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ADVENTURING WITH LIFE



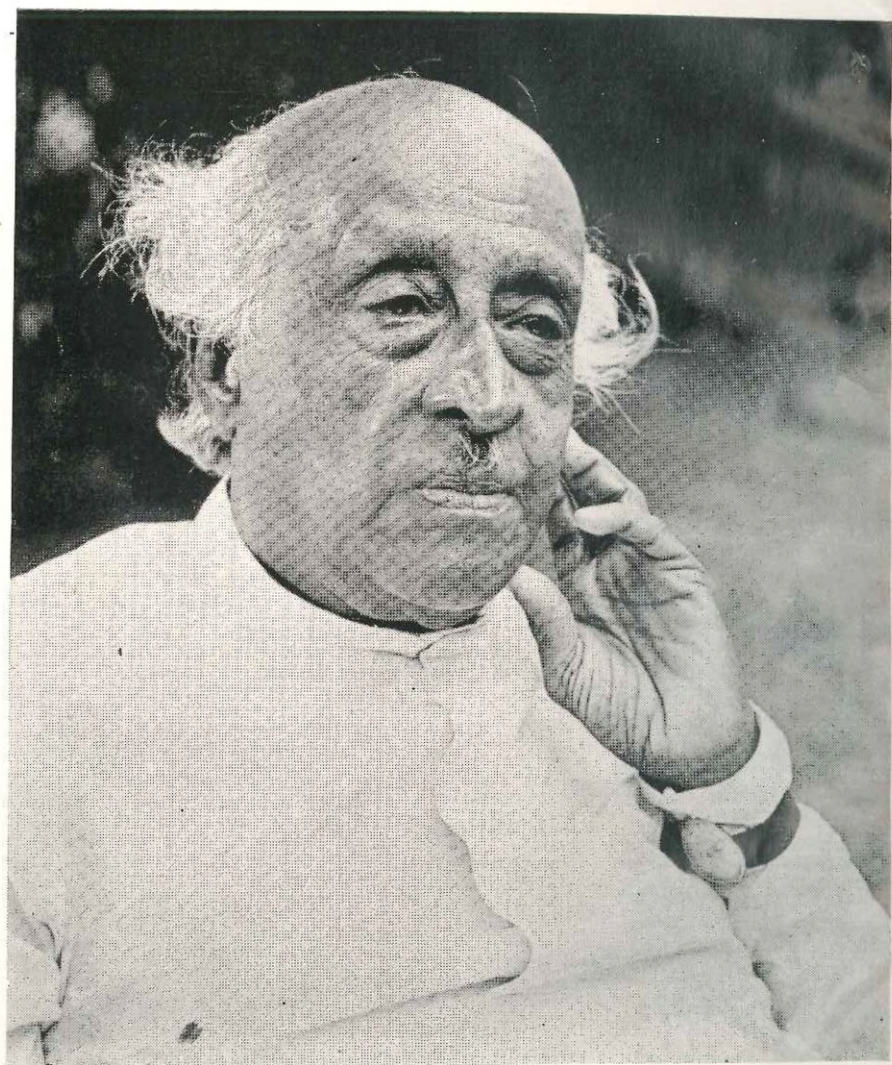
Dr G. RAMACHANDRAN

ADVENTURING WITH LIFE

G. RAMACHANDRAN

an autobiography

Part I



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G. RAMACHANDRAN

An Autobiography

PART I



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To
all my comrades
in Gandhi

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PREFACE

Dr G. RAMACHANDRAN—A GOLDEN STRING

Dr G. Ramachandran, who is now celebrating his 80th birthday is, in divine providence, an invaluable gift to our nation. His life is a golden string binding together two generations: one, that won our Independence and the other, that enjoys its fruits. The past generation stood for all that is noble and inspiring in the history and traditions of our mother-land. The leaders of that generation dedicated their entire lives to create conditions, political and social, for safeguarding and fostering those noble values and inspiring ideals. The present generation enjoys the fruits of those long-drawn out struggles and generous sacrifices of the past generation. To Dr Ramachandran the contrast between the outlook and the attitudes of these two generations must be an excruciating personal experience. It is a far cry from the ecstasy of the past to the agony of the present.

Undaunted by personal feelings and considerations Dr Ramachandran is continuing to serve the nation, unstintedly sharing with his fellow-citizens the immense wealth of his knowledge and experience. He exudes an optimism rarely seen even among generous and enthusiastic young people. He is making use of every opportunity to enlighten and to encourage the young as well as the grown-ups.

Dr Ramachandran had the rare privilege of imbibing idealism and patriotism at their purest source. His mentors were no less personages than Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajaji and men of that calibre. Together with them and under their direct leadership, he was drawn, from his very youth, into the main stream of our national life at its most crucial and decisive period.

One reason for the great success in his life was that he joined action to ideal. Beginning at grass-roots level, he was active in all the movements intended for the liberation and the development of our people. Beginning from community sanitation, basic

education and Harijan welfare, he strenuously exerted himself in making foundations like Gandhigram, Gandhi Peace Foundation and Gandhigram Rural University. All along he was a tireless worker and his efforts were ever blessed by God with good success.

Today we have arrived at a fateful moment in our national life. The vast majority of Indians today, including significant numbers of political leaders, have not known Gandhiji and the men of his generation nor the ideals that animated them. These people do not care to know about the economic and social conditions in which we started our life of political independence. It is mostly the negative aspects of life that appeal to them—not what we have achieved and the sacrifices made, but only the defects and the weaknesses in our national life—the stark poverty, the lack of employment and the apparently forlorn future that stares us in the face.

Such an attitude destroys all generosity and enthusiasm. It blinds all vision and foments discontent. It lands people in the Slough and Despondency. The sad events we witness all around us today are the symptoms of a fatal disease that has deeply affected our society.

The presence of Dr Ramachandran among us today, is a silver-lining in this dark cloud enveloping our horizon. We should do well to imbibe some of his idealism and his generous vision of life. We should be wise if we imitate his sense of dedication and share his spirit of service. He has well illustrated, through a life that has been full and significant, that real leadership is nothing but service. Jesus had once said to his disciples, who betrayed signs of selfishness and ambition: "The greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves Here am I, among you, as one who serves."

For men who have faith in God, who guides our destinies, and faith also in the essential goodness of man, created in God's image, there is no more propitious time than today for fruitful and generous service. Here in India, we are a nation with a glorious spiritual heritage and vast resources, human and material, adequate and suitable to build a community with a strong moral calibre and material sufficiency. This, surely is the

challenge that the life and the example of Dr Ramachandran poses before us in this autobiography as in his life.

Verba volant, exempla trahunt—'words fly, example moves'. In today's world, reverberating with sounds and noises, counsels and exhortations have little influence or inspiration. People are moved more by what they see, rather than by what they hear. In this Autobiography, we have the living and pulsating example of one, who has dedicated all that he is, and all that he has, to the service of the Nation. Our rising generation is facing new challenges and having new opportunities. May this life-story, narrated so gracefully and so graphically, inspire a legion of young men and women to dedicate themselves to the service of our people.

+ Benedict Mar Gregorios
Archbishop of Trivandrum

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SUNSHINE YEARS

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What a glorious sun-rise it was! The sun was coming out on the horizon in the distant east, pouring its coloured lights over the undulating plain. We, four children were watching the sun-rise from our hill-top house in Deviculam in the High Range Division of the old Travancore State. We were excited and hilarious as we watched the sun slowly come up. We clapped our hands and shouted to mother to come and look also. I ran to her and said, "Look mother, the sun is setting the land on fire!" But mother was busy inside the kitchen preparing breakfast. Father was not at home. He was out on circuit as the Excise Circle Officer in Deviculam. We ran to mother in the kitchen and pulled her out on to the veranda. She too was very pleased seeing the sun-rise. She did not however, tarry on the veranda, but went back inside again. And then there was a sudden commotion.

There was a group of Sanyasins coming up the foot-path to the hill top. They were singing "Ram! Ram! Sita Ram!" It was the first time I was hearing this Ramdhun which I was to hear so often later under the historic circumstances created by Mahatma Gandhi. The voices became louder and louder as the Sanyasins approached. The Sanyasins were clad in their traditional ochre-coloured garments, and had high tufts of hair coiled up on their heads. They also carried trisoolas or tridents in their hands with jingling bells tied to them. We children got the fright of our lives. We had heard wild stories how these wandering Sanyasins sometimes kidnapped children. So, we rushed inside the house and closed the doors and shouted to mother and the domestic attender to come and look at the approaching crowd. There were seven or eight of them. They came up to the veranda and shouted again "Ram! Ram! Sita Ram!" The attender went out and talked to them. What they evidently wanted was alms of rice, pulse and salt. We children

were looking at them through the bars of the closed windows. Then mother came up and asked us not to be frightened. She opened the door and went and gave them handfuls of rice and pulse. The Sanyasins then turned round and marched down the hill path singing as before, "Ram! Ram! Sita Ram!" But it was only when they had disappeared that we children had the courage to come out on the veranda.

We were four children. Padmam the sister was the eldest and then came Reghuveeran, Ramachandran and Sridharan. We were still uncertain about the bona fides of the Sanyasins and wondered whether in one of the bags they carried, there might not be a kidnapped child! But luckily they were gone and we breathed freely once again.

The hill-top house in which we lived over-looked a rolling plain dotted with villages. Behind, there rose a rocky hill from which flowed the pellucid waters of a spring which tumbled down some 20 to 30 feet in a continuous stream. This stream running down from the rock was a source of endless joy to us. It was this water that we drank and in which we bathed and played. There were some steps cut in the rock so that we could run up to the top of the rock and watch the stream from above as it tumbled down. The rock itself formed part of a small table-land with green grass and wild flowers. It was always a delight to play and roam about in this area.

At a little higher level on the hill than our house lived an Anglo-Indian family. Mr. Sheridan, the man of the house, was an Excise Inspector working under father. Mr. Sheridan and his family were close friends of ours. My own father's name was Govinda Pillai and my mother's name Madhavi Thankachy. Sheridan's children would often come, running to our house and what they enjoyed eating most was our pappads which mother gave them whenever they came. They would also sample other dishes made in our kitchen and run back to their house shouting that our Indian food was much better than was provided in their Anglo-Indian menu. One day we children were on a visit to the Sheridans and we saw something which made us tremble with pity and indignation. The Sheridans had a couple of cats and one day there came five kittens into the

world. The Sheridans did not want the kittens. So, they boiled water in a big open vessel and when the water started boiling threw all the kittens into the water. That was their way of killing unwanted kittens! We children wept aloud and ran back home and reported to mother how cruel the Sheridans were. But father interrupted our weeping to explain that in Europe, unwanted kittens and puppies were always killed and not allowed to live a life of misery. We just could not follow this strange code of compassion. But what father told us remained in our minds for a long time.

There were a number of incidents in this life of ours in Deviculum in the hill-top house, which we still remember with a thrill. I was only 6 or 7 years of age. But the memory of some of these events is crystal clear. Father kept a horse and rode on it when he went on short circuits. It was a big but quiet horse. One day it suddenly broke loose from its shed and started galloping round the house, neighing loudly. We children were naturally frightened out of our wits and ran inside the house and closed the doors. The horse meant no harm but was excited and happy to be free for a few minutes and that was all. A little later, the syce came and caught hold of the horse and took it back into its shed. We children then crowded round the horse which was tied down and gave it banana peels and some spinach we had stolen from the kitchen. The horse greedily ate up everything we gave and almost neighed its thanks for the unexpected repast.

Another day there was a fresh excitement because the news came that King Edward VII had passed away and all offices and houses were asked to put up signs of mourning. We also tied black curtains on the windows. We were told that in the night there would be a meteor in the sky indicating that a great person had passed away. We called the meteor in Malayalam Val-nakshatram. We waited and watched late into the night. But nature and the sky did not oblige us and no meteor appeared. Father was disappointed. As a loyal officer, he was sure that there would be a meteor to show that King Emperor, Edward the VII, had passed away!

We children had a small school-shed with a blackboard at

one end and a chair for the tutor and a bench for us. It was in this little shed with just one bench and a blackboard that my education began along with that of my sister and brothers. Strangely, we started with the English alphabet even before learning to write Malayalam letters. That was the style in those days. Learning English was considered prestigious even for children. I must have been pretty good as also Reghuveeran, my elder brother, in picking up English. We were taught nursery rhymes which we would recite with much eclat when asked to do so by father for the edification of visitors. I remember reciting "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" with much pride.

It is now strange to remember that my education began with the English language and that today at my 80th year I am writing the story of my life also in English and not in Malayalam. It is equally remarkable that only a few years ago, I was awarded the D. Litt. Degree by one of our well known Universities.

Then suddenly the family found itself shifted to Trivandrum the capital town of the old Travancore State to which father was transferred. Trivandrum was very different from Deviculam. It was a busy town full of officials and the ruling Maharaja's power and pomp. We three boys were admitted in the Model School in Trivandrum and my sister went to the Maharani's School for girls in the heart of the town. I one day accompanied my sister to the girls school and witnessed for the first time a School-assembly when all the girls stood in lines and sang "God save the King". We were very much then in the British Empire! In our own boys school, it was difficult to get admission. But our elementary knowledge of English stood us in good stead. When the Headmaster asked father if the boys, he wanted to admit, knew any English, my elder brother Reghuveeran assumed a boy's air of importance and said "Of course, we know English." The Headmaster looked pleased and admitted all the three of us in the primary section of the Model School. In this school, I saw something of good education without realising then its significance. This was more than 70 years ago and even then manual training was a part of education in the Model School. A Scotch man named Mr. Green organised a workshop inside the school and we children went there twice a week to learn

the use of elementary tools and coloured chalk pieces for drawing.

The Model School was attached to the Graduate Teachers Training School of which the Principal was a distinguished British educationist by name Dr Clark M. A. (Oxon). He was a handsome young man and took model lessons for the teachers under training and we children in the primary classes were the "guinea-pigs" for experimentation in new teaching methods. Dr Clark introduced even in those early days the direct method of teaching. He would bring a roll of coloured pictures and put them on the blackboard one by one. There would for instance be the picture of a horse or a dog or a cat. He will look at it and tell us "This is a horse or a dog or a cat." Education began with such simple exercises. Writing and reading came in later. It is astonishing to remember this happening some 70 years ago and to realise that this innovation is still only being talked about in present day schools.

In the manual training class Mr. Green was a slow-spoken and kind teacher. He would draw a triangle with coloured chalk on the board and then give us a cardboard asking us to repeat a triangle on it and then cut the triangle out with a small chisel. We were happy to do things and to escape at least twice a week from the regular classes with the text books and dictation and counting etc. Physical drill was compulsory and we were made to run and jump and skip. The drill master was a young Muslim enthusiast with a tailed turban on his head. Every time he came near me my hands itched to pull the tail of his turban. One day, before I knew what I was doing, I gave a tug to the tail and down came the turban. No sooner said than done; the drill master turned round in a flash of anger and gave me a whacking slap on my cheek. It hurt and I did cry. How far away is this story now! But I remember the drill master later came and comforted me and putting his hands into his pocket produced some peppermints and gave them to me. I felt sure it was well worth taking a slap to get such delightful sweets.

Dr Clark would go round the school and watch teachers doing their teaching work and occasionally step in and take a class himself. We were very proud when he would come into

our class to do this. We would go about crowing that Dr. Clark himself took a class for us! He insisted on every boy joining in the games and the game hour was not outside the school time but right inside. So, no boy could escape the game hour. I have sometimes wondered if it was this Model School in Trivandrum with the personality of Dr. Clark and Mr. Green behind it that gave me some original, even if only very elementary, taste for good education. One day Dr. Clark brought his young wife to go round and look at the classes. I held my breath with admiration as I watched her beauty of gait and figure and dress.

There was only one dark spot in the time I spent in the Model School in Trivandrum. In the fifth standard of the school there was a teacher nicknamed Kannadi Tampi meaning spectacled Tampi. His name was a terror in the whole school and many of us prayed that we might never reach the fifth standard even if it meant that we failed in our examination! One day the story was whispered around that this teacher had thrashed a boy so hard he fainted and fell down. We cursed Kannadi Tampi and consigned him to hell! But how great was our rejoicing when we learnt that Dr. Clark had called and reprimanded him. We blessed Dr. Clark and straight away promoted him to heaven!

And then alas, at the end of two years, father was transferred again, this time to a northern district, called Parur and the sunshine years of childhood got a break.

This is the story about the family background. Ours was an old family. The Malayalam word for the family is Tharavad. There is an intriguing story about ours called "Pathara Tharavad." Maharaja Marthanda Varma was fleeing from his enemies who were plotting to kill him. They were close on his heels near Colachel in South Travancore. He ran for shelter to a house he saw and sought protection from the man of the house. When the latter saw who the fugitive was, he bowed low, took him quickly inside and hid him in an underground cellar. Soon after, the enemies came up and seeing the man of the house asked him if he had seen somebody running ahead. The man looking perfectly innocent said he had seen nobody at all. The enemies then continued the chase up the path way. When the enemies had disappeared the man of the house opened the cellar and released the Royal fugitive. Marthanda Varma asked what was his name and he said it was Parameswaran. The Maharaja immediately conferred on him the title of Tampi and promised to build 10 cellars ie. pathu arakals in his house. That was how the family came to be known as Pathara Tharavad and acquired the title of Tampi. This was the old grand mother's tale which we heard again and again, but how far this romantic tale was true nobody can vouchsafe.

Later on, the grand nephew of Parameswaran Tampi migrated to Trivandrum and settled down in the city which had then become the capital of Travancore. His name was Thiruvikraman Tampi. He acquired large properties in Trivandrum. He himself stayed in a modest house outside the West Gate of the Fort. This house was known as Parakkad and it exists still, looking very much out of place in the modern city that has now grown around it. It was in this house that I was born in the Malayalam Era 1080 in the month of Kanni (October 1904) on the Chothi star day. Thiruvikraman Tampi held the post of Superintendent of

Police in Trivandrum under the then ruling Maharaja. There was a plot against this Maharaja secretly headed by the Valiya Koil Tampuran, Raja Kerala Varma. When the Maharaja came to know about this he was much agitated and summoned Thiruvikraman Tampi to his presence. He was ordered to arrest the Valiya Tampuran and take him to the prison in Alleppey. The Maharaja's order was peremptory and unqualified. The Valiya Koil Tampuran was a man of high distinction, a poet, a scholar and a redoubtable wrestler with a magnificent physique. He was also surrounded by his own Body Guard. It was not easy to effect the arrest of such a man. But Thiruvikraman Tampi was the man to do it. There are two oil paintings of him in our possession. He appears in these paintings to be a handsome giant of a man. He was a first class horse-man, swords-man and possessed high courage and dexterity. He immediately proceeded to make the arrest and found how difficult it was. But by a process of threats and strategem he made his way through the Body Guard at the gate and reached the palace of the Tampuran and was immediately confronted by the Tampuran himself ready for a fight. A duel took place and it ended by Thiruvikraman Tampi winning the fight and clapping a pair of silver manacles on the hands of the Tampuran. He was placed in a fast rowing boat and taken to Alleppey and lodged in the prison. The Maharaja heard the news and was very pleased and when Thiruvikraman Tampi appeared before His Highness, he expressed his appreciation and presented him with a golden "Veera Sringala" (Bracelet of courage).

Thiruvikraman Tampi became the founder of our family in Trivandrum. But he died of a heart attack when he had hardly reached his 60th year. He left behind him a distinguished name and large properties in different parts of Trivandrum town and even outside, as far away as Vaikom, in Central Travancore. The joint family system was then very much in vogue and the head of the family, called the Karanavar, was the eldest maternal uncle as per the matriarchal system in Kerala. So when Thiruvikraman Tampi passed away the next in the line of succession as Karanavar of the joint family was his nephew, Marthandan Tampi. He was one of the earliest graduates from among

the Nairs in Travancore. Like Thiruvikraman Tampi he was a handsome and dignified man. He dressed in high style in silk coats and a velvet cap with gold embroidery. He started a High School of his own which became famous as the Native High School. This name was adopted to distinguish it from Missionary High Schools. It is said many persons who later in life made a name for themselves in administration, law and public life in Travancore were once either students or teachers in the Native High School. In our typical manner of imitation and exaggeration, Headmaster Marthandan Tampi was some times compared in local circles to Arnold of Rugby ! Whatever that might be, he was a distinguished educationist and became a well known Headmaster.

Another remarkable remembrance about him is he was known among his friends as "Pula Tampi". The Pulaya was an untouchable then and Marthandan Tampi kept a Pulaya as his butler. This was something very revolutionary in Travancore seventy years ago. Any one who was his guest had to drink and eat what was touched and cooked by a Pulaya ! This was a hammer blow at caste and untouchability long before Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene. That was how Marthandan Tampi became a "Pula Tampi". I must have inherited this trait from my great uncle because later I became one of the Secretaries of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and gave relentless battle to caste and untouchability. When as a Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh I visited the school run by the famous Pulaya leader Ayyan Kali at Venganoor and was presented with an address of welcome, my being a nephew of "Pula Tampi" was mentioned in it prominently. Ayyan Kali had personally known how Marthandan Tampi kept a Pulaya butler. I felt very proud of my uncle who was by then no more.

My father Govinda Pillai began his career after graduating from the Madras Christian College, as a teacher in Marthandan Tampi's High School. It was then that he married my mother, Madhavi Thankachy a niece of Marthandan Tampi. The Headmaster and teacher became great friends and close relations and the friendship continued as long as they lived. Father's original home was in Neyyattinkara and mother's in Trivandrum. My

parents had four children. These were the children looking out at the sun-rise scene in the earlier chapter. They were Padmavathi Thankachy, Reghuveeran Tampi, Ramachandran Tampi and Sridharan Tampi. We boys later dropped the "Tampi" title altogether and were just known by our first names. We did not care for such caste titles. We were Nairs of Kerala, but this never meant anything to me. Father after serving as a graduate teacher in the Native High School later joined the State Excise Department and climbed the official ladder step by step and retired at last as the Acting Excise Commissioner of the State. In between, he was Circle Officer, Junior Assistant Commissioner and Senior Assistant Commissioner. He was a stern disciplinarian and a very upright person. It used to be said of him that in the Excise Department in which he served, no one retired from the high ranks he occupied as poor as father. His high integrity was a watch-word in the Excise Department of the State at that time.

Years, later, when I was a High School student in Nagercoil there happened an event which made me very proud of my father. Some rich Nadar merchant from Tamil Nadu had been arrested on the State frontier by the Excise authorities for attempting to convey across the border contraband goods worth a large sum of money. But more than that, in one of the boxes seized was a quantity of gold. Under the Law everything seized was to be confiscated. The Nadar merchant was in a terrific plight and sought an interview with father who was then Senior Assistant Excise Commissioner with Head Quarters in Nagercoil. He was brought to father's office. Within a few minutes I heard father shouting at the top of his voice: "What do you mean? You think you can offer me this bribe and get away with it. No, you cannot, and now you get out of here." The poor man was dragged away by the Excise Constables. When father came out, his face was flushed with anger at the thought that any one could think he could get him to do something dishonest for a bribe. One of my impecunious uncles, who was a bit of a wag, subsequently cracked a joke "I wish somebody would give me such a bribe!"

This is something of the family background. I have not written in any spirit of snobbery but merely to furnish the back-

ground against which many events will have to be described in the subsequent pages. I am not one bit proud that my family is an old family. There is nothing in the age of a family nor am I elated that there was a Thiruvikraman Tampi and a Marthandan Tampi in the family. It is not the old people who are dead which matter today, but what the present generation in a family is doing. I am afraid in such a comparison the present generation in the family may not come out with flying colours. That adds a sobering thought to the writer of these events.

Mention has been made so far only to persons in the family on my mother's side. My father came from a family of land-holders and farmers. He was the only graduate who came out of that family and made something of a name as an Officer of the State. Father never forgot the background of his family and till the end of his life continued to do some farming wherever he was and whatever position he occupied. Our own little family was never without a good vegetable garden and father would often bring baskets of fresh vegetables to mother with some personal elation. He would occasionally send baskets of vegetables and fruits to fellow officers who sometimes would jokingly refer to father as the "Gardener Officer". After father had retired from office, he went and made a farm for himself 10 miles outside Trivandrum in Neyyattinkara where he long lived in a little cottage, planting coconut, jack fruit and mango trees. Even after father had put up two good houses in Trivandrum he loved nothing better than to stay in the small farm-house in Neyyattinkara.

There is need to add only one other matter of interest. In the matriarchal family system in Kerala, it was the mother's family which counted and the father's family was only an adjunct without much importance. Any title like Tampi came to the children only from the mother's side and not from father's. If my father was a Tampi and my mother was not, I would not be a Tampi myself! The central idea in the matriarchal system was the special importance of the mother. If this was in any manner socially good, it is not easy to decide. Compared to the other parts of India this was however, a unique social situation in Kerala.

THE INCREDIBLE BEAUTY OF A LAND 3

The family was on the move from Trivandrum in the south to Parur in the north. The Travancore State was not a big one and this journey was of less than 200 miles. But in those far away days, 60 years ago, it was a long journey for anybody and particularly for a whole family moving with all its heavy luggage. There was then no rail link between the north and the south of the State and much less the air link we have now. All transport was by road or water. There were only few buses running on the roads and taxis were almost unknown. Journey by water meant travelling in big country-boats along the backwaters. The backwaters stretch from Trivandrum to Ernakulam and then on to Parur. These big, covered, slow-moving but very smooth and comfortable big country-boats would take four full days from Trivandrum to Parur. But if you stopped here and there to see places or when there was a storm and heavy rains, then it took another day or two. The stopping places after leaving Trivandrum were generally Quilon, Alleppey, Vaikom and Ernakulam. The family journeyed in three of these big covered country-boats. When there was a strong wind, sails would be set; otherwise two boatmen, one at the back and the other in the front, would push onward dexterously with long hard bamboo staves. The family had one boat to itself, the second boat was full of luggage and furniture and the third boat contained a couple of milking cows and their calves and an improvised kitchen with the servants. Oh ! how we children looked forward to this romantic journey along the backwaters! It was like a great joyful picnic.

The beauty of the backwaters of Kerala is something hardly describable. You have to see it and know it to understand the scenic beauty. There was a chain of deep lagoons (Kayals) connected by canals. Everywhere the banks were covered with coconut forests. On the western side of the backwaters and

with only a narrow strip of land in between was the Arabian sea beating against the shore with its ultra marine blue waves encrusted with their constant ivory foam. From the boats we could hear the roar of the waves and more than once on the east we caught sight of high hills and mountains. Under sails or under the vigorous push of the boatmen with the long bamboo staves, the boats moved on smooth and fairly fast. One felt there was almost no motion at all and yet we would be making 5 to 6 miles an hour. The sunrise would come from the east, flooding valleys and fields with the glow of many colours and then in the evening there were sunsets in the west when the sun dipped into the Arabian sea in a blaze of glory. Bird life was rampant along the banks of the canals and the lagoons. Cooking and eating in the boat was a rare experience for us children, and we enjoyed this more than words can say.

In the morning the boats would be brought to a stand-still near a convenient place on the canal banks. We would all jump out for the morning ablutions and then scamper back for the waiting breakfast. Father and mother would go into friendly houses in the morning and return with us for the breakfast. We had plenty of adventures as the big heavy boats moved on. Near Quilon we were in the Ashta-mudi lagoon when a storm overtook us and fairly big waves lashed against the sides of the boats. We children were frightened and thought we were all going to be drowned. One of the boatmen who held the sail was flapped off and splashed into the water. We cried out in fear. But father quieted us and said there was no danger at all. The boatman who fell into the water swam back and held the sail again. The sail caught the strong wind and the rolling boat righted itself and moved on. I noticed that while we children were frightened and father remained brave and unmoved, mother closed her eyes in prayer. This picture of mother sitting in prayer will be one of the most constant images in this story as it proceeds. Mother was reciting "Om Nama-Sivaya" for many minutes. She was certain in her mind that it was in answer to her prayers that the boat did not sink. I was ready to share her faith and she rejoiced at it. Sister Padmavathi was too frightened to say anything. Elder brother Reghuveeran was indulging in bravado

and saying that if the boat sank he would swim to the shore! Younger brother Sridharan was as usual, more an observer than a talker.

One evening our boats stopped near the bank beyond which we saw the outlines of a ruined temple. Between the edge of the bank and the temple was a small Satram or rest house. It was decided to stop here for sometime and to cook and eat our evening meal. The Priest of the temple, a Brahmin with holy thread, came up and welcomed us and got the Satram cleaned for us. All of us went in and the washing and cooking operations began. Suddenly there was a shout of terror from sister Padmam who ran up to father and said she had seen two snakes coiled up in the ceiling of the back veranda. My father called the boatmen to come at once with their bamboo staves to finish off the snakes. But then the temple Priest came forward and held up his hands. He said those snakes would do no harm at all, but belonged to the temple and if we did not disturb them they would not even come down, unless he called. This was the first time that I realised that there could be snakes which would not run out and bite you. Nevertheless, all the time the cooking was going on we were looking with genuine apprehension at the ceiling of the back veranda. But nothing happened. The Priest was right. The snakes took no notice of us and we also ceased to take notice of them. That was the honourable contract between the intruding travellers and the resident snakes! It was late when we completed our supper and went back into the boats. There was a wonderful moon outside and the backwaters were shining like silver sheets in the moon-light, as quietly and quickly our boats moved on towards Alleppey.

Alleppey was our next stop. This is a prominent port-town in Travancore. From the lagoon our boats entered a narrow canal with high embankments on both sides and tied up near an iron bridge. We were excited like sailors arriving at a port. We went out to see the town. Both the banks were crowded with godowns and offices of export houses, many of them British. We saw the sign-boards of prominent coir companies. As we went sight seeing in Alleppey I saw for the first time the bustle and the noisy crowds of a commercial town. The roads

were dusty and the drains on both sides full of flies. There were heaps of the big Kerala bananas on the roadside for sale. Vendors were going up and down shouting the excellence of their wares including cheap eatables. My first impression of Alleppey was somewhat repulsing. Trivandrum was a cleaner town, even Quilon. Father and mother were on a visit to some relatives and later we children also were taken there for lunch. It was an enormous lunch and one felt uncomfortable after the over-eating. In the afternoon we left Alleppey.

Then it was that the great Vembanattu lagoon opened up before us. It was almost like an inland sea. There was a strong wind and the waves were big enough to roll our country-boat from side to side as we moved along. For the first time I saw a big steam-boat chugchugging across the lagoon. They said it was a boat going from Ernakulam to Quilon. It belonged to a Steam-boat company called Brunden & Co. It was the biggest boat I had yet seen and it filled me with wonder. It seemed to me there were hundreds of people inside it though really the number could not have exceeded a hundred. When the steam-boat blared out its harsh whistle it resounded over the waters. I watched the steam-boat till it completely vanished in the distance with its trail of smoke floating behind. The Vembanattu kayal was reputed to be the grave-yard of many country-boats and even steam boats, when there was a storm it could be quite dangerous to cut across. There was a place called Thanneer-mukham and our boatmen took great care as we were passing it. Far away in the distance were the low outline of the everlasting coconut forests. The lagoon was dotted with country boats like ours going up and down.

