

GANDHI ON WOMEN

Collection of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings
and Speeches on Women

Compiled by
Pushpa Joshi





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FOREWORD

Gandhiji never wrote merely for the pleasure of writing, but always with a purpose and as a guide to action. He always described himself as a man of action. All that he spoke or wrote was meant to be translated into action; and he successfully put it into practice, both in his personal and public life. Every thought, feeling, act of his reflected a life mission; hence the statement “my life is my message”.

This quality of his utter honesty and purposefulness has attracted me the most towards him. I must confess that I have not consciously studied his writings, nor am I a *bhakta* (devotee) of him. However, I have been able to find answers to my questions from him on many occasions in my life.

I realise now that what he spoke or wrote was very Indian. He used to say, ‘My ideas are not mine, they are as old as the hills.’ But he had that receptive, open mind that understood the Indian people, their difficulties, their aspirations. No Indian leader has matched this understanding till now. I believe the source of this deep understanding was his high regard for the people. That is what made him a leader of the masses in its true sense.

He set a unique example amongst Indian leaders by including women among the ‘masses’ in a most natural way. Women participated in mass movements led by him in a natural course. And this made a big breakthrough in Indian women’s lives, forever. I would say that I would not have been what I am today, if Gandhiji had not made this breakthrough. This fact would apply to every Indian woman of today. His deep faith in women’s *shakti* (power) came, as he admitted, from his experience of his mother and his wife. He observed and studied women in his own home because he had respect for women as human beings, and that is why he perceived women as equal partners in the home and society, not merely as wives and mothers. No wonder he



sought the participation of women in the freedom struggles at political, economic and moral levels.

He was a super strategist, and his strategy to fight for freedom could not ignore women. He had more faith in his women soldiers than the men soldiers, because he really considered women to be superior to men, particularly when the weapons in the struggle were love and non-violence. He believed women to be stronger because their hearts contained, as mothers, qualities of love and peace. No other public leader has ever put such positive confidence in the women of the country. He realised a very strong need for support and participation from women in creating a society based on justice.

Gandhiji did see the exploitation of women in and outside their home. I have always been moved by his statement that no one can be exploited without his/her will or participation. For a long time I would not accept this view but after working for years in SEWA, our union of self-employed women workers, I find it Gandhiji's most valid statement. Gandhiji had observed his wife and mother quietly resisting their exploitation at home. He learnt the method of satyagraha from them and put it into practice as a major strategy to rebel against exploitation by the British. No fighter planes or tanks can cope with the attacks of love and satyagraha in a fight for justice.

I remember a satyagraha that we had launched in SEWA against the police authorities in the downtown market of Ahmedabad city. The vegetable vendors, who had plied their trade in that market for three generations, were being pushed out by the municipal and police authorities to make room for smooth flow of vehicular traffic. The vendors resisted the police order quietly and firmly. As the police was to physically remove them, the next morning, thousands of SEWA women stretched themselves on the open ground of the market squares during the night. No police could touch them to push, nor could the municipal officer pass an order to remove them.



Our demand was just and minimum, i.e. to allow us to earn our living in this market, as we are an integral part of this market for the last three generations. As vendors we are providing a useful service to the society, and as our demands were just and minimum we had full support from the general public during our struggle, and therefore the authorities became powerless. I have realised that if I lift a stone to make my point, I lose the public support. It then becomes only an issue of law and order, the doors of negotiations are closed and the just cause is lost. Also, as we shift our method from non-violence to violence, the local anti-social elements creep in, and our just demands are lost. In settling demands of the poor, especially, the general public support, is very essential.

In SEWA, all our struggles are in the open, we always inform our opponents of our plans before we take any action. We never cheat or dupe our opponents. I think this way we have been able to establish our credibility in the hearts not only of the public but also of our opponents. Once, in a struggle of agricultural workers, when we were beaten up by the police, our opponents came to the hospital to take care of those who had been injured. One of them donated his blood to one of the injured women workers. In fact, our opponents put more confidence in SEWA's reporting than what their own staff reported to them.

Once the demand is made, we stick to it at any cost. Therefore we demand only that which is just. No haggling in settling the demands. I think, this approach very well blends into the women's way of demanding. Once convinced, the women would not bend or bow down, and also, needy women remain very firm and ready to suffer the consequences, on their stand. They cannot be very easily bribed by the opponents.

We have also seen that SEWA women, though tradition-bound, have been able to come out of the restrictions based on caste and religion during the times of crisis. During the recent riots in our State, the local SEWA leaders in their streets actually



stopped the men of their own family from doing violence, and protected the families of the minority community in the *mohalla* (neighbourhood) from communal attacks. By working and saying prayers together for a decade in SEWA, they are developing respect for each other's religion and a need to remain together in their fight against poverty. Once, one Devilal came to me in great agitation, complaining that his wife (a SEWA member) had the audacity to stop him from what he was wanting to do, viz. to throw stones. As he became more violent, the wife went to the police with the request that her husband should be arrested. "I will tell the police (who is my friend) to arrest her because she is a bad woman", Devilal thus threatened her. She said, "You may call me by bad names, I am not afraid."

Chandaben is a local SEWA leader, and often has to go to the police to take up causes of her members. So Chandaben is not a popular person in the police department. Often she has to face humiliations of all kinds. But she says "I enjoy this suffering. These insults do not hurt me, they are my pride! I feel stronger when I suffer for my sisters." Didn't Gandhiji speak similar words in relation to the humiliations he faced from the British authorities? Each one of us has experienced that a tremendous strength generates from a struggle for justice. 'By participating in struggles, we have been gradually able to liberate ourselves from *Purdah* and such social taboos...' says Karimabibi, SEWA Vice President.

Actually it is the process of development that excites and enriches us all in SEWA. Often we have debates among ourselves on matters of moral values, e.g. a member engaging in theft. As a union, we inform the employer of the theft and return the stolen goods to the employer with an apology. It is a hard pill to swallow for us but there cannot be any compromise on such matters. Whatever is immoral is immoral. When our demand is just, our method to demand also has to be pure and straight



because what is there to hide if our demand is just? This strengthens our case in the eyes of the employer, the court and the public.

Gandhiji wanted to build a new society in free India—a society based on social justice and peace. He asked ‘Freedom for whom? What does freedom mean to millions of people who are so poor and backward?’ For him, freedom was a birthright for every nation, as well as every human being. He always included women in his ‘human being’. In his vision of social change, a moral character of high order was very important. All along, his most concerted efforts were on re-building of human beings.

Gujarat is the land of Gandhiji and in Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union he experimented his principle of trusteeship. He called it ‘a laboratory of human relations’. I worked in this union for 17 years dealing with women’s problems. It is here that I took lessons on trade union work, settling disputes by conciliation and co-operation, the theory of demand that it always has to be minimum and just. Here I learnt the methods of civil disobedience in our struggles, and in these struggles realised women’s strength in fighting for justice. And thus, SEWA was born.

‘We may be illiterate but we are knowledgeable in the ways of the world. We can manage our own affairs if given the opportunity’, say the members of SEWA co-operatives. Ninety-eight percent of women borrowers of the SEWA Co-operative Bank repay their loans. They are proud of themselves, and say, ‘We may be poor but we are honest.’

Gandhiji has seen the tremendous diversity in the Indian population and therefore had put a very strong emphasis on the integration of the people without disturbing their identity. He sacrificed his life for the unity of the nation.

SEWA women do picketing against liquor in the slums and villages. When one of them finds a woman being beaten up by a drunken man in the neighbour’s home, she



would call her colleagues and step into the neighbour's house and hold the man's hands to prevent him from beating. The team would go to the liquor shop and hold his hand to prevent him from drinking till the man leaves the place. Holding the hand of a man other than one's own man is considered 'bad' for the women but they would hold. "I do not care what people criticise, so long as my heart is pure." I firmly believe that this kind of moral courage that we see today among women who come in public life is "mainly because Gandhiji brought women out from their homes to participate in and lead struggles—political, social and economic.

I feel the most relevant and urgent struggle of women today is that of *swadeshi*. I am a great believer in self-reliance, particularly self-employment, and therefore his call for *swadeshi* rings bells in my ears. All his life he tried to rescue India from the Western economic structures based on profiteering and competition. He had deep faith in the traditional self-reliant village economy of India. He had seen the worst form of colonialism and imperialism in Africa. He saw the black people being bullied and oppressed by European industrialisation. He saw the consequences of capitalism and industrialism culminating in world wars. He realised that this would not be the way to progress for the free India. In his strategy, political freedom was only the first step. The larger step was *swadeshi* i.e. economic self-reliance. The concept of economic self-reliance is very close to self-employment.

I am of the opinion that in our country, historically and traditionally self-employment has been the form of work. Therefore, Indian social and cultural relationships are associated closely with self-employment. In such a situation, the economy was localised at the village level, the dealings were face to face, and decisions were made on mutual trust. Illiteracy was not a handicap then. In this economy women played a major role.



But with the advent of industrialisation in India, the modes of work changed, the transactions became larger and done at a distance, the written word replaced mutual trust; employer-employee relationships developed, income became fixed and work organisation changed. All these changes threw out women from their traditional employment, without providing them suitable alternative skills or work. Women are the greatest sufferers of the industrialisation process. Today women are becoming a commodity, and a machine to produce children. They are losing their inherent skills, culture, talents. They are slotted into categories like the rural poor, and are 'rehabilitated' and 'programmed' by the governments' poverty eradication schemes. After disintegrating them, they are now being covered under the Integrated Rural Development Programme!

In SEWA we are constantly fighting against policies that displace women from work. We try to simultaneously prepare them for better skills, higher markets, more income; organise them into co-operative banking, producers co-operatives and service co-operatives. Here they learn to take decisions and to manage their own affairs in the modern economy. These poor self-employed women have been proving their strength, but the outside forces of industrialisation and economic change are too massive and strong to be resisted by them individually.

We are not against industrialisation *per se*, but we want industrialization of our own, i.e., of the Indian kind, and not the alien kind. This is what we mean by self reliance (at the local level) and that is what Gandhiji meant by *swadeshi*. In a *swadeshi* economy, I see women playing a leading role, for sure, as I learn from my SEWA experience. Today there is a serious pressure from men to join SEWA, because SEWA women have started entering the mainstream of the economy and getting the benefits of it in a moderate way.



Certainly Gandhiji thought unemployment to be a women's issue, and therefore symbolically as well as practically he introduced the *Charkha* (spinning-wheel) as an instrument of the freedom movement. The propagation of Khadi was to protect the employment of the poorest women. We still have poor women in India, and even today SEWA and other organisations have to run a Khadi programme for the poorest women. It offers nothing much by way of full employment but does provide full dignity by way of bread labour. For Gandhiji Khadi was not a cloth but a thought, a philosophy that aimed at a self-reliant economy, a link of concern between the haves and the have-nots. But unfortunately in India today, this spirit of *swadeshi* or self-reliance is not taken seriously; and hence women's unemployment is not taken seriously.

While on his way to prison, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Gandhiji's colleague in the Ashram asked him to write a primer for the children of primary schools, and Gandhiji did it. The text is in the form of the mother teaching the child! In the primer, his non-sexist approach is so evident that some of his colleagues took objection to which he replied, 'I am building a new society.' In the new society he wants the children to keep clean, to pray to God, to play, to do exercise, and be healthy and strong, to enjoy work, to till fields, to do handicraft and also to do housework.

In the chapter on housework the mother asks her son—"Dear son, you should also help in the housework as your sister does." The son answers, "But she is a girl, I am a boy. A boy plays and studies." The sister says, "How come! I also love to play and study!"

Brother: I do not deny that, but, dear sister, you have to do housework as well.

Mother: Why should a boy not do housework?

Son: Because the boy has to earn money when he grows up, therefore he must study well.



Mother: You are wrong, my son. Women also make an earning for the family. And, there is a lot to learn in housework-housecleaning, cooking, laundry. By doing housework you will develop various skills of the body and will feel self-reliant. In good housework you need to use your eyes, hands and brain. Therefore these activities are educative and they build your character. Men and women both need to be educated equally in housework because the home belongs to both.

I feel indeed most thrilled and elevated by Gandhiji's writing of primer, viz., *Balpothi*, where the mother teaches the son!

I said to Vinabehn Mazumdar that I should not write this Foreword as I am not a Gandhian scholar. At her insistence, I have tried to put down some of the ideas that attracted me to Gandhiji, or where I found substance for his ideas in my own life and work. I do believe that writings of Gandhiji will provide an important support to the women's movement in India, if not in the whole world. I am very happy that the Centre for Women's Development Studies thought of putting this volume together, and that the Navajivan Trust agreed to bring it out as a joint publication. If my stray thoughts encourage some readers who are unfamiliar with Gandhiji's views on women to study this volume carefully, I shall be amply rewarded.

