military, if no disturbances had taken place? A deputation of 20 to 25 Hindus had a meeting with him in the morning. They had told him awful tales of what had happened in Tipperah and Noakhali. Similar tales have been pouring into his ears ever since he had set foot in Bengal. Even Muslim Leaguers had admitted that terrible things had been done. They disputed the figures which they feared were exaggerated. He was not concerned with numbers. Even if there was a single case of abduction, forcible conversion or forcible marriage, it was enough to make every God-fearing man or woman hang down his or her head in shame.

He was not going to keep anything secret, Gandhiji proceeded. He would place all the information which he might receive before the Ministers. He had come to promote mutual good-will and confidence. In that he wanted their help. He did not want peace to be established with the help of the police and the military. An imposed peace was no peace. He did not wish to encourage people to flee from their homes in East Bengal either. If the mass flight of the refugees had been deliberately

planned to discredit the Muslim League Ministry, it would recoil on the heads of those who had done so. To him it seemed hardly credible. He suggested that the right course would be to make a clean breast of the matter. "It is far better to magnify your own mistake and proclaim it to the whole world than leave it to the world to point the accusing finger at you. God never spares the evil-doer."

The gentleman who had spoken first thereupon admitted that he had heard of some cases of arson and looting but the looting had taken place after the occupants had fled. The deserted houses offered too strong a temptation to the hooligans.

"But why should people flee from their homes?", asked Gandhiji sharply. "People do not do so normally. Everybody knows that an unoccupied and unprotected house is bound to be looted by some one or the other. Would any one risk the loss of all he owns just to discredit the League?"

Still another member of the deputation remarked that only one per cent of the people had indulged in acts of hooliganism. The rest of the 99 per cent were really good people and in no way responsible for the happenings.

"That is not a correct way of looking at it", replied Gandhiji. If 99 per cent were good people and had actively disapproved of what had taken place, the one per cent would have been able to do nothing and could easily have been brought to book. Good people ought to actively combat the evil, to entitle them to that name. Sitting on the fence was no good. If they did not mean it, they should say so and openly tell all the Hindus in the Muslim majority areas to quit. But that was not their position as he understood it. The Qaid-e-Azam had said that the minorities in Pakistan would get unadulterated justice in Pakistan. Where was that justice? Today the Hindus asked him if Noakhali was an indication of what they were to expect in Pakistan. He had studied Islam. His Muslim friends in South Africa used to say to him: "Why not recite the *Kalama* and forget Hinduism?" The speaker used to say in reply that he would gladly recite the *Kalama* but forget Hinduism never. His respect and regard for Hazrat Mohammed was not less than theirs. But authoritarianism and compulsion was the way to corrupt religion, not to advance it.

Shamsuddin Saheb agreeing with Gandhiji quoted a verse from the Quran to the effect that there can be no compulsion in religion. He had told the Mussalmans, he said, that if they wanted Pakistan they must mete out justice to the minority community and win its confidence. "By doing what you have done you have killed Pakistan," he had told them.

"Mr. McInerny, the District Magistrate of Noakhali, in a leaflet he has issued," resumed Gandhiji, "has said that he will assume, unless the contrary is conclusively proved, that anyone who accepted Islam after the beginning of the recent disturbances was forcibly converted and in fact remained a Hindu." If all the Muslims made that

declaration it would go a long way to settle the question. "Why should there be a public show of it, if anybody genuinely felt inclined to recite the *Kalama*? A heart conversion needs no other witness than God." Mere recitation of the *Kalama* while one continued to indulge in acts which are contrary to elementary decency was not Islam but a travesty of it. That reminded him of the Plymouth Brothers who invited him to embrace Christianity because then he would be free to do anything he liked since Christ redeemed the sins of those who accepted Him. As against that there was the conclusive verse of the New Testament. "Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, with his lips comes to Me." It was therefore up to the leaders of the Muslims to declare that forcible repetition of a formula could not make a non-Muslim into a Muslim. It only shamed Islam.