One astonishing spectacle, as it then struck me was, that boats going in opposite directions with not more than a mile between them were both moving with the help of sails. I wondered how the same wind could move boats in opposite directions. It was at Thanneer mukham that I found our boatman uneasy and frightened. It was clear that the Vembanattu lagoon was at its widest here, nearly 10 miles. I heard a boatman saying to father that one risk at this place was the pull of the waters towards the ocean, because this lagoon joined the ocean at

some place not far away. It was evening now and father urged the boatmen to push on as quick as possible and cross the lagoon before nightfall. The vast extent of water, the fairly high waves, the number of country boats and the lowering skies with dark clouds which were gathering, furnished an awe-inspiring picture. Luckily we reached Vaikom safe in time.

The next stop was at Vaikom. We had some excitement at Vaikom. There is a famous temple in Vaikom and mother went to worship in it and of course we children accompanied her. Father did not come but stayed on in the boat. One delightful memory is of packets of sweetened aval (beaten rice) which vendors came to sell. If you bought and ate one packet you would want to buy another and eat it ! The sugar used was red sugar and there was a sprinkling of powdered cardamom. The Vaikom temple was a small one. But at worship time there was a big crowd, mostly of pretty young women with wet clothes on and with their long hair falling loose over their shoulders. I had not seen such a crowd before at a temple and I wondered what the devotees were thinking and praying for. The deeparadhana or worship with little camphor flames was a fascinating ceremony. But what pleased me most was the distribution of sweet prasadam afterwards. I thought it was a good idea for children to run to temples as often as possible and collect such prasadam.

Then in good time we anchored in Ernakulam. Again heavy rain and strong winds overtook us. We decided to spend the night with our boats tied to the bank. Ernakulam was a beauty place at night. Myriads of lights sparkled on the scene along the east bank and away to the west was the harbour with its own mysterious lights. Since then I have seen Ernakulam in the night scores of times. But the first impression of the beauty of the place at night remains unsurpassed to this day. We closed the roof of the boat and slept inside as the boat rose and fell gently on the waves of the big lagoon. When we woke up in the morning there was neither rain nor storm but only brilliant sunshine. We could see the Arabian sea in the distance and the harbour sparkling in the morning sun. But then we moved towards north Parur, and reached there in the afternoon. From

the back-waters we entered a small canal leading up to a boat jetty. Friends were waiting for us and we got out at last after a four-day journey. I was sorry that the beautiful boat journey had ended. I wished the boat would go on and on indefinitely towards some unknown shore on a journey without end. But that was a foolish thought and was soon forgotten as most foolish thoughts are always forgotten.

LENGTHENING SHADOWS OF DISCRETION

4

Life in North Parur was different from the life in Trivandrum. Parur was a small town. There was no college but only a Government High School. The biggest building was that of the District Court containing the Court of the Sessions Judge, the Munsiff and the Magistrate. The hospital was a small affair. My father was now an Assistant Excise Commissioner and his office was at the farther end of the town. Reghuvēeran was in the first form of the Government High School and I and Sridharan were in the elementary school close to father's office. Sister was in a convent school. What a difference it was to me from the Model School in Trivandrum with Dr Clark in the background to the elementary school in Parur housed in a conglomeration of low-roofed confused buildings. In Parur I was up against the reality of ordinary elementary education at the time with all its hopeless defects. The cane in the hands of teachers was as important as the teachers themselves and we children in the school went in terror of our teachers.

I was in the IV standard of the elementary school. There was no partition between the classes but benches were arranged in such a way as to form different classes. What one teacher was holding forth in one class could be heard in the other classes and vice versa. I used to be bewildered in the midst of different voices declaiming different lessons in different classes. With my best efforts it was often impossible not to listen to what was going on in the next class. One day I received striking punishment. My head was turned in the direction of the neighbouring class where a teacher was reciting a poem in Malayalam and explaining it. I thought it was an interesting poem and that the manner of reciting it by the teacher deserved my attention! As I was enjoying listening to the recitation of the poem the sharp cut of a cane fell on my thigh and as I turned round with the

stinging pain of the blow I saw my teacher Sri Ramakrishna Iyer glaring at me like a tiger. Down came another stroke and I cried aloud. The second drew a wee bit of blood. I sprang up and rushed away to father's office in the building close by. Father appeared very annoyed. I do not know whether he was annoyed at my conduct or at the beating given by the teacher. He asked one of the clerks to wash my tiny wound and dry it and sent me back to the class with a note to the teacher. I had no idea what was in the note. But my teacher just glared at me once again and asked me to sit down. That was the end of the episode. but every time I met this teacher either in the school or on the road I felt a tremour of fear. It took a long time before I could look upon this teacher with any affection.

Many years after when I had grown up and completed my University education I visited Parur to speak at a meeting and made elaborate enquiries about my old teacher. But alas! I was told he was no more. I wished I could have met him and told him that I had fully forgiven him for the harsh beating he gave me long ago.

On a special occasion, perhaps on the birthday of the Maharaja, an exhibition was held in the school. The agricultural department must have evidently co-operated in it. There were lots of attractive fruits and vegetables in the exhibition. We children were asked also to bring whatever exhibits we could. Some of the boys brought toys of coloured paper and some others little jerky dolls made of cloth and filled with saw-dust. I wondered what I could bring for the exhibition. For some time earlier I was learning clay-modelling from my drawing-master. So, I got some good clay and mixing it well, made the figure of a big black cobra coiled up and raising its hood. It looked pretty good and nothing-else gave me greater joy than that the teacher Ramakrishna Iyer himself said a word of praise about it. Some boys and girls were frightened looking at it and this pleased me very much as it made me think the snake looked real. At the prize distribution ceremony I got a small packet of coloured chalk-pencils from the Headmaster. I carried this packet home in triumph and showed it to my parents and brothers. My sister quipped that it was just this kind of a packet of coloured

chalk pencils she was looking out for in her drawing class in the Convent. And so, with a show of magnanimity I presented the packet to my sister. This probably is my first remembered act of abnegation.

In the meantime brother Reghuveeran was also winning some laurels in the Government High School. He acted in a drama in which he and his fellow students participated. What was put on the boards was the trial scene in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice." Reghuveeran acted the part of Portia ! He also won a prize, a good bound volume of Charles Dickens ie. "The Pickwick Papers." He came back home crowing over his prize book and taunted me saying, "What is your packet of coloured chalks compared to my book here?" I thought he was right, and managed to look duly humbled. I remember mother intervened to say that all prizes won by us in school were of equal importance and no one should assume an air of superiority. How grateful I felt towards mother then !

Next year all of us were promoted and I came from the elementary school to the preparatory class in the Government High School. Sister also joined the same school and so we were all together except Sridharan lingering in the elementary school. He looked sore as he was left alone behind. But there was no help for it. Education was now becoming a little more complex. There were a lot of subjects viz. English, History, Geography, Nature Study, Arithmetic etc. We had a number of text books and note books to carry up and down between the house and the school. Father appointed a tutor for home studies. This was very irksome though useful. We now had to confront teachers in the school and as though that misfortune was not enough we had a teacher at home who also kept a cane. The importance of the cane in Education at the time can never be over stated. Father also kept a cane for disciplines other than those in the school and for the home-front. We growing boys were becoming more and more mischievous and uncontrollable.

The worst offender was the irrepressible Reghuveeran who was more full of spirit and courage than the rest of us. He plunged into games and sports, and began to make his own time-table which sometimes would clash with that of the

school and the tuition master. He was the first among us to buy a badminton ball and net and bat. He opened a badminton club and gathered other young boys around him. We two younger brothers admired his initiative and enterprise and often became his camp followers. Father kept a wary eye on him and when he was caught in some misconduct he was given a thrashing. He once jumped into a forbidden tank with hardbiting fish roaming inside and got himself bitten so bad that the blood flowed. But as though the fish bite was not enough father added a thrashing for disobedience in jumping into the tank. I remember mother snatching the stick from father's hands and throwing it away.

It was not merely that we boys were growing up physically. Our minds were opening up too. We were looking at the many things in the world around us with wondering and curious eyes. We were sometimes baffled by what we saw. We sometimes failed to understand what was going on. Life was becoming more complex. The innocence of the sun-shine years was slipping away and the shadows of discretion were creeping in. We would often fight with each other and then join together to fight other boys. In these fights we were sometimes in the wrong and sometimes in the right. When we were in the wrong, punishment came quickly, but when we were in the right we had none to applaud us except ourselves. We were slowly discovering the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil, between love and hate, gentleness and anger and such things as envy, jealousy, pity and indignation were all claiming attention from us. It was as though we had swallowed some apple from the tree of knowledge and were therefore some times ashamed and some^{times} afraid. But we young were never beaten down altogether. We were always up and doing something or other.

The influence of servants on children in a family is an old subject on which much has been written. We got used to male servants and female servants. Sometimes a bad servant had a bad influence on us. Hardly ever did servants have any good influence on me except perhaps one woman. Her name was Nani and she used to read simple stories of the Ramayana and

Mahabharata and entertained us. If we were cruel to insects and animals, as most children would be, she would correct us, and teach us the meaning of pity and kindness. If we threw stones at a dog she would stop us. If we beat a cat she would stop us. She would intervene if any one including father punished us and take our side and comfort us. She herself would get sometimes punishment from father and then all of us children would join together to defend her and put in good words on her behalf. I have often thought she was the first follower of the Buddha I met in life but without herself knowing it.

Mother taught us to have regular prayers and to attend her poojas (worship). Her daily worship, every evening, would give us a thrill. There would be prasad made of ripe plantains cut to small pieces mixed with coconut and honey. When mother lighted the little camphor cakes on the metal container with a long handle and rotated the flames thrice round the picture of Shiva we would be lost in an ecstasy of devotion. But some times I wondered who discovered the form of Shiva as that of God! The image of Shiva with knotted hair piled high on the head and the serpent coiled round the neck filled me with more awe than devotion. But it was enough then, that mother worshipped that image, for me also to worship the same. I was caught up in this unthinking process because of my deep love for my mother who was gentle and kind in every situation. Here I must mention that father was dark and mother fair. Was not Shiva also dark? So I once told mother, father was also a Shiva perhaps! She looked very pleased and said "Then I am Parvathi!" I must confess I did not catch the exact joke.

Some earlier photographs of mother though dark had wellcut features. We were always proud to see him in his navy blue uniform with shining brass buttons on the shoulders and chest and with the laced turban on his head. I wanted to be so dressed when I grew up. We all had the ambition to become an officer like father. That was where our ambitions began. But dear God, how this ambition was shattered and revolutionised

in the later years in a Travancore and in an India throbbing with new ideas and visions!

Looking back, I wondered if the sun-shine years of innocence were the happiest years of our life. But how could that happiness last based as it was on innocence which was often ignorance? Knowledge can be a fearful thing and as we looked at the world and understood more and more of it, we perhaps become less and less happy for a time. That the good would be rewarded and the bad punished stood out like a blazing torch in the bewildered twilight of those years.

In Parur we made many friends among boys and girls. I was happier with my girl friends than my boy friends. The boy friends would be quarrelsome and ready for fights any time. The girl friends lived in a world of laughter and fun and kindness and affection. I have never forgotten two girl friends of those years, Pankajam and Parijatham. We were together in school and I was proud of escorting them to school and back. Reghuvveeran was already a gallant and was a successful competitor with me for the smiles of Pankajam and Parijatham. They were probably seven or eight years of age at that time! I lost touch with them after the Parur years. But the memory of boyhood's smiles and tears still bring back the breath of a fragrance from the past.

The Parur years include the memory of two distinguished teachers. Both were Headmasters. I was in the High School only for a short time under the first and for a longer time under the second. The first was Sri Easwara Pillai and the second was Sri Ramavarma Tampan. The first was a saintly scholar and the second was a brilliant teacher and orator. Both were close friends of my father and often came home on friendly visits which father would return. On those return visits he would take me sometimes with him. Mrs. Lakshmi Menon who later became a Minister in the Nehru Cabinet is the daughter of Sri Ramavarma Tampan and one of my friends of later years. Sri Kainikkara M. Kumara Pillai married Sri Easwara Pillai's daughter. A nephew of Sri Easwara Pillai married my mother's younger sister. So we were all bound together by these relationships. Sri Ramavarma Tampan exercised a distinct influence on

my mind with his oratory. I prayed I would some day become as good a speaker. Would that wish be ever granted to me, I wondered!

Before Parur vanishes from these pages, I must mention two experiences which struck some terror in my mind which lingers to this day. The first one was the sight of a big goat sacrificed in a Kali temple and the other the sight of a thief cruelly flogged publicly under a Magisterial order. The sight of the animal being cut was utterly cruel and ugly and specially when the body of the goat rolled from side to side for many minutes after it was laid on the ground with the head severed. I choked with horror and pity. I swore then I would never worship goddess Kali in my life. The public flogging was equally horrible. A condemned thief was tied to a wooden tripod in the open quadrangle of the Court House and given 15 lashes with a hard cane which a Police constable wielded without mercy. The man on the tripod wriggled desperately under the flogging and cried aloud while a big crowd watched in silence. I ran away cursing the Magistrate who was watching the flogging from the first floor of the Court House. I went home and told my mother, I hated Magistrates. How long ago and how nearly forgotten are these pictures from Parur? These pictures however, indicate something of the life of the times in an important corner of India. Many years after, did I not myself stand before several Magistrates who condemned me to various terms of imprisonment with hard labour in the non-violent revolutions led by Mahatma Gandhi for the freedom of India?

CHANGING SCENES AND GROWING EXPERIENCE

5

Every two or three years father would be transferred from one District to another. After north Parur came Central Travancore with father's head quarters at Kayamkulam. Kayamkulam town sat on the edge of one of the big lagoons which was also called Kayamkulam Kayal. One reached Kayamkulam itself by a narrow canal stemming from the kayal towards the town. Kayamkulam was smaller than Parur as a town. There was only a middle school for boys and another for girls. There were of course other schools at the elementary level. There was a temple of Sri Krishna with a very big tank adjacent to it. On one side of this tank, was a small cluster of trees reported to be the abode of sacred serpents. Some people were ready to testify that they had seen snakes coming and going round the altar. In the tank itself there were a couple of crocodiles which would sometimes bask in the sun on the surface and then go down to the bottom of the tank. Rumours circulated that these crocodiles took away a sheep or a dog sometimes from the surrounding houses. And yet men and women bathed at specified places in the tank without much fear. Evidently the crocodiles would not attack grown up men and women. They were probably not big enough to do that.

We rented a beautiful old house, a furlong from the tank. The house belonged to a rich land-lord who owned many acres of land filled with coconut, jack and mango trees. There was a separate small building as an office for father and then the big rambling house for the family. In the back court-yard were mango trees full of blossoms and fruits. In the central court-yard was a big rose bush which had been trimmed to stand erect and to almost touch the roof. The rose bush used to be full of red roses in the season. We children would sit round and watch the beauty of the roses. But the parental order of the day every time

was no one should pluck a rose. This was an extremely difficult instruction to obey and our hands itched to pluck a flower or two.

Father kept a covered spring cart with two big white bullocks for going on his circuits. Father was a stickler for correct conduct. When he went on circuit, he took a box full of provisions for making his food wherever he stayed. His driver was also his cook. He would never accept anything from lesser officials or local families for his travelling kitchen. The joke was that Assistant Commissioner Govinda Pillai would not even accept salt from any one without paying for it. One of the most delightful memories of life in Central Travancore was father taking us boys in turn, one by one, when he went out on circuits during the summer vacations. We would be out for a week and then come back. The bullocks would trot steadily drawing the spring cart quickly forward. I got wonderful glimpses of rural Travancore. The picture was of myriads of little homesteads and little farms and people busy with coir making.

Coir making was the all pervading cottage industry. In almost every home, the coconut tree was the Kalpa-vriksha or the every-purpose tree. Every part of the coconut palm was valuable to man. The coconut leaves were woven into thatch for roofing. The tender coconut was the best lemonade in the world. And the ripe coconuts became copra for export. No fire-wood was necessary in a coconut garden because there was plenty of special fire-wood obtainable from the coconut trees. The trunk of the tree itself when cut down became strong round pillars or rafters in house making. People loved coconut trees and men and trees lived in close companionship. Every two months the climbers would go up and cut down the nuts. We children would watch with bated breath when the climbers went up and up like monkeys till they reached the top. But, no one ever fell down. What came down were bunches of ripe coconuts. Bullock carts would carry the nuts to the market. The nuts belonged to the land-lord and not to us. We were therefore, only witnesses of the great enterprise of coconut cultivation and coconut cutting. Every time coconut cutting took place we would be entertained to

tender-coconut lemonade, as much as we could drink. This was a great delight of those days.

If we wanted romance, we had only to run to the bank of the tank and see the crocodiles enjoying the sun on the surface of the water. If we took a stone and threw it at them they would make a splash with their tails and disappear. This was a thrilling game for us boys. But one day the game became serious. It was reported that the bigger crocodile, evidently the male one, had come into our compound and attacked a small goat and taken it away into the tank. There was great excitement. People ran out with big sticks and even axes. But, the crocodile had escaped into the tank and pulled the goat down into the water. It was decided that the crocodile should be caught. So, a few days later a small goat was tied to a tree not far from the bank of the tank and left there in the night. And sure enough in the night the big crocodile came out and caught hold of the goat. Impromptu hunters on the watch attacked the crocodile and one of them gave it a heavy blow on the head with an axe and the animal turned and tried to roll away. It was hit again and again and killed. People ran out with torches and lamps to look at the dead crocodile. It was sold to a Muslim next day for Rs. 30/- which price in those days was a magnificent sum. Within the matter of a few more days the second crocodile was also caught and killed, even though the temple priest protested loudly against the killing by claiming the crocodile was the property of the temple. Nobody took this priestly claim seriously. Bathing in the tank became much safer after this. And we children used to jump in and learn how to swim. Almost every boy and girl in Travancore learnt to swim. There were so many rivers, canals and tanks that unless you knew swimming you missed half the joy of life.

Life at school was peaceful and uneventful except for occasional jerks and jokes. There was a teacher whom we called Mukkani Krishna Iyer. He was a good teacher and his classes were full of interest. But he had a special liking for girls in the class and would be ultra nice to them. This irked some of the older boys who used to play tricks on him by sending him little love letters with the forged signatures of some of the girls.

He was for a time taken in by this and showed his pleasure by turning his face constantly towards the girls and grinning at them. But he soon found out and became very angry and lashed out with his cane at some of the boys. There was an old teacher Sri Nataraja Iyer whom we loved because he was gentle and kind. Sometimes he himself joined the boys in making fun of Krishna Iyer and when this happened, Nataraja Iyer's popularity among us went up sky high. But there was another teacher of whom we were afraid. He was Sri Govindan Tampi. He was a scholar and good teacher but a very strict disciplinarian. Behind a stern exterior he kept hidden a kindly heart. We would sit quiet like mice in his class while we would shout and joke in other classes. Two other teachers whom we loved were Sri Kochunni Pillai and Sri Kochukrishna Pillai.

One day the Inspector of Schools came round on his visit. He was an Indian Christian. He was in full Anglo-Indian dress and wore a hat. As he came to the school, we lined up to greet him and later he came from class to class to watch the teaching going on. I was then in the second form. The Inspector stepped into our class. Our teacher became a little nervous. The Inspector took over the teaching for a few minutes and asked some questions. It was our English class and so he asked us questions in English. He suddenly turned to the teacher and asked "Who is your best student in English?" The teacher pointed to me and the Inspector at once turned to me and shot a question at me "Whom do you love more, your father or your mother?" I hesitated for a moment and then said "I love both equally". He laughed and said at once "You are a clever boy" and passed on to the next class. My teacher came up to me and patted me on my head saying that I had given the class a good reputation with the Inspector.

If a boy was clever in English he was always considered as a very good student even if he was weak in other subjects. I, therefore, got along famously in the Kayamkulam Middle School. There was of course a lot of mischief among the boys particularly because there was a girls school on the opposite side of the road. Boys would collect into a bunch and go to look at the girls and crack jokes. But the girls were very well behaved. They

walked on as though they heard nothing, looking straight ahead and so there was never any trouble.

Father's interest in gardening found full expression around our house in Kayamkulam. A big kitchen garden developed round the house with many vegetables and tubers and plenty of plantain trees. We almost never had to buy vegetables. We got plenty from the kitchen garden. And as in Deviculam, little baskets of vegetables would go to the houses of friendly officials and family friends.

Reghuveeran went to Mavelikkara, a nearby town, to attend the High School. He was the first one in the family to learn to ride a bicycle and when father gave him a brand new Raleigh cycle he was as proud as Lucifer. He would ride away with much gusto to Mavelikkara on the bicycle every Monday morning and would return every Friday evening for week-ends. He became something of a hero in the family as the first brave boy to ride a bicycle and that for a distance of about ten miles to and from Mavelikkara.

He was very good at his English lessons and would some times give me coaching in English. He would then assume all the airs of a teacher and teach me as though I was a baby. I enjoyed this fun very much. One clear memory is that Reghuveeran was fond of using bombastic words, for instance, instead of saying "It rained heavily" he would insist on making me say "It rained cats and dogs" or "The rain came down in bucket-fulls". I loved the simpler and more direct words but was helpless in view of the fact that I was sitting as a student before my cleverer brother. One day I took my difficulty to father and asked him which was better, to use simpler words or high-sounding ones. He was non-committal, because in any dispute between us brothers he was always on the side of the elder one. So, he said, it depended on what the matter was, which was being described. He gave an example saying that if there was a description of an elephant, it would be all right to say that the elephant is a mighty animal looking like a moving mountain instead of simply saying that the elephant was a big animal. I was not convinced but there was nothing more I could do at the time. There is however, an interesting sequel. More than fifty years after, I wrote to

my brother Reghuveeran, then living in London, that the Honorary Degree of D. Litt. was conferred on me by one of our Universities. He wrote back to say he was very gratified that his old student of English was found worthy of such an honour!

With the usual regularity, transfers came to father once in two or three years. From Kayamkulam the family moved to Quilon and after the usual two years in Quilon we came to Kottayam. Kottayam was a big town with several High Schools and the well-known C. M. S. College. For education it probably stood next only to Trivandrum. It was also a commercial town with a number of business houses dealing in rubber, copra, tea and a variety of forest products. It was also the hub where several roads met connecting it with other parts of Travancore. One saw more buses and cars in Kottayam than even in Trivandrum. There were beautiful Churches dominating the landscape which was hilly with valleys in between. A beautiful river ran on the border. Kottayam was a great centre of Christian influence and culture.

I was now in the C.M.S. High School beautifully situated on the crest of a hill. Reghuveeran was now in College in Trivandrum. Sister again went to a convent in Kottayam and Sridharan was in the 3rd form of the same High School in which I found myself. We were now grown-up boys with a new sense of importance and some vague dignity. We were in Kottayam for three years. No other town or school in Travancore left such a lasting impression on my mind as Kottayam and its C.M.S. High School.

The C. M. S. High School attached to the C. M. S. College was at the centre of life in Kottayam. The High School was situated on the crest of a hill which on one side sloped away down to the river. There were some fine trees in the High School compound and the school building itself was a good one stretching from the Chapel at one end to the College at the other. The College Principal was the famous Rev. Asqwith, a typical English man, with an air of calm superiority. He would come on to one end of the long veranda of the High School from his Bungalow and walk the whole distance to the College at the other end. He had a measured way of walking and the sound of his boots hitting the floor had a rhythm of its own. One almost thought he measured his steps and one step was exactly the same as the other. As the sound of his boots started out of the Chapel, we students would be on the alert to line up and salute him as he passed. He would walk on without a pause, slightly inclining his head in response and looking neither to the right nor the left. We heard rumours from the College that he was a strict disciplinarian and a good teacher.

We had also a good Headmaster at the High School, Sri P.M. Kurian. I remember his aptitude to imitate Rev. Asqwith. He was always dressed in a suit with a close coat buttoned up to the neck. Luckily he wore no hat; otherwise he would have been the imitation of the Principal, par-excellence.

I was in the 4th form of the High School and I must say that I had as my class teacher one of the best I have ever had, Sri T. T. Mathai. Like most of our other teachers in this Christian Mission School he was also dressed in Anglo-Indian style but kept a black round cap on his head, which some how did not suit the rest of his attire. He was a very pious Christian and a man of high principles. He loved his students and his students loved him. If students misbehaved he would punish them and

at the sametime weep because he had to inflict the punishment. He would weep right in the class before the students, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his tears. This teacher had considerable influence on the development of my character. I thought to myself it was wrong for any student to rebel against such a teacher for anything or to disobey him or to tell him a lie or to copy during dictation or in the arithmetic class. The influence of this teacher was thus a moral influence. He would sometimes invite me to his house and give me tea and biscuits. I have a distant notion that he thought I might become a Christian and encouraged me to attend service in the Chapel. This attendance was not compulsory but voluntary and I was one of those who gladly attended the Chapel service voluntarily. Probably it was this that put the idea into teacher Mathai's head that some day I might become a Christian. He did not induce me actively but very gently and without even mentioning the idea. He trusted in me and left it to his moral influence to effect the conversion.

That I might become a Christian was an idea which got added strength from the fact that I also began attending the C. M. S. Church near the house where I lived in the Chetti Street with father and the family. It was a beautiful Church over looking a valley. I would quietly slip into the Church on Sundays and listen to the music and the sermon. Accompanying me all the time in Church was a Christian boy friend of mine whose friendship I valued. Some one called on and warned my father about what was happening and he in turn called me and asked me what was my intention. I told him I admired Christ's teachings and loved the worship in the Church but there was no question at all of my becoming a Christian. He was not fully satisfied but he left it at that and nothing happened subsequently to annoy or hurt him.

Headmaster Kurian would occasionally step into 4th form and later in the 5th form where I studied and take a hand in giving an English lesson. He was a good teacher, though somewhat pompous and he would roll out his English words and sentences in a resonant voice which was pleasant to hear. I enjoyed his English lessons and learnt much from him. But by

far the best English teacher was Professor Sankaran Nambiar who was on the staff of the College but condescended to come twice a week to take classes in the 5th and 6th forms of the High School. I loved nothing better in those days than to sit in Professor Nambiar's class and listen to him reciting and teaching English poetry. It was he who taught us that wonderful English poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray. I was already fairly strong in English but after the classes of Professor Nambiar my love and devotion to English grew apace. Here was the beginning of my life-long love of English poetry. I secured the highest marks in English composition and this story went round the High School and I was looked upon as something of a prodigy. I have already mentioned how any student doing well in English would be considered a good student altogether. This was really a wrong judgement but there it was.

Then came an elocution competition. I was then only a student of the 4th form. All students of the High School were allowed to compete. The subject was "The advantages of travelling." The elocution competition was held in the big hall of the high school. The judges included Professor Nambiar. Everybody said that Chandrasekhara Menon of the 5th form was bound to win the first prize. He was the younger brother of Sri K.P.S. Menon of later I.C.S. fame. I was also quite sure that Chandrasekhara Menon would win. We were friends and I knew his ability as a student speaker. Each competitor had only 5 minutes to speak and I did my best during these 5 minutes. When the result was announced, to my surprise I had won the first prize which was a silver medal. It was the C. J. Kurian memorial medal. The first person to congratulate me was Chandrasekhara Menon himself. His friendly smile showed he had gladly conceded victory to me without any prejudice. I was impressed by his conduct. He, of course, came from a distinguished family and knew good conduct. Next year also when I was in the 5th form I won this medal a second time in competition with 6th form students. My father was very pleased and got made for me a black alpaca coat on which to wear on occasions the shining medals. An affectionate uncle presented me with a gold

sovereign to make a chain for hanging the medals on the coat. All this merely showed that I was learning my English language fairly well in the C. M. S. High School.

There is another event worth remembering. While I was a student in the 4th form under my teacher Sri Mathai, one day one of the students stole a colour pencil from his neighbour and the aggrieved student stood up and complained that his pencil had disappeared. The teacher asked the guilty person to declare himself. But no one did. There was silence in the class. The teacher was upset and talked earnestly of the duty of his students to be honest in everything. He repeatedly asked who was guilty. Then suddenly his eyes filled with tears and he took out his handkerchief to wipe them. I was much moved by the teacher's distress. So, I stood up and took the blame on myself and produced my own colour pencil as the one taken away from the aggrieved boy. My teacher looked at me very curiously and said "No, that is not possible. You are simply accepting the blame to comfort me". But, in a minute another boy stood up and confessed he was the pencil thief. Teacher Mathai called the guilty boy to him and patted his head and congratulated him on telling the truth. And then turning to me he said "My dear boy, you must not tell a lie even for a good purpose. A lie is always a lie." All I could do was to look penitent and to apologize. That evening Sri Mathai came to my house and related this story to my father and both teacher and father appeared to be pleased. That was enough comfort for me where I had been really silly.

In the C. M. S High School in Kottayam, my mental horizon was widening. I had become a voracious reader and I received guidance from my teachers on what to read. I was deeply attracted by stories of adventure. By the time I had completed my 5th form I had read most of the books of R. M. Ballantyne, W. H. G. Kingston, Captain Marryat and similar authors. I can never forget the thrill I got when reading my first English novel of adventure "The Coral Island" by Ballantyne and later on his "Gorilla Hunters," "Martin Ratler", "Ungava" etc. One effect of these stories of adventure of young people going to different parts of the world and facing danger and fighting wild animals

and savages etc. was that I slowly began dropping my timidity and discovering my own inherent courage. I could not admire the heroes of these tales of adventure without shedding my fear and becoming brave myself.

Probably I was also becoming more aggressive as I grew braver. I would challenge other students not to be afraid of the darkness of the night or of barking dogs or even of snakes. I began indulging sometimes in a cheeky show of courage. I paid for it soon after in a most unexpected manner. It happened this way. Some of us boys from the school were out on a moon-lit night and were sitting on the lawns of the high school beyond which was the churchyard. We were discussing whether there were ghosts or not. Some said yes and some no. I bravely asserted that there were no ghosts at all and added that I was not one bit afraid of them. One of the believers then threw out a challenge. He asked if I was so sure, would I go to the churchyard alone at night and bring back one of the yellow flowers growing there. I was non-plussed for a moment. I threw out a counter challenge. Would at least one other boy come with me? This was followed by complete silence. No one was willing to come with me into the churchyard at night. The matter luckily ended there. But I knew I had indulged in a bit of bravado and was thoroughly exposed!