Self Employed Women's Association

Ahmedabad

March 1986

Ela R. Bhatt



PREFACE

Contemporary history of academic interest in problems of women's status, roles and other issues presents many paradoxes in India. On the one hand, there is an increase, even explosion, of research and publications on women's problems, especially since 1975—because of the International Women's Decade, the fillip given to research on women by the publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India and the adoption of specific research programmes in this area by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and several other agencies—national and international. On the other hand, several critical areas—which in our opinion could provide basic clues to the paradoxical situation facing women in this country—have continued uninvestigated. The economic marginalisation of the overwhelming majority of women, identified by the Committee on the Status of Women in India, has attracted a great deal of attention from social scientists and even a few policy makers during the last decade. But the failure of political equality to introduce any new trends in women's situation in society, or in the political process, has hardly attracted a similar kind of interest. The whole issue of power relations within the family, the community, the economy and the State, though recognised as a major problem affecting women alongwith large masses of the people, has not really been seriously examined.

Another significant area that has been neglected by scholars in general is the interconnection between the women's question and the whole process of social upheaval that accompanied the birth of the Indian nation. The role of political ideology, and that of the national leadership in accepting gender equality as a fundamental principle of the Indian political system continue to be presented in simplistic terms without any serious investigation.

If the acceptance of gender equality was ideologically as complete as many commentators would like us to believe, then many, things, which have happened in



the four decades since independence would make no sense. One may, of course, say that the rise of revivalist and fundamentalist movements which threaten the fragile structure of women's rights is not something unique to India but is part of a global phenomenon. But this does not help to explain why the history of such efforts in independent India presents such a chequered history—why some moves were rejected by the Government in office while others succeeded.

The national debate on the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill earlier this year demonstrated, in a very vivid manner, how thin is the understanding, of either the political roots or imperatives of gender equality, or the close connection between women's rights to equality and the health of the Indian political system.

Another neglected area in our scholarship is the exploration of the views of Indian thinkers on the women's question. Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to the philosophy of non-violence is widely known, even outside India. But Mahatma Gandhi's views on women's rights and role in the process of social revolution are little known even to scholars inside the country. The few inadequate collections of Gandhi's writings on women represent the biases and the assumptions of the compilers in their selection.

Gandhi's attitude to women has generally been projected either as a part of his humanism or as a patriarchal compromise, which did not really overcome the restricted views about women's roles which was widely prevalent in his generation. In our opinion, neither of these positions is based on a really critical examination of Gandhi's ideas about women and their potential role in revolution. Nor do such studies examine the evolution of Gandhi's ideas over time, and the connection between shifts in his position with his understanding of the political imperatives of the Indian freedom struggle.



Most objective analysts of Gandhi agree on his role as an outstanding political strategist. In the evolution of his strategy for mass mobilisation, and his vision for a future India, where did the women's question fit in? To what extent did he succeed in communicating his ideas to other leaders, to his followers and to women? To what extent was the confusion, the compromises and the reaction even among Gandhi's followers in later years the result of his failure to articulate fully all that he had thought? To what extent was he himself unable to escape the attitudinal constraints of his background and generation? Or was this failure also rooted in political strategy?

The Centre for Women's Development Studies undertook to compile a comprehensive collection of Gandhi's writings on women in the hope that it will stimulate much more critical research in these areas than we have observed so far. We arranged the writings in chronological order to show that his views were not static but evolved through different stages of his political career and different phases in the Indian struggle for freedom. We offer this to all those who are interested in the Indian revolution, and others who accept the women's question as basically a political one. We hope this volume will help to stimulate closer intellectual collaboration between these two groups, who now remain very far apart.

We also hope this will help to stimulate some self-criticism and self-evaluation amongst all those who regard themselves as the inheritors of the Gandhian legacy.

Lastly we hope the volume will provide some assistance to those activists who are seeking for new strategies to mobilise women and men to work for a different kind of social order at the local, national or international level.

Our thanks are due to Pushpa Joshi who patiently worked through the massive collection of Gandhi's writings to compile this volume, to Leela Dubey who suggested the idea of a thematic index, the Navajivan Trust for agreeing so readily to bring it out as a joint publication and to Ela Bhatt for writing the Foreword. I must also thank all



other colleagues who contributed to the preparation of the volume through discussions, typing, proof reading, etc.

Centre for Women's Development Studies

Vina Mazumdar

15 August 1986



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1. DEEDS BETTER THAN WORDS

[October 26, 1906]

Two things are now being widely discussed in England...

The second example illustrating this saying is more remarkable. It is the movement in England for women's right to vote, which the Government is unwilling to concede. The women therefore go to the House of Commons and harass the Members. They have sent petitions, written letters, delivered speeches and tried many other means. Last Wednesday, they went to the House of Commons as soon as it opened and demanded the right to vote; they caused some damage also, for which they were prosecuted and sentenced to furnish a security of £5 each. On their refusing to do so, they were sentenced to imprisonment, and they are now in gaol. Most of the women have got three months. All of them come from respectable families and some are very well educated. One of these is the daughter of the late Mr. Cobden who was highly respected by the people. She is serving her term in gaol. Another is the wife of Mr. Lawrence. A third is an LL.B. On the very day these women went to gaol there was a huge meeting here in support of the resolve adopted by the brave ladies, and a sum of £650 was collected on the spot. Mr. Lawrence announced that he would pay £10 a day as long as his wife was in gaol. Some persons regard these women as insane; the police use force against them; the magistrate looks upon them with a stern eye. Cobden's brave daughter said, "I shall never obey any law in the making of which I have no hand; I will not accept the authority of the court executing those laws; if you send me to gaol, I will go there, but I shall on no account pay a fine. I will not furnish any security either." It is no wonder that a people which produces such daughters and mothers should hold the scepter. Today the whole country is laughing at them, and they have only a few people on their side. But undaunted, these women work on steadfast in their cause. They are bound to succeed and gain the franchise, for the



simple reason that deeds are better than words. Even those who laughed at them would be left wondering. If even women display such courage, will the Transvaal Indians fail in their duty and be afraid of gaol? Or would they rather consider the gaol a palace and readily go there? When that time comes, India's bonds will snap of themselves.

Indian Opinion, 24-11-1906 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. VI, pp.29-30



2. BRAVE WOMEN

A vigorous movement is going on here for securing the franchise for women. When the Government showed willingness to grant special treatment in gaol to the brave daughter of the late Mr. Codben, she replied, 'No matter, how I suffer, I shall seek no favour from you. I am in gaol for my own and my sisters' rights, and I will live like a common prisoner till the franchise is granted.' Such words have stirred up public feeling in their favour, and the papers which used to ridicule them before have stopped doing so. Every Indian in the Transvaal should take to heart the example of these brave women.

Indian Opinion, 1-12-1906 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. VI, pp.86-87



3. WOMEN'S EDUCATION

That India is very backward in the education of women is a fact that cannot be denied. But by admitting this, we do not mean to suggest that Indian women fail in their duty. We believe that, as there are in the world few men of any class who can compete with the Indians considered from all points of view, so are there few women anywhere in the world who can compare with Indian women. But this position can no longer be kept up in the present squalid, low and helpless state of India. The modern age is such that it does not allow anyone to remain in the same position. Those who do not want to go forward, or do not do so, must fall behind. In so far as this is true, we can see that Indian men have deliberately kept their women backward. Those who pose as reformers as also other well-to-do Indians, whether Hindu or Muslims, Parsi or Christian, either treat their women as if they were playthings to use them as they fancy for self-indulgence, with the result that they themselves become weak and help only to produce weaklings. And in this way they lead irreligious lives and still say, 'It is God's will that prevails.' If this state of affairs continues, India will remain in its present abominable condition even if she were to secure all her rights, from the British Government. In all countries where the people live a decent life, there is no disparity in the condition¹ of men and women. It is easy to see how much the real wealth of India would be attenuated, if one half of her human beings remained ignorant and existed only as playthings of the others.

These thoughts occurred to us while reading an address delivered to French girls by M. Lavis, a great savant of France. Only a few years ago French women were in the same plight in which Indian women are today. French society has now awakened and does not wish to let a half of its body remain inactive. We give below a short summary of M. Lavis's speech:



Girls, there is much for you to learn. It is your function to use the needle and the scissors. You have to learn how to keep your home tidy. If there is order in the home, its influence will be felt without, and the village or town will reflect the state of the home. You will also have to learn to use money. You will be mothers one day, and your children's future will depend on you. It is not enough that you learn to read and write. You have to cultivate your minds too. For it is the mother who provides the real training for her child. Just as you ought to develop your minds, so must you inform yourself of what is happening around you, what countries there are in the world besides your own, what people there do, whether they are better or worse off than you. That is why you are taught history and geography. Just as there are schools for boys, there ought to be schools for girls also.

It is while thus addressing schoolgirls genially at a large Paris school that M. Lavis indicated in passing the duty of parents. We have a large number of girls and women among Indians in South Africa. It is our definite opinion that they should both have good education. Such education can be easily imparted; but only if we stop dallying with our womenfolk and realize our duty. While imparting education, we have to bear in mind its aims. We would gain nothing if such education were designed for selfish ends. That would be only like changing one's dress.

Indian Opinion, 19-1-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. VI, pp.282-84

1. The original has number (સંખ્યા) instead of condition (સ્થિતિ).



4. WHEN WOMEN ARE MANLY, WILL MEN BE EFFEMINATE?

This question is suggested by some cablegrams received from England last week. While English women do manly deeds, shall we, though men, behave like women? This is no matter for fun, but a grave one indeed. Let us see how.

The women of England have no franchise. They are fighting for it without minding people's ridicule. A few days ago a procession of eight hundred women marched to the Houses of Parliament. When the police stopped the crowd, some brave women tried to force their way into the House. These women do not belong to the working class. One of them is a sister of General French¹, and over sixty years old. Another, Miss Pankhurst, is the daughter of a well-known wealthy Englishman. Both are women of learning. There were many such women in this crowd of eight hundred. Of those who forced their way in, prominent ladies like General French's sister were arrested and prosecuted. The Magistrate sentenced them to fines ranging from £1 to £2, or to imprisonment for varying periods. Such sentences have been passed on 49 women, and each one of them, instead of paying up the pittance of a fine, has courted imprisonment. The aged sister of General French is also among them. We believe these women have behaved in a manly way.

Now let us look at our own house. Lord Selborne and Sir Richard Solomon say that the Asiatic Ordinance should be [re-]enacted. Perhaps that will be done in a month or two. Will Indians go to gaol if that happens? We think men cry for fear of imprisonment when they are caught while using a false permit, but not while committing the offence. This we regard as unmanly. Now when people are wrongfully treated as criminals and asked to give their finger-prints, will they quietly give them or will they go to gaol? If they give their finger-prints and suffer dishonor, we shall regard



them as doubly unmanly. Hence we ask; will Indian men be effeminate? Or will they emulate the manliness shown by English women and wake up? Will they choose to find happiness in prison taking it to be a palace, or will they submit to oppression when the Transvaal Government starts it? In a few days our mettle will be tested.

Indian Opinion, 23-2-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. VI, pp.335-36

1. Field-Marshal Sir John French, (1852-1925); served in the South African War and was later Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in France during World War 1.



5. BRAVE WOMEN OF BRITAIN

We still receive cables from Britain regarding the struggle by some brave women. All of them go to gaol instead of paying fines. Though they have not won their rights so far, they have not lost heart. Instead, they believe that, even though they themselves may not get the rights, their daughters will get them as a result of their struggle.

Now about this resolution on gaol-going, no one must argue that he will go to gaol only if all the other Indians do so. It is the man with courage who will have to go to gaol. We have to follow the example of the women referred to above. They go to gaol, though they are very few in number, and thus draw the attention of the world to their cause.

We earnestly request all our readers to have this article imprinted on their mind, and to act with great deliberation.

Indian Opinion, 30-3-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. VI, p.385



6. BRAVE WOMEN OF ENGLAND

The women of England want to secure the right to franchise.¹ An authorized report of their Association has been published, which shows that it spends nearly £100 every week on its activities, and that so far, that is during the last two years, the women sentenced to gaol for the rights of their sisters have suffered imprisonment for an aggregate period of six years. The lady who is Secretary of the Association states that £20,000 will yet be needed to carry on its work and requests every member to help in collecting the sum.

When so much has to be spent and such hardships have to be borne by Englishwomen for winning their rights from their own compatriots, let all Indians calculate by the rule of three how much the Indian community will have to spend and what hardships it will have to endure to win its rights from a foreign people. Let them consider in this way whether it would be, after all, such a mighty task if they had to spend £13,000 and 13,000 Indians had to go to gaol. Till now Indians have not spent even £2,000 all told, and no Indian has so far suffered imprisonment. And yet to believe that we could get our rights is, it would seem, a patent mistake.

Indian Opinion, 29-6-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. VII, pp.65-66

1. The reference is to the Women's Suffrage Movement for Parliamentary rights. Under the leadership of Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), the Suffragettes adopted militant tactics which included picketing, hunger-strike and courting imprisonment.



7. BOYCOTT INDIANS

The Women's Association at Pretoria is raising such a cry. These women have passed a resolution to the effect "that the delegates would once more ask the members of the Branch to support white traders as against Indians". It is such movements that we should really fear rather than the new law. If the whites discontinue dealings with Indians, the latter will have to quit even without a law. There is only one way of preventing this from happening, and that is for the Indians to be industrious and to maintain perfect honesty. I even go so far as to say that women who have been pleased with the courage we are now showing will continue to buy [from us]. If we prove cowards, however, even they will look down on us and drive us out. This will be confirmed by those hawkers who might have had experience of this.