"All that has happened is the result of false propaganda," argued one member of the deputation who had not hitherto spoken.

"Let us not make a scapegoat of false propaganda," replied Gandhiji. "False propaganda would fall flat if we are all right."

Finally one of the deputationists remarked that they were all prepared to go into the interior along with the Hindu leaders to restore peace and confidence but the latter distrusted them.

Gandhiji replied that that did not matter. He would gladly accept their offer. "You and I will visit every village and every home in the interior and restore peace and confidence."

Dattapara, 15-11-'46

PYARELAL

### AMONG THE SAVARAS OF ORISSA

Swami Bhairavanand, originally a native of Jodhpur, has made his home in the uplands of the Cuttack District amongst an aboriginal tribe, called Savaras, in the valley of the Goddess Chandi at a place called Chandikhoh. He has built a temple to the goddess in this forest land where he prays morning and evening. At his instance a Marwadi friend has built a *Dharmashala* and a temple to Mahadeva. Water is brought by means of a 3" pipe into a *pucca* tank from a natural hill spring near by. It is delightfully refreshing to bathe in this pure water which is made to flow from the mouth of a cow.

About three years ago a small primary school was started for Savara children and Brahmachari Bhairavanand was put in charge of it. I could not have believed that progress was possible in the short space of three years, until I had seen things for myself.

Those who are familiar with the Ramayana will remember the Sabari woman who was simple enough to offer plums to Shri Ramachandra after having tasted them herself first to see whether they were sweet. The Savaras in Cuttack District are simple folk, literally hewers of wood. Their women go, axe in hand, to the forest and carry faggots of wood to sell as fuel in the neighbouring villages for a mere four or six annas at the most. This constitutes their

daily earning. The children do all kinds of household work such as city folk cannot imagine and the parents do not, therefore, like to spare them to go to school. Swami Bhairavanand has, however, made himself so popular with the Savaras by serving them in times of distress and getting occasional good meals from his rich friends for this under-nourished humanity that he has succeeded in drawing their children to his school. To the children also he gives parched rice at midday and clothes twice a year. From 30, three years ago, the number of children attending school has risen to 100. A single teacher institution has developed into a three-teacher one with good buildings for both school and residential staff.

The free hostel started for the Savara boys, however, had to be closed because the parents could not afford to spare the children for 24 hours. "When we hire our boys of 10 and 12 years of age to the agriculturists, they are not only fed and clothed free, but they get from Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 p. m. in addition. If you want to keep our boys as boarders, you must be prepared to give them something more than free food." This argument is only too true from the point of view of the poor Savara. He reminds me of the arguments propounded by the late Maharaja of Darbhanga against Shri Gokhale's Bill for Free and Compulsory Education in 1911. He said that the agriculturists simply could not afford to spare their children for schooling for even four or five years on end. It can easily be understood how much harder it is for the Savaras, who do not own an inch of land and have to depend on cutting fuel and grass for their livelihood throughout the year, to spare their children.

The real fact is that the devoted services of thousands are required in order to make useful citizens of the lakhs of children of the 25 million aboriginal population in India. Some Congress Provincial Governments have opened a special portfolio for the aboriginal tribes. It should be the rule and not the exception to spend lakhs every year for the education and material advancement of these backward people, in particular those sections who live in unapproachable hills and forests. Out of the total population of 25 million 20 reside in the uplands and plains of India and the remaining five in secluded forests and on hills. They need befriending.

A. V. THAKKAR

[The moral is that basic education, i. e. education through craft, is the education that India needs.

—M. K. G.]

New Delhi, 25-10-'46

### NOTICE

Change of address to be effective for the week should please be intimated to us by *Tuesday*. Please quote the subscriber number with the intimation.

Please note that change of address *cannot be effected twice within one month*.

Subscribers are not enrolled for a period of less than six months.