It was in Kottayam I, as a young boy, began making intimate friendships with other boys. There was T. K. Joseph the son of Professor Kuruvilla and Achutha Menon the son of the Malayalam Lecturer and there was also John Kurian. We were all in the same class and when we went up and down, Chandrasekhara Menon coined a well known title "The three Musketeers" for us. It was by the cultivation of these friendships that I came in touch with other families and became for the first time a conscious unit of society. Some of these friendships lasted throughout life. We met later in different places, engaged in the business of life in different ways and whenever we met we were happy to be together. T. K. Joseph became later a judge of the Kerala High Court; Achutha Menon became the Principal of the Law College and I met and renewed my friendship with John Kurian, some fifty years after. Also for the first

time in life I and my young friends were becoming conscious of the reality of the female sex. We became self-conscious in the presence of girls and began to develop certain complexes. I was struck with the fact that when we were with girls we were on our best behaviour; I did not know why. Not only was the horizon widening but it was also deepening.

As my young mind watched the widening horizon of life, two mighty figures came into my ken. The first was Vivekananda and the second was Gandhi. I was still a student in Kottayam, when a friend of my father presented me with a copy of a book entitled "Lectures of Swami Vivekananda". In the night at home I somewhat casually opened the book. I had previously read Surendra Nath Banerji's lectures and got a patriotic thrill out of them. Surendra Nath Banerji was then a great figure in politics and so attracted me considerably. But Vivekananda was a religious leader! I wondered what message he could have for a young fellow like me. The first of the lectures was Vivekananda's address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and it gripped me at once and I sat up enthralled. I finished this speech and then went on reading the speeches one after the other. They were delivered in America, England and India. There was in them ringing eloquence vibrant with his passionate faith in the greatness of Hinduism. The day light was dawning before I put the book down.

For days afterwards I went about with nothing but Vivekananda in my head. He struck me as no ordinary religious preacher. He was a prophet and his inspiring words echoed and re-echoed in my mind. He interpreted the culture of India with heroic dynamism. He held up Indian culture as revolutionary and capable of lifting Indian life to the highest level. I asked for and got more books on the life and teachings of Vivekananda. I also plunged into a boy's study of the life and teachings of Vivekananda's Master, Sri Ramakrishna. But somehow I came back to Vivekananda from his Master. It seemed to me in my youthful enthusiasm, the disciple was greater than the Master.

Almost at the same time I got hold of the writings and speeches of Annie Besant. Here was another mighty voice of inspiration. I wondered how she, a woman from another coun-

try, could interpret Hinduism in almost the same inspiring manner as Vivekananda. I was thus thrown into a new world. Till now I was gradually getting wrapped in the New Testament and the life and teachings of Christ. I was now on the Indian soil and beginning to realise the depth and height of Hindu culture. There was naturally a conflict in my mind which continued to tantalize me till Gandhi appeared on the scene and step by step fully captured my mind. But all this was still in the realm of boyish fantasy. These experiences came crowding into my second year in the Kottayam High School.

How and when did I first hear of Gandhi? What was my first glimpse of him on the horizon? I look back gratefully and remember clearly. There was in Kottayam an Association called the Rising Star Literary Association. Monthly meetings were held in the house of Chandrasekhara Menon. His father was no more but his venerable mother lived in this house. Sri K. P. S. Menon was in the house only occasionally. He was then a student in the Madras Christian College, if I remember right. It was a big house. When the Rising Star Literary Association held these meetings in the house, we young fellows who attended seldom numbered more than 15. Chandrasekhara Menon was then the Secretary. At every meeting we elected one of those present to take the chair. Some one, I do not remember exactly who, once read a paper on Gandhi's Satyagraha in South Africa. Gandhi had just then returned to India and had been given a great welcome in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. All this was in the paper read at the meeting of the Rising Star Literary Association.

My curiosity was quickened and my interest turned sharply to Gandhi after this meeting. Luckily I got a copy of Rev. Doak's book on Gandhi. It was a little book by a Christian Missionary in South Africa, who knew Gandhi personally and had seen Gandhi at work in South Africa. Within a few pages, Rev. Doak had given a picture of Gandhi which took my breath away. Here was a man veritably embodying in himself the best in Hinduism and equally the best in Christianity. Even if a deeply religious man, he was a Barrister at Law fighting the battle for the political and economic freedom of Indians in South

Africa. What a curious combination it appeared to me! His own speeches, as reported in the press, did not possess the ring of eloquence of Vivekananda or Surendra Nath Banerji or Annie Besant but there was in them some other remarkable quality of utter realism, courage and selflessness. The speeches were not exclusively those of a political leader. Nor were they those of a religious teacher. They were a blend of both. I read his speeches with growing wonder.

One day there was a curious discussion at home between me and my elder brother Reghuveeran. He brought the news of how for the first time an Indian had been raised to the Peerage in England in the person of Lord Sinha. The controversy related to which was the better title for a patriotic Indian, that of the Mahatma conferred on Gandhi by the leaders and people of India or that of Lord conferred on Sinha by the King of England and Emperor of India. My brother argued that it was a unique distinction for an Indian patriot to become an English Lord with the right to sit in the House of Lords. I argued on the other hand that such a title was only the jewelled evidence of Indian subjection to British rule and that the title of Mahatma was far greater and ennobling. In the heat of the controversy our voices rose high and father who had just returned from his office stepped into the scene and asked what was all this noise about. We eagerly told him all about it. He was inclined to vote in favour of Reghuveeran saying that after all the title of Mahatma was only given by those without proper authority, whereas the title of Lord was given to Sinha by the King Emperor. He was a loyal officer of the Maharaja and therefore, of the King Emperor at this point. But I would not yield and told my father that Lords may come and Lords may go but the title of the Mahatma would remain through all time. My father said he admired my faith but found it difficult to share it. I was very disappointed that I could not win father's support. But there was no help for it and I kept my own mind without faltering.

Sometime later father put the whole matter before a scholar friend of his, who was also a distinguished lawyer. He was the late Sri P. K. Narayana Pillai who was then the leader of the Bar

in Kottayam. Father had the shock of his life when the scholarly lawyer voted in my favour. I remember his saying that neither the Buddha nor Christ were raised to the Peerage in their times but both were known as Lord Buddha and Lord Christ down the centuries. Gandhi also, he said would be the Mahatma for centuries to come.

From now on another vista of life was opening before me. I wanted to know more and more of the Indian National Congress and its leaders. It was at this time that the names of Tilak, Lajpatrai and Tagore became known to me. I was moving away from the beaten track in a new direction. How far I would travel on that way was a mystery to me more than to others. While my young mind was thus breaking new ground in my patriotic thinking, another event occurred which showed me doing likewise in another direction.

A famous Arya Samaj Missionary Thakkur Khan Chandra Varma arrived in Kottayam and delivered a number of speeches, the burden of which was that Christ was a myth! He was also the author of a booklet entitled "Christ a Myth" which he distributed widely for rupee one for a copy. My Christian teachers and friends were very upset and warned students not to attend his lectures. But I took the matter into my own hands and attended two of his lectures. He was an emotional and volcanic speaker. He attacked Christianity and what was worse, he attacked Christ himself saying that there never was a Christ and that the very name Christ was derived from the name Krishna. I was not only astounded but furious to hear such nonsense. At the second meeting held in the open air in Kottayam I stood up and said if Christ was a myth, He was a mighty myth indeed who had survived through many centuries and shaped civilization. If Christ was a myth then perhaps Rama and Krishna were equally myths, as some one might well try to prove. The Hindu audience which was listening with wrapt attention to the speaker became angry and shouted me down. Some one pushed me out of the meeting and I went home very indignant and upset.

This story came into a local newspaper and when I went to school the next day there were two small groups of students

waiting for me. A few Christian friends were cheering me and a few Hindu friends were sneering at me. There was a lot of noise and Headmaster Kurian came out on the scene and dispersed the students peacefully with some tactful words. From then on I was a kind of chota hero in the school. The story of course came to father. But he was this time frankly on my side and he told his fellow officials and friends that he admired my courage for what I had done. I was however very unpopular for a time with the Hindu students and had to stand many a taunt from them for betraying, as they thought, Hindu religion. I was not however, conscious of any such betrayal. I was sure in my mind that I was a good Hindu in what I had done. That much I had learnt from reading Vivekananda. Much later in my life I knew more certainly than at the time that I was right and that Gandhi's teachings fully supported me. This is a big subject and it became one of my major pre-occupations as I advanced in age and knowledge.

In my final year in Kottayam, World War I ended. Orders came that all offices, colleges and schools etc. should celebrate the victory of the Allies against Germany. Father also instructed that our own house should be decorated and an arch should be put up at the main gate. Crowds of students went up and down raising cheers to the King Emperor. Kottayam being mainly a Christian town took up the victory celebration with added gusto. I remember, Headmaster Kurian addressing the students and telling us that the great war was fought to end all wars, and that he was sure there would be no more wars in our life time. The victory of the Allies was explained as a victory for human freedom and for justice and truth. Along with the other boys, I am afraid, I also swallowed this story and joined in the cheering.

How can I close the memories of my life in Kottayam without recalling a poignant little episode. It is also time I mentioned that I was already earning a name for mischief and trouble-making. Once father was away on a long circuit. In father's absence we boys often made a lot of uproar in the house. On the occasion I have now in mind, I had done something quite wrong. I had quarrelled with my sister and made her cry bitterly. She took her case to mother who intervened to ask me to touch my

sister's feet and apologize to her. I bluntly refused. Mother, usually gentle, would not yield and insisted that I make due reparation to sister. When I refused altogether mother went into her pooja room and shut the door. In a minute or two a mood of repentance came over me. But I pushed it away obstinately. Just then I heard the soft sounds of sobbing from the pooja room. I ran and pushed open the door and went in and saw mother sitting in prayer with tears streaming down her cheeks. I was terribly shaken and flung myself at her feet washing them with my own tears. I told her I would carry out her behest as often as she wanted and at once. She smiled through her tears and took my head in her hands and gave me a wonderful mother's kiss. I went out and fetched my sister before mother, and bent and touched her feet and apologized to her most earnestly. Now everybody was smiling and happy. This episode left a deep impression in my mind and every time I looked at my mother I remembered it and swore that I would never again be guilty of bringing a single tear to my mother's eyes. Looking back now over the last more than fifty years I can say with a clear conscience that I did keep my promise. As the years rolled on I became more and more devoted to my mother and her influence over me deepened all the time. What a noble mother she has been!

FAILURE AND YET FURTHER ADVENTURES

8

The next place to which the family came on father's transfer from Kottayam was Nagercoil in the extreme south. We left Kottayam before the results of the Annual Examinations were announced. I certainly expected to pass which would mean my coming up from the 5th form to the 6th form or the school final class. Some days after reaching Nagercoil the results were announced in Kottayam and I had failed in my examination. This was like a slap on my face. How and why I failed did not become clear to me at once. When the marks came I found I had good marks in all subjects except in the two papers in Mathematics. I was not fond of Mathematics, but what was worse, I had not paid much attention to this subject and the result was that I failed. The main reason for my failure was, however, that I was too much engrossed in matters outside the school curriculum. There were too many interests outside my class work which claimed my attention. This was evidently not good for my studies. I was very much ashamed, I had failed. It was the first time I had failed in any class. There was nothing I could do but join the 5th form of the Scot Christian High School in Nagercoil.

Nagercoil was not as pleasant and attractive a town as Kottayam. Perhaps it was nearly as big. The routine grind of work in the school and in the same class as before was not very exhilarating. But here in this school also I voluntarily attended Bible classes. My increasing understanding and appreciation of Hinduism did not stand in the way at all. My Christian teachers were however, pleased and particularly the one who took the Bible class, Sri Paul Appolos. He was very kind to me and took me joyfully through the New Testament Gospels. Neither at the time nor later did I ever regret my earnest study of the Bible. It had stood me in good stead throughout life. Be-

sides gaining spiritually and morally, I improved my English idiom and diction through this study. I remember reading an immense volume entitled "Paul the Dauntless". It was the life of Saint Paul stressing his great courage, his high intellect and above all his profound devotion to Jesus Christ, though originally he was hostile to Christianity. In an all-Travancore Bible examination I won a coveted prize worth Rs 50/-

I think this year was perhaps 1919. Things were moving in India under Gandhi. He had already become a great figure in Indian politics and in radical social reforms. His battle against untouchability and his passionate plea for the liberation of the untouchables stirred the students deeply. Gandhi was also attacking the drink evil and this again added to his moral stature. He had brought from South Africa the doctrine of Satyagraha i.e. non-violent resistance to evil and suppression. He wanted India to adopt Satyagraha in the battle for freedom against the British. Andhrakesari Prakasam was then editing "Swarajya" an English daily from Madras and supporting Gandhi valiantly. Gandhi himself was editing a Weekly "Young India". It is impossible today to describe the eagerness with which some of us students ran to the post office once every week to secure a copy of "Young India". The "Swarajya" was also very popular with students. Gandhiji's articles and utterances in the "Young India" moved the younger generation as nothing else at the time.

But there was another daily from Madras, "The Mail". This was wholly anti-Congress and anti-Gandhi, being an organ of European and Anglo-Indian commercial interests. The Mail vigorously attacked Gandhi and the Congress in well written leading articles. One day I went into the library and saw The Mail with a leading article entitled "Gandhi's vanity and illusion". The theme was that Gandhi would never be able to shake the mighty British Empire and his dream of Swaraj was an illusion. The Christian atmosphere in the school was distinctly anti-Gandhi. To the Christian, Gandhi was the enemy of their beloved King Emperor, who was considered to be the Head of the Protestant Christian Church. I therefore, found myself as something of a misfit in this strange atmosphere. But being good in the English class I was considered as usual a good student.

Moreover, did I not quite voluntarily attend the Bible class? And so, I got on fairly well.

It was decided that a War victory medal should be awarded to the best student in the high school. Sri Paul Daniel, the reputed Headmaster of the Scot Christian High School, selected me to receive the bronze medal. The State Director of Public Instruction, Sri K. V. Rangaswamy Iyengar, was invited to preside over a big meeting. He was reputedly a brilliant English speaker and as he was speaking I listened to him with awe and admiration. He also repeated the catch-words of the time that the World War had been fought to end all wars and that mankind might from then on look forward to a world without war! Students and teachers cheered the speaker lustily. Then I had to go up and receive the medal. I stood before Sri Rangaswamy Iyengar and received the medal with an appropriate bow and murmured my thanks. Father had come to attend the meeting and I saw my Headmaster shaking hands with him. When we all returned home, father had something piquant to say. He called me and looking at me with a quizzical expression on his face said to me, "You see, Ramachandran, this is a medal of the King Emperor and not from Mahatma Gandhi." I looked at the medal and sure enough there was the figure of King Emperor George V etched on one side of the medal. Father's words gave me a jerk and I went and hid the medal in a corner of my bookshelf where it remained untouched for months together. Whenever somebody asked me to see the medal, I would say I just did not know where it was! The whole episode became somewhat silly and confused.

Then came the news that Mahatma Gandhi had given a call for a hartal (strike) throughout India. Everywhere students joined the hartal and came out from schools and colleges. When I reached my school the next morning I noticed an air of tension with the teachers running up and down. The Headmaster came in looking grave and disturbed. He called me and said he did not want any strike in the school and that if any body absented from class he would be punished. I wondered why he had picked me up to tell me this. Then I remembered that I was dressed in khadi and was the only student in the high school

to wear it. Khadi was then called Gandhi cloth. The Headmaster therefore, naturally suspected me as the one fellow who might incite a strike in the school. I was, however, innocent and had no such intention at all.

Just then I heard much loud shouting coming from the road outside and saw in the distance hundreds of students from a neighbouring school marching towards our school gate. The gate was closed at once so that, nobody could come in. I called together a handful of my boy friends and went to the gate and told the shouting students on the other side not to create any trouble but to move on. My appeal was received with angry shouts and we ran back for shelter into the school building. But luckily the boys outside were not very truculent and marched on shouting their slogans. It was that day I first heard the resounding cry "Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai" which rose and fell like distant waves as the students marched away. Hardly did I realise then that this was going to be the cry of the great non-violent revolutions in India under Gandhi which finally brought to an end the British Empire and established in its place the Independent and Sovereign Republic of India. But the cry thrilled me even then. The Headmaster quite wrongly came to the conclusion that but for the appeal I and my friends made at the gate to the marching students they would have forced their way in and created trouble. He called an assembly of the students and congratulated them on their own good conduct in not joining the strike and mentioned my name with approval. I was not stout-hearted enough to come forward and admit that no credit was due to me at all.

There was otherwise not much life or excitement in the Scot Christian High School. Luckily there was also in the same compound the Scot Christian College. This college had a Debating Society but open to college students only. Though I was only a student of the high school, I obtained the permission of the English Principal of the College on the recommendation of my Headmaster to attend these debates and to take part in them. This was a feather in my cap and my fellow students treated me with added consideration. The debate one day was on the subject, 'Who was the greater prophet, the Buddha or

Christ?" The Principal presided and several students participated in the debate. I read a whole book on the Buddha in preparation for the debate. I spoke in favour of the Buddha being the greater prophet bringing out the point that he was the son of a King who renounced his kingdom to become a seeker after Truth and when he had found the Truth, he renounced worldly life altogether to take the message of Dharma to the people. But a college student who spoke was in brilliant form and made a good point to meet my argument. He pointed out that in the life of Christ there was the story of how Satan had offered the entire kingdom of the earth if he would turn away from God and how Jesus refused to be tempted. He asked eloquently "which was the bigger sacrifice, that of the little kingdom of Kapilavastu by the Buddha or that of the kingdom of the whole earth by Jesus?" We lost the debate and Christ won the day with a thumping majority. But the Principal called me to his room the next day and comforted me saying that what mattered was not the number of votes but the substance and eloquence of a speech. He added, I had done very well in the debate. I felt I gained something more than a victory in the debate.

The collection of the Tilak Swaraj Fund was then going on under inspiration from Gandhi. The leaders of the Congress in Nagercoil were advocate Sivathanu Pillai and Doctor M. E. Naidu. Dr Naidu was a leading medical practitioner. He had studied in Dublin and had for a time lived an anglicised life. He wore English clothes and dashed about in a dog-cart drawn by a spirited pony. He suddenly gave up all his foreign clothes and put on khadi. He had a magnetic personality and I was deeply attracted to him. I went to him again and again to learn more about the Congress and Gandhi and the Indian freedom movement. In fact I have said often in later years that Dr M. E. Naidu was my first political Guru. I joined in the collection of the Tilak Swaraj Fund and remember how I got from several friends a sum of Rs. 350/-and took it in triumph to Dr Naidu, who was very pleased and mentioned my work at a public meeting the same day.

I also started putting on khadi. Khadi in those days was as

good or as bad as gunny-bag material. When I first went to the Scot Christian High School dressed in a khadi dhoti and shirt, the Christian boys stood round and hooted at me. Their joke was I was wearing gunny-bag dress. The Christian peon of my Headmaster came up and threatened me that if I ever said a word against the King Emperor he would bash my head! I was, however, unrepentant and wore nothing but khadi in the school.

Then came the late Sri A. K. Pillai on the scene. He was considered by some of my friends as the young Nehru of Kerala. He was a student in Oxford working for his B. C. L. degree when Gandhi began his Non-Co-operation movement. He, then suddenly, threw up his studies in a fine gesture of patriotism and returned to India and plunged into the freedom movement. He was now the Secretary of the Travancore District Congress Committee. He addressed a well-attended open air public meeting in Nagercoil. I attended and listened to his excellent speech in English, which some one translated into Tamil. Nagercoil was a Tamil area. It was in Nagercoil that I learnt my first Tamil words.

At the end of his speech Sri A. K. Pillai appealed for donations in cash and kind for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. I first took off my wrist watch and gave it to him but as the excitement grew and more and more donations came, I also gave away my pair of cooling eye glasses. Sri Pillai auctioned whatever he received as gifts and my watch and glasses fetched the tidy sum of Rs.58/-. I felt gratified with my little gift to the nation. But when I returned home and the matter was reported to father, I got it in the neck from him. He said I had no business to give away these articles because they were not articles for which I had paid with my own earnings. I was upset and said that some day when I earned an income of my own, I would pay back the price of these articles! Father just laughed in my face and said I was a dear fool. I thought that in his heart he was not so displeased as he appeared to be.

It was in Nagercoil that I first learnt to spin on the charkha. Mahatma Gandhi was advocating the charkha and khadi in every speech he made and in every article he wrote in "Young India". So I bought my first wooden charkha and learnt

spinning within a few hours. Along with some other young fellows I started a spinning club which kept a few charkhas for any one willing to spin. We used to collect 3 or 4 pounds of yarn every week and take the yarn to Dr M. E. Naidu who had already established a small khadi production centre to weave handspun yarn on a couple of handlooms.

A few months later Dr Naidu called me to him and presented me with a khadi piece of 10 yards length saying that this was the cloth woven from the yarn of my spinning club. I shouted for joy and later shared the rough cloth with my friends at the spinning club. I took my one yard of khadi to my mother and touching her feet presented it to her. She got this bit of cloth washed and kept it in her prayer room to serve as a small towel to wipe her sacred vessels. It is curious to remember now that I had made my first offering of khadi not only to my mother but also to her God!

In Nagercoil too my preoccupations outside the school took away a lot of time and the result was I failed in the school final examination also. I was once again very ashamed. Headmaster Paul Daniel came to meet my father and to express his sympathy. He left some good advice with me. He said "Try again but do not get mixed in politics too early in life." I am not sure I followed his advice.

ONE CURTAIN FALLS AND ANOTHER RISES

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I spent the first few months of 1920 in the St. Joseph's High School in Trivandrum. The best thing I remember about this school is the vivid and strong personality of the Headmaster Kulandaiswami. He was a strict disciplinarian and students stood in awe of him even if he was never harsh and hardly ever used a cane. He was a remarkable teacher of English and some of his old students speak even today with admiration of his classes in English prose and poetry. Being in the final year of high school again, I went about as a senior student.

For the first time in school Headmaster Kulandaiswami taught us some of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. He started with the Gitanjali. He would read a poem and ask us to repeat lines with him and then explain the meaning. He had a wonderful memory and would recite poems without looking even once at the book on the table. One day he read to us Tagore's famous poem beginning with "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high". I listened to this poem with a high shock of wonder and joy.

Some window suddenly opened before me as I looked out at the world and nascent dreams and thoughts and hopes came flooding into my mind and some deep inspiration stirred within me. I made up my mind to study the poetry of Tagore. I read the Gitanjali and then the Crescent Moon. The third book of Tagore that came into my hands was Sadhana. My joy and wonder grew from book to book as I read them. W. B. Yeats' introduction to the Gitanjali added a whisper of ecstasy to the music which had already filled my mind.

I had another experience in this high school, which was neither good nor elevating. There was a foul-mouthed teacher who took lessons in Mathematics. He had the habit of calling students rascals and scoundrels. The more I sat in his class and

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heard him shouting these words at fellow students, the more my blood began to boil. It came to a breaking point one day when he turned to me and said, "You rascal, stand up". Something snapped within me. No teacher in any school had called me by this epithet. I refused to stand up. He then advanced towards me threateningly. I still kept sitting and as he came near, looked straight at him and said he should withdraw the offending word. He was astonished and grew red in the face. I almost thought he would burst into flames! He raised his voice and repeated the insulting word. Just then by sheer luck, the Headmaster walked in, as he sometimes used to do, going round from class to class. He enquired in a stern voice what the matter was. Before the teacher could say anything, I said to the Headmaster in the politest manner:

"Sir, we students have a complaint against this teacher. He often calls us rascals and scoundrels. This hurts our self-respect. Please give us your protection."

The Headmaster looked very surprised and turned to the teacher. Usually a bully, he was now humble and silent. The Headmaster asked the class if my complaint was true. Several boys now picked up courage to confirm my statement. The Headmaster asked the students to make no further noise and quietly walked away. A few minutes after an attender came in and handed over a slip of paper to the teacher who was sulking. He immediately went out and we saw him going towards the Headmaster's room. We knew nothing of what then happened. In the meantime the bell rang and the class dispersed. But that teacher never again called any student a rascal or a scoundrel.

While I was going ahead with my study of the poetry of Tagore, I saw in the newspapers that the Poet himself was coming on a visit to Trivandrum within the next few weeks and that preparations were afoot to give him a great welcome. I could hardly believe my eyes because here was a dream coming true.

The Poet who arrived on the appointed date was given a rousing welcome at the Railway station. The same afternoon he was accorded a public reception in a huge decorated pandal with the Dewan of Travancore presiding. I eagerly attended this meeting. A beautiful special poem of welcome composed by Kerala's



own leading poet Kumaran Asan was recited by Sri C. Kesavan. Both the poem and the recitation were at the highest level and the audience was spell-bound. I was looking all the time at the majestic figure of Rabindranath Tagore on the platform with Rev.C.F.Andrews beside him. There were also in the front row Rathindranath Tagore, the poet's son and his wife Protima Devi.

As the poet rose to speak we held our breath. He looked like a prophet of old in his flowing robes, with his silver hair in waves over the noble expanse of his brow and with his beautiful beard. He presented a picture of an unforgettable personality. After thanking the public of Trivandrum for their warm welcome he read a paper on "The Religion of the Forest." What a voice, what language and what profound thoughts! When the Poet resumed his seat the loud cheering continued for several minutes. A purse was presented to him towards the funds of the Visva Bharati University, which the poet had started in Santiniketan.

The poet was staying in the State Guest House. I went there and met Rev. C.F. Andrews. I gave Mr. Andrews my application for admission in the Visva Bharati. Mr. Andrews was very kind and noticing my great enthusiasm to join the Visva Bharati, he looked through my application form and seeing my marks smiled and said "So, you ploughed in Mathematics, so did I long ago in my school. I am afraid you will now have to appear for the entrance examination in the Visva Bharati."

I then pleaded with him that he should take me to the poet for a minute or two to get his blessing. He asked me to come along and we went upstairs. The poet was sitting in a big upholstered chair and looked up as we came in. Mr. Andrews introduced me saying that here was Ramachandran, eager to come and join Visva Bharati. The poet smiled and said he would be happy to see me in the Visva Bharati. He enquired about my family and education and gave me his blessings. I came away knowing that hereafter the poet would be my Gurudev as he was the Gurudev to all the students and teachers in Visva Bharati.

My father was not happy when I told him that I had given Mr. Andrews my application for admission in the Visva Bharati. Visva Bharati was not then a recognised University, as it is

today. It was then what might be called a private educational foundation. Father asked me what use would be education in such a University. I showed father the various courses of studies in the Visva Bharati which had already appeared in the "Modern Review" of Calcutta. He glanced through the pages and said again that without a degree from a recognised University, I would have no future. He said his ambition was to see me come up as a lawyer and, therefore, I should enter a college in Trivandrum instead of running away to the Visva Bharati.

I became very downcast and went to mother as usual and pleaded with her to persuade father to let me go to the Visva Bharati. She asked me to be patient and not to press father immediately. There was a little family complication at the time because my elder brother was then clamouring to go to England for higher studies. What was mother to do? Without father's consent nothing could be done.

Father and I for a time lived in a state of armed neutrality! He would not consent to let me go to the Visva Bharati and I refused to continue my education in Trivandrum. A way out had to be found and I found it by going on a fast. I had some vague idea that this was the Gandhian way in such a situation. I started my fast and closing the doors of my room, sat cross-legged on the floor in front of a portrait of Gandhi. Sridharan, my younger brother, found out what was happening and reported to mother. She knocked at the door and I opened it for her, but resumed my yogic posture with closed eyes. I told mother, I would go on fasting till father gave his consent. Mother said at once she would plead with father and that there was no need for me to fast. I did not, however, relent.

Father was more amused than angry and on the second day of my fast asked mother to tell me that I could go to the Visva Bharati if I were so insistent. That was how I won in my first act of Satyagraha! Once father agreed, he had no more hesitation. He himself wrote to the Visva Bharati and within a few days there was a reply asking me to come to Visva Bharati to appear for an entrance examination. My heart, however, sank for a moment, because I was now being called to go far away from Travancore. Till now all my wanderings and adventures

were inside the State. I had now to face the unknown.

Luckily my elder brother Reghuveeran was also called to Allahabad at the same time to sit for his preliminary I. C. S. Examination. He had already graduated and his biggest dream was to compete for the I. C. S. and go to England to complete his studies. It was decided we would travel together and go first to Calcutta and then to Santiniketan. Brother would come and see me admitted in the Visva Bharati and then proceed to Allahabad. We made a curious pair as we travelled from Trivandrum to Calcutta by train. Reghuveeran was dressed in European clothes and I was completely swadeshi in my khadi dhoti and kurta.

We reached Santiniketan on the morning of a winter day in December 1920. We stayed in the University Guest house and I had time to look round. The guest house was an imposing building, the only one of its kind in a big area with innumerable cottages and mango and sal trees. The surroundings were shady and pleasant. Even as we entered Santiniketan, coming by bus from the Bolpur railway station, three miles away, something of the haunting beauty of the place took hold of my mind.

In front of the guest house where the bus stopped, we were standing on a fairly high but flat expanse of land over-looking what appeared to be a broad valley extending to the south. We were to meet the Principal of the Visva Bharati after lunch. We, therefore, hurried to the bathing ghat built around a big circular well from which water was lifted by bullock power and poured into open cisterns. There was a second wall running the whole circle of the bathing ghat, furnishing privacy to those taking their bath. We found ourselves in the company of several students and teachers. Taking his bath quietly at the cistern next to ours was a simple, lean, intellectual-looking person with a holy thread making it clear he was a Brahmin. He had a pleasant and shining face. He must have been about 45 years of age. When we had finished our bath, Reghuveeran turned to him and asked him with his usual air of importance:

"Look here, Sir, will you be so kind as to tell us which is the house or office of the Principal with whom we have an interview at 2.30 P.M.?"

The ascetic looking Brahmin with nothing but his loin cloth around his waist and a towel on his shoulders smiled and pointed his finger to a little thatched cottage visible through the trees. We returned to the guest house and after lunch and rest went to meet the Principal. There, to our astonishment, we found that the Principal was the same person we had met at the bathing ghat. He was sitting in one of the rooms of the cottage behind a low table on the floor covered with a small carpet. Reghuvēeran looked a trifle shame-faced, but managed to make his bow and I did the same. There were no chairs and we too sat down on the carpet. The Principal was very nice to us. He said Rev. Andrews had already given my application to him. He turned to me and asked me a few questions. I remember one or two of the questions. The first one was if I knew who Asoka was and what was his place in history. I knew my answer and gave it fairly. He then asked his next question, if I thought there was any leader in India at the time who resembled Emperor Asoka. Without a moment's hesitation I replied that Mahatma Gandhi certainly resembled Emperor Asoka, though he was not an Emperor at all. The Principal was very pleased.