Indian Opinion, 5-10-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. VII, p.268



8. BRAVE WOMEN

Women in England have surpassed all expectations. When the Indian community started the struggle against the obnoxious law in the Transvaal, the suffragette movement in England was many months old. They are still continuing the struggle undaunted. The struggle of the Transvaal Indians is nothing when compared with the courage and the tenacity of these women. Moreover, they have to face opposition from many women. There is a much larger number of women against than in favour of franchise for themselves. Though a mere handful, these women do not admit defeat. The more they are repressed, the more the resistance they offer. Many of them have been to gaol. They have borne being kicked and stoned by base and cowardly men. There was a cable last week that they had resolved to intensify their struggle still further. There are taxes to be paid to the Government by these women or their husbands. If they do not pay the taxes, whatever thing they possess can be auctioned. They may even be imprisoned. The women have now resolved that they will not pay any taxes or levies till they get their rights, but will rather allow their possessions to be auctioned, and they themselves will suffer imprisonment.

This courage and tenacity deserves to be emulated by the Transvaal Indians, in fact, by the whole Indian community. The Natal Indians think it much of a hardship if their goods are to be auctioned for trading without a licence. These people do not realize that the Government cannot auction the goods of a large number of people. But what would it matter if it did? If women can sacrifice their possessions for a matter like franchise, cannot we put up with a similar hardship while fighting for our livelihood? The movement of the suffragettes will go on for a long time, and they will keep up the agitation, resolute and tireless. They fight on with faith in truth, persuaded that, though they will not be there to enjoy the rights, if only the succeeding



generations enjoy them, it will be as good as if they had themselves done so. Indians have to fight with the same spirit.

Indian Opinion, 28-12-1907 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. VII, p.453



9. FINGER-PRINTS FROM WOMEN

It is reported from Volksrust that officials demand thumb-impressions of Indian women, and the latter give these. What is more, the women give thumb-impressions and refuse to lodge complaints. We have thus lost many rights through fear. For myself I would rather that women were not subjected to such harassment. Even white women have to give their finger-impressions, to say nothing of thumb-impressions. There is good reason for this: a large number of white women of questionable reputation come in. No such charge has been made against Indian women in the Transvaal. I believe, therefore, that, if the Indian community shows some pluck in dealing with the matter, Indian women may be spared the harassment of interrogation. I hope that this point will be borne in mind and that all such cases will be reported without fail to the Association.

Indian Opinion, 29-2-1908 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. VIII, p.111



10. WOMEN PRISONERS' HAIR

A satisfactory reply has been received from the Natal Government to the representation of the Congress regarding the shearing of women prisoners' hair.

The Government has ordered that their hair shall not be cut in future.

Indian Opinion, 11-7-1908 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. VIII, p.359



11. SPEECH AT TAMIL LADIES' MEETING!

[JOHANNESBURG,

December 3, 1909]

Mr. Gandhi said that the community was grateful to Mrs. Vogl and Miss Schlesin for their noble work among the Indian women of the Transvaal. The speaker understood that the ladies present were all passive resisters and had sent their husbands or brothers or sons to gaol in connection with the national struggle that was going on. They had acted very bravely and their work had attracted attention in the Motherland. The speaker then explained the result of the mission in England and hoped that, no matter what the difficulties were, his hearers would continue their work and not be frightened by obstacles or owing to the struggle being prolonged.

Indian Opinion, 11-12-1909

CWMG, Vol. X, p.90



12. FROM A LETTER TO MAGANLAL GANDHI

JOHANNESBURG,

Wednesday [August 31, 1910]

I agree with Chhaganlal about not sending Santok. I think she will not be happy in India. Such is our plight. She will not be able to live there with that spiritual and physical freedom which she enjoys here. When, thanks to her stay in Phoenix, she becomes firm in her convictions and courageous enough to adhere even in India to her ideas and way of life which she considers right, she will be happy there. Her stay will be beneficial to India and she will render true service to the country as well as to herself. I, however, feel that she may be allowed to go if she is pressed to go as was Chanchi. Veni¹ writes in every letter that in India she feels as if she were in prison. This is not true of women alone.

Courtesy: Radhabehn Choudhri From the Gujarati original in Gandhiji's hand: CW. 4935

CWVG, Vol. X, pp.311-12

1. Wife of Gaurishanker Vyas, a leading Indian of Pretoria and a satyagrahi.



13. HELP FROM THREE WOMEN

In the Transvaal struggle we have received help not only from prominent men but in equal measure from notable women also. Readers of *Indian Opinion* are aware of the help received by Mr. Polak in India under the leadership of Mrs. Ramabai Ranade and Mrs. Petit.

And now we have had a Reuter message about a forceful article of Mrs. Mayo (published] in England.¹ We have also received an advance copy of the article itself and have a clearer idea of its contents. She writes about the whole of South Africa. As we intend to publish a translation, we do not wish to say more about the article here. We shall merely give some particulars of Mrs. Mayo. She is an old lady of about 60. She is a novelist and journalist, and one of those selected by the late Tolstoy to translate his works. We can therefore see why it was that her article caused the stir it did.

Besides Mrs. Mayo, there is Miss Hilda Howsin. The report of her lecture at the East India Association is worth reading. In this she discussed the issues involved in matters relating to the Transvaal problem. Everyone who commented on her lecture admired the satyagraha struggle and expressed sympathy for the satyagrahis. About the same time that these two ladies were thus engaged in writing or speaking, Miss Polak was appointed Secretary of the Committee.

What need is there, then, to feel dispirited, when we have been thus getting help, whether or no we ask for it, when the struggle has become well known, and when South African Indians are attracting world-wide attention and India's prestige is rising correspondingly? Seeing that this is the fruit of our struggle having been prolonged, we should fight on with still greater zeal.

Indian Opinion, 4-3-1911 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. X, p.422-23

1. Mrs. John R, Mayo occasionally wrote under the assumed name of Edward Garrett. The article appeared in the *Millgate Monthly*.



14. RAMBHABAI SODHA

..... The wrangling over Rambhabai's case still continues. The Transvaal High Court having confirmed the decision of the Megistrate,¹ an appeal has been filed to a higher court. This being the first case involving a woman, it will be wise, from a practical point of view, to take all possible steps to prevent here being lodged in gaol. That will be no special reflection on our idealism and the appeal may therefore be welcomed. By filing the appeal, moreover, we secure ourselves against all blame. We give proof to the world of our determination not to send women to gaol except as a last resort. General Smuts can no longer allege that we are intent on sending them to gaol.

The clay is on the potter's wheel. We shall see what kind of a pot it turns out. Meanwhile, we urge Indians, both men and women, to emulate the example of Rambhabai.

Indian Opinion, 4-3-1911 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. X, pp.423-24

1. The Magistrate had sentenced her, on January 10, 1911 to a fine of £10 and one month's imprisonment. The High Court revised the Sentence to one of fine or imprisonment.



15. INDIAN WIVES

The decision of Justice Wessels in the matter of an application on behalf of an Indian woman to enter the Transvaal, being the wife of a registered Indian, raises points of the highest importance to the Indians throughout South Africa.¹ The lady in question is the same person who was some time ago turned away by the Immigration Officer at Durban and whose case we have already referred to. The Judge's remarks show that Bai Rasul (for that is the applicant's name) has been unduly hampered in her endeavour to make good her claim. The Judge said that, if the Court had the power, he would have granted a temporary permit to enable the applicant to produce the necessary proof of her marriage. Had the Immigration Officer granted such a permit, here would have been no case in the Court. We still hope that Bai Rasul will be given every facility to prove her claim. For, surely, here there is no question of Indian competition in trade.

But what is of greater importance is the Judge's *obiter dictum* that an Indian may not bring more than one wife. Hitherto those who have more than one wife have been allowed to bring them without any let or hindrance. If the Judge's dictum is sound law, all we can say is that it will have to be altered. In British Dominions, wherein all religions are respected, it is not possible to have laws insulting to any recognized religion flourishing under it. To hold otherwise in this country would simply create misery in many an Indian household in South Africa. We are glad, therefore, that the British Indian Association and the Hamidia Islamic Society have already moved in this matter. It ought to be possible to settle this matter without any agitation being necessary.

Indian Opinion, 8-7-1911

CWMMG, Vol. XI, p.120



1. Adamjee, an old registered resident of the Transvaal, brought over Bai Rasul, his wife, from India. At Durban, the Immigration Officer refused her permission to disembark, although normally such immigrants were allowed to land temporarily on furnishing a bail of £10. Bai Rasul then attempted to enter the Transvaal from Delagoa Bay, and her case eventually went up to the Transvaal Supreme Court. For a report of the judgment, *vide CWMG*, Vol. XI, p.120.



16. WHO IS ENTITLED TO ENTER TRANSVAAL?

Only those Indians who hold certificates under the Registration Act of 1908 or 1907 can now enter the Transvaal without an application or other formalities. ...

We hear that such certificates are also required from women. It is our emphatic advice, however, that women must not give their thumb-impressions. The Government has no authority to be so rigorous in regard to the identification of women for the simple reason that there is no need for that. There have not been many instances of Indians trying to bring in women who have no genuine rights. About women, therefore, we must put up a fight. We believe that in the case of women the marriage certificate would suffice and we know that the right of a woman holding such a certificate can be legally established.

Indian Opinion, 15-3-1913 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XI, pp.490-91



17. THE WOMEN'S RESOLUTION

The remarkable resolution of the Indian women of Johannesburg on the marriage question, that has been agitating our countrymen for the past few weeks, marks an interesting development of the passive resistance campaign. The resolution has been duly wired¹ to Mr. Fischer, and, if the Minister still persists in ignoring the grievance created by the Searle judgment, he will do so with his eyes open. He may rest assured that Indian women are not dying to go to gaol, nor do the male members of the community contemplate with equanimity the prospect of their women-folk being imprisoned. If, therefore, Indian women become passive resisters, they must have what is, to them at any rate, a very serious grievance. We congratulate our plucky sisters who have dared to fight the Government rather than submit to the insult offered by the Searle judgment. They will cover themselves and the land of their birth, as, indeed, of their adoption, with glory, if they remain true to their resolve to the end.² We know that they fully recognize what their wire means.

Indian Opinion, 10-5-1913

CWMG, Vol. XII, p.66

1. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XII, pp.65-66.

2. How the pioneer women passive resisters acquitted themselves in the struggle is narrated in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Ch. XL.



18. SPEECH AT VREDEDORP MEETING¹

[JOHANNESBURG,

September 28, 1913]

Mr. Gandhi at the outset stated that he had already addressed two meetings that afternoon, one of which consisted of some fifty Indian women who were mostly affected by the Immigration Act. All of them had decided to throw in their lot with their sisters who were serving three months' hard labour at Vereeniging. (Applause.) They had decided, some of them with babies in arms, to undergo all the hardships that gaol life meant. They were going to suffer for their own honour, and though he had warned them, and had even exaggerated the factor of the hardships of gaol life, they would be gratified and surprised, possibly, to hear that the women were staunch. In a few days' time they would be in His Majesty's gaol. ...

Rand Daily Mail, 29-9-1913

CWMMG, Vol. XII, p.215

1. Gandhiji addressed a well-attended mass meeting of Indians at the Hamidia Hall. A. M. Cachalia presided.



19. THE MARRIAGE QUESTION

Since women have been attacked, they too have had to join the struggle. In so far as this marriage question involves an insult to our religions and an attack upon our national honour, it is far more serious than that of the obnoxious tax. A nation that cannot protect its women's honour and the interests of its children does not deserve to be called by that name. Such people are not a nation but mere brutes. Even animals use their horns to defend their young ones. Will men, then, if they are men, hang back, clinging to their wretched finery and their pleasures?

Indian Opinion, 1-10-1913 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XII, pp.228-30



20. THE LAST SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN: MY EXPERIENCE

[After July 23, 1914]

When the Phoenix batch went to prison, Johannesburg could not remain behind. The women there became restive. They were fired with the desire to be in gaol. The entire family of Mr. Thambi Naidoo got ready. His wife, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, Mr. Moorgan's relatives, Mrs. P. K. Naidoo, Valiamma, who made herself immortal, and other women came forward. They marched forth with children in their arms. Mr. Kallenbach took them to Vereeniging. The idea was that, when they crossed the Free State border and returned, they would be arrested. Their expectations were not fulfilled. They somehow managed to spend a few days in Vereeniging, where they tried to get arrested by going round with baskets, hawking, but they were left free.

This frustration held within itself a glorious future¹. If the women had been arrested in Vereeniging itself, the strike might not have taken place; at any rate it would never have reached the proportions if finally did. But the community was in the [protective] hand of God. He is ever the protector of truth. When the women were not arrested, it was decided that they cross the Natal border. If they were not arrested even there, they were to fix, along with Mr. Thambi Naidoo, their headquarters at Newcastle. Accordingly, they proceeded to Natal. At the border, the police did not arrest them. They made their home in Newcastle. There Mr. D. Lazarus handed over his own house to the women; his wife and sister-in-law, Miss Thomas, took it upon themselves to look to the comforts of the women satyagrahis.

The plan was that in Newcastle the women should meet the indentured labourers and their wives, give them a true idea of their conditions and persuade them to go on strike on the issue of the £3 tax. The strike was to commence on my arrival at Newcastle. But the mere presence of these women was like a lighted match-stick to dry fuel. Women who had never before slept except on soft beds and had seldom so



much as opened their mouths, now delivered public speeches among the indentured labourers. The latter were roused and, even before I arrived, were all for commencing the strike.