MANAGER

## PROHIBIT HORSE RACING AND FOOTBALL POOLS

The gambling instinct has its roots deep down in human nature. There were gamblers in Vedic times to whom the Rishi Kavasha Ailusha addresses the following words in the Rig Veda (X-34-13):

अक्षैर्मा दीव्यः कृषिमिन् कृषस्व ।

"Do not gamble with dice, but till the land."

In Mahabharata times *Kshatriyas* were addicted to gambling and were foolish enough to believe that they were bound to accept an invitation to gamble even as they must accept a challenge to fight.

आहूतो न निवर्तेत घृतादपि रणादपि ।

But things improved later on with the result that on the eve of British rule gambling like drink presented nothing like a problem to our people.

The British brought horse races and the stock exchange with them to India. As betting is not much in evidence in our country, we are not in a position to pronounce judgment on its evils. But competent British observers believe that "betting is an even more serious social evil than excessive drinking" (Hugh Martin's *Christ and Money*, S. C. M.). In view of the magnitude of the evils of the practice generally and the grave risk of placing temptations in the way of the weak, Mr. Martin holds that even trivial and occasional bets are undesirable. He thinks that the arguments for total abstinence in the case of drinking apply more strongly to betting. The Church should not give countenance to the habit by organizing raffles in connection with bazaars. Ballots for hospitals are undesirable and "destroy the true spirit of giving for the sake of the worthiness of the object to be helped."

The case against betting is summarized by Mr. Martin in a single sentence: "In any legitimate transaction there is a benefit to both the parties; in betting one of the parties gains without giving anything in return." Betting differs from stealing only in the circumstance that in betting the loser agrees to pay if he loses. A person has the right to get money by giving something equivalent in work or otherwise or by receiving a gift. But betting means getting something for nothing; it is gain through the loss of another.

So also gambling whether in games or on the stock exchange is undesirable. "Difference" transactions are definitely unsocial in character. "The gambling habit, persisted in, produces a feverish passion as harmful as drug-taking and as destructive of the sense of right and wrong."

In a story by Conrad the hero won a big prize in a lottery. Having won once he was sure he could win again. The Passion captured him. "The lottery is eating him up," remarked a friend of his. Mr. Martin testifies that it is the story of thousands.

Mr. Martin's conclusion is that whether for his own sake or for the sake of others, betting is not one of the ways in which a Christian will spend his money.

If Christians have learnt in the school of experience that betting is bad for them, it is equally bad for Hindus and Mussalmans. Hindus are bound to follow the Vedic advice already cited, and Mussalmans dare not disobey the *Holy Quran*, which condemns gambling as strongly as it condemns drink:

"They question thee about *strong drink and games of chance*. Say: In both is great sin." (II-219)

"O ye who believe: *Strong drink and games of chance . . . are an infamy of Satan's handiwork*."

"Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship." (V-90)

(M. Pichhall's translation)

Even J. M. Keynes the hard-headed economist suggested prohibition of book-makers along with that of alcoholic spirits.

Our ministers would do well to accept Keynes' suggestion as well as resist the invasion of English football pools, which has just commenced as may be gathered from newspaper advertisements.

V. G. D.

## AN INDIAN VILLAGE FIGHTS AGAINST FAMINE

The village of Belgatta is a typical village of the Deccan plateau of South India. It is some four hundred miles from Cape Comorin, over a hundred miles from the west coast, over two hundred miles from the east coast. Its annual rainfall is just above 20 inches. It is a purely agricultural village, relying for food in normal times mainly on its own production of millets and pulses, eked out with mango fruit and bananas, to say nothing of toddy tapped from the toddy-palm. The peasants also grow some cotton, ground-nuts, castor and other oils, and by selling these products they can purchase cloth, rice and a few other things: not much to live on, but enough to thank God for.