We found out later his name was Pandit Bidhusekhara Bhattacharya and that he was a great Sanskrit scholar who knew also Pali, English, French, German and even some Tibetan. He agreed he would allow me to sit for the entrance examination, and gave me a slip to someone in the office close by. He then asked us to go and meet Rev. Andrews who had agreed to see us at 5 P.M. Mr. Andrews received us warmly at the appointed time and after a brief conversation took us both to the Poet himself.

The poet lived in a beautiful little cottage with big windows opening on the horizon. Tagore was very gracious but frankly looked amused at the difference between us two brothers, one in European clothes and the other in a khadi dhoti and kurta. After talking a little with my brother and wishing him success in the I.C.S. examination, the poet turned to me and asked me what subjects I proposed to study in the Visva Bharati. Somewhat hesitatingly I mentioned that I had not yet appeared for the entrance examination but if I got through, I would like to take

English literature and Indian philosophy. He suggested it would be good to add sociology to my subjects adding that while literature and philosophy might take me up into the sky, sociology would keep me on the earth. He also said that they had at the time in the Visva Bharati a very distinguished British Professor of Sociology, Mr. Patrick Geddes. I was struck by his human interest in a new student. We took leave of the poet and I once again bowed at his feet while Reghuveeran shook hands with him.

I have only to add that I got through my entrance examination within the next two days and stood first in the list of those who passed from among 35 candidates from different parts of India. As soon as I was admitted, Reghuveeran left for Allahabad. I did not meet my brother for many long years. He went to England and later settled down in London finding for himself a job at the Office of the Indian High Commissioner. But when he left me in Santiniketan and went off to Allahabad, I felt lonely and perplexed as I returned to my hostel to face a new life altogether. I was now far away from my home in the extreme south of India and from all my family. Thus one curtain fell and another rose on the little stage of my life.

The early days in the Visva Bharati University were filled with new scenes and sensations. I joined my classes. I was admitted into the senior course in the subjects I had selected, namely English Literature, Indian Philosophy and Sociology. In no class was the number of students more than 15 to 20. How startlingly different this was from the crowded class rooms in Travancore. Classes were held in the shade of trees. There was no furniture at all. The Professor would bring his own "moorra" (wicker stool) and students brought small woven asanas, which were really small pieces of thick carpet, sometimes woollen and sometimes of cotton. Students would sit in a semi-circle in front of the Professor. The Professors and Lecturers were often young and brilliant persons who had come to work in Santiniketan out of their high esteem and admiration for Gurudev Tagore.

My English Professor, to begin with, was Sri Jehangir Vakil, M. A. (Oxon), a short, handsome and vivacious person. He, like other teachers did lecture, but lecturing was the least part of his vocation. He actually conducted study-classes in which students and he participated in a process of learning. He would suggest a lot of reading material available in the library. He was fond of giving us a good deal of home work to do, which necessitated our going to the library and consulting the books he suggested. He was very careful in correcting our home work. He often read these together with us in the class itself and corrections were made on the spot. He was a keen lover of English poetry and specially of the poetry of the Irish poets headed by W. B. Yeats and George Russel, generally known as AE. When he took Shelly and Keats for us he exhibited deep scholarship and understanding of English poetry. He was himself a poet and wrote some exquisite English poetry which perhaps was later published. It was a joy for us to be his students.

But there were two Englishmen who were at the top of English teaching. They were Rev. C. F. Andrews and Dr Mark Collins. In the second and third year Mr. C. F. Andrews lectured on the history of English literature from ancient to modern times. He brought to bear on his subject his profound Cambridge scholarship and a broad human vision. Dr Collins took Shakespeare. He also was an erudite English scholar. He led us into a careful study of selected dramas of Shakespeare without himself coaching us too much.

In my philosophy classes I studied under a remarkable teacher, Professor Saroj Kumar Das. He was a Professor of philosophy in the Calcutta University who came once a week to Santiniketan to lecture to us on Indian Philosophy. He was a fine speaker in English and to this was added his passion for philosophy. When he took classes, students and teachers from other sections would also come to listen to him. I became very fond of this Professor and he returned my affection and gave me excellent guidance in my study. He was a great admirer of Dr S. Radhakrishnan under whom he had studied in the Calcutta University.

But the most romantic of our work was in the subject of sociology. Professor Geddes hardly lectured on the subject. He would take us students into villages and without making any fuss he would ask us to sketch pictures of the village with its rows of trees and thatched cottages and note its daily events. Usually he and we would be in a village at day break and stay on till sun-set, watching the life of men and women and the work they did and the manner in which they spent their time. We would collect mothers and children and talk to them. Every evening we brought with us sketches and notes. This would later become the subject matter of discussion and study. We were probing into the causes of village poverty all the time and wondering how poverty and the simple happiness of the Santhals could go together.

But far more important than the studies and lessons was community life in the Visva Bharati. Santiniketan was the parent Ashram and the Visva Bharati was the latest off-spring. There were not more than a hundred students at the time in the Visva

Bharati. But the number of students in the Nursery School and the Primary and High Schools was much bigger. Students in the Visva Bharati like me were those who had left schools and colleges in response to the call of the non-co-operation movement which had just swept over India under Gandhiji's leadership. The majority of students came from Gujarat and the Gujarati students constituted a well-knit linguistic unit in the Visva Bharati. But there were students from all over India and from European and Asian countries. I remember a couple of Japanese students and some European students from Germany, Norway and France.

I had as my room-mate in the hostel a boy from Norway by name Olaf Aagha who had come to India by serving in a Norwegian ship and thus paying for his own passage. He had come to study Indian Philosophy. His father was a Banker who had disapproved of his project of study in India. And that was why he had to fend for himself. The Visva Bharati gave him a scholarship. He changed into Bengali clothes from his European dress and was a somewhat clumsy figure in his dhoti and kurta but being extremely well mannered, he was very popular.

Community life was full of freedom and happiness and artistic. Almost every week there would be cultural programmes of music, dance and drama. Gurudev Tagore himself would sometimes appear on the stage and he often attended these functions. In the whole of Visva Bharati, no department was more conspicuous than the Kalabhavan under Sri Nandalal Bose, who has sometimes been called, the greatest Artist of modern India. There was also the renowned Sangeetha Bhavan. Normal academic studies received inspiration from the background of the Kalabhavan and Sangeetha Bhavan.

The Department of Indology was also important and famous. Pandit Bidhusekhara Shastri, the Principal and Pandit Kshiti Mohan Sen added lustre to the department of Indology. They were scholars of national and international fame. Student life was free and untrammelled; nevertheless there was discipline and decorum everywhere. This became possible because of the high character and example of the teaching staff. The great personality of Rabindranath Tagore stood behind the whole

institution and next to him was Rev. C. F. Andrews with his deep love of India and his equal devotion to Tagore and Gandhi. Hardly a day was dull or uneventful. Visva Bharati and Santiniketan bubbled with life and particularly intellectual and artistic life. Tagore himself took classes in poetry and philosophy. What a privilege and joy it was to sit in his classes!

Less than two miles away was Sriniketan, a vital part of the Visva Bharati. It was the department of Agriculture and Rural Reconstruction. Tagore had anticipated Gandhi in adventuring with his programme of village reconstruction. There were at the time not more than forty students in Sriniketan. Tagore was particularly devoted to Sriniketan and went there often. He was greatly helped in developing Sriniketan by Mr. Elmhirst, an Englishman who, like Mr. Andrews, had learned to love and admire Tagore. Sriniketan had an agricultural farm, a dairy farm, a school of handicrafts and a programme of rural health and adult education. Academic and philosophic studies in Santiniketan and in the Visva Bharati with dance and music and painting added, on the one hand, and the integrated programme of rural development in Sriniketan on the other, was the revolutionary and inspiring picture of education initiated and built up by Rabindranath Tagore.

One gets a thrill even today when remembering, how more than fifty years ago and even before Gandhi came on the scene, Tagore had arrived at the conclusion that without reconstructing the health, education, prosperity and happiness of the villages, there would never be a free or progressive India. The more I visited Sriniketan and participated in the joint process of learning and productive work upon which the whole of the institution was based, the more I realised that Rabindranath's programme of self-help and self-growth which he was shaping and developing in this wonderful wing of the Visva Bharati, was one of his greatest gifts to India. Every year there used to take place a colourful ceremony in Sriniketan in which the students of Sriniketan and Santiniketan joined hands. Rabindranath himself would arrive and put his hands to a plough and open up the earth for a while as little girls sang their praise to mother earth. This participation in person by the poet in the ceremony, more

than anything else, underlined his deep understanding of the problems of village India and his integrated programme to solve them.

In Santiniketan and in the Visva Bharati life was full of intellectual and artistic vitality, but in Sriniketan life was lived at the ground level of the people. Both combined to produce the full picture of what the poet dreamt for his mother land. It was impossible to live in the Visva Bharati and in Santiniketan without feeling the impact of Sriniketan with its practical philosophy of productive work. In fact the Visva Bharati and Sriniketan were like the two wings of a bird lifting itself into the high air of culture and development.

Thus even before I came to personally know Gandhiji and his revolutionary "Constructive Programme," I came to realise in the Visva Bharati something of the challenge and significance of village reconstruction. This fitted in with my own young mind's dream for my country. From the writings of Vivekananda and Gandhi I had already caught a vision of new India in which the millions of our people in the villages would march forward co-operatively hand in hand with the people of towns and cities. Professor Geddes put this vision in poetic language when he taught us that the future of India depended on "The marriage between the Village and the Town" in our country.

Around Santiniketan were innumerable Santhal villages. Santhals were tribal people who had settled down in peaceful life for centuries on the plains. They were a lovable people with soft, rounded features and a dusky colour which looked very attractive. They were indolent and took life easy and were satisfied with little in terms of the needs of life. Mr W. W. Pearson, an English colleague of Rev. C. F. Andrews had given himself wholly to work among the Santhals. He cycled into the villages with a few student volunteers every day and conducted adult education in literacy and health and sanitation. I rode out with him on my cycle whenever I could snatch the time from my other studies and I was deeply impressed by the sincerity and love of Mr. Pearson for the simple Santhals whom he looked upon as his own children and they in return gave him their abundant love and willingness to learn from him. Mr. W. W. Pearson, like

Mr. C.F. Andrews, was a devoted admirer of Gandhi. Along with Mr. C. F. Andrews he had gone in earlier years to South Africa to help Gandhi in his work to bring a measure of freedom, self-respect and dignity to the thousands of Indians who had become part of the economy of South Africa and yet were subjected to many hardships and cruelties on racial considerations.

One day along with a few friends I went to Mr. Pearson to invite him to speak at our students' meeting on Gandhi's birthday. Gandhi was then in prison. Mr. Pearson was silent for a few minutes and then wrote on a slip of paper that he was observing Gandhi's birthday as a day of silence and prayer. As an Englishman, he wrote, he was so ashamed that the British rulers had put such a man as Gandhi in prison that he would not wish to attend the meeting even if only to pay his tribute to the Mahatma.

Some of us returned so moved by Mr. Pearson's words that we ourselves almost gave up the idea of the meeting. But when the meeting was held and I mentioned this episode to the assembled students, they too were so touched that they decided to march silently to Mr. Pearson's cottage after the meeting and to present him with a small collection of money to help him in his work among the Santhals. I do not think the amount was more than Rs. 100. Mr. Pearson received the marchers in silence and accepted the gift with folded hands. An year later when we students heard that Mr. Pearson had died in a railway accident in Switzerland, we mourned his death with deep sorrow and decided to take more active part in the work for the Santhals. Prof. Geddes and Mr. Pearson were the first two teachers who introduced me to the realities of village life in India.

What were these realities of life as I saw them in 1921 in the villages around Santiniketan? For the first time I saw the utter poverty of the people. The houses were of mud with low thatched roofs and most of them contained only just one room with sometimes a small enclosure under the same roof. There was nothing in the house except some cooking pots and one or two bamboo cots strung with thin jute ropes. The men went to work in the nearest rice mills and towns. They went in the morning and came back in the evening. In the meantime women kept

watch in the mud huts over the children and some poultry and a goat or two. They cooked only once and probably had only one full meal in the evening. In the meanwhile they ate some uncooked food like edible roots or parched rice which would keep for days.

Village people took their poverty for granted and never bent their minds to any programme of improving income or food or clothing. There was hardly any productive work in the cottages which remained dull and silent throughout the day except for the barking of stray dogs. The Santhals were a happy-hearted and easy-going people. The men usually wore a short dhoti with another tied on their heads, No one probably possessed more than these two pieces of cloth. In the winter the cloth on the heads would come to cover their chests. The women wore nothing but an one-piece sari.

Some of us students in the Sociology Department would go into the houses and find out what the food was like. It was often just some thick gruel eaten with a green chilli or a raw onion. Malaria played havoc with these ill-nourished people. There was nothing like sanitation because the villages were small, with not more than 20 to 25 houses and surrounded by open fields or sal forests. I understood that the Santhals were a little cleaner in their small villages than the Hindus and Muslims in the bigger villages. One had to work hard to make them learn reading and writing. But cultural programmes and any magic lantern show or a film strip would bring all the men and women and children out to look on. Mere literacy as such was something of an abstraction to them. But apt cultural programmes appeared to them to be in some way a reflection of their lives and hopes.

The Santhals were fond of singing and dancing. Mr. Pearson encouraged troops of these dancers and singers to come to Santiniketan and to receive our friendly hospitality. The Santhal dances were very simple and attractive. They danced and sang to a gentle rhythm of voices and drums. Except such programmes they hardly had any recreations. Most of the males often carried a flute and you could hear their plaintive notes come floating from any point of the horizon. The only convey-

ance available was the bullock cart and every village had a cart or two which perhaps were owned by the whole village. Drinking water came from shallow wells. But the water was often contaminated by the bad habits of the people. There was hardly any cultivation except some banana trees. There were also plum trees growing wild around the cottages.

I wondered again and again why these tribal people cared little for education or any technical knowledge and why they were so placidly content with their unchanging lives. I must however, add they drank some cheap date-palm or rice toddy which was another of their rare enjoyments. Santiniketan, the Visva Bharati and also Sriniketan were centres of learning and of the application of modern knowledge and technology to the problems of better living and production. But within a stone's throw, lived these Santhals totally unconcerned by these enterprises of the educated community. The gulf between the two was very wide and difficult to close. Was not this one of the biggest problems facing India? I wondered and felt confused in my mind as to what could be the solution.



MY PARENTS

MADHAVI THANKACHY - GOVINDA PILLAI

MY ANCESTORS



FOUNDER OF MY FAMILY
THIRU VIKRAMAN TAMPI

KARANAVAN OF MY FAMILY
MARTHANDAN TAMPI



MY BROTHERS AND SISTER



PADMAVATHI THANKACHY



REGHUV EERAN TAMPI

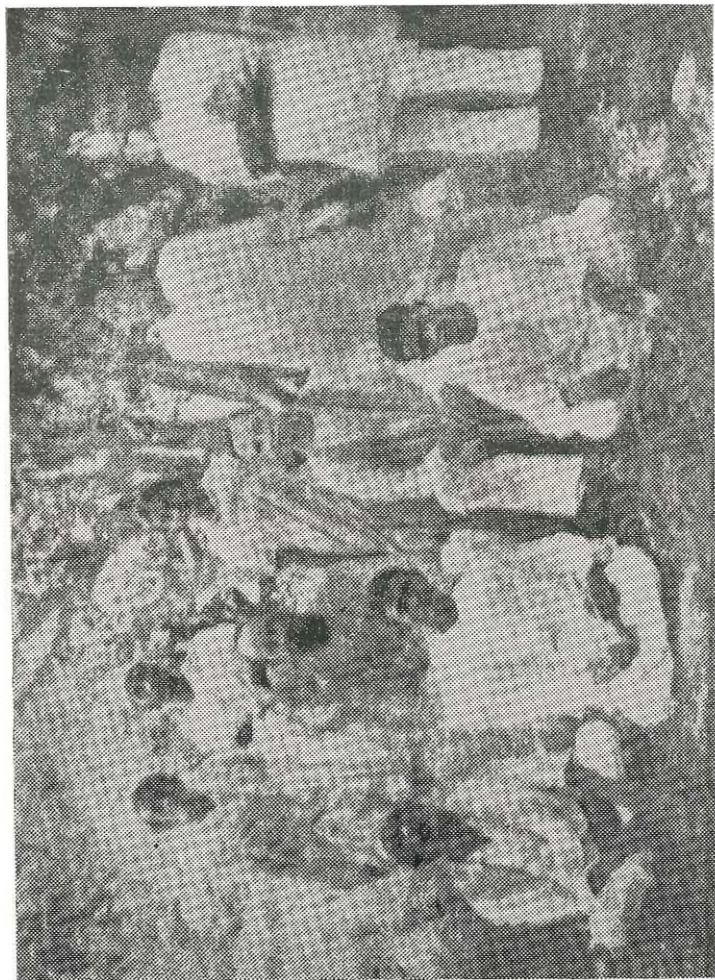


RAMACHANDRAN



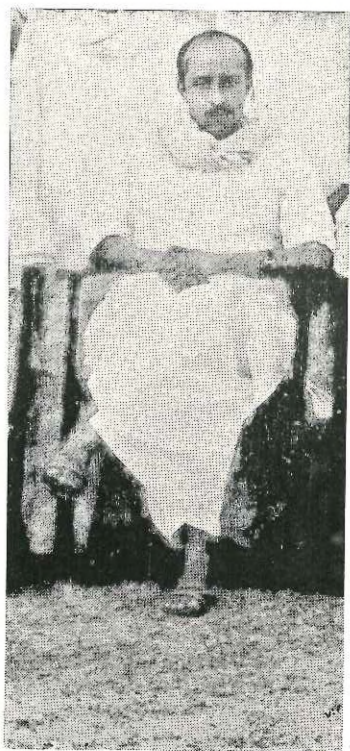
SRIDHARAN TAMPI

STUDENT IN SANTINIKETAN



MYSELF STANDING EXTREME LEFT

C. F. ANDREWS AND STANLEY JONES IN THE MIDDLE



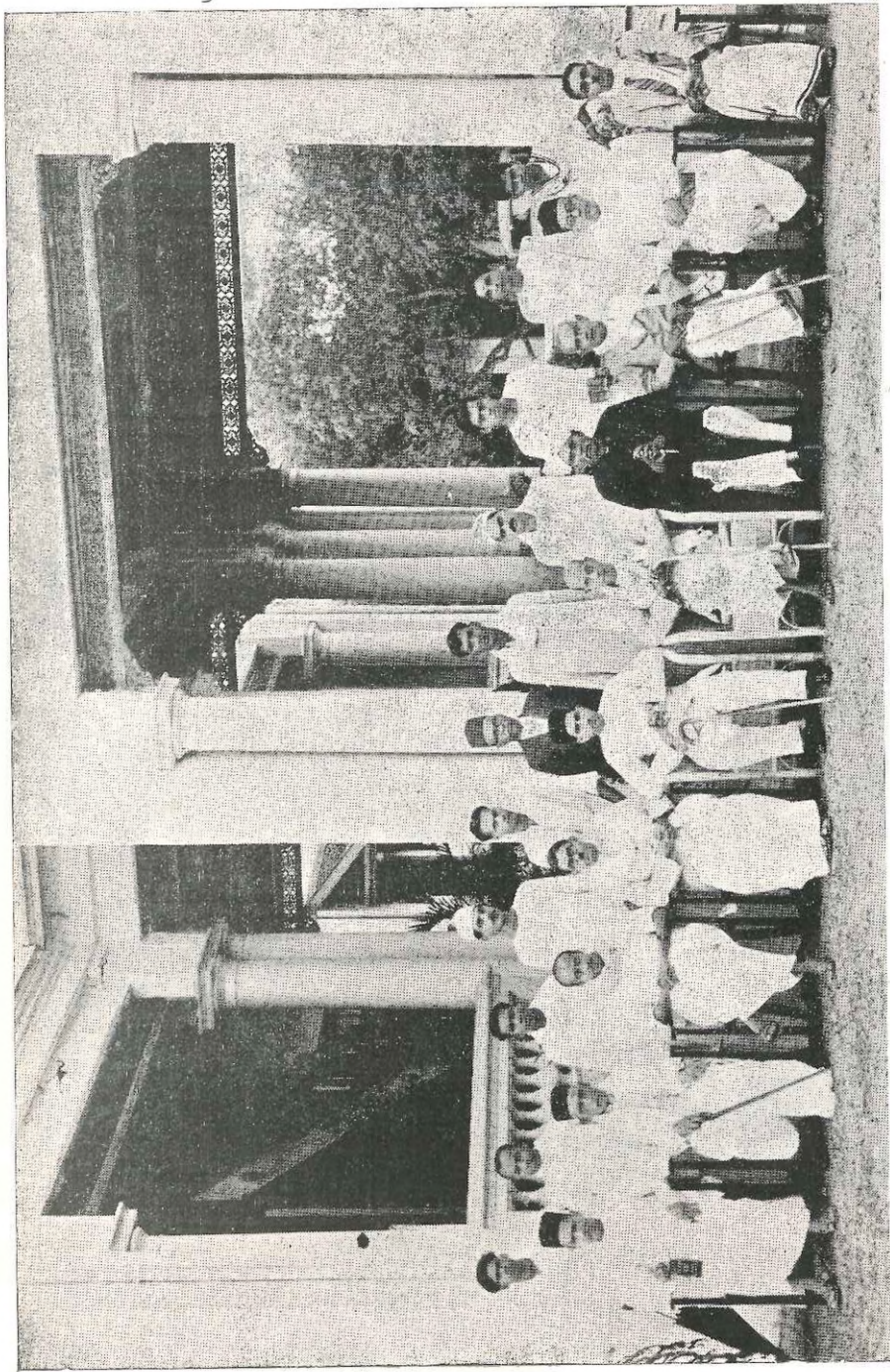
MYSELF AT 32 YEARS OF AGE



MY MARRIAGE CEREMONY IN SEVAGRAM, SHOWING JAMNALAL BAJAJ,
Dr SOUNDRAJ, RAJENDRA PRASAD, GANDHIJI ETC.



WITH RAJAJI AND CHANGANACHERY IN HARIJAN TEMPLE ENTRY



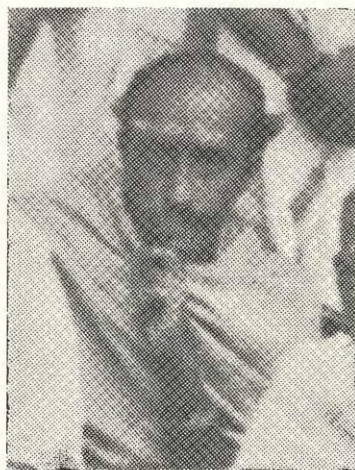
WITH G. D. BIRLA, CHANGANACHERY, AYYAN KALI, M. GOVINDAN, K. P. NILAKANTA PILLAI



BY THE SIDE OF RAJAJI



A VIEW OF "MADHAVI MANDIRAM"



MYSELF IN THE TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT

VISVA BHARATI VIBRANT AND GLOWING

11

As I lived in Santiniketan and even afterwards I have sometimes heard the view expressed by some critics that the Visva Bharati was a place for lotus-eaters, cut away from the realities of India and indulging in day-dreams and fantasies. Nothing however was farther from the truth. This false idea of Santiniketan and Visva Bharati must have arisen from the fact that poetry, philosophy, handicrafts, painting, music and dance were parts of the grand design of education as conceived by Rabindranath. Much later, when I studied under Gandhi at the Satyagraha Ashram on the banks of the Sabarmati, I was to hear similar views about what went on there. Various intellectuals and University Professors used to say that there was nothing in the Satyagraha Ashram except spinning and praying!

Let me however write first about the Visva Bharati. We were a small community of students and teachers. We lived together, learnt together and worked together. Teachers and students were like comrades engaged in a great enterprise of knowing India and the world. The Visva Bharati laid its claim to be an International University. The very name Visva Bharati meant World Culture. It was certainly fast becoming a Centre of International Culture.

Rabindranath had not only dreamt and written poetry and song and drama but was also a keen student of history and modern thought. He had travelled in many countries of the world and met some of the most distinguished thinkers and writers of his time. More and more his interest was in man as such, as distinct from religious or philosophic or even political and economic groupings. He even challenged the validity of nationalism as a worthwhile goal for mankind. He was already looking beyond the frontiers of nationalism, towards a World Federation. He had a free and unfettered mind. Intellectually

and morally, his courage was at the highest level. He accepted nothing except what was clear to his reason as the truth of a matter. Power did not frighten him and wealth never enticed him. He never bent his knee before any insolent might.

He combined in himself the highest gifts of a poet with the wisdom of a philosopher and at the same time kept his feet on the hard earth of reality. He did look at the problems of India which required immediate and urgent attention and care. He not only created poetry and song but gave his mind to improved agriculture, rural handicrafts, dairy farming, adult education, rural health and sanitation. He was a rare combination of the idealist and the practicalist. That was how he developed not only Santiniketan but equally and simultaneously Sriniketan, the one an abode of knowledge and the other an abode of production and prosperity.

We students under him were taught no day-dreaming or playing with fanciful ideas. We had to learn our subjects hard and live a life of simplicity and devotion. Our hostels were low-roofed dormitories with very little furniture.

The bell awakened us before 5.00 a. m. The morning prayer was at 6.30 a.m. It was a free and unregimented prayer. Students went out of the hostels and sat anywhere under the shade of trees in meditation for about ten minutes and then gathered together in front of the library to hear devotional songs of the season composed by the poet and then we dispersed quietly. Rabindranath himself often joined the prayers and joined in the songs. Here was a high level example of non-denominational prayer for a country of many conflicting religious traditions. We were in our classes after breakfast by 7.30 a.m. Classes went on till 10.30 a.m. and then we dispersed for private and personal studies in the library or elsewhere. We met again at 2.30 p.m. and had classes till 4.30 p. m. Then there were sports and games till 6.00 p. m. Meetings of Students Associations and Cultural Programmes came after the evening meal. The lights went out at 10.00 p.m.

It was almost impossible to be lazy or indolent. Students had to be on the move throughout the day. No notes were dictated but plenty of notes were taken on our own. There were monthly

tests which were fairly informal but demanded hard study and attention. The students had their own Associations and there was even a Student-Court of Justice to deal with any acts of indiscipline. The Judges of the Court were elected students and thus discipline became self-evolved.

Contrary to the general idea at the time, not many students came from rich families. Most of the students were from middle class families. The Visva Bharati at that time was not a Chartered University, but a Private Educational Foundation. That was for me one of its great attractions. The prospectus of the Visva Bharati had made it clear from the beginning that the aim of the University was not to confer degrees or diplomas but to undertake various studies in depth and in research. It was only towards the end of my time in the Visva Bharati that degrees and diplomas came into the picture.

The community life of students was largely self-organised and self-managed. Students ran the hostels and the kitchens and kept discipline in the dining hall and elsewhere through elected representatives. There were a number of teachers who gladly shared hostel life with the students. Let it be remembered that all this constituted something less than a revolution in education at the time. What a far cry this was from the regimented and stereotyped system of education current in the schools and colleges in the country. Gandhi's Basic Education scheme was also nowhere in the air at the time. But how remarkable it was that some of the key features of that revolutionary education programme were already taking shape in the Visva Bharati.

Every institution inspired by a great thinker will emphasise some life values more than others. The values which were emphasised in the Visva Bharati were of considerable significance to India and the world. Let us take a look at these values.

The first and foremost was the recognition of the unity of mankind in which there could be no distinction of race, nationality, colour, class or caste. The society of man was one and indivisible. Then came the value of man as an individual. Man was first and last just a man, pure and simple. The greatest heritage of man through the ages was his freedom and particularly

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the freedom of his mind. Civilisation and culture had validity only in the area of that freedom of the human mind. This was a matter over which Rabindranath often became prophetic and passionate in his utterance. To gain the whole world and to lose the freedom of the mind was for Rabindranath the equivalent of the Biblical teaching that it would be of no avail to gain the whole world after losing one's soul.

But Rabindranath was a poet and artist. To him the right to happiness was the birth right of every human being. In this quest for happiness was included everything in civilisation and culture including political and social freedom. Rabindranath taught that civilisation perished when true happiness was betrayed. But knowledge alone was the key to happiness and freedom. The quest for knowledge, therefore, was at the core of education and it was an unceasing quest marching through time. Co-operation and harmony leading to peace must be the aim of all human endeavour, instead of conflict and competition leading to war. Culture was the ultimate efflorescence of civilisation. In the growth of a broad-based and human international culture must be found the future of mankind.

That was why the Visva Bharati stood for the harmony and understanding among world cultures. These were not merely theoretical values. They constituted the foundation on which the Visva Bharati stood. For Rabindranath these were the axioms of modern and progressive life. Without them human life would always remain at low levels. Rabindranath also integrated these values in practical programmes of studies, productive work and extension. It was not easy for him to find teachers who would understand fully the depth of these values in theory and practice.

He was, however, extremely lucky in the early band of teachers who surrounded him and helped him in this great task. Among these were C. F. Andrews, Bidhusekhara Shastri whom we affectionately called Shastri Mahasai, Kshiti Mohan Sen, Nepal Chandra Rai, Pearson, Elmhirst, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Prabat Kumar Mookerjee, Dinendranath Tagore and others. Each one of them was a personality on his own, with Gurudev towering among them as a giant.

The international character of the Visva Bharati was proved

not only by the variety of languages and subjects which were taught to small groups of students but also by the fact that some of the resident teaching staff and visiting professors came from different countries of the world. Thanks to a generous endowment by the Tatas, a succession of European and Asian scholars arrived in Santiniketan to lecture in turn for a period of time. The first to arrive was Professor Sylvian Levi, the French scholar and an authority on Buddhism. Then came Dr M. Winternitz, a life-long scholar in Sanskrit literature from the University of Prague and himself a German. He was succeeded by Professor Tucci and Professor Formichi from Italy and Dr Stenkonov from Norway.

They delivered what might be called a series of extension lectures, and some of them stayed on for months together. Dr Winternitz stayed for nearly an year and lectured on the history of Sanskrit literature. He was a German, short statured with a small goatee and something of a sailor's cap on his head. When he arrived he was given a warm reception in the mango grove, which was something like an open air stadium of Santiniketan, with Rabindranath presiding.