Golden Number, Indian Opinion, 1914 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XII, pp.511-12

1. Literally, "immortal hope".



21. SPEECH ON INDIAN WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY

February 23, 1916

Mrs. Vidyagauri[¹ Speech] invites some comments. We shall accept equality of rights for women, but I think their education should differ from men's, as their nature and functions do. In progressive countries, women receive the very highest education but, after it is over, they do not have to perform the same duties as men and in our country women have never to compete with men for a livelihood. The help this institution receives from us, whatever it be, will not go unavailing to us. When we start a school or a college here, we shall get back a part of what we donate. It is my earnest request, therefore, that we should give the best help we can to this institution.

Prajabandhu, 27-2-1916 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XIII, pp.245-46

1. Vidyagauri R. Nilkanth, a social worker.



22. SPEECH AT SECOND GUJARAT EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

BROACH,

October 20, 1917

The education of women is as faulty as that of men. No thought has been given to the relations of men and women or to the place of woman in Indian society.

Primary education for the two sexes can have much in common. There are important differences at all other levels. As Nature has made men and women different, it is necessary to maintain a difference between the education of the two. True, they are equals in life, but their functions differ. It is woman's right to rule the home. Man is master outside it. Man is the earner, woman saves and spends. Woman looks after the feeding of the child. She shapes its future. She is responsible for building its character. She is her children's educator, and hence, mother to the Nation. Man is not father [in that sense]. After a certain period, a father ceases to influence his son; the mother never abdicates her place. The son, even after attaining manhood, will play with the mother even as the child does. He cannot do that with his father.

If this is the scheme of Nature, and it is just as it should be, woman should not have to earn her living. A state of affairs in which women have to work as telegraph clerks, typists or compositors can be, I think, no good, such a people must be bankrupt and living on their capital.

Hence, just as, on the one hand, it is wrong to keep women in ignorance and under suppression, so, on the other, it is a sign of decadence and it is tyrannical to burden them with work which is ordinarily done by men.

There must be provision, therefore, for separate arrangements for the education of women after their attaining a certain age. They should be taught the management of the home, the things they should or should not do during pregnancy,



and the nursing and care of children. Drawing up such a scheme presents difficulties. The idea is new. The right course would be to constitute a committee of men and women, of good character and well-informed, who would think further and arrive at conclusions, and ask them to produce a suitable plan for the purpose.

This committee should consider measures for the education of girls from the time that they cease to be children. There is, however, a very large number of girls who have been married off before puberty, and the number is increasing. Once they are married, they just disappear from the field. I have given my views on this in my foreword to the first book of the “Bhagini Samaj” series. I reproduce them here:

We shall not solve the problem of women’s education merely by educating girls. Victims of child marriage, thousands of girls vanish from view at the early age of twelve. They change into house-wives! Till this wicked custom has disappeared from among us, the husband will have to learn to be the wife’s teacher. A great many of our hopes lie in women being educated on matters mentioned above. It seems to me that unless women cease to be a mere means of pleasure or cooks to us and come to be our life-companions, equal partners in the battle of life, sharers in our joys and sorrows, all our efforts are doomed to failure. There are men to whom their women are no better than animals. For this sad state, some of the Sanskrit sayings and a well-known *doha*¹ of Tulsidas may be held responsible. Tulsidas says at one place: “The drum, the fool, the Sudra, the animal and the woman—all these need beating.”²

I adore Tulsidasji, but my adoration is not blind. Either this couplet is an interpolation, or, if it is his, he must have written it without much reflection, following the tradition in his time. As to the Sanskrit sayings, people seem to labour under the impression that every verse in that language was a scriptural precept. We must fight this impression and pluck out from its very root the general habit of regarding women as inferior beings. On the other hand, blinded by passion, many among us regard women as beautiful dolls to be adored as so many goddesses and decorate them with ornaments just as we have Thakorji³ dressed up in new finery every few hours. We must keep away from this evil also. Ultimately, however, there can be salvation for us only when—and not until—our women become to us what Uma⁴ was



to Shankar⁵, Sita to Rama and Damayanti to Nala, joining us in our deliberations, arguing with us, appreciating and nourishing our aspirations, understanding, with their marvellous intuition, the unspoken anxieties of our outward life and sharing in them, bringing us the peace that soothes. This goal can hardly be achieved in the immediate future merely by starting girls' schools. As long as we have around our necks the noose of child marriage, men have to be teachers to their wives, and that not merely to make them literate. Gradually, it should be possible to introduce women to the subjects of politics and social reform. Literacy is not essential for this. The man, in such a case, will have to change his attitude to his wife. If a girl were treated as a pupil till she came of age, the husband observing *brahmacharya* the while, if we had not been pressed down by the weight of inertia, we would never subject a girl of twelve or fifteen to the agony of child-bearing. One ought to shudder at the very thought of it.

Classes are now conducted for married women and lectures, arranged. All this is good as far as it goes. Those who are engaged in this work make a sacrifice of their time. This is to the credit side. It seems to me, however, that unless men simultaneously discharge the duty indicated above, these efforts will not produce much result. A little reflection will show this to be self-evident.

Mahatma Gandhini Vicharsrishti [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XIV, pp.31-36

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1. Couplet.
 2. This is from *Ramacharitamanas*.
 3. The idol or image of God.
 4. Parvati, spouse of Shiva.
 5. Shiva, one of the Hindu trinity of gods.



23. SPEECH AT OPENING OF GOKHALE

LIBRARY, UMRETH¹

November 12, 1917

Gokhale's was a life of extensive activities. Today, I shall relate some incidents in his domestic life for the benefit of the women assembled here. It is an example for them to follow, for Gokhale served his family very well. He never acted in a manner which would cause pain to anyone in the family. He refused to follow the current practice in Hindu society of marrying off a girl, doll-fashion, as soon as she reached the age of eight and so cast her away to sink in the sea. His daughter is still unmarried. He had to go through much in keeping her so. Moreover, he lost his wife while he was yet in the bloom of youth. He could have married again, but he did not. He served his family in many ways; ordinarily everyone does so. One may, however, serve one's family either out of self-interest or to advance the interests of the nation. Gokhale had renounced all considerations of self-interest. He did his duty by the family, and then the town and then the country, as occasion demanded, with an undaunted spirit, with perseverance and labour.

Dharmatma Gokhale [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XIV, pp.81-83

1. In Gujarat.



24. ADDRESS AT ALL-INDIA SOCIAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

CALCUTTA,

December 31, 1917

Equally important is the question of the status of women, both Hindu and Mahomedan. Are they or are they not to play their full part in the plan of regeneration alongside their husbands? They must be enfranchised. They can no longer be treated either as dolls or slaves without the social body remaining in a condition of social paralysis. And here again, I would venture to suggest to the reformer that the way to women's freedom is not through education, but through the change of attitude on the part of men and corresponding action. Education is necessary, but it must follow the freedom. We dare not wait for literary education to restore our womanhood to its proper state. Even without literary education, our women are as cultured as any on the face of the earth. The remedy largely lies in the hands of husbands.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2-1-1918

CWMMG, Vol. XIV, p.127



25. SPEECH AT BHAGINI SAMAJ, BOMBAY¹

[February 20, 1918]

DEAR SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF BHAGINI SAMAJ,

I am thankful to you for asking me to preside over this annual function of the Samaj. Your president, I really feel, should be a woman, though you may seek men's help or advice in your work. The Samaj is dedicated to the noble aim of women's regeneration and, in the same way that another's *tapascharya* does not help one to ascend to heaven, men cannot bring about the regeneration of women. I don't mean to suggest that men do not desire it, or that women would not want to have it through men's help; I merely wish to place before you the principle that it is only through self-help that an individual or a race can rise. This is not a new principle, but we often forget to act upon it.*

The Samaj is at present kept going by the enthusiasm of Bhai Karsandas Chitalia. I am looking forward to a time when one of you will take his place and release him from this Samaj for other work. Having dedicated his life wholly to the service of women, he will find out some work in the same field. The Samaj will come into its own when it elects its office-bearers from among its women members and gives a better account of itself than it does today. I have close associations, as you know, with both men and women, but I find that I can do nothing in the way of service to women without help from women workers. That is why I take every occasion to protest in no uncertain terms that, so long as women in India remain ever so little suppressed or do not have the same rights [as men], India will not make real progress. Hence it will be all to India's honour if this Samaj succeeds completely in its aims.*

It is necessary to understand what we mean when we talk of the regeneration of women. It presupposes degeneration and, if that is so, we should further consider what led to it and how. It is our primary duty to have some very hard thinking on these



points. In travelling all over India, I have come to realize that all the existing agitation is confined to an infinitesimal section of our people who are really a mere speck in the vast firmament. Crores of people of both the sexes live in absolute ignorance of this agitation. Full eighty-five per cent of the people of this country pass their innocent days in a state of total detachment from what is going on around them. These men and women, ignorant as they are, do their bit in life well and properly. Both have the same education or, rather, the absence of education, both are helping each other as they ought to do. If their lives are in any sense incomplete, the cause can be traced to the incompleteness of the lives of the remaining fifteen per cent. If my sisters of the Bhagini Samaj will make a close study of the lives of these 85 per cent of our people, it will provide them ample material for an excellent programme of work for the Samaj.

In the observations that I am going to make, I will confine myself to the 15 per cent above mentioned and, even then, it would be out of place to discuss the disabilities that are common both to men and women. The point for us to consider is the degeneration of our women relatively to our men. Legislation has been mostly the handiwork of men; and man has not always been fair and discriminate in performing that self-appointed task.

What the authors of the various *smritis* have said about women can in no wise be defended. Child-marriage, the restrictions on widows and such other evils owe their origin to the injunctions in the *smritis*. Women's being placed on a level with Sudras has done unimaginable harm to Hindu society. These statements of mine may have verbal similarity with the occasional attacks of Christians, but, apart from this similarity, there is no other common ground between us. The Christians, in their attacks, seek to strike at the roots of Hinduism. I look upon myself as an orthodox Hindu and my attack proceeds from the desire to rid Hinduism of its defects and



restore it to its pristine glory. The Christian critic, by demonstrating the imperfection of the *smritis*, tries to show that they are just ordinary books. ...

The largest part of our effort in promoting the regeneration of women should be directed towards removing those blemishes which are represented in our shastras as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women. Who will attempt this and how? In my humble opinion, in order to make the attempt we will have to produce women, pure, firm and self-controlled as Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi. If we do produce them, such modern sisters will receive the same homage from Hindu society as is being paid to their prototypes of yore. Their words will have the same authority as the shastras. We will feel ashamed of the stray reflections on them in our *smritis* and will soon forget them. ... I pray to God that this Samaj might soon produce such women as I have described above.

We have now discussed the root cause of the, degeneration of our women and have considered the ideals by the realization of which the present condition of our women can be improved. The number of women who can realize those ideals will be necessarily very few and, therefore, we will now consider what ordinary women can accomplish if they will try. Their first attempt should be directed towards awakening in the minds of as many women as possible a proper sense of their present condition. I am not among those who believe that such an effort can be made through literary education only. To work on that basis would be to postpone indefinitely the accomplishment of our aims; I have experienced at every step that it is not at all necessary to wait so long. We can bring home to our women the sad realities of their present condition without, in the first instance, giving them any literary education.

I am just returning from a district of Bihar. I once met there a large group of women from respectable families of the place. They all observed purdah. In my presence, they removed the purdah as they would in the presence of a brother. These



women had had no education. Just before I went to meet them, an English woman had been to see me. She had called on me where I sat surrounded by a number of men. To meet the Hindu women, on the other hand, I had to go into a room specially set apart. Half seriously, I suggested that we could go to the room where the men were sitting. All enthusiasm, they said that they would be only too happy to do so, but that the custom being what it was, they would need the men's permission. They did not like the purdah at all [they said] and wanted me to see that the custom was ended. While there is tragedy in these words, they also bear out what I have said above. These women had realized their condition without having had any literary education. They were right in asking my help, but I wanted them to have the strength themselves to win their freedom and they admitted, too, that they had such strength. I have come away full of hope that we shall soon hear that these women have flung away the purdah. Women who would ordinarily be considered uneducated are doing excellent work in Champaran. They are waking up their extremely backward sisters to the freedom which they themselves enjoy.*

Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought to be the natural condition of things and not as a result only of learning to read and write. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have. Many of our movements stop half-way because of the condition of our women. Much of our work does not yield appropriate results; our lot is like that of the penny-wise and pound-foolish trader who does not employ enough capital in his business.