"In normal times." But how rarely, when everything depends on the weather, does the normal occur! 1945 was exceptionally abnormal. The rains completely failed. The crops withered in the ground. Even the trees lost their leaves. The cattle starved. Owing to short-sighted war-time policies, the surplus from earlier years had all been disposed of. The village had nothing to fall back on, and nothing to look forward to except famine. For nearly twelve months the spectre of starvation has been round the corner; sometimes it was within whispering distance. Today it is further off, almost banished. Not only are the new crops good, and ripe for harvest; but the State Government (Belgatta is in the State of Mysore) after a perilously slow and unconvincing start, has taken adequate measures to feed the needy people only just in time.

Mysore alone could not do it. Though the administrative machinery had to be devised on the spot, the food had to come from much further

off. Scarcely fifty miles away, in western Mysore, where three or four times as much rain comes each year from the west as Belgatta gets, and where the rains did not fail in 1945, there was a small surplus of rice, but this was soon consumed. Belgatta, like hundreds of other Deccan villages, had to look for imports from distant parts of India, and from overseas. This whole village whose inhabitants have never seen the sea, or a great city, or a great river, has been saved by the united action of the continents. Let us go inside the village food depot and see. Here are bags of wheat flour from Australia. Here is wheat from Canada, and maize from the United States. A recent assignment, which the local officials greeted with curiosity, was "Egyptian millet". When the bags were opened, it proved to be not some unknown and unpalatable cereal, but their own familiar *jowary* or *jola*, whose tall, brown seed heads are now nodding hopefully in the fields and all round the village. And there is a recent arrival of Burma rice. Surplus States and Provinces of India, such as Assam, Hyderabad and Sind, have sent their quotas. All the world has been conspiring together to save the humble villagers of Belgatta from starvation.

I was meditating on this theme as we drank cups of coffee in the postmaster's house. But he gave me something else to meditate on, with the sudden observation: "The benevolence of God has sent us the rain at the right time." As the minds of these people have turned from dread to hope, they give thanks, not mainly to Australia or America or Egypt or Burma, but to God.

There are other things I like about this village. Two shy and solemn little girls have been presented to me, who have been cured, one of skin trouble, the other of indigestion, since they had regular multi-vitamin pills. They are typical of many others. And then one of my companions introduces me to a young medical graduate who is living in the village (too many Indian medical men confine their attentions to wealthy fee-paying townspeople), who I find is serving five villages. "Has the food shortage increased the incidence of disease?" I ask him. "Of course it has," he replied, "especially skin diseases and intestinal troubles." When, an hour later, a medical man of higher rank, with three years' army service in Europe, assured me that he had been touring all the worst districts for five weeks and had found no evidence of any increase of disease—"unless possibly a little skin trouble"—I had no difficulty in deciding which to believe when the doctors disagree. To be fair to the senior doctor, perhaps one should add that he and his staff had cause for congratulation that in a time of semi-starvation, when in many places it was hard to find any good water to drink, no major epidemic has broken out.

Belgatta is a village of hope. And it is surrounded by other villages of hope today. But that district is not all India. The millets, which are the staple food of these Deccan villages, are almost ripe. But a couple of hundred miles away live millions of Madras peasants, still surviving on a precariously inadequate ration, who are short of rice. Even in Mysore they plead "Send us more rice." The South Indian rice will not be ready to market till January or February, 1947. Meanwhile fitful rice shipments come from everseas—Burma, Siam, Java; and some from Assam, Orissa or else-where in North India. Can that uncertain stream be kept up, and amplified with sufficient wheat from America, to keep these millions alive? We do not know. And behind South India and its continued need lies a big question mark covering Bengal. Increased distribution of milk and multi-vitamins to children all over South India is helping to hold back the threat of famine. Last week I saw scores of little children in Travancore lapping up their milk and coming back for more. But the cry is still for "Rice and wheat, rice and wheat". Men of every nation can still be persuaded to help their unseen brothers in distant lands—thanks be to God, who moves their hearts and minds and wills.

Chitaldrug, September, '46

HORACE ALEXANDER

[I would only add to this thanksgiving essay that God helps those who help themselves. The villagers must be taught to grow more food themselves. Then help from outside will come and will be welcome. — M. K. G.]

On the train to Calcutta, 29-10-'46

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