Bidhusekhara Shastri, our own great Sanskrit scholar, welcomed him in a Sanskrit speech and his words sounded like silver bells in the air. Listening to him one realised why Sanskrit has been sometimes called the language of the Gods, but what was our wonder when Dr Winternitz stood up with a radiant smile and responded in a full-throated Sanskrit speech of equal eloquence. We had all lived under the impression that when European Indologists spoke Sanskrit they would do so with their own foreign accent and intonation. But here was Dr. Winternitz speaking Sanskrit as though Sanskrit was his mother tongue! We listened with admiration and applauded him loudly which he acknowledged by bowing again and again. Later as he delivered his series of lectures on the history of Sanskrit literature, not only the whole of Visva Bharati but even students and professors from Calcutta came to attend. Dr. Winternitz spoke with great warmth of emotion when he referred to the philosophic works of Adi Shankaracharya. Raising his voice he said that, after 40 years of

the study of Sanskrit and contemporary philosophy, he acknowledged that there was hardly any other philosopher in the world who could take his place by the side of Shankaracharya. Perhaps he said the only European thinkers who could match him were Immanuel Kant and Bertrand Russell, though they were expounders of different systems of thought. Bidhusekhara Shastri was lost in admiration at the mastery of this German scholar over Sanskrit.

Professor Tucci of Italy also left a deep impression on our minds. In one of his lectures he said that the spread of Buddhism from India across Tibet and China and upto the borders of Mongolia was probably the only instance of a religion spreading without any sort of gunboat diplomacy behind it or any attempt of violent conversion. We students drew a deep breath of legitimate pride listening to this testimony about Buddhism. What wonder then that we young fellows in the Visva Bharati felt a sense of importance and distinction as the students of the only International University in India!

Among the visitors who came to the Visva Bharati none was more loved and welcomed than Ramananda Chatterji, the famous Editor of the "Modern Review". This Review was at the height of its circulation and prestige at this time. There was hardly a college library anywhere in India or any well known Institution or Club without the Modern Review on its table. Ramananda Chatterji was very close to Rabindranath Tagore and in fact with his silver hair and beard he bore some resemblance to the poet from the distance. In almost every issue of the Modern Review there would be a copy of one or the other of paintings from the students of the Kalabhavan. Most of Rabindranath's articles in English were the monopoly of this Review. Ramananda Chatterji was a very keen student of national and international affairs and he wielded a powerful pen when he attacked someone or some issue or a political development. C. F. Andrews also often wrote in the pages of the Modern Review. Ramananda Chatterji was really a friendly soul and we students would sometimes surround him when he came for walks along the Sal avenue in the centre of Santiniketan and most of our talks were peripatetic. Ramananda Chatterji was a critical but devout admirer of

Mahatma Gandhi. But when there were differences of opinion between Rabindranath and Gandhi, he would courageously support the poet. The Modern Review gave the widest publicity to the programmes and projects of education and rural development in the Visva Bharati. Was it not in the Modern Review that I had first seen the prospectus of the Visva Bharati, which finally brought me to Santiniketan?

RABINDRANATH AND GANDHI 12 AND THE CLASH OF IDEAS

Those were days in which the poet himself was one of the teachers in Santiniketan. He sat with students of different age levels from time to time and taught them under the shade of trees. He was most at home with little children to whom he would tell stories interspersed with songs and recitations of his own poems. How the children would sit around and look at him and listen to him with a concentration which we elder students could never achieve. There would come roars of laughter from the children in which he would join them. With the elder students he was naturally more solemn and went deeper into any subject he taught. He took some classes for the senior students in the Visva Bharati on Shelley and Keats and Browning. He confessed that while Wordsworth and Keats were his favourite English poets in earlier days, he came to admire more and more Shelley and Browning. This was one of the rare occasions when he taught us in English. He took his classes mostly in Bengali and even when he taught about European thinkers, poets and artists, he would speak only in Bengali.

At the weekly prayers in the steel-and-glass Brahma-Mandir every Wednesday he would give a religious talk, taking up slokas from the Upanishads and quotations from the great religious scriptures of different religions. Every one of these talks was in Bengali. He was soaked in the philosophy of the Upanishads and was the living embodiment of their spirituality. When he took a class, he welcomed questions, in fact he provoked doubts and challenges, and then answered with undisguised candour and freshness of mind.

When I asked him why he turned to Browning later in life he answered with a smile that one never could give the reason, just as one never could say when looking at the sunrise or the sunset, why one sometimes loved to look at the softer

and simpler play of colours and sometimes at the many splendoured display of deeper colours in the sky. I enjoyed along with my fellow students this fine explanation but was not sure that I got the answer to my question. He would not go further into the matter and only added that in our love of poets and poems, of paintings and songs, our hearts would be plucked by different shades and tones of meaning and beauty at different times. This did not necessarily imply any superiority or inferiority of any of them. It was largely a question of our own emotions and moods of thought and responses.

Every great man has his own background. This was very much true of the poet. The poet's background was Santiniketan, its beauty and peace, its history and growth and aims and aspirations. When I first saw Rabindranath in Trivandrum as mentioned earlier I saw him against a crowded popular reception and a big public meeting. Even so, his personality and culture had struck a deep chord in me. But it was in the background of Santiniketan that I realised the radiance of his personality and genius. It was here that he blossomed to his fullness. It was here that his poems and songs rose in an increasing symphony of immortal beauty and truth. It was here he wove the patterns of his dynamic philosophy of the unity and freedom of mankind, cutting across every obstacle of race, nation, creed, community and caste. It was here again that his vision of the Visva Bharati was born and nurtured.

There is in Santiniketan a sal-avenue. It is to that avenue that my mind turns as I now write. There, from the eastern end would come a tall royal figure. Not in any costly robes or external aids did his kingliness lie. It was there in his majestic figure. Some ancient prophet or emperor might have had such a figure. He would approach in his simple flowing robes which covered him from head to foot. His hair was snow white and yet his gait unbent and his walking firm. His hands were held behind his back. His broad brow rose like a marble dome crowned by the white snow of his hair over shining eyes and his noble Aryan nose. There was such serenity flowing from him, such peace and self-possession, that one would ask, "Is it some Maharshi or Prophet of old, re-risen, who is approaching?" And as he

approached, you saw a smile of affection lighting up his whole face.

Boys and girls of Santiniketan greeted him with bowed heads and folded hands. He had a smile and a kind word for everybody. But the little children did not stand away in reverence like others. They ran to him shouting, "Gurudev!" and clustered round him to bend and touch his feet in greeting. With the children he would crack joke after joke, and there would go up peals of laughter from among them in which his voice was that of the most glad-hearted. They laid hands on his robes and pulled him till he consented to sit somewhere with them in the shade of some spreading tree. They asked him questions. He gave them answers which made them break into fresh peals of laughter. Then suddenly there was silence, for he was telling them a story or singing them a song. It was a magic circle. It was the Eden of children. Elder students and other men and women of Santiniketan came and sat around, a little behind the children; and seeing them he would say laughingly, "Why are you here, you old people? This is our, the children's durbar." He was so much one of them!

Day after day he came walking in serenity and dignity down that sal avenue. Day after day we used to greet him there and touch his feet and felt ennobled. That sal avenue was so full of him in those days. Those trees would never forget him. They must be missing him now!

It was once a rainy day. There were only a few class rooms or lecture halls worth the name in Santiniketan in my days. The classes one morning started in passing sunshine. A class of little children was going on in the grove behind the library. The rain gently started without warning. The children did not want to break up the class. The teacher was hesitating. Suddenly there was an uproarious voice coming from the side of the library. Rabindranath was approaching with an armful of umbrellas shouting "An umbrella for a song! An umbrella for a song!" The children broke up the class at once. They ran to him joining in the fun. Gurudev had come to the library and seeing the rain start had gathered all the umbrellas in the library veranda without asking anybody's consent. And yet, it is this same glad-hearted and

child-souled poet and prophet who has also given us his profound philosophy, and sorrowed deeply over the many tragedies of modern civilisation.

In the years I spent in Santiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore was at the height of his achievements. He was in the glorious autumn of his life which is often the richest part of one's years. The poet had reached the fullness of life and had become world famous. His vigorous and dynamic philosophy was not without an effect on current human culture and events.

He had already built and nourished Santiniketan and after that the Visva Bharati. Scholars and students from distant climes came to the Visva Bharati to live and study there in peace and happiness. I have already mentioned how my room mate in the hostel was a Norwegian youth. Professors also came from many countries. There was nothing narrow or fanatic about the thought and life in Visva Bharati. We lived there as a small and vital community of world youth. There was no caste or class, no communalism or racism in the Visva Bharati. Our culture was Indian, but it reached out aspiringly to a new world culture. We were within a deep and broad world view and in an intellectual and artistic atmosphere. Rabindranath kept his intellect and ideas crystal clear. He was a very fearless person. I have very seldom come across in all my life a man who knew less of intellectual and moral fear than Rabindranath Tagore.

1921-1927 were great years in the history of India. It was during these years that Gandhi had fully come into the life of India and taken up the leadership of the people. He had generated the first non-violent revolution in India known as the Non-Co-operation Movement which swept the country from one end to the other like a storm. It uprooted many things and it shook many institutions and traditions. Several colleges were left empty and even British Courts and the Provincial Legislatures were boycotted. They were stirring days in India's history and Gandhi was awakening and inspiring the millions as never before. Every word he wrote and every word he spoke echoed and re-echoed in the towns and villages of India.

Then suddenly the Poet of Santiniketan and the Saint of Sabarmati clashed with each other. One day Gandhiji read in

the Modern Review an article entitled "The Call of Truth" by Rabindranath Tagore. The whisper went round in Santiniketan like wild fire that our Gurudev, our Chief Acharya of Santiniketan had written an open criticism of Gandhi's movement. Most of us, students, were Gandhi's followers; we were in fact fanatic Gandhians. We had left colleges in response to his Non-Cooperation Movement. We were therefore very much excited. We started reading the article which contained Tagore's criticism. Tagore said in effect in that article that Gandhi was the soul of India, that after the Buddha there never had risen in our country a greater person, but at the same time, even this great man of India's destiny was making a great mistake. He was establishing a kind of moral and mental dictatorship which could be worse than political domination. Here was a leader whose word had become law to millions of unthinking people swept by patriotic passions. People had become like the sheep following the shepherd. This was intellectual and even moral suicide.

Tagore then turned to the charkha. He said he liked the charkha and wanted the charkha to spread in India. He was willing to sit down and learn to spin on it. But if Mahatma Gandhi said the charkha alone would win the freedom of India, it was a clear case of misdirection. Freedom would not come by simply spinning on the charkha. Freedom could come only as the cumulative result of innumerable programmes of action. So he respectfully warned Gandhi to think again and not to establish a moral dictatorship over the conscience of India.

We were angry and said, "What right has Gurudev got to challenge the Mahatma?" We argued up and down in loud voices and there was a lot of noise and confusion. Some of the students even shouted anti-Tagore slogans inside the Visva Bharati itself. We waited to see what Gandhi would do. Gandhi was editing the Young India; and in those days no patriotic home was complete without a copy of Young India. In the next issue of Young India came Gandhi's reply. We opened our copies of this weekly and began reading eagerly. The heading was "The Great Sentinel". Tagore's challenge came under the title "The Call of Truth" and Gandhi's answer came under the caption "The Great Sentinel". He said that he had no words

to express his deep gratitude to the poet. He pictured Tagore as the great Sentinel of the human spirit, warning people against hero-worship and blind obedience. Mahatma Gandhi said he wanted every Indian to read every line of what Tagore had written. He wanted the whole of India to discuss the subject and also the warning which had come from Tagore. But he added, that he had a quarrel with the poet who had said he was establishing a moral dictatorship. Gandhi wanted to assure him that he would rather perish than establish any such dictatorship. He wanted every man and woman to think for himself or herself. He insisted that the people should not accept his philosophy or programme of the spinning wheel unless they understood their significance. Their significance was to him unassailable in view of the reality of the grinding poverty of the people of rural India. He did not seek to establish a moral dictatorship in India because he himself valued the freedom of the human mind as much as the poet himself.

There were then certain economic arguments in the poet's article and Gandhi countered them. In one particular paragraph, he gave a somewhat sharp reply when he said to the poet something like this: "If you trace the source of every penny that comes into your pocket you will see that it comes from the toil of the villagers of India. There were the wealthy people, the educated people and there were great institutions in the country. They all drew their sustenance from the village producers and gave hardly anything in return. This was morally wrong and required atonement. One of the ways of atonement was voluntary spinning and use of khadi." Gandhi after dealing with the economic challenge added, he wanted poetry, philosophy and beauty for every man and woman, however poor, but they must first have had at least one square meal a day. What was the use of poetry and philosophy and beauty for the hungry and the naked, for those who have nothing except toil and sweat throughout their lives? He said that Santiniketan and its music, dance and culture were good and necessary, but they must filter down to the millions in the villages. So the poet must come down from his heights and stand with the people of India shoulder to shoulder in the struggle for food and freedom. Then his songs will be

sweeter and his poetry richer.

It was a great challenge. Here was one great man arguing with another and lifting the discussion to the highest level. As this controversy developed, people took one side or the other. The great scientist, Acharya P. C. Ray, took sides with Gandhi and so did Acharya Kripalani. The Irish Poet, George Russel called it a noble debate. Others took sides with Rabindranath Tagore. Romain Rolland referred to it in moving words of admiration as the model of a dialogue between two great minds.

Then suddenly some of the students in Visva Bharati also made up their minds to make a contribution to this debate. As the Secretary of the Students Association I was asked to call a meeting of the Association. Somebody then came and asked me to read a paper on the subject of the controversy. Now like the Irishman in the story, I was only too ready to join the fight. Two Irishmen were having a fight in the street, one fellow hitting the other. A third Irishman came down the street and stopped and watched the fight for a minute and asked if it was a private quarrel or if he could also join in it! I was perhaps the Irishman in the current situation in the Visva Bharati. I agreed that I would produce my arguments and so the students wanted me to come out in the open to support Gandhi's views against those of Tagore. The students in Visva Bharati and also most teachers mustered strong at the meeting. There were, the among latter two strong supporters of Tagore. They came to listen to me and they must have made up their minds that if I said something against Tagore they would give me a good rubbing down.

I moved a resolution, "In this controversy in regard to the immediate tasks to be accomplished in India, Mahatma Gandhi's programme is the only right programme." I said it was all right for the great poet to sit in Santiniketan, singing his beautiful songs and writing his magnificent poetry and weaving the texture of a world philosophy and doing some symbolic rural reconstruction. These were necessary and excellent in themselves. But to reconstruct the shattered life of India with its three hundred and fifty millions of people was a different matter. It was this Herculean task that Mahatma Gandhi was

trying to accomplish and it could not be done unless all joined hands together unhesitatingly. It required the hardest work at every level of Indian life. It required the co-operation and regimentation of millions of the people. And so on and so forth. Then, of course, there were those who opposed the resolution. There was a keen debate and a number of students and teachers spoke for and against. A vote was taken. My resolution won. The opposition had made out a strong and eloquent case. The two lecturers who spoke against the resolution did very well. And yet we had won. We all returned to our hostels carrying the argument to our beds.

Next day sometime in the forenoon I got a message from Gurudev which simply said that he wished to see me. I thought the matter was being taken up at the highest level and I did not know what would happen. I was a little nervous. I went to Gurudev who received me kindly. Then he said he was greatly interested to hear that his students had a debate on whether their Gurudev was right or wrong in the views he held on the current situation in India. He added he was delighted that the majority of students had voted that he was in the wrong. I said to myself, "What am I hearing? I came to be reprimanded and to be told I was a fool". But here was Gurudev with a smile on his face saying that he was delighted to hear that his students had argued fearlessly and finally adopted an adverse resolution. And then he wanted me to call a meeting again at which he wished to explain his views. I could only say humbly that there could be no greater privilege than to listen to his direct words. He then asked me with a twinkle in his eyes, "Even if I prove that I am right, will you like to hear me?" I had the good sense to reply "Yes." I came back and met my friends who were waiting for me somewhat anxiously. When I told them what had happened they too could hardly believe their ears.

The next day, the whole of the Visva Bharati gathered to hear Gurudev. Then Gurudev arrived. He came into the hall with a smile and a joke. There was pindrop silence. He then spoke to the students. Let me summarise what he said from some notes and memory:

"When I established the Visva Bharati, I had! one great

dream in my heart. I myself, as a boy, had no happy life at school. Teachers would jump at me and compel me to think along their lines. So, I ran away from school and when I grew up, I said I must establish somewhere an institution where boys and girls will grow up in freedom and joy. The foundation of Santiniketan and Visva Bharati is therefore the freedom of your young minds. Every boy and girl here must be free to think, grow and develop along his or her own lines. I have heard with delight of the debate you had yesterday. I was particularly delighted that the motion had gone against me. I have not come here to oppose your motion. I do not want to alter it at all. But I want you to give me a hearing." And then he explained his point of view at length with deep conviction and sincerity. He revealed such reverence for Gandhi, such deep love for him, that those of us who listened to him said to ourselves, "Is it of this man that we spoke yesterday as a man obstructing Gandhi? This man understands Gandhi, knows Gandhi and loves and reveres him more than all of us put together."

But even so, he said, he was not willing to agree with Mahatma Gandhi in everything. He mentioned hand-spinning and khadi and spoke about village industries and non-violence and the emancipation of the untouchables. He said that in all these matters Mahatma Gandhi was giving India unique leadership. But he warned that not one of us should accept any programme just because it came from Mahatma Gandhi. We should study him, understand him, discuss his views amongst ourselves and accept them only if by our own reasoning we agreed with him. He said "I want the whole of India to follow Gandhiji, but they must follow him, thinkingly, understandingly and not blindly." And then his voice rose as he added "Anybody following Gandhiji blindly is doing injustice to the greatest man of our country." He went on to say finally "This Visva Bharati will fail if it fetters your minds or makes you fear ideas. Even if every one of you holds an absolutely different view from mine, even so Santiniketan will still be your home. It will shelter you. Today is the day of my victory because my students have said freely and bravely that I am in the wrong. I do not admit that I am wrong. But I want you to have the courage to say so, if that is

your conviction. May Visva Bharati always give you that freedom and courage!"

Rightly did Mahatma Gandhi call Gurudev the "Great Sentinel". What nobler or more courageous Sentinel of the human spirit has India produced since Gautama Buddha, 2500 years ago! Gurudev's concluding words that night still ring in my ears. "Do not accept anything even if I say so or because it is my view. Wrestle with these problems with your own power of reasoning. You must fearlessly reject my view if your reasoning does not agree with mine. That I am the head of this institution gives me no right to enforce my ideas on you or to curtail your mental freedom. It is my duty in Visva Bharati to guard the freedom of your mind as the most precious thing in the world. That is the mission of the Visva Bharati."

Let us think for one moment of the gurus all the world over seeking to bend the mind and will of students to their own mind and will through fear or coercion of every kind, and let us remember with our heads bowed in love and reverence this great Gurudev who taught us that the value of the freedom of the human mind was the greatest value under the sun. How astonishing that in this matter of the freedom of the human mind, Gandhiji was also utterly clear and unambiguous! Again and again he had reiterated that nothing would defeat his movement than the masses of the Indian people following him blindly. In regard to every one of his teachings and programmes of action he wanted the people to understand fully the meaning and purpose. But nevertheless both Tagore and Gandhi had their share of blind following. This is perhaps the price which all great Teachers have to pay.

It was my third year in the Visva Bharati. C. F. Andrews had become my favourite Professor and I lived very close to him in mind and in spirit. My own age was twenty. Something then happened in my life which gave it a turn from which I never could come away in all the rest of my life.

Already in the Visva Bharati I had set myself up as an intellectual and I loved nothing better than to challenge every kind of ideology and concept. I found delight in being an agnostic and held that the very idea of God was against all reason. God was not needed at all to make men and women good. In fact, God had never succeeded in doing that yet! Spiritual life was for me the artistic life of poise, dignified behaviour, integrity of character, the readiness to do good and above all intellectual clarity. I was eager to debate and argue on every subject under the sun with my fellow students and teachers. It was into this life of mine that something came like a flash of lightning, illuminating my inner world and changing it for ever.

C. F. Andrews received one day a hundred-worded telegram from Maulana Mohammed Ali, who was then the President of the Indian National Congress. The telegram conveyed the news that Mahatma Gandhi had gone on a fast of 21 days in Delhi to bring about unity between the Hindus and Muslims following a series of violent conflicts between them, and that a conference of the leaders of all the communities was being summoned in the same city. Maulana Mohammed Ali asked Mr Andrews to come to Delhi immediately and to take care of Gandhi during the fiery ordeal. It was Gandhi's atonement for the sins of his people. The whole of Santiniketan was plunged into gloom. Never before had Gandhi undertaken such a long fast. He was also reported to be in indifferent health. Could he survive such a long fast? Even if the mind was strong, would the frail body stand the test? There was a crowded meeting of students

and teachers in the library hall in Santiniketan at which Andrews spoke with deep feeling. He caught the night train and left for Delhi. I lost my sleep. I was thrilled and shattered at the same time. Four days later, Andrews summoned me to Delhi to come and help him. I decided to answer the summons without the slightest delay. There was another excited meeting of the students who gave me a touching send-off. Within the next 36 hours I reached Delhi.

The Delhi railway station was full of khadi-clad and white-capped Congress volunteers. From every part of India Congress leaders and workers were pouring into Delhi. The mighty pull of the moral conscience associated with a Gandhian fast was stirring in the souls of vast numbers of men and women in every part of India. Within a few days, Delhi had become the centre of innumerable pilgrimages of the people from every part of the country. One of the Congress volunteers identified me, drew me out of the railway station, put me into a 'tonga' and we went straight to "Dil-kush", a beautiful, quiet house on the edge of the city in which Gandhi lay fasting. As our 'tonga' neared "Dil-kush", we passed through growing crowds of men and women and as we turned in at the gate, I saw some five to six thousand people sitting in solemn silence on the road side and on the lawns and in the shade of trees. A deep anxiety hung in the air like some heavy rain-cloud of July.

Many astonishing things happened during the next few days. Andrews occupied a small room on the ground floor opposite to the staircase which led up to the first floor and it was in a room on the first floor that Gandhi lay fasting. I was kept busy day and night helping Andrews wash his clothes, get his food, sweep and tidy his room and last but not least, deal with his correspondence and the unending stream of visitors who filled his room all the time. So far as Gandhi was concerned, Dr Ansari had strictly forbidden visitors except close relations and colleagues. It was in that small room of Mr Andrews that I saw for the first time the Roman figure of Motilal Nehru, princelike young Jawaharlal, sharp and ascetic Rajaji, dynamic Chittaranjan Das, scintillating Sarojini Naidu, soft spoken Rajendraprasad, the immense Alli brothers, tall and valiant Swami Shrad-

dhanand, the iron-faced Sardar Patel and a host of others. One fairy little girl figure who flitted in and out by the side of her father was Indira Nehru. For nearly a week, I did not get even a glimpse of Gandhi. I was a prisoner in that room on the ground floor and was kept busy every minute attending on Mr Andrews and visitors who came into his room. And then, one evening unexpectedly, Andrews asked me to accompany him to attend Gandhi's evening prayers in the room above and I felt the thrill of the thought that at last and for the first time I was going to see Gandhi at close quarters. I was about to get at long last the first real glimpse of my great hero.

The sun had just set as I climbed the stairs behind my Professor. By the time we reached Gandhi's room, it was full of silent figures sitting on the carpet on the floor. The electric lights had been switched off. In the after-glow of the sunset, I saw a thin but distinct figure on the cot, wrapped in folds of snow-white khadi. I knew at once that was Gandhi. He looked a frail figure etched in delicate, peaceful lines against the evening light which came in through the big open window. I could also just distinguish the faces of the many leaders, Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Hindu, sitting around the cot with bowed heads. Then someone suddenly struck up the cadences of the prayer, the pattern of which became classical in later years in the history of India. Again and again the voices of prayer rose and fell inside that room. There was complete silence after the prayers; no one spoke a word.

I watched the scene and heard the prayers with all my critical and intellectual awareness. I said to myself that I must not be swept away. I tried to keep a hold on myself. But even as the prayers were going on, something began to pound inside me. It was not a physical experience, but a mental one completely. I saw the frail figure on the bed and looked at the many mighty men of India's destiny sitting with heads bowed in reverence around that central figure on the cot. The question came to me: how did this little man succeed in becoming the unquestioned leader of India's political revolution and how did he perform the miracle of linking that revolution with non-violence? How could at all a man of prayer become the leader of the

revolution? All distinctions of caste, religion and creed melted away in the power of devotion to the unseen God. My mind caught fire.

The truth came to me in a flash that God existed and ruled the conscience of mankind. The intellect might not reach God and reason might also fail to know God. But, God did exist. No myth could hold and rule the hearts and heads of millions of men and women. God was truth and love in one and he who lay on the bed fasting, so that Hindus and Muslims might come together in goodwill, peace and understanding, was the symbol of that truth and love. The spirit of God appeared to hover close within that room. A man had brought God into the room. I felt it unmistakably within my mind. I said to myself, I may never see God, nor know God, but this human symbol proved the truth of Godhood. I would follow the man who had brought God into the room.

This was some sixty years ago. I have tried to keep the pledge I gave to myself inside that room in "Dil-Kush". I know I have sometimes failed and slipped and even fallen. But, I have never once stopped trying to hold on to that pledge with all the strength in me. I met Gandhi again and again after this historic fast. I lived close to him and worked with and under him for nearly a quarter of a century. More than once during these last many years I have sometimes shocked or amused my friends by telling them that if I had not known Gandhi, I would have been a life-long atheist and that perhaps the only party of which I could have become a member was the Communist Party. But, the moment I understood that a man of God could at the same time become the unhesitant and valiant leader of a great political and social revolution, I ceased to be an atheist and had no more need for the membership of the Communist Party! I have met innumerable other men and women who have said the same thing to me in different words. The world will realise in times to come that Gandhi furnished the only alternative to the materialistic and atheistic challenges of Marxism in our time. The world must ultimately go the way of Lenin or Gandhi. All other ways will only be modifications and amendments of these two paths which have already been cut deep in the earth of

history. At least, so I thought then.

This first meeting with Gandhiji was probably on the 13th day of his fast. There were still eight days to go to complete the 21 days' fast. All the time the great conference of leaders of all communities and parties was sitting under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. Moulana Mohammed Ali and Shoukat Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr Ansari, and Moulana Azad among the Muslims and C. Rajagopalachariar, Rajendraprasad, Pandit Malavya, Swami Shraddhanand, Jawaharlal Nehru etc. were all engaged in devising measures for establishing Hindu-Muslim concord. There were also of course, the leaders of the Christian and Sikh communities. Master Tara Singh, the redoubtable Sikh leader, was in the conference as also Dr F. Westcott, the Metropolitan of India and a great Christian Divine. Mr Andrews would every day bring news of the conference to fasting Gandhi and again and again I heard high praise from his lips for Motilal Nehru and Rajagopalachariar among others for playing a noble role in the conference.

While the conference was thus going on, the crowds swelled around "Dil-kush". Bhajan parties and prayer processions kept on coming and going and several thousands of people sat in patience the live long day around "Dil-kush" to hear the morning and evening bulletins concerning Gandhi's health and to watch leaders come and go. There would be occasional swells of voices from some part of the crowd chanting "Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jail" and this would go rolling up and down as more men and women took up the chanting.

There was no distinction at all in the flow of devotion of the crowds consisting of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. There was only the deep human anguish concerning fasting Gandhi and prayers for its successful termination. Gandhi had handed over to Mr Andrews the Editorship of his weekly journal "The Young India" and Andrews wrote some of the finest articles on the subject of inter-religious understanding and communal unity. Often Mr Andrews and Dr Westcott would walk in together and go up to Gandhi's room to sit with him in silent prayer. Outside in the whole of India, a mighty stirring of the human conscience was taking place. Thousands

of meetings were held to advocate and cement Hindu-Muslim goodwill and unity. There was between the fasting Gandhi and the millions of Indian people, a living link, the vibrations of which I could almost hear from the little room of Mr Andrews in "Dil-kush".

I must not omit here to mention a poignant incident. I think, this was on the 16th day of the fast. During all the days of the fast Gandhi kept up his half-hour of spinning on his charkha. But on the 16th day, he became so weak that he found it difficult to sit erect to do his spinning. Dr Ansari who examined him suggested that Gandhi should now give up his spinning, till the fast was over, as the strain of it was telling on him. Gandhi reacted strongly against this suggestion. He looked straight at Dr Ansari and asked him in his feeble but clear voice, "Have you forgotten the power of prayer? My spinning is my daily prayer to God. If you take that away, I will not be able to survive." So, Gandhi was allowed to sit propped up against high pillows to do his spinning. Dr Ansari examined him before he started spinning and examined him again after the spinning. In a voice choking with emotion Dr Ansari said to Gandhi, "Bapu, how wonderful that your pulse has improved with the spinning. Surely, when you were spinning, you were closer to God." There was a radiant smile on the face of Gandhi as he whispered "God alone is my strength." This story somehow got into the newspapers and the nextday I saw that hundreds of men and women brought their spinning wheels to ply them as they were sitting around "Dilkush." That was how the fasting leader inside "Dil-kush" was affecting the conscience of his people outside.

But a day after I had another startling experience. I was taking down some dictation by Mr Andrews when there walked into our little room an old peasant and his wife, poorly clad dusty and tired. They must have come some miles from their village. They came and touched the feet of Andrews and told him their mission. Their daughter was lying very ill in their village home. They had brought a pot of Ganges water with which they wanted to wash the feet of Gandhi and then take the water back home as the surest cure for their ailing daughter.

Mr. Andrews was much upset and said, he could never take them to Gandhi for such a purpose. But they insisted and pleaded so hard that Mr Andrews took them upstairs asking them not to tarry for more than two to three minutes after seeing Gandhi. So, we all went upstairs.

Mr Andrews explained the situation to Gandhi. Gandhi looked serious and beckoned to the two peasants to come and sit near his cot. He told them that their mission was foolish, that even Ganges water after being poured over his feet would have no curative value at all. How could they believe in such a superstition? Only God's mercy could help them. He was only a mortal man and they must not insult God by treating him as a God. They should immediately get a good Doctor for which he would gladly arrange. He persuaded the peasants to pour the water they had brought into a flower pot nearby and then blessed them and sent them away. Before Mr Andrews took them down, he turned to Gandhi and quipped "I knew Bapu, this would be just the thing you would do" and Bapu gave another radiant smile as they left the room. Dr Westcott the Metropolitan was thrilled to hear this story. I asked him gently what would Jesus have done in such a situation? He looked hesitatingly for a moment and answered "I cannot say. Jesus lived in an age of faith and we now live in what seems to be an age of science." That gave me the answer and I thanked him for it. Mr Andrews interposed to add that was the spirit of youth in the Visva Bharati.

The fast was over at last. The Unity Conference also was over. The Conference gave a noble lead to the whole country and Hindu-Muslim fraternisation became the order of the day everywhere. The breaking of the fast was to me an unforgettable experience. Gandhi could not sit up, he had become too weak. He lay on the cot, a smiling frail figure under his white khadi sheets. A whole crowd of leaders sat round his bed. There were recitations from all the great religions of the world. C. Rajagopalachariar read some beautiful lines from Thirukkural and then Dr Ansari gave Gandhi a glass of orange juice to terminate the fast. I knew I was looking at an event of historic significance to India and the world.