If I am right, a good many from among you, members of this Samaj, should go out to educate your ignorant sisters about their real condition. In practical terms, this means that you should spare as much time as you can to visit the most backward localities in Bombay and give the women there what you have yourselves received. If you have joined men in their religious, political and social activities, acquaint them with these. If you have gained any special knowledge about the bringing up of children, impart it to them. If you have studied and realized in your own experience the benefits of clean air, clean water, clean and simple food, and exercise, tell these women about them too. In this way, you will raise yourselves and them.*

But although much good and useful work can be done without a knowledge of reading and writing, yet it is my firm belief that you cannot always do without a knowledge thereof. It develops and sharpens one's intellect and it stimulates our power of doing good. I have never placed an unnecessarily high value on the knowledge of reading and writing. I am only attempting to assign its proper place to it. I have pointed out from time to time [that] there is no justification for men to deprive women or to deny to them equal rights on the grounds of their illiteracy; but education is essential for enabling women to uphold these natural rights, to improve them and to spread them; again, the true knowledge of self is unattainable by the millions who are without such education. ... Education, therefore, is necessary for women as it is for men. ... Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair and, therefore, it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of woman and, therefore, in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into watertight compartments or that some branches of knowledge should be closed to anyone; but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed.



I should say a word or two as to whether English education is or is not necessary for our women. I have come to the conclusion that, in the ordinary course of our lives, neither our men nor our women need necessarily have any knowledge of English. ...

Merely to have outlined a scheme of education as above is not to have removed the bane of child-marriage from our society or to have conferred on our women an equality of rights. Let us now consider the case of our girls who disappear, so to say, from view after marriage. They are not likely to return to our schools. Conscious of the unspeakable and unthinkable sin of the child-marriage of their daughters, their mothers cannot think of educating them or of otherwise making their dry life a cheerful one. The man who marries a young girl does not do so out of any altruistic motives, but through sheer lust. Who is to rescue these girls? A proper answer to this question will also be a solution of the woman's problem. The answer is albeit difficult, but it is the only one. There is, of course, none to champion her cause but her husband. It is useless to expect a child-wife to be able to bring round the man who has married her. The difficult work must, therefore, for the present at least, be left to man. If I could, I would take a census of child-wives and would find the friends of their husbands and through such friends, as well as through moral and polite exhortations, I will attempt to bring home to them the enormity of their crimes in linking their fortunes with child-wives and will warn them that there is no expiation for that sin unless and until they have by education made their wives fit not only to bear children but also to bring them up properly, and unless, in the meantime, they live a life of absolute celibacy.

The Hindu, 26-2-1918, and Mahatma Gandhini Vicharsrishti

CWVG, Vol. XIV, pp.202-209



1. Gandhiji presided over the annual gathering of the Bhagini Samaj, a women's welfare organization of Bombay, held in the Morarji Gokuldas Hall. The item is reproduced here as published in the *CWVG* volume. It combines the report of the speech from *The Hindu* which is incomplete; the paragraphs not found in it are from the Gujarati report in *Mahatma Gandhini Vicharsrishti*, and marked by an asterisk.



26. LETTER TO MOHANDAS NAGJI

[NADIAD,]

June 23, 1918

My view about remarriage is that it would be proper for a man or a woman not to marry again after the death of the partner. The basis of Hinduism is self-control. Of course, self-control is enjoined in every religion, but Hinduism has attached to it especial importance. In such a religion, remarriage can be only an exception. These views of mine notwithstanding, so long as the practice of child-marriage continues and so long as men are free to marry as often as they choose, we should not stop a girl, who has become a widow while yet a child, from remarrying if she so desires, but should respect her wishes. I would not, however, put it into the head of even a child widow to remarry, though, if she did marry again, I would not regard her action as sinful.

Blessings from

MOHANDAS GANDHI

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. IV [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XIV, p.449



27. SPEECH AT RAS

June, 26, 1918

Sisters, you should encourage your husbands and brothers and sons and not to worry them with your objections. If you want them to be true men, send them to the army with your blessings. Don't be anxious about what may happen to them on the battle-field. Your piety will watch over them there. And if they fall, console yourselves with the thought that they have fallen in the discharge of their duty and that they will be yours in your next incarnation.

The Bombay Chronicle, 2-7-1918

CWMG, Vol. XIV, pp.453-454



28. SPEECH AT LADIES' PROTEST MEETING, BOMBAY¹

April 6, 1919

Mahatma Gandhi, addressing the meeting, said he had intended to speak before them at some length, but he was sorry he was not able to do so as he had just received an urgent message calling him on some very important business. He had just heard that some untoward incident had occurred near the Market. The police seemed to have made some mistake or possibly the people had committed the mistake; but before leaving the meeting, he would appeal to the women of India to co-operate with the men in the constitutional fight which they were waging against the Rowlatt legislation. Just as a man, with one half of his body inactive, could not do anything properly, so the Indian body would not be able to do its work properly if one half of it, namely, the women, remained inactive, and so he would appeal to his sisters of India to join the satyagraha movement in large numbers.

The Bombay Chronicle, 7-4-1919

CWMMG, Vol. XV, p.189

1. Ladies of all classes and communities held a meeting at the China Baug to record their emphatic protest against the Rowlatt legislation. Mrs. Jayakar presided.



29. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BOMBAY

May 8, 1919

DEAR SISTERS,

Not being well today, I shall talk to you sitting. Those among you who are educated will have read about the swadeshi vow in the papers. The one thing I have been saying over and over again ever since my return from South Africa is this: So long as women in India do not take equal part with men in the affairs of the world and in religious and political matters, we shall not see India's star rising. To take an illustration, men who suffer from paralysis of one side of the body can do no work. Similarly, if women do not share in men's tasks, the country is bound to remain in a wretched state. What conditions can we expect in a country where the women remain ignorant of the joys and sorrows of men?

I feel tempted to talk about all these matters, but I do not have the time to do so. I want you to make your full contribution to the cause about which I shall speak today. All I mean is that it is essential that women make their contribution to the developments taking place in the country. This requires no knowledge of letters. It is not true that, without such knowledge, one cannot take part in national work. Women work in their homes well enough. I have to work among farmers and weavers. We can inspire more enthusiasm in them than in the educated classes. In the satyagraha in Kheda district, if men worked, women helped as much. Had they not done so, had they yielded to fear and held back the men, where would we have been?

The swadeshi vow, too, cannot be kept fully if women do not help. Men alone will be able to do nothing in the matter. They can have no control over the children; that is the women's sphere. To look after children, to dress them, is the mother's duty and, therefore, it is necessary that women should be fired with the spirit of swadeshi. So long as that does not happen, men will not be in a position to take the vow. Woman



is the mistress of the home and lives in royal style; if this does not change, what can man do? Women's clothing costs more than men's.

India has to part with 60 crores of rupees [annually] to foreign countries. Four crores are wasted in this manner on silk and the remaining 56 crores on cotton fabrics. India has a population of 30 crores and this means that every person throws away, on an average, Rs. 2/-[annually] over foreign cloth. Further, there are three crores in India who get only one meal a day. Formerly, our mothers and sisters used to spin in the homes and that helped preserve India's self-respect and honour. That work is now taken over by the mills. Outside the Bombay Presidency, women are now observing the swadeshi vow. In Madras, Bengal and other parts, cloth for women is made by Indian weavers. Here, however, women generally use expensive foreign cloth.

It is men who are responsible for the idea that women must have English cloth. It is they who tell women about such cloth and suggest that it is good to wear. This has given the women their wrong idea, but we must correct it now. We ought not to allow our own art to perish, running after foreign art. All this has had unhappy consequences and we must help India to get rid of them. However bad the climate and soil of our country, we do not run away from it. We should use cloth made in our country, however coarse it may be. The eye will get used to it by and by. It is the soul we should care to make beautiful. We need not go after external adornment.

Our country, moreover, is miserably poor. We have frequent famines. The plague and cholera are ever with us. If the country were really rich, there would be some propriety in our living in style. At present, however, when there are some who do not even get enough clothing, this ostentation is not in good taste. Bear in mind that, if we do not act in this manner now, we shall be compelled by circumstances to do so. Posterity will feel sad for us and the country will grow poorer. If you do not want the country to remain poor, observe the swadeshi vow, and wear swadeshi cloth,



however coarse it be. There was a time when a piece of Dacca muslin could be packed into a little box and yet served to cover one's nakedness well enough. Where do we find such craftsmen and such weavers? That muslin was not made on any machine. How is it that they have lost the skill now? They have been utterly ruined. The fine variety of foreign cloth which we get these days is cloth only in name. It does not serve to cover one's limbs. If everyone takes the vow of swadeshi, we shall be able again to produce the same kind of muslin. A large number of men are ruled by women. This is my own experience, as it is that of many others. But, then, I want the women to have tenacity of purpose, a religious disposition and love for India. At the time of the war in South Africa, the Boer women showed a spirit such as no other women have ever done. My present demand is briefly stated. It is that you throw away your stocks of foreign cloth or make them over to others who may not have taken the vow of swadeshi. I should like all women to follow this course. It will sound harsh if I say that all women should take the vow this very day. But you may think of taking the vow from tomorrow, and I pray to God that He may so incline you.¹

You can take the vow a day later, but make up your mind today. It would be too long if you were to wait till all the dresses had worn out. One or two saris may be excused, but how if you have heaps of clothes? You ought to make this sacrifice for the progress of the country. What would you have done if all those clothes had been stolen? Well, think that they are stolen. This sacrifice must be made for the country. If, retaining your clothes, you are likely to feel rather sore about the thing and to feel tempted to wear them, hand them over to me. I shall put them to good use. Those who find it impossible to take this vow may take the vow of partial swadeshi but, as far as possible, they should keep the vow in full.

Kheda Vartaman, 21-5-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XV, pp.290-93



1. Gandhiji then asked the women in the audience if they had any questions to ask. Thereupon, one of them suggested that, the foreign cloth with them being expensive, they should keep it and resolve not to buy any more in future. Another said that they needed eight days' time to have new dresses made. What follows is Gandhiji's reply.



30. SPEECH AT FOUNDATION LAYING OF VANITA VISHRAM, AHMEDABAD¹

June 29, 1919

This ceremony should be performed by Malaviyaji. But he has had to go to Lahore and it is his own order that I should perform it. ... His words are worth noting.² I agree with what he says about how much men owe to women.

I have been touring all over India since 1915 and saying everywhere that, till woman takes her place by the side of man and claims her rights, she will not come into her own. And till she does so, there can be no progress for us. If one of the two wheels of a carriage remains in a working condition but the other goes out of order, the carriage will not run properly. This was the burden of the ladies' song here before us, and it is true. Opinions differ, and probably that is so in regard to this subject. Men carry all manner of plans in their pockets, as if they had them ready-made, and they produce plans about women's education, all different from one another. They seem to me like the leaflets which they dropped in this place from aeroplanes. This, of course, is no reason for the founders of the Vanita Vishram to be uneasy. With patience and experimenting, they will reach the goal. One need not be afraid of making mistakes, nor of experimenting. If we do not move forward, we shall lag behind. Hence the founders should go on making experiments within the frame-work of their principles. If we correct the mistakes we make, we shall succeed in our aim.

We see from this report of the Vanita Vishram that Sulochanabehn has brought lustre into her widow's life. There is beauty in widowhood, if only we can see it. It is well known that there are two different views about widowhood; in any case, however, it remains true that, in the measure one has strength and nobility of soul, one can promote one's own and others' good. Every widow owes it as an especial duty to dedicate her strength and her soul to the motherland. If we like, we may say that, becoming a widow, Behn Sulochana has, as Narasinh Mehta would have said,³ shaken



off her burden; but, then, in her widowhood, she has taken the motherland to husband. Thanks to her indefatigable efforts, this institution is making good progress.

In this great task, Shri Somnath's donation has been a good help. With reference to what was said here about donations, I should like to say that, if we are sincere in our work, donations will come seeking us. I found disappointment in the report. It is an unhappy thing for the founders that, for a matter like money, they had to go begging for this small institution as far as Africa; for Ahmedabad, it is a matter of shame. The people here should have said that, while they were alive, they would never permit the founders to go to foreign countries for money. They owe it as a duty to give such a re-assuring promise. In my view, those in charge of the institution do not need to go to Africa. They ought to collect the money from the citizens and, should they refuse, resort to satyagraha against them. I am afraid the men on the managing body are not seasoned enough. They have everything in them but self-confidence. With faith in their own strength, they should melt the citizens' hearts and get from them the money they need.

This institution needs scholars as much as it needs money and widows to manage it. That is, we require learned teachers. I have been all this time looking at the motto in front of me: "Learning owes its worth to dharma." What the motto says is true. I have discovered in the course of my travels in India that, without dharma, learning is barren. This raises the question: "What is right learning?" I have given my reply often enough. We shall settle afterwards the issue of what manner of learning to provide. For the present, we may follow one definite method and include religious instruction in it. Religion is not a matter for reflection but of conduct. It is not a subject for talking about, be it noted. Teachers can create the thing only by their conduct. Gujarat itself should produce such teachers; it is shameful to go looking for them outside.



It was said here, by way of complaint, that Ahmedabad has an excess of *Vanik* shrewdness; but I am not unhappy about this. Along with the shrewdness of a *Vanik*, one should have a venturesome spirit, knowledge and readiness for service, that is, the qualities of a *Kshatriya*, a *Brahmin* and a *Sudra*. It is the *Vanik* who in fact gives the country its wealth. He is the best *Vanik* who has dedicated his skill in commerce to the country and is carrying on trade accordingly. The spirit of patriotism does not come unless one has a true sense of dharma. By the compassion which the *Gita* teaches, I only understand that we should dedicate ourselves wholly, body, mind and possessions, to relieving the suffering of those around us whom we find in distress.

In Gujarat, we may embark upon any kind of ventures. It is my prayer to God that the venture on which this institution has embarked may prove the best among them all and be followed by similar ones elsewhere in the province.

It is my especial wish that the scholars and men of letters of Gujarat should be put to use in this or similar institutions. It is but right that the wealth which the people of Gujarat accumulate with their commercial shrewdness should be used by them with the same shrewdness for philanthropic purposes.

To the pupils in the school, I have only this to say: “Bring credit to your education. When you enter on family life, see that you bring credit to your home and country.”

The widows who have been taking advantage of this Ashram should dedicate to the service of the country the training of body and spirit which they receive here.

Gujarati, 13-7-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XV, pp.409-11

1. Gandhiji laid the foundation-stone of an independent building for the Vanita Vishram, a school for girls.



2. In his message, he had said: "Great is man's debt to woman as mother, sister, wife and daughter. Nothing we can do to honour and comfort womankind can repay the countless self-sacrificing acts of affection and devotion with which women influence lives of men for good and contribute to our richest happiness."

3. In a verse attributed to him, the poet welcomes his wife's death as it has set him free to devote himself entirely to worship of God.



31. SPEECH ON SWADESHI AT WOMEN'S MEETING, NADIAD

July 6, 1919

SISTERS,

I am happy to see such a large number of my sisters of Nadiad present here. I am thankful to you all for attending. I shall speak as loudly as I can; even so, I cannot continue speaking unless you maintain silence. I have not come here to make a speech, but to explain things to you. What I have to say has an especial bearing on our dharma. It has an economic aspect and also a political one. Today, however, I shall place before you the idea of swadeshi from the point of view of dharma, that is, explain how through swadeshi you will follow your dharma. It will be useless for me to make a speech if you understand nothing, and it is plain that, if you do not hear, you cannot understand.

There was a time in India when, following our belief, we could not drink water offered anywhere except in a Hindu home or, rather, by anyone not our own caste. In the fair at Hardwar, water was fetched by Brahmins and Muslims. The Muslims accepted the water fetched by Brahmins but the Hindus would not touch water fetched by Muslims. It was a matter of dharma for them to believe and act so, despite all the heat of the day. And so they would not drink water offered by a Muslim.

I have stayed in the place where Ramachandra was born, and in that place, in Bihar, and its neighbourhood, where Sita grew up and played. There are many there who will not eat in a train, but fast. To be sure, it is a valuable religious sentiment which will not permit a man to eat in a train, not to speak of other places. There is self-control in this, self-control meaning deliberate refraining from the use of certain things. No one is under pressure from anyone else in this matter.



This cultivates strength of the *atman*, takes one higher. There is self-control in rules about eating and not eating, drinking and not drinking. If we treated anyone with contempt, we should be committing a sin. There is dharma, I believe, in refusing to eat food cooked by a particular person, if we do so not because we doubt whether we would get it to our liking¹ but because we believe such food to be forbidden.

Formerly, men and women in India used cloth made with their own hands. Among the extracts from the shastras which some *shastris*² have sent me, I find that the bridegroom used to say something to this effect to the bride when offering her the wedding garment: "I give you these garments made by the guardian goddesses of my family; may you and I be happy, wearing them." There are verses to this effect in the shastras, but we do not need them at the moment.

We have our sisters in the Punjab. Those ladies who believe that Nadiad and Gujarat are not the whole country, that our country is India and so the Punjab, too, is our land, for them the Punjab is their land. There, they spin and weave with their own hands and wear the clothes so made. This was formerly the practice all over India. Even women in big wealthy families used to spin. People of every caste did so. Our people, the elders among them, discovered that, if they would clothe the millions in the country, they should learn to make cotton into yarn. We cannot go without food, and so women should know cooking; this is so everywhere on the earth. We cannot go without clothes and everyone should know weaving. This was the way Indian civilization was built. The elders in the country did not think that they would import cloth from abroad and use it here. A country which does so will go to ruin.

If this course is not followed, one country will have to fight with another. People must cultivate friendship for Ahmedabad for the sake of its cloth. If a country depends on another for its needs, the former should be friends with the latter; otherwise it should be prepared for war. The cause of wars in this world is trade. Our forefathers



used great foresight and decided that India should have two things. If people get food and clothing, they can live happily. These two things should be available in India. They raised cotton, invented simple machines for spinning and weaving and thus we got plain clothes to wear.

A hundred and fifty years ago, i.e., five generations ago, we used cotton grown in this country, yarn spun with one's own hands and cloth woven by the weaver. Compared to the cloth you wear now, that of former times was of priceless worth. It had a soul in it. Today, you have reason to envy me. You ought to want to wear cloth like mine. You are deceived if you think that it is of fine texture or in any way beautiful. If you offered me your clothes, I would throw them into the fire. My cloth is the product of dharma, yours is the product of *adharmā*.

Using foreign cloth for the last hundred and fifty years, we have violated dharma and morals and lost our industries. Dharma consists in compassion. Tulsidas describes compassion as the root of dharma. If the men and women of India had compassion on India, they would not import cloth from abroad. Suppose I were your neighbour and lived by weaving cloth, and suppose I requested you to buy some. You would perhaps send me away with a word of abuse or, if you happened to be polite, tell me that you would rather have Chinese cloth. Would you say this was compassion, or cruelty? You may advise me to give up weaving, but I know it is the only thing I can do. In the result, the weaver who is your neighbour will have been ruined and your own sisters will have lost what they can earn through spinning. In what way can they have earned? Formerly, we used to spin with our own hands and that itself meant some earning. If we get the spinning done by an outsider, we have to pay him something. If we do it ourselves, we shall have yarn for the cost of cotton. Further, if we ourselves weave, we shall have cloth for the price of cotton. A hundred and fifty years ago, they followed this straightforward course. We serve both our economic interest and our dharma



through swadeshi, the former because our wealth remains in the country and the latter because we take work from our neighbour, so that his talents may have scope. There is no dharma in your neglecting your neighbour and giving your work to someone else. Your neighbour will lose his dharma and you will lose yours. To abandon swadeshi amounts to plucking out dharma by its very root. Your swadeshi industry is the occupation of millions. The agriculturists and *Patidars* of Kheda own farms and raise crops. If anyone told you that they were off their heads and, giving up this work, started getting grains from the Punjab, what would you say? “Their days are numbered”.

What sort of wisdom is there in transporting grains from the Punjab when you have *bajra* and other crops growing right in front of your homes? If there were [real] teachers of religion, they would knock the people so hard that the latter could not but take notice. Just as it would not be right for Kheda district to give up agriculture, so it is not right for India as a whole to give up weaving her own cloth. We can do so if we do not mind going naked. So long as we would cover our nakedness, dharma requires us to use cloth produced with our own hands from our own cotton. As parents do not abandon their ugly child or a husband his ugly wife, for God has created love for one’s children and one’s wife, so also one may not abandon one’s occupation. We say it is cruel of an *aghorī*³ to abandon his child. Because of imported cloth, the people are getting impoverished. You are all well dressed. Not travelling about in India, you have no idea of the starvation which prevails. This itself shows that the country is going the wrong way. The better houses in prosperous villages are growing dilapidated. The wooden rafter in the huts are not being replaced. I saw in the course of my tour of Kheda last time that people had no grains in their big earthen jars. This bespeaks famine conditions. Anyone who goes round will see this for himself. If these conditions had come about a hundred and fifty years ago, they would not have tolerated them. On cloth, we lose, on an average, two rupees a head annually. This makes 300 rupees



for 150 years. How utterly ruined must be the men and women who have lost so much of their wealth!

The nation has thus been gradually ruined. For want of suitable occupation, men and women lost their all as time went by. Farmers and their womenfolk could, during the three months from Fagan⁴, spin enough yarn to meet the family's needs [for the year]. If you spin with your own hands, you will have yarn at no more than the cost of cotton. Again, if you do the weaving yourselves, you will have the cloth, too, for the price of cotton. The person whom you pay will then be richer. If, instead, you have the money yourselves, weaving with your own hands, you will earn more than the assessment [you pay]. What this comes to is this, that you can earn the amount of three years' assessment in one year. Even little girls can understand this simple calculation.

If you wish a prosperous future for your children, you should leave them, as legacy, the idea that it is *adharma* to obtain our needs by imports. They should want to use cloth made in this country.

Do not choose your dresses in imitation of those of the British. If your husband brings any such garments for you and asks you to go about dressed in unbecoming fashions, you should say you will have none of this husbandly assumption of authority, that your sari must be one made in this country. They will ask how it is possible to have a sari of fine texture made here. However, if you indeed want saris of such quality, you will have them. A sister once came to me; she wanted money. I asked her of what material her skirt was made. She said it was made from the covering of her bedding, so much the wiser she was.

You should use cloth produced in Nadiad. Do not think it will be much too heavy on the body. If it is, you should see to it that the quality improves and it is no longer heavy. If a child is ill, you will give him medicine, and not abandon him. Likewise, you



should accept a piece of work and then get it improved by the weaver-physician. You should wear only such cloth which is made by our weavers. You should not discard the clothes you have with you. Wear them out. But the new ones you buy henceforth should be swadeshi. Use and encourage swadeshi cloth. Get swadeshi saris made. Win over your husbands and, helping one another, be independent. If you, ladies, understand this idea well and act upon it, you will say after two years that Gandhi was right.

The day after tomorrow is *Bhima ekadashi*⁵. People will be taking the *chaturmas*⁶ vow on that day. What is the vow you will take on that *ekadashi*?— that you will not wear cloth which has not been made in India, that you will wear out what you have, but will not buy any more foreign material. You should take the *chaturmas* vow with a pledge to this effect. Your taking the pledge to use cloth made in Nadiad will not by itself satisfy me; you should also persuade others to wear Nadiad cloth. I cannot estimate the resulting increase in prosperity if everyone were to make such a resolution. We should have this result in no more than a year or two.

Everyone among you should learn spinning. It is easy work. I know this because I have done spinning myself. On my right side is Gangabehn and on this side Anasuyabehn; they have experience of the work.

Do what some other ladies do. You have two or three hours in which you do nothing. You spend them in temples. Telling the beads in temple is dharma, but at the present time real *bhakti* consists in this work for cloth. To till the land for love of others and make the produce available to the people, to spin for the good of India, sitting in the home, and that too not for money— this is the highest dharma. If you do less, you will have followed less of dharma. Even a person who spins for money will have followed dharma. Women in rich families should spin two or three hours every day and pass it on to the Store here, gift it to the venture which the friends here have



undertaken. The cloth will be cheap then. Next, gift it to Kheda. When Nadiad has had enough, give it to some other place. As God has created you that you may live in Nadiad, service of the people here is India's service. It is your dharma to see that Nadiad does not become a burden on other parts or on a foreign country.

It is, therefore, my request to the ladies in well-to-do families that they should spin and gift the yarn. Anyone who spins for money will get three annas a pound [of yarn]. Every pice earned is useful. With the money so earned, you can buy your needs. You can buy things like medicine which you may need. The more you earn, the more the gain. This is an excellent means of earning. The effort is small, the machine simple. The spinning-wheel is priced at two rupees eight annas. This is cheap. If you cannot afford this price, under the plan here they will supply a spinning-wheel. A deduction of four annas a month will cover the cost gradually and be fair to you.

This swadeshi dharma is a very important one. Through it alone will India become prosperous. Everything else is mere bookish theory. This alone is swaraj. The *Gita* teaches that where dharma prevails, other things follow. Walking in the way of the swadeshi dharma will ensure our uplift. We have no desire to be millionaires. We can be so only by doing injustice. The whole population of 30 crores cannot have millions, but all can be prosperous. I am here today to show you the way.

I thank you for hearing me attentively. If you see anything in the idea, swallow this dose. I wish such women to come forward. Out of the 24 hours of the day, you should spend some at the spinning-wheel. Speak about it to your neighbours and your husband. Just as a good family should have a quern, so also it should have a spinning-wheel. If this comes about, Nadiad can produce its needs. There will be no more hunger. Swadeshi is the only right way of passing your time in doing dharma. Use swadeshi. Produce swadeshi. If we use swadeshi, there is not enough cloth to go round. We can have it, if we take to weaving. If all men and women agree, we can see



to it that foreign cloth disappears in 11 days. If we but make up our mind, the way is simple. We shall have to produce the 75 per cent [of our requirements] at present imported from outside. If all the women embrace this dharma, be sure our emancipation is near at hand, within 15 days.

May you embrace this dharma, I pray. And I pray to God, likewise, that He may dispose you all to this and prompt you to work for this right cause.

Gujarati, 20-7-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XV, pp.439-45

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1. The *Gujarati* report is not clear at this point.
 2. Men learned in the shastras.
 3. A sect of mendicants following very harsh practices.
 4. Name of month in the Indian calendar, roughly corresponding to March.
 5. Eleventh day of the bright half of *Ashadh*, roughly corresponding to July.
 6. Literally, a period of four months; the term signifies a vow of fasting and semi-fasting during the four monsoon months.



32. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, DOHAD¹

August 31, 1919

In the afternoon, Mr. Gandhi addressed a meeting of women on swadeshi and the importance of hand-spinning. Hundreds of women attended the meeting. The following is the gist of Mr. Gandhi's address:

The protection of dharma is in the hands of women as men, being too much engrossed in worldly cares, often forget it and sometimes neglect it. It is for the women to protect it as dearly as their children. Hence, I have ever believed that the salvation of India lies in the elevation of her women. Swadeshi is a great dharma which has been forsaken by most of the women of Gujarat. None who neglects a neighbour can serve a distant man. He who serves his neighbour serves the world. It is irreligious to neglect our own artisans and encourage the foreign ones. For a century we have been guilty of that sin through the stress of various circumstances. As a result, we have deprived our own artisans of crores of rupees and transferred them into foreign hands. And hence it is that India is suffering from starvation. Our greatest needs are only two, viz., food and clothing. Fortunately, the food we eat is produced in our own country. But the cloth that we wear comes mostly from foreign countries. As a result, we sent away sixty crores of rupees last year to foreign countries. This is a matter of great shame. It is our duty to be free from this position and the easiest way to do so is to do exactly as we did a hundred years ago. Women should mainly take to spinning, while men must weave. I have met hundreds of women since the launching of the swadeshi movement, and some of them have told me that they used to spin cotton, or that their mothers did so. My own mother used to spin yarn and wear coarse cloth, though she could afford to purchase finer cloth and she did so simply out of love of it. Spinning was not then regarded as a mean occupation. Even queens in royal families used to spin out of pure love of it or out of fellow-feeling. It behoves our sisters in Dohad to



revive that ancient and holy art. I do not ask that a poor woman should give up her own present honest calling and take to spinning. What I say is that as spinning is a simple and beautiful art and can be learnt easily, it can be taken up and left off at will. If our poor sisters do a little spinning in their leisure hours, they can have a little income of their own, and give an impetus to a most essential indigenous handicraft. In order to spread widely the gospel of swadeshi, women's earnestness is very essential. Everyone of you should decide henceforth to wear swadeshi clothes. To spin daily some quantity of yarn at least for the sake of your country must be your next resolve. If the women of Dohad would but make up their minds, all their clothing could be obtained from Dohad itself. Not only that the people of Dohad will be free from the trouble of importing cloth from abroad but most of the money they spend on cloth will flow into the pockets of the women and weavers of Dohad. It requires some little sacrifice to bring about this result. We shall have, for the time being at least, to rest content with coarse cloth woven by our people and be thankful to God, and banishing all idleness, should work the wheel in our moments of leisure. I hope that every woman will be interested in this work.

At the close of the meeting, many women expressed a desire to begin spinning immediately and some who knew the art volunteered to teach it to the new aspirants.

Young India, 10-9-1919

CWMG, Vol. XVI, pp.79-80

1. One of the principal towns of the Panch Mahals, a district in Gujarat.



33. A SHAMEFUL SIN

[September 14, 1919]¹

TO MY SISTERS:

I want to talk to you on a matter simple and yet of very great importance, a matter on which depends, and without which is impossible, the salvation of India. Man in his stupidity may forget his duty towards woman, but should that prevent woman from doing her duty towards her sisters?

I have received a letter from Dohad giving news which is shameful to us all. The correspondent writes that the women of the *Dhed* community there who cannot procure work which may be done at home go out for labour, which they procure at the price of their chastity. The male members of these women's families—craven creatures—know this fact, but are sleeping over it. I have used the word *Dhed* for this community, but they are weavers. I do not know why some weavers are known as *Dheds*. But if we always keep in mind the sad fact that, in spite of their clean calling, these people are regarded as untouchables, some of us are sure some day to be free from the sin of untouchability. As women for want of other work have to go out for labour, so also have men. Hence, when they saw that I was ready to supply them with yarn, they pledged themselves to do no other work than weaving, provided I guaranteed to them a regular daily supply of a maund of yarn. My correspondent further informs me that the chief reason why they took this pledge was their knowledge of the immorality I have referred to. You may rest assured Dohad is not a solitary sink of this iniquity. When I was in Umreth, I was told that most of the women there added to their little income by winnowing pulses for merchants. They have to go to them to receive and return the pulses and there they have to put up with all sorts of indecent jokes and abuse. It has been my misfortune to hear this tale of woe at numerous places during the course of my four years' wanderings throughout India. It



seems to me that a hundred years ago, when millions of our mothers used to spin cotton, such things must not have been happening. I therefore beg to request my wealthy and educated sisters that, if they are anxious to protect the chastity of their poor sisters, they must take a prominent part in the movement for handspinning and handweaving. I do not desire at this place to repeat all the arguments why I prefer these occupations to any other. Suffice it to say that spinning has been regarded as an ancient, noble calling which even queens made their own. It is very easy to learn spinning. Any ordinary carpenter can make a spinning-wheel. If millions of our sisters work the wheel, all the yarn they may produce can be consumed in India alone. And that being almost as useful as food-stuffs, spinning cannot be regarded as a temporary occupation. It does not require great physical labour and it can be left off and taken up at will and hence it is an occupation to fill our leisure hours with. If some good women were to take up this work, they would be able to put an end to the enormities I have mentioned above. They will thereby be ensuring for some of our sisters suitable work for want of which they may have to seek other work in which their chastity is jeopardized.

Sister reader, even if you be rolling in wealth, you are bound to protect the chastity of your poor sisters. I have pointed you out the royal road. I hope you will think over it this week: I hope to show next week the various ways in which every woman can help in this work.

Young India, 17-9-1919

CWVG, Vol. XVI, pp.129-30

1. The Gujarati original was published in *Navajivan*, 14-9-1919.



34. HOW TO REMOVE THE BLOT

[September 14, 1919]¹

To MY SISTERS:

Last time I showed by some illustrations how, on account of our negligence, idleness or indifference, our poor sisters fall an easy prey to temptation for want of some independent work.

It is quite proper that we are horrified at the plight of thousands of our sisters in far off Fiji. For that we are accusing the Government of Fiji and asking the Government of India to make strenuous efforts to put a stop to the indentures which breed immorality in Fiji. To do so is our clear duty. But what are we doing for the women, more numerous than in Fiji, suffering before our very eyes?

For removing the blot nearer home we do not need to pass resolutions demanding justice from Government. For that we ourselves have to work to the utmost of our capacity. Every one of you, sisters, has to find out a remedy to end this evil. It is the object of this paper to help you in thinking out the remedies.

As we found last week, the best protection for the chastity of our poor women, and to tell the truth, of all women, is the spinning [-wheel]. Perhaps you will say, “we can understand that for poor women, but what have other women to do with the spinning-wheel?” There is a proverb among us, a very good proverb, that, “an idle man ruins himself and his country”. I can say from my own experience that idleness feeds our passions. If our monied sisters were to devote their leisure to some useful work instead of gossiping or some other needless activity, they would engage their mind, hands and feet in a fruitful manner and [if] they were to take to spinning, they would serve a double purpose. A sister became a widow only a few days ago. She came to know of the work of spinning. As she cannot go out of her house for at least one year,



belonging as she does to a good family, she has taken up the work of hand-spinning. Within six days she has been able to send half a pound of fine spun yarn. It is her devout wish that she might be able to spin enough yarn for her family before she leaves the widow's corner.

But I have digressed. We are considering how to help poor women who go astray on account of force of circumstances. If you are able to devote all your time to the work of reclamation, you would go to the villages, find out what your poor sisters are doing there, teach them, if they do not know, how to spin, supply them dressed cotton, paying them the labour [charges] for spinning it into yarn. The Bombay Swadeshi Sabha has undertaken the work of supplying cotton and, in a short time, many places will be selected for that purpose. The local Sabha also has opened such a branch and provides facilities for supplying such cotton. I do confess that all cannot give all their time for such work. Those who can devote only [a few] hours and are not in a position to [leave] their own native village or city [may] well take care of their own locality. Large-hearted women cannot be satisfied with merely taking care of themselves. They must infect others with their purity. Hence, such sisters will try to understand and better the lot of their neighbours. They may open a club for spinning in their own locality, supporting and instructing their less fortunate sisters.

If you cannot do that much, if you do not believe in your capacity for persuading your other sisters or have no heart for it, you can at least learn spinning for yourself and, by doing that work for a fixed period every day, you can set an example to your other sisters and, if you spin your yarn free of charge, you can to that extent help your poor sisters by making it possible to pay them a higher rate. You will see in *Navajivan* from time to time examples of sisters who have already begun such work. It is my hope that you would all take part in such a movement according to your capacity—a movement which nourishes the life of the nation, which helps its poor, which protects



the chastity of its women and which is calculated to bring economic independence to India in a simple and easy manner.

Young India, 1-10-1919

CWMG, Vol. XVI, pp.131-32

1. This is in continuation of the preceding item.



35. SPINNING-WHEEL IN VIJAPUR¹

When I requested the ladies concerned for articles on the spinning movement in Vijapur and other related activities, they felt embarrassed and asked me how I could wish their names to be made public. Till now, I allowed their work to remain unknown. I, too, felt a little embarrassed in bringing work such as this to public notice, but I feel it is necessary for the people to know that the spinning programme can prosper, that it is popular, that it is profitable economically and in other ways and that ladies of respectable families have also been working in it. Even if I had not had the medium of *Navajivan*, I had decided to bring the work of these ladies to public notice. This was why I published, with their permission, the names, of Lady Tata, Lady Petit and Mrs. Jaiji Petit in the *Pateti* issue of *Sanj Vartaman*.² In my humble opinion, the work of Mrs. Gangabehn is of the highest importance and the nation ought to know about it. She has dedicated her all to this work. Only when, having invested some of her own money, she had achieved a measure of success in the movement did she ask for, and receive, monetary help from others to further it. The fact that such a spinning programme can flourish on so large a scale in a small place like Vijapur suggests that, if the work is done properly, in a short while every village will start spinning and the weavers who have been deprived of their vocation will be standing on their feet again. I hope that Gangabehn's example will be followed by all women who can spare some time.

Navajivan, 21-9-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XVI, pp.161-62

1. The comments which follow were appended to an article by Mrs. Gangabehn Majumdar, who helped Gandhiji to organize the spinning-wheel movement. It described how she came to take up the work and the progress made till then.

2. Vide "Swadeshi in a Nutshell", 11-9-1919, CWVG, Vol. XVI, p.125.



36. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, RAJKOT¹

September 25, 1919

He told them that women as a rule had been using foreign cloth for fashion, etc., more widely. The women of India were intensely religious, but as illiteracy was prevalent among them, they were unaware of what was going on in the world of today. If they had been roused to a sense of their duty, he was sure that their women would not remain what they were. He would therefore tell them the fact that their dependence on foreign countries in the matter of cloth and other things was responsible for their present degradation. The Indian women should realize it in all its gravity. Their comparative poverty should stimulate them to work out their own destiny. The most efficacious remedy was that they should start spinning-wheels, the harder sex [should take] to weaving. It would give honourable employment to women at their very homes and, at the same time, enable them to render a valuable service in the cause of country. He saw them on the present occasion clad in fancy and fine sarees. They should so set themselves to work that the spinning and weaving industry might reach that level in India. Nothing was impossible to a resolute will and persevering nature. He finally appealed to women assembled to translate their momentary zeal into continued action in the service of the motherland in the way he had indicated.

Kathiawar Times, 28-9-1919

CWMMG, Vol. XVI, p.168

1. In the afternoon, Gandhiji addressed a meeting of about 500 women at Banik Bhojanshala.



37. SPEECH AT BHAGINI SAMAJ

October 2, 1919, Bombay

PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

As I have said in the *Navajivan*, I can not find words to express to you my gratitude. Presentation of this purse places on me a great responsibility. On the occasion of my birthday many men and women have done some work or other which I have liked. Every time there has been a function I have said: "When we have respect and affection for somebody, the best way of expressing that respect and affection is to follow in his footsteps."

The main object in celebrating my birthday is to accept whatever appears good in my life. If I go out and beg in India, I can collect lakhs and crores of rupees. But that will not make for progress. This does not mean that money has no importance. It only means that every thing has its proper place. If something made of gold goes to a wrong place, we have to discard it.

Many people have piles of money, but if they cannot spend it for a good purpose their having or not having that money is the same.

There is scarcity of food and clothing in our country. People in our country have to satisfy themselves with one meal a day and many people go naked.

You ladies do not know what cold means. But if you come with me to the fields, I will show you that some women use *straw* and cowdung to warm themselves. I want to be known as a farmer and a weaver. If some people instead of spending a single paisa to get milk for their children squander money on gambling, how can they rise at all?

Head bared and with my hand stretched, I am begging from the rich in India. I tell them about my experiments and they help me. I intend to use this money for a



good purpose and so I have agreed to accept this present. Large number of women have contributed towards it. Smt. Awartika Bai and I can tell the story of Champaran. The women there told me that they went without bathing and remained dirty because they did not have any change of clothes. I felt sad because I had no extra clothes with me. The responsibilities I have to shoulder at present are beyond telling. I believe I shall be able to account for it to you and to God. I have solicited the views of many men and women concerning the use of this money, and I hope to use the money accordingly. What I am asking in India is merely with a view to seeing the reemergence of Satya Yug. We had a golden age at one time. In that age men and women in India spontaneously and automatically spoke only the truth. Women in those days could maintain their chastity. In those days even when men and women got together, they did not have lustful thoughts in their minds. That is how things were in the Satya Yug, or the golden age.