MY FIRST PEEP INTO THE MIND OF THE MAHATMA

14

Before returning to Santiniketan from Delhi I had a piece of great good luck. Mr C. F. Andrews took me to Gandhiji who was yet recovering from the travail of the fast and said to him, 'Here is Ramachandran. He will be returning to Santiniketan in a couple of days. He is brimming with some questions for you to answer. He has served all of us very humbly and devotedly during your fast. Ba (Mrs. Gandhi) has given him a good certificate. I am sure you will give him some time.' Gandhiji looked at me and with his usual smile said at once, 'Yes, certainly. I shall be glad to have your questions. I shall give you time tomorrow itself between 9 and 10 a.m.' I was overjoyed and thanked my Professor profusely as we went out of Gandhiji's room. Mr. Andrews left the same day leaving me behind to ask my questions and get my answers from Gandhiji. I went up to Gandhi's room the next day at 9 a.m. I had put down my questions on paper and was very nervous. Gandhiji was sitting up in his bed. He asked me to sit down on the carpet on the floor close to him. He asked me questions about my family in Travancore and my studies in Santiniketan. He was evidently putting me at ease with his kindly enquiries. I lost all my nervousness and was eager to ask my questions.

Luckily, my questions and answers were carefully recorded by Sri Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's Secretary and this was published in the pages of 'Young India', in two instalments. I cannot do anything better than reproduce what thus appeared in the pages of Young India of which Gandhiji was the Editor. Here is that record:

'How is it,' asked Ramachandran, 'that many intelligent and eminent men, who love and admire you, hold that you consciously or unconsciously have ruled out of the scheme of national regeneration all considerations of Art?' 'I am sorry'

replied Gandhiji, 'that in this matter I have been generally misunderstood. There are two aspects of things—the outward and the inward. It is purely a matter of emphasis with me. The outward has no meaning except in so far as it helps the inward. All true Art is thus the expression of the soul. The outward forms have value only in so far as they are the expression of the inner spirit of man. Ramachandran hesitatingly suggested: 'The great artists themselves have declared that Art is the translation of the urge and unrest in the soul of the artist into words, colours, shapes etc.' 'Yes' said Gandhiji. 'Art of that nature has the greatest possible appeal for me. But I know that many call themselves as artists, and are recognised as such, and yet in their works there is absolutely no trace of the soul's upward urge and unrest.'

'Have you any instance in mind?' 'Yes', said Gandhiji, 'Take Oscar Wilde. I can speak of him, as I was in England at the time that he was being much discussed and talked about.'

'I have been told', put in Ramachandarn, that Oscar Wilde was one of the great literary artists of modern times.'

'Yes, that is just my trouble. Wilde saw the highest Art simply in outward forms and therefore succeeded in beautifying immorality. All true Art must help the soul to realise its inner self. In my own case, I find that I can do entirely without external forms in my soul's realisation. I can claim, therefore, that there is truly sufficient Art in my life, though you might not see what you call works of Art about me. My room may have blank walls; and I may even dispense with the roof, so that I may gaze out upon the starry heavens overhead that stretch in an unending expanse of beauty. What conscious Art of man can give me the panoramic scenes that open out before me, when I look up at the sky above with all its shining stars? This, however, does not mean that I refuse to accept the value of productions of Art, generally accepted as such, but only that I personally feel how inadequate these are compared with the eternal symbols of beauty in Nature. These productions of man's Art have their value only so far as they help the soul onward towards self-realisation.'

'But the artists claim to see and to find Truth through out-

ward beauty' said Ramachandran. 'Is it possible to see and find Truth in that way?'

'I would reverse the order' Gandhiji immediately answered. 'I see and find beauty in Truth or through Truth. All Truths, not merely true ideas, but truthful faces, truthful pictures, or songs, are highly beautiful. People generally fail to see Beauty in Truth, the ordinary man runs away from and becomes blind to the beauty in it. Whenever men begin to see Beauty in Truth, then true Art will arise.'

Ramachandran then asked, 'But cannot Beauty, be separated from Truth, and Truth from Beauty?'

'I should want to know exactly what is Beauty,' Gandhiji replied.

'If it is what people generally understand by that word then they are wide apart. Is a woman with fair features necessarily beautiful?'

'Yes' replied Ramachandran without thinking.

'Even,' asked Bapu, continuing his question, 'If she may be of an ugly character?'

Ramachandran hesitated. Then he said, 'But her face in that case cannot be beautiful. It will always be the index of the soul within. The true artist with the genius of perception will produce the right expression.'

'But here you are begging the whole question', Gandhiji replied. 'You now admit that mere outward form may not make a thing beautiful. To a true artist only that face is beautiful which, quite apart from its exterior, shines with the Truth within the soul. There is then, as I have said, no Beauty apart from Truth. On the other hand, Truth may manifest itself in forms which may not be outwardly beautiful at all. Socrates, we are told, was the most truthful man of his time and yet his features are said to have been ugly. To my mind he was beautiful, because all his life was a striving after Truth, and you may remember that his outward form did not prevent Phidias from appreciating the beauty of Truth in him, though as an artist he was accustomed to see Beauty in outward forms also!' 'But Bapuji', said Ramachandran eagerly, 'the most beautiful things have often been created by men whose own lives were not beautiful.'

'That' said Gandhiji, 'only means that Truth and Untruth often co-exist; good and evil are often found together. In an artist also not seldom the right perception of things and the wrong co-exist. Truly beautiful creations come when right perception is at work. If these moments are rare in life they are also rare in Art.'

All this set Ramachandran thinking hard. 'If only truthful or good things can be beautiful, how can things without a moral quality be beautiful?' he said, half to himself and half aloud. Then he asked the question, 'Is there truth, Bapuji, in things that are neither moral nor immoral in themselves? For instance, is there truth in a sunset or a crescent moon that shines amid the stars at night?'

'Indeed' replied Gandhiji, 'these beauties are truthful, in as much as they make me think of the Creator at the back of them. How else could these be beautiful, but for the Truth that is in the centre of creation? When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon my soul expands in worship of the Creator. I try to see Him and His mercies in all these creations. But even the sunsets and sunrises would be mere hindrances, if they did not help me to think of Him. Anything, which is a hindrance to the flight of the soul, is a delusion and a snare; even like the body, which often does hinder you in the path of salvation.'

'I am grateful', exclaimed Ramachandran 'to hear your views on Art, and I understand them. Would it in not be well for you to set them down for the benefit of the younger generation in order to guide them aright?'

'That', replied Gandhiji with a smile, 'I could never dream doing, for the simple reason that it would be an impertinence on my part to hold forth on Art. I am not an art student, though these are my fundamental convictions. I do not speak or write about them because I am conscious of my own limitations. That consciousness is my only strength. Whatever I might have been able to do in my life has proceeded more than anything else out of the realisation of my own limitations. My functions are different from the artist's and I should not go out of my way to assume his position.'

Ramachandran now turned to the next question. 'Are you against all machinery, Bapuji?'

'How can I be,' he answered, smiling at Ramachandran's naive question, 'when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel itself is a machine; a little tooth-pick is a machine. What I object to, is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour,' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but its just dispersal in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might.'

'Then, Bapuji,' said Ramachandran with eagerness, 'you are fighting not against machinery as such, but against its abuses which are so much in evidence today?'

'I would unhesitatingly say 'yes'; but I would add that scientific truths and discoveries should first of all cease to be the mere instruments of greed. Then labourers will not be overworked and machinery instead of becoming a hindrance will be a help. I am aiming, not at eradication of all machinery, but its imitation and control.'

Ramachandran said, 'When logically argued out, that would seem to imply that all complicated power-driven machinery should go.'

'It might have to go' admitted Gandhiji, 'but I must make one thing clear. The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not tend to make atrophied the limbs of man. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of the Singer Sewing Machine. It is one of the very useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself. Singer saw his wife labouring over the tedious process of sewing and seaming with her own hands, and simply out of his love for her he devised the sewing machine, in order to save her from unnecessary labour. He, however, saved not only her labour but also

the labour of everyone who could get a sewing machine.'

'But, in that case,' said Ramachandran 'there would have to be a factory for making these Singer sewing Machines, and it would have to contain power-driven machinery of ordinary type.'

'Yes' said Bapu, smiling at Ramachandran's eager opposition. 'But I am socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalised, or State-controlled. They ought only to be working under the most attractive and ideal conditions, not for profit, but for the benefit of humanity, love taking the place of greed as the motive. It is an alteration in the conditions of labour that I want. This mad rush for wealth must cease, and labourer must be assured, not only of a living wage, but a daily task that is not a mere drudgery. The machine will, under these conditions, be as much a help to the man working it as to the State, or the man who owns it. The present mad rush will cease, and the labourer will work under attractive and ideal conditions. This is but one of the exceptions I have in mind. The sewing machine had love at its back. The individual is the supreme consideration. The saving of labour of the individual should be the object, and honest humanitarian considerations, and not greed, the motive. Thus, for instance, I would welcome any day a machine to straighten crooked spindles. Not that blacksmiths will cease to make spindles; they will continue to provide the spindles; but when the spindle gets wrong every spinner will have a machine of his own to get it straight. Therefore, replace greed by love and everything will come right.'

Ramachandran was evidently not satisfied with this. He had understood Gandhiji to be against all machinery. So he wanted to go to the root of the matter. But it was getting late and he had many more questions to ask. 'Don't mind losing your train', said Gandhiji, smiling. 'I am prepared to satisfy you. You may ask any questions you like later and it won't tire me now in the least.'

The young friend had by no means exhausted his list of questions. The assurance from Gandhiji that he would give him more time put him entirely at ease. And so gathering courage once more he proceeded with the next question which dealt with the institution of marriage.

'The third question' said Ramachandran, 'that I would like to ask you is whether you are against the institution of marriage.'

'I shall have to answer this question at some length,' said Bapu. 'The aim of human life is Moksha. As a Hindu, I believe that Moksha is freedom from birth, by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God. Now marriage is a hindrance in the attainment of this supreme object, in as much as it only tightens the bonds of flesh. Celibacy is a great help, in as much as it enables one to lead a life of full surrender to God. What is the object generally understood of marriage, except a repetition of one's own kind? And why need you advocate marriage? It propagates itself. It requires no agency to promote its growth.'

'But must you advocate celibacy and preach it to one and all?'

'Yes,' said Gandhiji—Ramachandran looked perplexed. Then you fear there will be an end of creation?' 'No. The extreme logical result would be not extinction of the human species, but the transference of it to a higher plane.'

'But may not an artist or a poet or a great genius leave a legacy of his genius to posterity through his own children?' 'Certainly not,' said Bapu, with emphasis, 'He will have more disciples than he can ever have children; and through those disciples all his gifts to the world will be handed down in a way that nothing else can. It will be the soul's marriage with the spirit; the progeny being the disciple, a sort of divine procreation. No! You must leave marriage to take care of itself. Repetition and not growth would be the result; for lust has come to play the most important part in marriage.'

'Mr. Andrews,' said Ramachandran, 'does not like your emphasis on celibacy.'

'Yes, I know,' said Gandhiji, 'that is the legacy of Protestantism. Protestantism did many good things, but one of its few mistakes was that it ridiculed celibacy.'

'That' rejoined Ramachandran, 'was because it had to fight the deep abuses in which the clergy of the age had sunk.'

'But all that was not due to any inherent evil of celibacy.' said Bapu, 'It is celibacy that has kept Catholicism green up to the present day.'

Ramachandran's last question was about the much discussed 'Spinning Franchise'. Ramachandran assured Gandhiji, at the outset, that he was a spinner, but had to confess that he, with three friends at Santiniketan, only began spinning after they had heard of Gandhiji's fast. He also affirmed that he believed in universal spinning. But he could not understand how the Congress could compel its members to spin. Persuasion and not compulsion should be the method.

'I see,' said Gandhiji, 'you go even farther than Mr Andrews. He would not have the Congress to compel its members; but he would fain become a member of a voluntary spinning association with rules about spinning. You object to any such association whatsoever?'

Ramachandran appeared uncertain in his mind.

'Well then' replied Gandhiji, enjoying the argument, 'I ask you, has the Congress any right to say that its members shall not drink? Will that be a restriction of the freedom of the individual too? If the Congress exercised that right of enjoining abstinence from drinking, there would be no objection. Why? Because the evils of drink are obvious. Well, I say that in India today where millions are on the brink of starvation and plunged in utter misery, it is perhaps a much worse evil to import foreign cloth. Think of the starving millions of Orissa. When I went there I saw the famine stricken. Thanks to a kind Superintendent, who was in charge of an Industrial Home, I saw also their children, bright, healthy and merry, working away at their carpets, baskets etc. There was no spinning, because these other things were much in vogue at the time. But on their faces there was the lustre of joyful work. But when I came to the famine-stricken, what did I see? They were merely skin and bone waiting to die. They were then in that condition, because they would under no circumstances work. Even though you had threatened to shoot them, if they refused to work, I am sure they would have preferred to be shot, rather than do any honest work. The aversion from work is a greater evil than drink itself. You can take some work out of a drunkard. A drunkard retains something of a heart. He has intelligence. These starved men, refusing to work, were like mere animals. Now, how can we solve the problem of

getting work out of people like this? I see no way except that of universalising spinning. Every yard of foreign cloth, brought into India, is one bit of bread snatched out of the mouths of the starving poor. If you could visualise as I can the supreme need of the hour which is to give India's starving millions a chance to earn their bread with joy, you would not object to the Spinning Franchise. I take the Congress to be a Body of men and women who accept the paramount necessity of spinning.

Why should it not ensure the integrity of membership in the Body by making it compulsory for every member to spin? And you talk of persuasion! What can be better persuasion than that every member of the Congress spins regularly a certain quantity of yarn every month? How would it be honest for the Congress members to ask people to spin, when they do not spin themselves?

Ramachandran replied with great earnestness. 'But how can you exclude people, who do not spin, from the Congress? They may be doing valuable service to the nation in other ways.'

'Why not?' asked Gandhiji. 'What is the reason for the property franchise? Why is it necessary for a man to pay four annas to be a Congress member? And why is age considered a necessary qualification? Would the eight year old violinist prodigy of Italy have the franchise? John Stuart Mill, however clever he may have been, when he was seven years old, with his knowledge of Greek and Latin, had no franchise at that age. Why were these prodigies excluded? Some men will have to be excluded under any franchise. No; today many will not accept my position, but I have faith that the day will come—it may be after my death—when men will say that after all what Gandhi said was right.'

'So, Bapuji, Truth is the main thing,' said Ramachandran resuming the previous day's conversation. 'Beauty and Truth are not separate aspects of the same thing.'

'Truth,' repeated Gandhiji with greater emphasis, is the first thing to be sought for, and 'Beauty' and 'Goodness' will then be added unto you. Jesus was, to my mind, a supreme artist, because he saw and expressed Truth; and so was Mohammed, the Koran being the most perfect composition in all Arabic litera-

ture, at any rate, that is what scholars say. It is because both of them strove first for Truth, that the grace of expression naturally came to them and yet neither Jesus nor Mohammed wrote on Art. That is the Truth and Beauty I crave for, live for and would die for.'

Ramachandran reverted to his difficulties as to Gandhiji's logical position with regard to machinery. 'If you make an exception of the Singer Sewing Machine and your spindle, he said, 'where would these exceptions end?' Gandhiji replied, 'Just where they cease to help the individual and encroach upon his individuality. The machine should not be allowed to atrophy the limbs of men.'

Ramachandran asked again, 'May not after all some artists be able to see Truth in and through Beauty?'

'Some may,' said Gandhiji, 'but here too, just as elsewhere I must think in terms of the millions. And to the millions we cannot give that training to acquire a perception of Beauty, in such a way as to see Truth in it. Show them Truth first, and they will see Beauty afterwards. Orissa haunts me in my waking hours and in my dreams. Whatever can be useful to those starving millions is beautiful to my mind. Let us give today first the basic things of life and all the graces and ornaments of life will follow.'

Here the long conversation ended, and early the same morning Ramachandran started on his way back to Santiniketan rich with Bapu's blessings, wondering how far the teaching of his Gurudev, Rabindranath Tagore, would harmonise with that which he had just heard, and how far there was a fundamental difference.

The Young India interview made me something of a celebrity in Santiniketan. My fellow students crowded round me plying me with questions and my teachers congratulated me on what one of them called 'Your youngish debate with Mahatmaji.' Most of my young friends were happy to think I had brought out the differences between Tagore and Gandhi and they were on the side of Gandhiji. My Philosophy teacher, Prof. Saroj Kumar Das, thought that I had brought credit to the student community in the Visva Bharati. He mentioned my name

in our philosophy class and said that in the sum I was more with Gurudev Tagore than with Mahatma Gandhi ! But I was yet undecided in my mind whether I wholly accepted Gandhiji's views or was seeking for a synthesis of the views of my two great Masters. After all, I was only a young student and was unexpectedly caught up in matters far above my ken.

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FROM SANTINIKETAN TO SABARMATI

15

The remaining years in the Visva Bharati passed away quickly. I appeared for my final year examinations in 1924. My subjects were English Literature, Philosophy and Sociology. I passed in the first class and received a medallion as a token. When the results came out I began thinking what I should do next. There was a deep desire in me to go to Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati. I spoke of my desire to my revered Professor C. F. Andrews. He encouraged the idea, and took me one day to Gurudev Tagore to get his blessings. Gurudev also appeared pleased with my desire to go to Sabarmati. He kindly agreed to write a letter to Gandhiji to recommend my admission in the Satyagraha Ashram.

There was still some time left for me in Santiniketan and I used this time to write an essay on Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. It was a careful and reverential study in comparison and contrast of the personalities and ideas of my two Masters. I buried myself in the library and also consulted my Philosophy and English Professors. I decided to call my essay, "The Soul-Word and the Soul-Deed". I thought then it was a good title but only later realised it was somewhat quixotic. I offered to read my essay at a special meeting of the Visva Bharati Sammelani which was the Association of the Students.

As luck would have it, this meeting was held on the veranda of Gurudev Tagore's lovely cottage and Professor Dr Formichi of the University of Rome, who was then with us, consented to preside. There was a large gathering. Gurudev sat in his big chair to the right of the President of the meeting. His presence made me a little nervous. But I picked up my courage and read my essay in clear and loud voice. There were no microphones at that time. I must have taken a little more than thirty minutes to read my paper. When I had finished there was a

round of applause and some questions followed. Some among the audience thought that Gandhi and Tagore were so different that any comparison would be inappropriate.

Dr Formichi from the chair turned to Gurudev and requested him to make his comments on my paper. He laughed and said, "Ramachandran has mentioned Mahatmaji and myself and given his study in comparison and contrast. I know something of Mahatmaji and Ramachandran has given his deep appreciation and high praise of him. I fully agree with him. But he has also expressed his love and admiration for a person called Tagore. I am sorry I know so little of him that I am not in a position to give any opinion on him!" There was a burst of laughter and Dr Formichi happily intervened to close the discussion by saying that both Gandhi and Tagore were the great luminaries of the 20th century and they complemented and completed each other. This was received with vociferous cheering. I have only to add that a few months later the Modern Review published my essay in full and brought me compliments of many friends including Mahatma Gandhi's Secretary, Sri Mahadev Desai.

Within a fortnight I was leaving Santiniketan. I went round bidding farewell to many men and women friends and visiting many little places I had so much loved in the Santiniketan-Sriniketan Complex. And then, I went to Gurudev Tagore to take leave of him. He received me very kindly and entertained me to tea and gave me a closed cover to be given to Gandhiji when I reached Sabarmati. I suddenly bent and touched Gurudev's feet and asked him to give me a final message which I would remember and treasure all my life. His words still ring in my ears:

He said, "It is not my message that I give you, but the message of the Visva Bharati. If you remember this message and carry it with you wherever you live and work, you will continue to be a child of Visva Bharati." He was silent for a moment or two and then his voice came to me vibrant with his deep emotion, "Everytime you meet a man or a woman say to yourself truthfully that the greatest thing about the man and the woman is just that he is a man and she a woman. Nothing is greater than to be a man or a woman in God's great creation. All difference of wealth, learning, power and even spiritual attainments

should be submerged in the simple concept of man as man. This is the truth which I have placed in the centre of the Visva Bharati. This is the truth which alone can obliterate all differences between man and man anywhere in the world. I give you my blessings that you may cherish and hold on to this ideal whatever you do and wherever you are." I bent once again at the feet of my Guru and took my leave of him. The picture and the memory of that parting are still in my mind. They are unforgettable.

Within a few days I was knocking at the door of the Satyagraha Ashram at the other end of India. I was leaving one world behind and entering into another. The world left behind was one of the highest culture and the graces of the fine arts and poetry and philosophy. The magic of that background was enthralling and inspiring. I had deliberately come away from it seeking some truth which I could not yet define to myself. But the memory of the gentle and mighty spirit of Mahatma Gandhi whom I had met earlier and talked with, beckoned me on to something totally different and revolutionary.

It was forenoon of a hot day in the summer of 1924 that I entered the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmati. The first person I met was Sri Chhaganlal Gandhi who spoke to me kindly and made his enquiries. When I told him I was coming from Santiniketan and I had a letter from Gurudev to Mahatma Gandhi, he took me to a small guest room on the edge of what appeared to be a weaving-shed, from inside which came the sound of shuttles. He asked me to take some rest and have my lunch before he took me to see Gandhi. Things happened in quick succession and early in the afternoon I stood before Mahatma Gandhi in his cottage on the banks of the Sabarmati. Gandhiji was sitting on the floor on a grass mat with a little writing-desk in front. As I bent low at his feet he asked me to sit down and said he was glad a student of Santiniketan had come to him.

I then gave him Gurudev's letter. He opened it and read it and then looked at me and said, "So you have won Gurudev's heart. You will now have to win my heart!" I replied at once that I hoped to succeed to win his heart also. He gave me time next morning to meet him again when he said he would arrange

for my admission and studies. Just then Mahadev Desai came into the room and recognised me and greeted me affectionately. He had brought some letters for Gandhiji which he placed on the little desk before Gandhiji with whom he started a lively conversation in Gujarati. I sensed at once I was the subject of their talk. Then Mahadev Desai stood up to leave and turning to me invited me to come with him. I bowed again to Gandhiji and followed Mahadev Bhai outside. He told me at once that I was to stay with him and came with me to collect my luggage.

Within a few minutes I was in the house of Mahadev Bhai and was as good as settled in the Satyagraha Ashram. The house was in line with others of the same type as in an Indian village. My host sat down with a heap of papers to which he gave his careful attention. He made me feel at home by simply saying that here was my new residence. There were no servants and I should arrange my luggage in a small room at the end of the veranda. His wife Sri Durgaben brought me a cup of excellent coffee but flavoured in the Gujarati style. I took my bath soon after and after lunch rested for a time. All the time my mind was quickly gathering impressions and watching what was going on around. Several people passed up and down but no one bothered to notice the new comer. They were all busy with some work or other.

Later in the afternoon Mahadev Bhai returned from Gandhiji's cottage. He called me to him and said to me he was very pleased to have me stay with him. He asked me if I would like to work with him in editing "Young India." I told him I would be proud to do so if he found me fit for such a job. He closed the talk by saying Gandhiji would be talking to me the next day about what I should do and learn in the Satyagraha Ashram. And so I went to sleep that night wondering what the morrow would bring.

Gandhiji called me and talked to me the next day. He gently asked me some searching questions to find out what exactly I myself aimed at doing in life. My answers were unequivocal. I wanted to be trained in the Constructive Programme of Gandhiji fully in all its aspects. Gandhiji was very pleased. "I shall arrange to give you that training. First will come complete training in

khadi. Other items will follow. When you have finished you would be like an M. A. in Constructive Work as I have laid down."

Then as an afterthought he said "Along with khadi you will have to learn sanitation which is a complete science. We are a large resident community inside the Ashram. As the first step in sanitation you will have to become a scavenger, cleaning community latrines and urinals. We have almost perfected this course in sanitation. You will have to give two hours every day to sanitation and three hours to khadi." Then he called in a stout young Brahmin, Surendraji by name and said to him, "Here is your new student for sanitation". They talked in Gujarati for a few minutes. Surendraji smiled at me and drew me out. This was how I began my education in the Satyagraha Ashram.

The days that followed brought nothing less than a series of creative adventures in the Satyagraha Ashram. We were all up by 4.30 a. m. There was a rush by the inmates to bathe in the Sabarmati river. Boys and girls splashed about with shouts of glee. Breakfast was over by 6.30 a.m. There was a big general kitchen and also food in the family homes. Gandhiji with kindly understanding had put me into the house of Mahadev Desai, his well known Secretary. I had a very pleasant breakfast including even some hot coffee. This was unusual in the Satyagraha Ashram but not impossible.

I went about looking at the various activities of the Ashram. Khadi was at the centre of life. There was a big school building across the road which housed the offices of the All India Spinners Association and classes in the different processes of khadi work i.e., ginning, carding, slivering, spinning and weaving. A crowd of boys and girls were at work in different rooms. This was not the regular school of the Ashram. That was in another part of the building where young boys and girls got their general education. There was a great deal of agricultural work in which the more elderly students returned from. But community sanitation work was what caught my eye specially. It was a double process of cleanliness and fertilisation of the farm. When I returned to lunch, Mahadev Bhai asked me if I had a good look around. I told him I was deeply impressed by all that I saw. In the afternoon I went to meet Surendraji to whom Gandhiji had entrusted me. He sketched for me my programme of work. He had consulted Gandhiji and had decided I should first have a course in community sanitation.

Community sanitation in the Satyagraha Ashram, had a whole philosophy and history behind it. Insanitation and untouchability were closely interconnected in the Indian social tradition. Sanitation work in the smaller towns and in the villages of

India was a horrible business. The lavatories were ill built and difficult to clean. Some of the lowest castes were ear-marked for this work. They were the poorest of the poor and themselves lived in conditions of terrible filth. Only these castes would do the work of cleaning the lavatories and carting heavy loads of filth to assigned places. These castes were the 'untouchables' of India.

From the day Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa he had vowed that he would fight untouchability tooth and nail. He would not have in his India a single 'untouchable'. He wanted every member of his Ashram and every grown-up boy and girl in his school to voluntarily become an 'untouchable' by doing the work of scavenging in the community. Everyone had to clean some of the lavatories in the Ashram. These lavatories were well built and well arranged. Even so, this work was a test for all those who lived with Gandhiji. He himself had shown the way for several years. But scavenging had another and brighter side. All the matter from the lavatories would be carried in buckets to the manure pits where they were scientifically converted into excellent fertilisers. Since some six hundred people lived in the Ashram, the quantity of manure thus produced was very large. This was utilised in the Ashram farm which grew vegetables and fruits. Ordinarily such a huge quantity of manure would be thrown away and wasted in the villages and towns. That was the traditional Indian way. Gandhiji would not stand for such wastage of first class manure.

I found myself drafted into one of the sanitation squads. We were four or five young people in the squad and it was our responsibility to clean five of the lavatories. The lavatory system in the Ashram was excellent. You took away the two used buckets, one with urine and the other with night-soil covered with concave lids. The two buckets were placed under a double commode in the lavatory. The buckets were taken to the manure pits where my teacher Surendraji was in charge. He received the buckets and emptied them into the manure pits, not an easy job. He then washed the buckets and disinfected them with phenyl and kept them to dry in the sun. The members of the squad took back the buckets which were dried the previous

day. The lavatories were washed clean every day and fresh earth was kept to cover the matter in the buckets. I found it hard taking the full buckets to the manure pits. But, in a few days I got used to it.

I had strange comrades in my sanitation squad. One was a German woman, another a Telugu Doctor and the third was a teacher from Mysore. We talked and laughed and joked as we worked. Surendraji was pleased with our work. Gandhiji kept in touch with the entire sanitation work and when I met him one morning he mentioned that Surendraji had given a good report of our work. So here I was matriculating in the Satyagraha Ashram education! This sanitation work lasted two hours every morning. Then we ran to the river and had our wash and came and had our breakfast. You may be sure we were hungry!

At 9 a. m. I went for my khadi lessons. I specially enjoyed the carding of cotton and the making of slivers. In a few months I had become a good spinner and so went on to the weaving class. Khadi weaving was not easy. You had to prepare the warp and woof. The yarn was not always even and as you made the shuttle fly, there were a lot of breakages and you had to join the threads again. But, in good time your shuttle flew quicker and quicker and your weaving became more steady. It was nearly six months when I was able to take out my first khadi piece 45" wide and ten yards long. I took the piece in triumph and placed it at Gandhiji's feet as he returned from the evening prayer. He examined the cloth carefully and gave me just pass marks. But he was pleased and gave me his blessings too.

In the meantime, the question of Adult Education for the weavers and their families came up. Gandhiji sent for me and asked me to organise this work under the supervision of Surendraji. The Telugu Doctor also joined enthusiastically. The Adult Education classes were held early in the night. Gandhiji gave us the mantram, "Adult Education does not begin or end with literacy. It should mean all-round education of the weavers and their families with special stress on sanitation, nutrition, geography, history and certainly also literacy." Religious education was to be given through activities of selfless service and dedication to the people. There were both Hindu and Muslim

weavers and we had to be careful of what we taught about religion.

Long afterwards when I was appointed the Secretary for Adult Education under the Talimi Sangh in Navagam, I remembered the lessons I learnt in the Sabarmati Ashram. I was much impressed by the thought that in the Satyagraha Ashram, where there was so much importance given to productive work, the workers themselves were given Adult Education in the broadest and the most realistic manner. Literacy was never neglected but it was not the whole of Adult Education. It is a sad thought that even today we are still floundering in our country with Adult Education at heavy cost.

One of the interesting developments during this period was the arrival of a young Chinese student whom I had known for sometime in the Visva Bharati at Santiniketan. His name was Tseng. He himself had met Gandhiji earlier in Calcutta. He was a young fellow passionately seeking some truth of which he was not yet fully aware. He had come believing that the truth he was seeking would come from Gandhiji. Soon he became an active member of our community and joined our sanitation squad. Because we had known each other a little in Santiniketan, he and I became very close friends. He was a hard working person. Besides working in sanitation he also joined the full khadi course, and became an adept in the various processes of this work. He started learning Hindi and picked it up quickly. His English was fairly good. He made friends with everybody in the Ashram and became a general favourite. He was always smiling and full of jokes and quips.

But, as he went on attending prayers and listening to Gandhiji's talks a strange change came over him. He began brooding and often shut himself up in his little room. He was seen writing some long letter. One morning he went to Gandhiji and put the letter in his hands and bowed low and ran away. Gandhiji read the letter with some surprise. It was a long letter of confessions. Tseng had lived in Singapore before he came to India and he had led quite a bad life in that big city. In his letter were his unreserved confessions about the evil life he had led in Singapore. He wanted to atone for them by a ten days' fast and

wanted Gandhiji's blessings for it.

Mahadev Desai went and talked to him but he was determined to fast. Gandhiji did not prohibit it, but pointed out how much suffering the fast would bring. A Chinese specially would find fasting very difficult, but finally Gandhiji permitted the fast. Tseng went through the fast with grim determination. He took only water with salt during the ten days. On the third or fourth day he literally crumbled in his bed. Gandhi who knew the science of fasting went to him every day and gave him proper advice. At the end of the fast Tseng took some vows with Gandhiji as witness. They were of course vows of purity and good conduct. Gandhiji then gave him a new name "Shanti" and so he became Shanti Tseng there-after.

This little story is important as showing the impact of Gandhian education on a young foreigner. The impact was altogether purificatory, affecting the inner character of the student. Would Tseng have fasted in the above manner if he had continued in Santiniketan? He would have had more intellectual and cultural experiences in Santiniketan but, not this heart-searching and self-purification. Here we see how the education in Santiniketan and that in the Sabarmati Ashram were complementary. This is why I have always held that those who had the privilege of education both in Santiniketan and in Sabarmati would be lucky students. I have always thanked God that I had this good luck in my life. Several others too have had the same experience. Education of the head and the heart must always go together. Unfortunately, we have today grossly neglected education of the heart in our schools and colleges. This is at the bottom of the chaos we see in Indian education today.

In the nights I meditated on my experiences. I saw clearly that there was a difference between the education in Santiniketan and in Sabarmati and yet, for the life of me, I could not understand how each could be wholly self-sufficient. I discussed this matter with my professor Mr C. F. Andrews who came to the Satyagraha Ashram twice at least when I was there. He was clear in his mind that Gurudev and Mahatma Gandhi were complementary spiritual forces in India. Nothing would be more foolish than to think of them as contradicting each other. All of

us knew how devoted Mr Andrews was both to Tagore and Gandhi. He never once admitted any fundamental spiritual difference between them. He advised me to come back to Santiniketan sometime for one more round of studies. It is also good to remember how much Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi loved and admired each other even while there were differences in their proposals for the making of New India.

Another distinguished and welcome visitor who came to the Satyagraha Ashram was Sri Rajagopalachariar, affectionately called Rajaji. He took some special interest in what I was learning and doing and said "How I wish I could send my Narasimhan also to Santiniketan." Narasimhan did come to Sabarmati but stayed only for a short time and I know he never went to study in Santiniketan. Evidently, Gandhiji and Rajaji had some talks together about me and my future. When Rajaji was leaving he said something to me that meant I was to go to his Gandhi Ashram in Tiruchengode sometime or other. I forgot this little matter in the events that followed.

One of the events was the visit of Dr Zakir Husain to Sabarmati. Dr Zakir Husain came with Prof. Mohammed Mujib and Dr Abid Husain to discuss the future of the Jamia Millia. I was very much taken up with these new visitors. I had some good talks with them and expressed to them my desire to know something of the history and culture of Islam through the centuries. They were not sure if I could fulfil my aspirations in the Jamia Millia, but they would warmly welcome me to come and work and study in their University. A few days after they went away Gandhiji called me and said that he was thinking of sending me to the Jamia Millia to organise khadi work and to do any learning or teaching I could. I jumped at this opportunity. Thus ended my life in the Sabarmati Ashram. As I made my preparations to go to Delhi to join the Jamia Millia, my Chinese friend was very upset and threatened he too would come to the Jamia Millia. I was also sad at leaving the Sabarmati Ashram, but as I was going to the Jamia Millia with Gandhiji's blessings, I felt elated.

Let me now pay my tribute to Kasturba Gandhi, Gandhiji's devoted and saintly wife. I had for months assisted her in the

kitchen in cooking the food and serving it to some fifteen members of the Gandhi family. Kasturba was very kind to me and was not quite pleased with my going away. But there was no help for it. And so, I went with her blessings. She was a sparkling and active woman in the Ashram. Her family duties took up a lot of time. But she attended to her larger duties in the Ashram with punctual regularity. Gandhiji had many visitors and when they came, Kasturba had to take care of them and provide them with hospitality. This was hard work for her. But some of us would always be at her elbow to help her. There were of course no servants in the Gandhi Home nor in the Ashram. All work was done by members of the community, everyone taking a share in the work and the responsibility. The Gandhi home was an Ashram within the Ashram. But life throughout the Ashram was simple and busy.

Next only to Gandhiji in the Ashram hierarchy was Maganlal Gandhi. He was a soft-spoken and gentle person but a hard task-master. He was the Ashram Manager and the right-hand man of Gandhiji. Every one in the Ashram looked up to him with respect and love and he in turn cared for all of them like an elder brother. As I took leave of Gandhiji to go to Delhi, his advice concerned Hindu-Muslim unity. He said it was the dream of his life and without realising it there could never be a free India. I must make use of the present opportunity to learn all I could about Islam and Muslims. Every Hindu should learn something of Islam and every Muslim should learn something of Hinduism. This would apply to followers of all the great religions. Here was the foundation of Gandhiji's teaching of Sarva Dharma Samanatva. With this message locked up in my heart I left for Delhi.

THE JAMIA MILLIA AND THE MUSLIM CIRCLE

17

I received warm welcome from Dr Zakir Husain and Prof. Mujib when I arrived in the Jamia Millia. I was to stay with Prof. Mujib. The Jamia Millia was in Karol Bagh in old Delhi. The full name was the Jamia Millia Islamia, meaning The National Muslim University. This name came because the Jamia had broken away from the old Aligarh Muslim University during the Non-co-operation movement. At about that time Zakir Husain, Mohammed Mujib and Abid Husain were in Germany doing post-graduate studies. Even from that distance they welcomed the birth of the Jamia Millia and promised Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr Ansari they would join the Jamia after completing their education in Europe. Gandhiji was very pleased to hear this. Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr Ansari were those who had helped to start the Jamia Millia. It was housed in good rented buildings in Karol Bagh. By the time I arrived in the Jamia, Dr Zakir Husain, Prof. Mujib, Dr Abid Husain and a band of devoted Muslim teachers were steadily building up the new institution.

I was one of the few Hindus to become a teacher in the Jamia Millia. I was given the special work of organising khadi production. I found the work and the whole atmosphere exhilarating. It was a new experience altogether to be living among Muslims. Teachers and students were very good company. There was a good library and good community life. I kept my eyes and ears open, and even more than that, my mind. For the first time in my life I was looking at the cohesion of Muslim community life. The culture of an educated Muslim with all his fine courtesies is something worth knowing. Neither in Santiniketan nor in the Sabarmati Ashram had I experienced such graces of culture.

Along with my lectures in Indian Philosophy, I started spinning classes for the boys in the school and for the teachers

in the college. This was hard work as no one had any experience in spinning and allied processes of khadi. It took some weeks before the boys could spin fairly even thread. The college teachers fared a little worse. But all of us kept on persisting in the work. I was able to collect at last in five or six months a hundred hanks of fairly well spun yarn. I reported the progress to Gandhiji in Sabarmati and he sent a line of congratulation to the students and teachers and asked them not to give up. There was plenty of fun in the spinning classes and the students began to enjoy the spinning hour. C. Krishnan Nair, who had already graduated from the Jamia and knew good spinning, helped me in the work. I began also taking classes in English literature.

I took up seriously some guided study of the history of Islam and the growth of Arab civilization. I was amazed at the quick spread of Islam after the death of the great Prophet. Islam spread on both sides of the Mediterranean right on to Spain at the far end of Europe. The Arabs had cultivated the arts and sciences to an astonishing degree. As I went on with this study, Dr Zakir Husain and Prof. Mujib helped me considerably. But since I did not know Urdu or Arabic, all my knowledge came from English translations of the books on the subjects I studied. It was thus second hand knowledge only. My education was however strengthened by long talks I had with Dr Zakir Husain, Prof. Mujib and other Muslim teachers. I asked many questions and got many answers. What was the secret of Islam spreading so quickly in other countries? The usual story was that Islam was forced upon people. I discovered on the contrary that Islam was a powerful liberalising influence bringing to the common people the message of the equality and freedom of man before God.

In the middle ages the Christian Church in Europe was the enemy of science and spiritual freedom. We have had what are called the dark ages of Europe. Islam went as a liberator of the human mind. Islam introduced science and philosophy and helped in releasing the forces of the Renaissance in Europe. The earliest Universities in Europe were established by the Muslims in Spain. Spain was under the rule of Muslims for nearly 200

years. In North Africa particularly Islam acted as a powerful regenerating force. Even if ultimately Islam was pushed out of Europe it left a mighty impression on European culture. All this was new knowledge for me. I saw how Islam had played a revolutionary role and how the Arabs had found their place in history. I also understood something of Gandhiji's faith in his Muslim comrades. I spent more than an year in the Jamia when it was in Karol Bagh.

Something happened at that time which gave me some idea of Hindu-Muslim relations in Delhi. A Muslim fanatic had shot and killed Swami Sradhdhanand, who was once considered an Apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity. Feelings ran high between Hindus and Muslims over this incident. The Hindus took out a great procession carrying the body of the Swami to the banks of the Yamuna for cremation. Muslims did not participate in the procession, perhaps to avoid untoward incidents. But Dr Zakir Husain took a party of his teachers and elder students to join the procession in respectful homage to the memory of the dead Hindu leader. They walked with unshod feet and uncovered head. I had the privilege of going with them. Our little group caught the eyes of those who lined the roads. There was no danger of Hindu fanatics attacking us. It was perhaps the largest procession of human beings I had seen till then. The body of the Swami was carried in a sitting posture in a big curved chair and all along the route people offered flowers and incense before it. At the burning ghat on the banks of the Yamuna the rush of the people was so great that we stood aside on a mound of earth and watched the human sea.

Later at the Jamia Millia our teachers and students were solid in their view that Islam never stood for the assassination of saints of other religions. Gandhiji who was not in Delhi wrote in Young India of his deep sorrow at the murder of the great Hindu saint and leader but cautioned that nothing should be said or done to turn the matter into a grave communal issue. He expressed his happiness that many Muslims had condemned the assassination even though he was fully aware that there were Muslims who looked upon the assassin as a hero.

A very pleasant memory was the celebration of Ramzan. I

took no time in deciding that since I was living within a Muslim community of fellow teachers and students, I should also join the fast and prayers. Prof. Mujib welcomed the idea. It was a wonderful experience to keep the fast and to break it at the proper time. As I joined the prayers I had the same sense of elation as in the prayers in Sabarmati. The outward forms were different but the inner core was the same, devotion to the one and only almighty God and the determination to live according to His will. My taking part in the fast and in the prayers created some stir among the Hindus outside the Jamia. I did not however heed any such criticism. With the Santiniketan and the Sabarmati traditions in my mind I was convinced that I was doing the right thing. I was very happy to share in the religious devotions of Ramzan.

Let me not omit an amusing incident which occurred at the time. Prof. Mujib and I went shopping in the Chandni Chowk. This was a wonderful place for buying anything at good prices. We had to push our way through thick crowds come on the same business as ourselves. We were tired and went into a Hindu tea shop. Prof. Mujib who was an Oxford M. A. was clean shaven which was somewhat unusual for a Muslim Professor. I had, on the other hand, grown a small beard and had perhaps something of the appearance of a Muslim. The Hindu shop-keeper took Prof. Mujib for a Hindu and took me for a Muslim! He brought tea to Prof. Mujib in the usual shining metal tumbler and brought me my tea in an earthen cup. We looked at each other and thoroughly enjoyed the situation. But what was the astonishment of the shop-keeper when at the time of paying for the tea we spoke to each other inadvertently calling each other by name. We left in a hurry not to precipitate any caste crisis.

It was quite usual at the time to come across Muslim pani and Hindu pani in hotels and even in Railway Stations. I remember even today how some of us broke these water pots at a small railway station outside Delhi and almost started a riot from which we escaped only by the skin of our teeth. Such things of course no longer occur in India. We have come long past such shameful habits and customs. Within the Jamia itself teachers

and students of all communities lived together in peace and goodwill as brothers. The Jamia was thus even then like an oasis of communal amity in the desert of communal differences and strife outside. This was in the true Gandhian tradition of which I had come as a humble representative to the Jamia.

One difference between the Jamia on the one hand and the Visva Bharati and the Sabarmati on the other was that the Jamia admitted only boys and no girls. This was in line with Islamic tradition and the Jamia was careful not to break such traditions without creating the proper conditions for any change. Apart from this, the education in the Jamia was broad-based with an international outlook. Firmly rooted in Islamic foundations the Jamia was completely modern. Teachers and students lived together in friendliness and companionship. I had seldom known happier students than in the Jamia.

The Institution had of course many visitors. Even Mr Jinnah came on a friendly visit after the Jamia had shifted to Okhla. It was reported that he was very pleased with the basic type of education in the Jamia and even invited Dr Zakir Husain to come to Pakistan. What specially struck visitors was the spirit of sacrifice and dedication of Dr Zakir Husain and his colleagues. They all took small salaries which even a peon would sniff at today. If I remember right Dr Zakir Husain's salary as the Sheikh-ul-Jamia (the Vice-Chancellor) was only Rs. 250/-per month. Most of us lecturers and teachers received a salary of Rs. 150. The Jamia under Dr Zakir Husain earned a great name in the educational world and students came from almost every part of India. I had thus the good fortune to live in the midst of a great educational experiment.

Among the outstanding personalities who gave their support to the Jamia were Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr Ansari, Moulana Mohammed Ali, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad and certainly Mahatma Gandhi. Moulana Mohammed Ali was a big jovial person and a scholar and fearless patriot. With his Oxford education he was an eloquent speaker in English and a brilliant writer. He edited a Journal called "The Comrade" which at the time had become very popular. Moulana Azad had a majestic figure and he was famous throughout the Islamic world as a profound

Muslim scholar. He had written valuable books on the philosophy of Islam. His eloquence in Urdu was matchless. The Jamia teachers and students held him in the highest esteem. Mahatma Gandhi had stood behind the Jamia from its very inception and once when the Jamia was facing a financial crisis, he stepped in with an offer of assistance which enabled the Jamia to tide over the crisis. Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr Ansari were the original builders of the Jamia and I always felt their pervading influence among the teachers and students. But the one person more than any other who brought up the Jamia and gave it an international reputation was Dr. Zakir Husain. He too had a fine personality and possessed deep scholarship in history and politics. As already mentioned, along with Prof. Mujib and Dr Abid Husain he had studied in Germany. The Jamia had thus great leadership.

But my life in the Jamia ended within less than two years, when Gandhiji wrote to Dr Zakir Husain to relieve me to enable me to join Sri C. Rajagopalachariar in his Gandhi Ashram in Tamil Nadu. The parting with my Muslim friends moved me deeply. But I was strengthened in my mind as I carried with me their love and blessings. It was a far cry from Delhi to Salem District in Tamil Nadu. Another door thus opened before me. I had no idea where this door will lead me to. But it was Gandhiji's call and I responded to it without a moment's hesitation.

Returning from the Jamia Millia I went straight to the Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, in Salem District of Tamil Nadu and met Rajaji. He was good enough to discuss with me my future work with him. He thought I should go to Tiruppur which had then earned the reputation of being the khadi capital of South India. Rajaji was somewhat brusque in the way he gave me his instructions. I had come a long way to meet him under Gandhiji's behest. I would have certainly appreciated a day of rest in the Gandhi Ashram. But Rajaji's letter of introduction to S. Ramanathan who was then the Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Spinners Association was ready in less than an hour. I started for Tiruppur within a few hours.

Tiruppur was a strange place to me with nowhere to lay my head. S. Ramanathan who had made a home in Tiruppur gave me the veranda of his quarters for immediate occupation. Ramanathan was something of an intellectual and a lawyer who had given up his practice to work for khadi under Rajaji. I found him good company and he sketched for me his plan to make me a good producer and salesman of khadi. I had to learn specially the manner in which khadi accounts were kept. Within a day or two I went to work. I was taken round and shown the enormous khadi production and khadi sales centres in Tiruppur. Big bales of cotton arrived every day and were distributed to spinning and weaving centres and every day cart loads of khadi cloth arrived from these centres. The head office in Tiruppur hummed with activities throughout the day and I must confess I was a little bewildered. I got some idea of how the khadi movement had spread in Tamil Nadu.

I was posted to a few khadi production centres where I stayed with the workers in charge. At every centre crowds of village women came every day to deliver their yarn and to take back enough cotton for a week's spinning. All spinners were

women and all weavers were men. The women spinners were mostly widows and old and they spun regularly to earn Rs. 2/- or Rs. 3/- per week. This little money did help them, as they lived with their relatives in the villages. It was their pocket money. The weavers of course earned a better income, a few good rupees a day. But khadi weaving was not easy. The hand-spun yarn was not always even and as the weavers plied their shuttle, there were many breakages. For the first time I was seeing village India in the raw. The old women were ill nourished and the grand-children who came with them were also in the same plight. The weavers were a sturdy and quarrelsome lot. I tried to learn as much as possible of the life of the spinners and weavers.

I asked myself if the spinning wages really made a difference to the life of the spinners. I was surprised to learn that they did. That Rs. 2/- to Rs. 3/- a week could make such a difference showed the depth of rural poverty. Most of the spinners had only one saree per head and this they kept with the utmost care. I visited the spinners and weavers in their homes. Each home by itself was kept clean in the traditional Indian way but a few houses clustering together made the village filthy and very insanitary. Collective sanitation was almost unknown. Only half the children went to school and these were the boys. Girls were required at home to help the mothers.

I discussed what I learnt with S. Ramanathan. He was of the view that hand-spun and hand-woven cloth could only be a temporary attempt at giving the poorest of the poor some work and some wages. He was doubtful if hand-spinning had any future worth the name. As a temporary relief measure it had some significance in the economic conditions obtaining in the villages. At about this time Gandhiji had announced a price of Rs. 1 lakh, a fabulous amount at the time, to any one producing a spinning wheel which would double the out-put of yarn.

After a few months I was given independent charge of a khadi production centre some miles away from Tiruppur. This was in Uttukuli on the railway line from Tiruppur to Erode. I was given an assistant and an attender to help in my work. And so I settled in Uttukuli and became a khadi producer. Every month

I took to the central depot in Tiruppur white bleached khadi cloth worth about Rs. 10,000/-. In Uttukuli also I saw the depth of poverty in the villages and how Rs. 2/- or Rs.3/- a week could make a difference in the life of a spinner. There was one excruciating story from Uttukuli which I have never forgotten.

Some three to four hundred spinners had brought their yarn which was classified into three numbers. Yarn under the first number got more wages than the rest. The classification was not easy and required much experience. The spinners would be watching and would seldom agree to a lower classification. Suddenly I saw in front of me a very old spinner, a widow in white cloth coming up to deliver her yarn. I had to classify it as No. 3 yarn which meant a few annas less in the weekly wages. The old woman set up a loud cry and started cursing me. She wanted her yarn to be classified as No. 1. The difference in wages would be only 4 or 5 annas at that time. I was in a quandary. My assistant whispered to me that the old woman had become hysterical and she would attack me with her long nails if I did not give her what she wanted. I gave her the proper wages and then took out five annas from my pocket and gave it to her. How can I ever forget her sudden radiant smile of happiness and how she started pouring her blessings on me? She wanted God to give me at least ten children! Thank God this prophesy was never fulfilled.

The bitter lesson I learnt was how much a few annas a week can mean to a poor old spinner. I wrote this story to Gandhiji and he asked me to go deeper into the problem of village poverty and employment to understand the meaning and challenge of his khadi programme. I was called back from Uttukuli after an year. I must say I was glad to come away. There were only a few educated people in Uttukuli for company. I was the only one who got "Young India" or a newspaper. I had to cook my own food or eat at the only small hotel in the village run by a Pandaram and his wife. But I came away from Uttukuli convinced more than ever before that the khadi programme had certainly a part to play in bringing work and wages into the villages. The wages were of course poor. And yet hundreds and thousands of women came to earn even these

low wages. Perhaps without the Khadi movement many poor and old women would have died of penury.

Then came the question of my getting trained in khadi sales. So I was packed off to the khadi sales depot in Karaikudi in the heart of Chettinad. There were many rich Chettiars with plenty of money from Burma and so the khadi depot sold on an average khadi worth Rs. 20,000/- a month. In the Deepavali season of course sales would shoot up. Usually most shopping was done by the women in the rich Chettiar families. These women were generally called Aachies. They would always come with a Brahmin clerk to make the payments and check the bills.

One day one Chettiar lady arrived in a big car and she was accompanied as usual by a Brahmin clerk. She came into the khadi shop with her jewels and dressed in a costly silk saree. She wanted gold-laced cloth for the male members of the family. I received her politely and gave her a stool to sit down. But she waved away the stool and came and sat down plumb on my low accounts-table. I requested her to release my little table. She jumped up in anger and attempted to shout my head off. She had come, she said, to buy at least Rs. 1,000/- worth of laced cloth but would buy nothing as she was insulted. She walked out calling the Brahmin clerk after her. She went away without making any purchases. I pitied myself for being such a poor salesman and did not know what to do.

Half an hour after, the same big car came back with the Chettiar himself in it. He came in and I received him politely and made him sit down on the stool. He asked me why I had insulted his wife. I explained the whole matter to him. The husband was more reasonable than the wife. I of course apologised to him for my unintentional slight of his lady. He was mollified and his purchases amounted to nearly Rs. 2,000/-. I reported this incident to Ramanathan in Tiruppur who wrote back some biting words about Chettiars and their manners.

In Karaikudi I also went out hawking Khadi in dull months. This also was a great experience in the art of selling khadi to people who were not very keen to buy it. Only the magic name of Gandhiji helped often. Karaikudi was a dry place and in the summer one used to get very thirsty. Clean drinking water was

not available and so I would take in a few bottles of aerated water and I charged this to my office account. At the end of the month a letter came from Tiruppur disallowing this expenditure ! This certainly taught me a lesson and showed how the khadi movement was being run throughout the country with rigorous honesty under the eagle eyes of Gandhiji sitting in the Sabarmati Ashram.

At the end of the year, I was recalled to Tiruppur where I stayed for some more time learning dyeing and printing of khadi cloth. No machinery was used in printing khadi cloth but only beautiful wooden blocks of various designs. Some of the beautiful blocks came from Meerut. Now the question arose of sending me to Kerala in charge of the khadi work in the Malayalam province. While the matter was under discussion, Rajaji invited me to come to his Gandhi Ashram in Tiruchengode and take over its Managership under his direction. I thought this was a wonderful opportunity to come close to Rajaji and warmly accepted his call.

Within a few weeks I was in the Gandhi Ashram and was appointed its Manager. My earlier visit to the Gandhi Ashram was too short to leave any impression on my mind. It had struck me then that here was a small edition of Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram. There was a cluster of little cottages inside a five-acre, walled compound. Inside the compound were coconut and mango trees which were watered from a deep well from which the bullocks drew bales of water. But now I began to look round carefully and to find out for myself the nature of the work I had to do. Rajaji himself resided in one of the small huts. The workers of the Ashram including two Harijan families occupied the other huts. There was a big khadi depot and an Ashram school for village children. There was a small hospital under a qualified doctor. Bee-keeping was one of the industries in the Ashram.

Here was genuine village India once again. Hundreds of village women had taken to hand-spinning in a systematic manner. Twice a week they came and filled the Ashram bringing their yarn, getting their wages and taking back cotton for the next week. There were also several scores of weavers. The

annual khadi production was worth about one million rupees. Besides spinners and weavers, there were several washermen and dyers involved in the work. Perhaps some three thousand people thus found employment through the Gandhi Ashram. It was a veritable picture to see Rajaji working in the Ashram. Living in his own small hut with his daughter Lakshmi taking care of him and his son Narasimhan helping him in his office work, he was all the time in touch with the outside world even while concentrating on the work in the Ashram. That a great intellect and political genius like him could bury himself in a distant village was an astonishing thing. Rajaji's daily incoming and outgoing post was enough to engage him and Narasimhan and some others full time.

What specially attracted me was the village school attached to the Ashram. I gave much attention to this school and built a small chain of Primary Schools in the surrounding area. With the help of co-workers in the Ashram I developed a full-fledged Adult Education Programme. Sanitation, elementary geography and history besides literacy made up our Adult Education Programme. We went out night after night into the villages with Petromax lanterns and slates and black-boards. Our sanitation programme gained momentum and cleaning villages became a big pre-occupation. Rajaji invented a particularly fascinating child welfare programme. Once a week we would collect a few hundred children and give them a good oil and soap bath in the morning. We then gave them light refreshments and held story classes. The mothers of the children were involved in this programme. These occasions were full of joy in Ashram.

I stayed in the Gandhi Ashram as the Manager for three full years. There is another story worth relating during my life in the Ashram. This was the battle against caste and untouchability which we were obliged to fight. There were, as mentioned above, Harijan families living in the Ashram. At sometime mischief makers started a scare in the area. That year there was the failure of rains and a serious drought followed. The scare created was that this was the result of breaking caste rules and discarding untouchability! The people in the surrounding villages were in such suffering that they swallowed the story. Spinners

and weavers stopped coming, milkmen refused to bring milk and even vegetables were denied to us. This was thus a strike without the name, based on superstition. We stood our ground firmly inside the Ashram and the Harijan families were fully protected. We enlisted the support of influential people from the nearby towns to come and expose the superstition and to point out how Mahatma Gandhi wanted untouchability to go root and branch. After about a month of this difficult situation, everything came back to normal because the call of life was stronger than the call of caste and untouchability. During the struggle, however, I saw how cruelly Harijans in the villages were treated by the caste Hindus who would not allow them even to take water from their wells. I had thus a glimpse of the horrors of untouchability in the villages.

Curiously later my next assignment under Rajaji was in the Harijan Sevak Sangh and in the battle against untouchability. In the meantime Mahatma Gandhi was preparing to start his second great Non-Violent Revolution, ie., the Salt Satyagraha Campaign. Rajaji was soon drawn into this impending struggle. Gandhiji had selected the salt law to be broken by the Indian people to achieve their freedom from British rule. The British rulers and their henchmen laughed at the whole idea. How could British rule be ended by the salt law being broken? But those who knew Gandhi understood better. They knew he would wake up the masses and unite them in a second great attempt to put an end to British rule. Rajaji of course knew what was ahead.

Gandhiji planned to march from his Ashram in Sabarmati to Dandi on the sea coast which would be a trek of about 150 miles. He would take with him his Ashram co-workers as his fellow soldiers of non-violence. I was of course deeply stirred and went and saw Gandhiji and requested him to let me join his march. But Gandhiji advised me to join Rajaji in the struggle in Tamil Nadu. Rajaji welcomed the idea and I joined him as he went on a quick tour of Tamil Nadu to prepare it to take its share in the coming battle for freedom.

What I now saw was a new Rajaji, the warrior of non-violence in action. His brilliant speeches aroused the mind of the

people. Rajaji then announced that he would march with a hundred volunteers from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam on the Tanjore sea-coast and there break the salt law after Gandhiji had done the same in Dandi. Dr T. S. S. Rajan was the right-hand man of Rajaji on this occasion. In fact Rajaji's march to Vedaranyam began from Dr Rajan's garden. I was one among the hundred volunteers in the march. The march commenced at break of dawn. We stood two by two in a long line and said our prayers before we marched out. Our marching song was nothing less than the famous lines of Gandhiji's prayer, "Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram, Patita Pavana Sita Ram". Here was an ancient prayer becoming the song of our non-violent revolution.

The march was through Tanjore district. As the British Government saw the tremendous popular support to Rajaji and his marchers they got panicky, Mr Thorne I. C. S, the Collector of Tanjore issued a proclamation prohibiting villages on the way of the march offering welcome or supplies to Rajaji and his volunteers. This was at once shown to Rajaji who was nimbly picking his way towards Vedaranyam. His comment was cryptic and characteristic. "I know the people of Tanjore and they know me. I am afraid the Collector's proclamation will only add heavily to the welcome of the people. I am sorry to say thorns and thistles are not going to stem the tide of freedom any more." How we rejoiced when we heard this rejoinder of Rajaji to the newspaper reporters who met him. Throughout the long march from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam lakhs of people mentally joined Rajaji and when at last he reached Vedaranyam he received a royal welcome from tens of thousands of village people.

At Vedaranyam Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai welcomed Rajaji. Rajaji spoke in a quiet voice telling them he would break the salt law next morning in the Vedaranyam salt swamp and that from then on everyone must break the salt law, so that Tamil Nadu became a land of law-breakers. The next morning Rajaji broke the salt law and was immediately arrested and taken away to an unknown destination.

NON-VIOLENT BATTLE: VEDARANYAM

19

It was indeed a veritable battle between violence and non-violence. The hundred Satyagrahis who had marched to Vedaranyam under the leadership of Rajaji represented Gandhian non-violence. With the help of Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, himself a salt merchant and our chief host in Vedaranyam, we, the volunteers, had set up our own camp at the centre of the little town consisting of good thatched sheds surrounded by a wooden fencing. Inside was the camp office, the general kitchen and dining hall which was also the sleeping room of the volunteers. Across the road, at another end of Vedaranyam, was the Police camp under a Deputy Superintendent with a strong police force. Some of the police were armed and the rest wielded lathis. The battle lines were thus well drawn. The people of Vedaranyam and the surrounding villages watched every movement of Satyagrahis and the Police.

After the arrest of Rajaji, K. Santhanam was appointed the camp leader. When he too was arrested a couple of days later, the leadership went in succession to Subramaniam and Mattappara Venkitrama Iyer. Every day small batches of Satyagrahis went into the salt swamp and collected handfuls of salt which they later auctioned at public meetings for fancy prices gladly paid for by the enthusiastic public. The police attacked the volunteers when they collected the salt and also when they auctioned it at open meetings. Curiously however no Satyagrahi was arrested. The idea was not to arrest the volunteers as long as possible to prevent many others rushing in to take their places. But this good-humoured situation did not last long. The auctioning of salt packets at meetings created considerable stir among the villages and the police started using their lathies on the volunteers. Some of the Satyagrahis were considerably hurt and were lifted and brought into the camp. We had a good

Doctor in the camp who treated the wounded. As the battle grew, the police began to indulge in brutality. Volunteers were beaten up and dragged into thorny bushes. In the meantime the three camp leaders were arrested one after the other and removed to prisons.

I had the rare fortune of being appointed the fourth camp leader. Less than thirty years of age at the time I was somewhat unnerved to begin with. But since I had participated in the struggle for a number of days already, I carried on bravely. Every day I increased the number of Satyagrahis collecting salt in the swamps, who marched back singing songs and raising slogans. We arranged regular meetings close to our camp to explain to the people who came from the villages the significance of Salt Satyagraha. Important leaders from Tamil Nadu came to address these meetings. They explained what was Gandhiji's aim in launching the movement. It was nothing less than the attainment of Swaraj, the freedom of India. There were in India nearly 400 million people and if they stood united in action for any basic issue affecting their own life, British rule would begin to totter. After all the British were only a handful of people in the cities and towns. The British soldiers numbered less than a lakh the rest of the Indian army consisted of Indian soldiers. Gandhiji even wanted the Indian soldiers to come out of the army. Gandhiji thought the salt tax was a sin against the poor masses of the people and therefore selected the breaking of the salt-law to bring people together in common action against British rule. The people responded to the call as it was something which affected closely their daily life.

The battle between the Satyagrahis and the Police became intenser as the days passed. The finest hour for the Satyagrahis every day was at 4 p.m. when the volunteers returned from the swamps with their collection of salt. This was the hour at which we held our most crowded meetings when prominent speakers from outside addressed the gathering. Friends came from Thiruchirappally, Madurai, Salem, Coimbatore etc. One afternoon Sri A. Vaidyanatha Iyer from Madurai was advertised as the speaker and a big crowd gathered to hear him. It was on this occasion that the police brought out their new weapon against the Satyagrahis.

Beatings with the lathis had become notorious and there was much criticism in the press about the police being too free with the lathis. The police now came out with an alternative to the lathy and this was long tamarind-tree twigs. These twigs caused much pain but was less spectacular. The attack with these twigs created a new sensation. Sri Vaidyanatha Iyer himself got a taste of it. We surrounded him to protect him from further assault. But neither the crowd nor the Satyagrahis gave way. We stood our ground. Later I despatched a communication to the press describing this new cruelty. And so the tamarind-twig story went round the whole of Tamil Nadu. Within the next two or three days these twigs disappeared and we heaved a sigh of relief. But I still remember the cruel mark of the twig on the backs of Sri Vaidyanatha Iyer and his friends.

The struggle now shifted to the two gates in the Satyagraha camp. It became very difficult for us to get out of our own gates which were guarded by the police without trespassing into the camp. We therefore put our heads together and arrived at a solution. We pulled up the entire fencing around the camp, thus leaving our camp area open all round. The police did not arrest our volunteers without their having committed an actual breach of the salt law. Now the police found that our volunteers went out of the camp and came in just as they liked and could be caught only when they were picking salt in the swamp.

There was one interesting incident at this time. The Deputy Superintendent of Police sent me an invitation to come and have a talk with him over a cup of tea and I went and saw him. I politely refused the tea as it was forbidden under our camp discipline. I was informed that the police were intending to arrest the entire camp and confiscate whatever property was inside. I said I had no comment to make. The police were evidently offering me a chance to disperse the Satyagrahis to their own homes and thus avoid arrest and imprisonment. I answered such a situation would never arise and returned to the camp. There was much commotion in the camp when I reported the conversation to the assembled Satyagrahis. All of them got ready to be arrested and no one was quitting. Mass arrests took place a few days later.

The Satyagrahis had brought to the camp a big quantity of salt and were preparing to auction the salt at a chain of meetings in Vedaranyam. As soon as the police got scent of this, they made a rush at the camp. All of us Satyagrahis kept the salt in the centre of the camp and surrounded it to protect it from being captured by the police. Mrs. Rukmani Lakshmipathi gave courageous lead to the battle that followed. We Satyagrahis covered the salt with our bodies. Mrs Lakshmipathi was beaten and dragged away but it was a bitter struggle before the police could remove the satyagrahis by brutal force and capture the salt. Dr T.S.S. Rajan who had arrived only a little before at the camp was also arrested. And so at last we were all under arrest and were now prisoners of his Britannic Majesty. Sometime later we were marched to the Vedaranyam police station where a Magistrate held a peremptory court to try us under the law.

This was my first experience of a British court and I was much amused to see the kind of evidence that was produced against us. We were asked if we had any representation to make to the court. We said we had nothing to say; we had broken the law deliberately and were thus prepared to pay the penalty. The whole thing took only a couple of hours. The Satyagrahis were all sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year. As camp leader I was given the same sentence but with the additional honour of a fine of Rs. 500 or in default another three months in prison.

While this mockery of law and justice was taking place in the improvised court house, big crowds of people from the villages marched up and down the streets of Vedaranyam shouting, "Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jail! Rajaji-ki-jail!" We heard these shouts from within the police station and rejoiced that the people were with us in our struggle against British rule. After all the major aim of the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha was to rouse the minds of the people and unite them in a passionate desire for the freedom of India. Our Satyagraha proved that even if the leaders were arrested, the people would be ready and capable of carrying on the struggle. A Satyagraha battle is ultimately the non-violent battle of the people and by the people.

In Vedaranyam there was not one act of violence by the

Satyagrahis. All the violence came from the side of the Police, who of course knew nothing better. At one stage hundreds of women in Vedaranyam went into the big temple and prayed to God for His blessings for the Satyagrahis. Many of them wept aloud. We in turn issued a daily bulletin, copies of which were sent out through messengers to different places in Tamil Nadu which kept watch over the happenings in Vedaranyam. These bulletins were read at public meetings in the various towns to which they were sent. The newspapers were hesitant to publish these bulletins, as the heavy hand of Government would have fallen on them if they did so. And yet, if my memory is correct, the Vedaranyam battle of non-violence against violence received wide publicity.

There were Salt Satyagraha battles in many other places in Tamil Nadu and specially in Madras where the redoubtable Andhra leader Prakasam played a heroic role. Another name which came out prominently in the city of Madras was that of Durgabai, a very brave woman leader, who later became famous in the Indian Parliament. There were of course many other names deserving mention. The Salt Satyagraha movement reached every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu and India. The genius of Mahatma Gandhi, who selected the salt law for being broken, became apparent as the struggle reached every town and village. Here was something which everyone could do anywhere in the country with just a dash of courage and patriotism. It became a movement of the millions which shook India from end to end.

The British rulers had, to begin with, laughed at the very idea of their great Empire coming to any harm because Gandhiji and his followers chose to break the salt law. But as the movement grew and spread, they sat up in wonder at the whole of India seething with unrest and rebellion. All the great leaders in the country were participating in this Non-violent Revolution and behind them were the masses in the towns and villages. Here was no class struggle but the unity of all classes seeking the freedom of India. The idea that a revolution would precipitate a class war was disproved.

The British Government in India came to terms with Mahatma Gandhi. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, and Gandhiji signed

an agreement under which the old salt law was abrogated in part and all prisoners released. It would not be right to claim that the Salt Satyagrha movement brought political freedom to India. It, however, opened the gates wide for the people to march onward to their destiny. The people of India had acquired new courage and determination, having tasted the first fruits of freedom.

From now on the people would rally behind Gandhiji whenever he gave the call. Gandhiji himself grew in stature in the hearts of the people who trusted him completely. In the Salt Satyagraha movement the people of India proved beyond doubt their capacity for collective non-violent resistance. One of the most remarkable developments in this movement was the awakening of Indian women who came out in their hundreds and thousands to participate in the peaceful revolution. Mahatma Gandhi drew added strength and confidence from this particular development for his dream of fully liberating India through the people's power of non-violence.

The one person whose name and political prestige came out covered with glory from the Vedaranyam Satyagraha was Rajagopalachariar. He became second only to Mahatma Gandhi as the most convincing expounder and practitioner of Satyagraha. His cool courage, calm judgement and identification with the common man gave him a unique place in the hearts of the people of India. Like Sardar Patel in Gujarat and Babu Rajendra Prasad in Bihar, Rajaji became one of the acknowledged leaders of India. He was in his personal life utterly simple and unpretentious. He had an intellect sharp as a razor and a command of the written and spoken word which was irresistible. Even his political opponents had high regard for his character and ability. After Gandhiji, he was my political Guru. We came closer together in after years. One of the things which none can forget about Rajaji was his rare moral courage even in occasionally differing from Gandhiji and going his own way. But he never once failed to come back to the unquestioned leader of India whenever he found he was needed.

After the Vedaranyam battle I naturally found myself in prison. My sentence was one year rigorous imprisonment, which meant imprisonment with hard labour. There was also a fine of Rs. 500/ or three months in default. Along with others I was taken from Vedaranyam to the District Jail in Cuddalore. We were some twenty B-class prisoners in this batch. We were kept in a separate building meant for under-trials. We were given our rations and we did our own cooking. Pandit Harihara Sarma of the Madras Hindi Prachara Sabha took charge of the kitchen. We were waiting to be taken to the Central Prison in Vellore. During the days in Cuddalore we had no work to do and we were kept idle. We spent the time reading newspapers and magazines or discussing the political problems facing our country. The major question we discussed was if a non-violent struggle could win against the powerful British Empire. Among the prisoners was Dr M. E. Naidu from Nagercoil and some of the leaders from Andhra.

After some days we were removed to the Vellore Central Prison. In Cuddalore we did not know the reality of prison life. But now here in Vellore we walked straight into that reality. We were all marched to the high and imposing prison gate. A sentry checked our names and cards. A small trap-door then opened and we all passed through it into a new world altogether. The trapdoor closed behind us and the world outside was completely shut out till we were released nearly an year afterwards. Uniformed warders marched us to the office of the jailor. Here our clothes were removed and we had to put on jail clothes to begin with. Then all our little packages, which we carried with us, were opened and checked and almost everything taken away except a tooth brush, a cake of soap and one or two other minor articles.

Then away again we were marched to our prison cells. These cells were in what was called the Close Prison which is

a prison within a prison, with its own high walls. The Close Prison is ordinarily used for "Black Caps". This meant prisoners who came twice or more to prison. As we entered the Close Prison our hearts sank a little because we were now doubly cut away from the outer world and in front of us were rows and rows of prison cells with long verandas in front. Each one of us was assigned a cell and we went to look at our new homes. Most people know what a prison cell is. There were no windows except a trap-window at the top of the back wall and then, of course, in front was the iron door with railings. May be each cell was about 12 feet long and 8 feet broad. There was a small cement platform inside which served as a cot and each of us was given a grass mat and a "kambli" (woollen bed-sheet) and something called a pillow. In one corner of the room was a small mud pot with drinking water and another covered urine pot.

This was how we began. But some amenities were allowed later as we were B-Class prisoners. When food came we knew what we were in for. The food came from the general kitchen of the prison which is always a huge affair. Prisoners are engaged as cooks. They steal what food they can and we get the rest. We then joined together and went to the Superintendent of the prison on a small deputation and suggested to him to give us our rations, whatever they were, and we would cook our own food and also serve the food to the Congress prisoners. He was at first very lofty and obstinate, but when some of the senior Congress prisoners pressed the demand, he at last agreed. And so, we began a long life within the Close Prison of the Vellore Central Jail. As many of us had been given imprisonment with hard labour, we were given some work or other to do.

We were allowed to choose which workshop we would attend. I selected the tailoring shed and thus, had the opportunity of learning tailoring. To sit at the machine and stitch away was not difficult. It was "cutting" which required more practice and skill. I began with making jail banians which involved only little cutting and then went on to more difficult work. There were convict-warders in addition to some master tailors all the time with us. I soon found out that the workshop

was something like a market place where a lot of barter took place. The prisoners doing tailoring will pass cut-pieces to the convict-warders who, in turn, would bring them the next day what prisoners most needed, beedis, cigarettes, pan etc. Beedi became some kind of a currency. So many beedies, could always be exchanged for so much cut pieces of cloth. The prison authorities knew all about this, but blinked at the whole matter. I was told that some of them even received of a share bartered goods. One great attraction was that the jail people could come in and get whatever they wanted stitched free by the prisoner-tailors.

I had an interesting experience. One of the jail people wanted to repair a couple of his shirts and brought them to me without knowing I was a political prisoner. I readily took the shirts and repaired them and returned them. Two days after one of the political leaders came in search of me and he was guided to my seat in the workshop by the same person whose shirts I had repaired. When he found out who I was, he looked thoroughly abashed. But I put him at ease by not mentioning anything about the incident. He came round later and apologised to me very unnecessarily. What a beedi or cigarette can mean to a human being, I realised only when I saw what was daily happening in my workshop. Occasionally friends from outside would also bribe convict-warders and send through them money and forbidden articles to the prisoners.

Inside the close-prison were shady trees and we organised many study classes in the shade whenever possible. A little away from the Close Prison was where A-Class prisoners were kept. These included veterans like C. Rajagopalachariar, Pattabhi Seetaramaiah, T. Prakasam, Bulusu Sambamurthy, Madhava Menon, Raman Menon and others. They were allowed to come and see B-class prisoners in the Close Prison on Sundays and so Sundays became days of rejoicing and learning. These leaders, specially Rajagopalachariar and Pattabhi would give lectures on various subjects. There were, of course, inside the Close Prison, B-Class prisoners from Kerala, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Naturally, there were discussions and debates which sometimes led upto uproars, and shouting and some in-fighting.

The younger Telugus were very aggressive and were often joined by the younger people from Kerala. Tamilians were less quarrelsome and perhaps little more reasonable. K. Santhanam was their leader, and he was an intellectual and a perfect votary of non-violence, but, in discussions and arguments he almost always won the game. Curiously, the Tamilians came to be known as "Thayir Vadais" and the Telegus as "Masal Vadais." We thus had our own jokes even inside the prison!

We were nearly six hundred Congress prisoners in the A & B classes in the Vellore Central Jail and this was the major reason why the jail authorities did not indulge in too much administrative enforcements which could lead to a lot of trouble. Congress leaders exercised a restraining influence on the large number of their fellow prisoners and the jail authorities consulted these leaders whenever they had complaints against the Congress prisoners. It has to be admitted that there were often acts of misconduct on their part. They indulged in a lot of smuggling through the convict warders who were amenable to small payments. Sometimes different groups of the prisoners would indulge in violent quarrels. Food became one of the main causes of quarrels among the prisoners. Food assumes extraordinary importance in prison. The food was cooked by the prisoners themselves and served by them. There were charges of partiality leading to trouble. At all these points the jail authorities generally consulted leaders like Rajagopalachariar, Pattabhi, Sambamurthy, Raman Menon and others who would take a hand in settling disputes peacefully. Even with these interludes life began to drag as month succeeded month in the prison.

The sudden coming of fresh prisoners always created a stir and for several days the new comers had to answer the eager questions of those already in. We, thus, got a lot of information about what was going on outside in the Salt Satyagraha Revolution. We were thrilled to hear of the Bardoli battle and the manner in which the peasants of Gujarat including the women and even children stood solidly behind Sardar Patel. Stories came about the wide-spread struggle for freedom in every part of India. We all had the feeling that our Non-violent Revolution was going ahead and shaking the British Empire.

And then suddenly one day came the news that the members of Working Committee of the Congress had been released and that Lord Irwin had invited Mahatma Gandhi for political talks in New Delhi. It is difficult to describe our excitement inside the prison. We could, of course, get only scappy news. The jail authorities would give some news to the Congress leaders in the A-Class and from there the news would trickle to the B-Class. So we all waited in suspense from day to day.

Then finally came the day when the announcement was made that some agreement had been reached between Lord Irwin and Mahatma Gandhi and that all Congress prisoners would be released. A great cheering rang across the Close prison. A number of the prisoners even began packing their small possessions. The jailor came in soon after and announced that we were all free and could go home collecting our travel money from the jail office. What a rush there was and in a day or two we were all outside the little trap-door in the massive gate of the prison. We took leave of each other promising to keep in touch with developments in our own different parts of the country. The rest is part of history and well known.

In this Chapter I have tried to describe prison life as I experienced it for the first time. We had, of course, many of us, lost weight, but this was no serious matter. We had, of course, faced humiliations and insults from time to time. But such things only hardened and strengthened our moral fibre. We were all now well-trained soldiers of non-violence going home and waiting for the next call from Mahatma Gandhi. That call was not to come early.

Mahatma Gandhi attended the Round Table Conference in London and this lasted some months. It ended in a very uncertain political situation. The Congress could claim only a very partial victory. But the British Government had for ever lost its old prestige and its invincible character. The failure of the Round Table Conference led to the re-starting of Civil Disobedience and Mahatma Gandhi and all our great leaders were again in prison.

We, the rank and file, followed the leaders again to prison. We were all arrested in different places and tried in the British

courts and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment again. Curiously, many of us found ourselves once again before the trap-door of the massive prison gate in the Vellore Central Jail. Some of the jail staff welcomed us with a smile and we were soon back in the Close Prison but we were now in lesser numbers. And this made a difference. The jail staff became harsher in their treatment of us and this brought us sometimes into conflict with them. But, on the whole, prison life now was an interesting repetition.

We were released at the end of our terms of imprisonment, this time only some months. We were, however, not to have much time to rest. The Civil Disobedience Movement took new forms. One such form was resistance to the war effort then going on. India had been dragged into the war without her consent. And so the nation registered its resistance to the war, and non-co-operated with the conduct of the war. This made the British Government very angry and even lose their heads completely. Lord Willingdon had become the Viceroy and he tried his utmost to crush the Congress. The result, of course, was renewed battle, and for us renewed imprisonment. This time we were first in the Coimbatore District Jail, and then in the Thiruchirappalli Central Jail. This Thiruchirappalli jail was not so big as the one in Vellore but big enough to be imposing and to have all the paraphernalia with which we had become familiar in Vellore.

The adventures in the Thiruchirappalli jail were different from those in Vellore. None of the top leaders of the south was in the Thiruchirappalli jail. We lived in long barracks consisting of sheds which were neither very clean nor comfortable in any sense of the word. In the day time we were let out of the long sheds and we could walk about in a limited open area. In the night we were shut up. There were attached lavatories in these sheds. The Congress prisoners were of all sorts and the lavatories would often be in a mess. Some of us volunteered to clean these lavatories and did so for a time till the prison authorities stopped us from doing so. We had, however, plenty of company in these long sheds and as soon as we were shut in at 6.00 p.m. we would arrange varieties of in-door games and as the lights

were kept burning throughout the nights, there were groups which kept on playing some game or other till midnight. There was, however, a terrible menace in these long dormitories. This was an army of bugs which lived along with us. They made the nights unbearable. No one could sleep except those who did not care for the big-bites. We organised a veritable war against the bugs burning them out of their crevices in the wall. The result was fairly good but the bug menace was never completely eradicated. Some of us wrote poems on our battle against the bugs and presented them to the jailor!

The Cuddalore, Vellore and Thiruchirappalli jails even while they were all of one set pattern had each of them a separate atmosphere. Congress prisoners in large numbers in these prisons upset the traditional patterns. The prison authorities were totally unused to political prisoners and were often in a quandary how to deal with them in different situations. But on the whole, Congress prisoners tried to live in accordance with Gandhiji's instructions as to how prisoners should behave. Whatever quarrels arose between the authorities and the prisoners were almost always settled peacefully. Hardly ever was there an act of violence from the political prisoners. And this naturally resulted in the prison authorities also behaving non-violently.

More than even in the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha I saw how non-violence under all conditions was a better solvent for most of our problems. The long-established fear of the police and prisons which was current among the people practically disappeared with the Salt Satyagraha Revolution. We all became more fearless and more determined in lining up behind our great leader Mahatma Gandhi who was himself the embodiment of non-violence. It was now clear beyond any doubt that the people of India having tasted the first fruits of freedom would march on towards the final goal of independence. The gate-way to complete freedom was now open and India's millions were slowly and steadily entering its portals.

My active participation in the Salt Satyagraha Movement sowed the seeds of non-violence in my mind. Even earlier I knew that Gandhiji's aim was to awaken and harness the non-violent power of the people for the battle for freedom. Both Gandhiji and Rajaji had explained this aim in unmistakable words. I had of course read of Gandhiji's Non-violent Struggle in South Africa. The Story of this struggle had stirred me deeply. I remembered again and again that Gandhiji's non-violent soldiers in South Africa were mostly unlettered coolies, men and women. I was filled with wonder that such people could come to know the value of sacrifice and suffering without retaliation. If this was possible for poor Indians in a far away land amid the terrible conditions of 'apartheid', then what was not possible in India itself among the millions of her people who had some roots of non-violence in their immemorial culture?

I could not at the time imagine that the people of India would adhere to non-violence all the time and under grave provocation. The people could not have forgotten what happened in the great Indian Mutiny which almost overthrew British rule only some decades ago. As a young man coming into political life I had no illusions about non-violence in my mind. Nevertheless, the possibilities of organised non-violence for political purposes had already become apparent to young India. In the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha and in some of the follow-up movements I had witnessed how our people could face police violence with Gandhian non-violence. The people understood instinctively that Gandhiji did not want them to surrender and at the same time not to retaliate in terms of violence.

I had begun to understand how Satyagraha worked. Every Satyagraha programme created two unmistakable results. The first directly affected the British Government by winning some points at their cost. The second was perhaps more startling. This

was the creation of the contagion of non-violence reaching vast numbers of people not directly participating in Satyagraha but watching it from a distance. These were also affected profoundly. Waves of sympathy swept across the country in favour of the Satyagrahis.

In an earlier chapter I have mentioned how in the small town of Vedaranyam our Satyagraha created immense public opinion in our favour. Crowds of women and children went to the temple and prayed for our success. The police force attacking the Satyagrahis received hostile looks wherever they went. It dawned on me that Satyagraha could be a most potent instrument in rousing the public conscience in favour of the Satyagrahis facing police lathi charges and courting imprisonment. Gandhiji thus sowed the seeds of non-violence far and wide in the minds of millions of people and the people responded from one end of the country to the other.

The British rulers had scoffed at Satyagraha to begin with. They ridiculed Satyagraha as timidity and even cowardliness. But they soon sat up to realise how Satyagraha brought together large numbers of people pledged to win their freedom at all costs. Any violent movement of the people would have been driven underground by the British police and army and the mass of the people kept away from the struggle. But here was Satyagraha bringing hundreds of thousands, men and women, into open but peaceful rebellion. The effect was very disquieting and alarming to the Government.

After the Salt Satyagraha revolution and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the message of non-violence reached almost every home in the towns and villages of India. The awakening among women and their participation in the struggle in very large numbers created a world impression. Here was the discovery of a weapon with which the so-called weak could fight the so-called strong with a sporting chance of success. Once the fear of the police and the prison was taken out of the minds of the Indian people, a new and unprecedented situation faced the British rulers. But this was only one side of the picture.

On the other side was Gandhiji who was a hard taskmaster. He was constantly at the task of training the people in

non-violence through his Constructive Programme. He had never forgotten how he had once to recall the Non-Co-operation Movement because the people turned violent suddenly in some places in India. But the Salt Satyagraha put tons of fresh courage into Gandhiji and the Congress of which he was then the undisputed leader. The personality of Gandhiji fascinated young India. Here at last was a leader after their own hearts living in voluntary poverty, speaking and acting the truth in every situation and always ready to move forward for freedom with invincible courage. He had become the symbol of India fighting for her freedom. Whereas in South Africa he had to inch his way onward against daily obstacles, here in India his problem was to control the masses and enable them to move forward unitedly with his discipline of non-violence.

Gandhiji proved himself to be a master of the art of controlling and disciplining vast masses of people. Just as after the withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation Movement, Gandhiji waited ten years, training the people in non-violence, so now also after his half-way victory in the Salt Satyagraha Movement, he again with inexhaustible patience prepared the people for the final battle for the full independence of India. He regulated the training of the people both in the Constructive Programme of Village Reconstruction and in the political programme within the Legislatures. He proved his mind was flexible and pragmatic. He was earlier totally opposed to the Congress fighting the elections and entering the Legislatures. He later changed his mind however and permitted the Congress to fight the elections and enter the Legislatures with the firm purpose of using them for strengthening the will of the people.

The British were confounded at both points. In the Legislatures the National Congress gave a hard time to the British bureaucracy, and in the country, Village Reconstruction in the manner in which it took shape, annoyed and puzzled them. All the time Gandhiji lived in his little mud hut in Sevagram but continued to be the cynosure of all eyes and minds in India and outside. Through the Constructive Programme he kept in touch with the people throughout the country and guided them in their constant march to freedom. So far as the British were concerned,

they knew by now in Delhi and London, beyond any doubt, that there could never be a political settlement in India without the consent and acceptance of Mahatma Gandhi. They would have wished for nothing better than to see Gandhiji and the Congress crushed altogether. But this being impossible they played a double game with him and India. They would sometimes extol him and seek his advice and sometimes load him with calumny. Gandhiji, however, survived their praise and their abuse with perfect equanimity and went his way. He passionately desired to see India completely free and independent in his life time. But he was willing to compromise with Dominion Status, if it was given in time and with no constraints attached.

The British failed as always to act in time and Gandhiji waited and watched the political situation in India and the world with unerring discrimination. What was more significant than anything else at the time ^{of} Gandhiji was able to hold the Indian National Congress in ^{the} ^{one} ^{and} ^{the} ^{same} ^{unity} ^{and} ^{direction}. There were in India at this time great leaders who would have earned a name in any country in the world. We have only to remember such giants of our history like Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Malavya, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajagopalachariar and several others. Mahatma Gandhi towered as a giant among these giants. He brought them together into a mighty joint leadership of the nation. He made politics into an arena of suffering, sacrifice and fearlessness and moral dignity. He had nothing to offer these leaders working with him except sacrifice and the British prison.

Everytime there was a battle and a price to pay, Mahatma Gandhi was the first one to step forward and lead the way. And because his utter selflessness and fearlessness were so self-evident before the people, his leadership was more than political. It was also moral and spiritual. And so as I grew up slowly in these troubled and formative times, Gandhiji became the polestar for young India to follow. It was an era full of challenges and changes in India. Every day brought a sense of adventure and a call to participate in great events. It was a privilege to be alive and young in this Gandhian era. There were of course

people who kept away from the struggle for freedom and kept themselves comfortable on the side of the British rulers.

Gandhiji's non-violence grappled with the problem created by such people and what he did was something utterly new in our politics. Gandhiji insisted that such people should in no way be politically attacked or insulted in any manner. They had every right to take up their own position. We had thus a valuable lesson in political tolerance.

Let me recall a telling story in this connection in which I too was involved. Annie Besant was no friend of the Congress or Gandhiji at this time. She was a vehement opponent of the Non-Co-operation Movement earlier and of the Salt Satyagraha later. She was hooted and insulted at a big public meeting in Trivandrum. The students protested when she expressed her opposition to the Congress. She made some disparaging remarks about Gandhiji's non-violence. She said if Congress-men talking of non-violence threw brick-bats, the British were bound to retaliate with bullets. At this juncture pandemonium broke out. Mahatma Gandhi strongly condemned the attack by the students on Mrs Besant. He made it clear that she was perfectly entitled to her political opinions and the students were guilty in obstructing her speech. I was one of those who attended the meeting and attempted in vain with a few other students to stop Mrs Besant being heckled. I was very happy when I read Gandhiji's criticism of the conduct of the students. This was of course many years ago and it is likely my memories are somewhat confused.

Gandhiji was perhaps the most effective mass adult educationist of our time. He took up one after another the problems affecting the daily life of the people and wove his teachings around these problems. He took up the poverty of the people and in his khadi and village industries movement taught millions of our people the elements of rural economics and the history of how the British exploited India. He took up the question of untouchability and taught the people how it was a sin against man and God and thus taught them the elements of social morality. He dealt with the problem of the drink evil and showed the people how the Government made their millions by offering

liquor to the poor peasants and labourers which ultimately ruined their lives. In the Non-Co-operation Movement and much more in the Salt Satyagraha Revolution the masses of India received education in politics and economics of incomparable value.

Into the controversy about Dominion Status versus Independence, between cottage industries and large scale industries there flowed a vast amount of mass adult education. I remember so well these controversies at the time and understood for myself how people argued for and against political and economic propositions. Young people- specially were deeply moved and also learnt a great deal. My own young life was caught in these currents and cross currents of political and economic controversy. I had before me the Gandhian approach and also the mind of Poet Rabindranath Tagore, of which I had learnt in the Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan. I could therefore keep an open mind and look at the problems and issues of the day with a measure of freedom and objectivity.

The Gandhian tide was however sweeping so strong across the country that I was also caught in it. While Gandhiji represented the realities in the life of the people, Tagore stood as the sentinel of the spirit of intellectual freedom. I made my way between these two great teachers. Sri Rajagopalachariar was the great intellect of the Gandhian movement and his writings and utterances also influenced me. I was however conscious all the time that Gandhi and Tagore summed up for me, at the time, the basic Truths of India. Thus I built up for myself a fairly balanced life in which I became devoted equally to Truth and to Beauty, as the two sides of the same great coin of life.

Gandhiji's logic, even if gentle, was inflexible. He firmly expressed the view that the freedom of India could come only when the people fought their own battles to cleanse society of evil customs and vices which had degraded their life for centuries. He, therefore, gave a mighty churning to Indian society. He attacked with all his strength the evils of caste and untouchability and the liquor trade which ruined the life of the village people. He raised his voice in protest against the suppression of women and wanted women to take their full share in the making of the nation. He involved the people

actively in these battles against themselves and thus released powerful forces of national integration which strengthened the country in its battle for freedom.

Gandhiji, knew the pulse of the people as no other Indian leader and used this knowledge with consummate skill to make them work for their own benefit. Young India joined him in his work enthusiastically. As Gandhiji built the unity and the non-violent strength of the people step by step, the nation followed him with complete trust in his leadership and in his method of non-violent action. Greater adventures were ahead of the people of India as Gandhiji waited and prepared them for their final battle for the independence of India. The great event of the century was this sowing of the seeds of non-violence in a vast country like India by Mahatma Gandhi, who held no state power, and whose weapons were all the time moral and spiritual.

Let me end this chapter with a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson which might well apply to Gandhiji:

"Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe, or where it will end. There is not a piece of science, but its flank may be turned to-morrow; there is not any literary reputation, not the so-called eternal names of fame, that may not be revised and condemned. The very hopes of man, the thoughts of his heart, the religion of nations, the manners and morals of mankind, are all at the mercy of a new generalisation. Generalisation is always a new influx of the divinity into the mind. Hence the thrill that attends it."

Looking back for a moment at the years covered in these twenty one chapters and bringing before our mind's eye the personality, character, ideas and work of Mahatma Gandhi, we might also echo the closing words of Emerson, "Hence the thrill that attends it."

With this chapter the first part of the autobiography comes to an end. We have thus far covered only half the story.

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Prime Minister's House
New Delhi
September, 29, 1984



Dear Dr Ramachandran,

I learn that you are turning 80 this month. My warm congratulations to you.

You have had an eventful life as freedom fighter, editor, educationist and Parliamentarian. Through your articulation and your dedicated work, especially in Gandhigram, you have upheld principles and causes dear to our nation.

I wish you many more years of activity.

Yours sincerely
Sd/-
(INDIRA GANDHI)