In this Kali Yug, it is difficult for women to remain chaste. When I went to Harijan quarter at Dahod, somebody told me that for the past two years, the women there had not been doing any kind of work, but had recently started working.

The men had been weavers and their women assisted them. Hence during that time they could preserve their chastity. Lastly they have not been doing any spinning and have taken to working as labourers. The condition of women is very sad. The overseers tyrannise over them.

Education of women is our paramount task in India. With education women can remain chaste. For such education we do not require great learning. All that is needed is character. It needs no money. Four hundred Muslim women are today helping themselves and they are earning adequate wages from spinning.

Since you have shown me so much love today, I appeal to you to show me the love that will bring back Satya Yug.



India is in a position to take care of itself. If we use only the cloth produced in the country, we shall be able to make the country secure in very little time. I have been campaigning for the spinning-wheel. The chastity of women can be protected with the help of the spinning-wheel. There is another occupation in which our millions of women can engage themselves remaining at home. This does not call for much intelligence. India must learn to be self-reliant. When India produces brave men and women, we shall become self-reliant. We have to show the gallantry of Satyagraha. This needs more bravery than the bravery of arms. If that happens, we shall be free right away. Protect your women and those millions of rupees being drained away from India. You can work wonders even if you work only for an hour every day.

You have shown me boundless affection. You call this money a small amount but it is... This gift given willingly and with good intention is bound to bear fruit. To me it has the value of a billion rupees. Hence do not think that this is inadequate. If you find my appeal to you for work appropriate, prepare to train yourselves for that work in the interest of your country.

From *Bapujini Sheetal Chhayaman*.

Notes:

1. The Bhagini Samaj had collected a sum of Rs.23,000 for the Golden Jubilee Fund in connection with Gandhiji's 51st Birthday. The Purse was presented to him on October
2. For a brief account of Gandhiji's speech on the occasion, *vide CWMG*, Vol. XVI, p.202
2. *Ibid*, pp.174-5



38. WIDOWS' OUTPOURING

Eleven sisters from Surat have written two letters, pouring out their suffering. They begin their letters with the words: "We are *Vaishnava*, *Vanik* widows, widowed in childhood." They have given their own names but concealed the names of their parents and their addresses. I am sorry that they have not given full particulars about themselves. The law governing newspapers requires that the editor should pay no attention to anonymous letters, and this law is necessary. It is the editor's duty, if a correspondent does not desire his name to be published, to respect it fully, but the writer must give his full name for the information of the editor. If this is not done, the editor, despite his keenness to help, cannot help as much, as he otherwise could. In the case of these sisters themselves, I see that, if I knew their names and addresses, I could inquire for more details and also find persons who would befriend them in their suffering. Notwithstanding the incompleteness of the letters in this and other respects, they mention some general things which all should know. Of these eleven sisters, three have had some education and eight are utterly illiterate. One of them can barely manage to read the *Navajivan* once in eight days. Members of the community shoo them away as ill-omened, and dub them "husband-devourers": they have to live dependent on who knows what kind of men; by way of education, they have had nil, and they get little ghee and sugar in their food. There are forty-two *Vanik* communities in Surat, among which there must be not less than 700 widows. No one knows what dharma is.

We know our dharma, but are denied the means which may enable us to preserve it. If we are maintained in some Ashram and given some education, taught how to serve, we are ready to follow the widow's dharma. In the absence of this, we are exposed to so many temptations that we feel it necessary for us to have a husband's intimate company.... When the path of knowledge declined,



Vallabh¹ propagated the path of *bhakti*. With the passing of time, customs have changed. This should happen in regard to widows too.

There is much more than this in their letters. They also describe how widows come to lose their virtue. I have tried to give, mostly in my own words, the gist of what I could from the two letters. The question of widows is no ordinary problem for the Hindu society. There will hardly be any Hindu family which does not have the responsibility of maintaining a widow. The reformers have recommended a one-sided solution. Remarriage is the only solution, they say. To me, that idea appears terrible. I read a profound meaning in widowhood; equally, I also see how it can be turned to good account. Would it not be better if men, too, refused to marry again on becoming widowers? Nowhere, though, do we see any agitation to this end. And yet, how can this idea, even if implemented, end the sufferings of child-widows? Even if thousands of widowers should refuse of their own free will to marry again, how does that help the young girl who has to live a life of enforced widowhood? Can there be dharma in forcibly preventing a widow from remarrying? Can purity be expected of widows without placing them in conditions in which they could live a life of illustrious widowhood?

These complex problems are not easy to solve. There is an element of truth on either side. Without entering into argument I wish to place before the Hindu society the following conclusions:

1. The attempt to end the practice of widowhood is injurious to religion.
2. Marriage is a sacrament. Love can marry only once.
3. A widow deserves to be looked upon with reverence. It is a sin to despise her. The sight of a pure widow is a good omen. It is a sin to count it as an ill omen.



4. If marriage is, or is considered to be, a sacrament, and if it is a symbol of pure love, then marrying children and ill-matched partners must be considered a sin. If it is not wrong for a man of fifty to marry a girl of nine, and if such a man is not excommunicated, then it is also a sin to excommunicate or otherwise punish that girl if, becoming a widow, she marries again.

There is no room for coercion in the matter of dharma. And, therefore, my advice to the *Vaishnava* and other Hindu families regarding child-widows in Surat is that they should think out a plan to keep the minds and bodies of the widows occupied and save them from temptations, and put the plan into action. Even so, if it is important that a child-widow should not be induced to remarry, it is equally important that, should such a widow want to remarry, she should not be prevented from doing so. To live a widow's life is a holy thing, but it is not entirely sinful for a widow to remarry. If the various communities would live so as to bring credit to *varnashrama*, if they do not want it to disappear, they will have to eliminate the innumerable evils that have arisen in it and see that the problems which arise in practice are solved with due regard for dharma. To the widows, therefore, I would say: "Look upon your widowhood as sacred and live a life worthy of it. There are many instances of such widows in Hindu society." To people of the various communities I would say:-"If any child-widows want to remarry, do not despise or outcast them."

Navajivan, 12-10-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVI, pp.232-34

1. Vaishnava teacher (1473-1531); principally responsible for spreading the *bhakti* cult in Gujarat.



39. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, AMRITSAR¹

November 4, 1919

SISTERS,

Amritsar has become a place of pilgrimage not only for me but for every Indian. No penance will suffice for the evil that has been wrought by our hand in Amritsar. It is true that a large number of our people were killed in Jallianwala Bagh. But we ought to have maintained peace even if everyone present had been killed. It is not right, in my opinion, to take blood for blood. Our religion teaches us not to inflict pain on anyone. I regard Amritsar as a place of pilgrimage because our brethren here have recently suffered much. The Government had detained me at Bombay, and I had been wondering when I would have my freedom and be able to visit Amritsar. Now, having been freed, I have had the good fortune of meeting you. I will have peace only when I have done the work that I ought to do. You mothers, who must have had either a son, a brother or other relative killed or imprisoned and for whom you sorrow, should not regard it as an infliction. For we shall not come free of pain so long as we have not accustomed ourselves to putting up with hardships. We will have to endure much for the good of the country. In the late War in Europe millions had to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country's freedom. India cannot become free if we are not ready to endure hardships so long as we live. The joy of freedom is only for those who are ready to face death. In 1896-97 hundreds of thousands died of plague in the Punjab. No one treated the Punjab as a place of pilgrimage then.

Mahatma Gandhi [From Hindi]

CWVG, Vol. XVI, pp.286-87

1. The meeting was held at the house of Lala Girdhari Lal, a Congress leader of Amritsar.



40. WOMEN'S MEETING

The women in Hafizabad could not attend the men's meeting as the time and place did not suit them. Hence, they asked for a separate meeting and I agreed to it. The result was that the women came in even greater numbers than the men. I always confine myself to two subjects when addressing women—one, that they should exert themselves for the sake of those of their dear ones who are in jail, but abandon all anxiety and grieving, and, two, that they should take up the spinning-wheel as a religious duty. At the end of my talk, there was a heap of hand-spun yarn before me. There were garlands of yarn, too, ever so many of them. Several women vowed always to wear hand-woven cloth made from hand-spun yarn.

Navajivan, 14-12-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVI, pp.331-32



41. REQUEST TO GUJARATI WOMEN

The women of Gujarat have much to learn from their sisters in the Punjab. Punjabi women are extremely simple in their attire. Very few wear ornaments, or materials such as gold lace, and all know spinning. Not all these women are poor. It is quite likely that they possess as much money as their sisters in Gujarat. But they love the spinning-wheel and prefer simplicity. Their freedom and modesty appeal to me very much. The men show them great respect. When I arrived at Ramnagar, men and women came a mile out to meet me and the men always made way for the women. I have already referred to this courtesy and restraint and I still have the same experience. If any women in Gujarat have a doubt regarding the spinning-wheel, I would request them to follow the example of their sisters in the Punjab and I would ask the men to emulate the Punjabis' courtesy towards their womenfolk.

Navajivan, 14-12-1919 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVI, pp.331-32



42. SCENES ON THE WAY

... There is a station on the way called Bahuddin. The village is a fairly large one. A multitude of men and women stood there as far as my eye could reach and women competed with the men in their efforts to come to me. In every place, the women made offerings to me of yarn spun with their own hands. But, at a station named DHINGA where the train stops for five to seven minutes, the scene was simply wonderful. The women stood behind the men and, from there, they threw ball after ball of hand-spun yarn and we in the train and the men who stood in between caught them as they came. I understood the feelings of these women and my heart overflowed with joy. To the question, 'Why do all these women show such love?' I found the answer in the miracle at DHINGA station. It is my deep conviction that the women of the Punjab have understood my message. They have felt that swadeshi is not merely a means of protecting India's wealth but that it makes for protection of women's honour, that it is a form of *Ishwar bhakti*¹ and that in it lies the country's best freedom. Moreover, they have been able instinctively to grasp the significance of the holy message of satyagraha and have received from it great peace of mind and a new assurance. They feel that, if my message is adopted by the country, peace will prevail in India and through India, in the whole world and the Satyayuga² will be born. They have understood that, whether all this is realized in the near future or not, it is for us to work on with faith for these two objectives and this is why they come to me in ever larger numbers, shedding their fear. I was convinced during this journey that there is no exaggeration in saying that women have understood how we can fight our opponents with love and without hate, and be a match for them, how we can fearlessly point out to the officers their errors and they will have to listen to us, and that, seeing all this, they are extremely happy.



... But in order that I might engage the genuine interest of readers in truth and swadeshi, I beg leave to state, deliberately and knowingly, that I do not believe the profound feelings of the Punjabi women to be directed towards me personally. They are taken up with admiration for me because of the truth they see in me and the simplicity of swadeshi which they have come to realize through me. The men's love is no less. But I am not sure of its purity. Some are drawn to me because I am a fighter against the Government. Some think that, though I do not speak out, in fact I harbour a good deal of hatred which, being a shrewd man, I hide from others. Some consider that I have great fighting capacity, no doubt, but that I am something of a fool for lack of intellect. They do not, therefore, think it wrong to avail themselves of my fighting capacity and to show me sufficient regard with that end in view. Others are genuine lovers of truth and swadeshi and, regarding me as more experienced in these matters than themselves, bear sincere affection for me. Thus, since I suspect that men's feelings for me are mixed, I am frequently uneasy and nervous when surrounded by men and sometimes I fear lest they and I together bring about some calamity. But with regard to women, such an idea would not occur to me even in a dream. They come to me with but one feeling in their heart and therefore their presence, even by the thousand, gives me nothing but a sense of peace. They strengthen my faith and confidence in satyagraha and swadeshi, make me ever more resolute and create a new zest in me and inspire me to greater effort. If I could inspire in men devotion as pure as I find in the women, within a year India would be raised to a height impossible to imagine. As for swaraj, it would be the easiest thing in the world.

A Muslim servant of Sarladevi said something to her and she reported it to me. I shall place it before my readers and close this letter with a request to them to ponder over it very carefully. Many men and women address Sarladevi as *Mataji* or Mother. This servant said, "*Mataji*, if Mahatmaji keeps talking to all women about the spinning-wheel, surely it is not without reason. He is a man of God and believes that the Indian



women can safeguard their dharma through it. This is why he does what he does.” Sarladevi told me in some context that this servant was a good and devout man, and she passed on his ideas about swadeshi to me. She was amazed to find such wisdom in one who could be called ignorant. I was greatly pleased but by no means surprised. The wisdom I have seen and learnt from so-called illiterate people I have not learnt from others.

Navajivan, 22-2-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVII, pp.31-33

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1. Worship of God.
 2. The Age of Truth.



43. SPEECH AT MEETING OF MILL-HANDS, AHMEDABAD¹

February 25, 1920

If the workers find it necessary today to send their wives and children to work in factories, it is our duty to see that they do not have to. There ought to be no need for workers' children to go and work, at the cost of their education, for the sake of an extra income of three to four rupees. Work is not for children. Nor is it for women to work in factories. They have plenty of work in their own homes. They should attend to the bringing up of their children; they may give peace to the husband when he returns home tired, minister to him, soothe him if he is angry, and do any other work they can staying at home. If we want our family life to be comely and sweet, we ought to do this. It is not for women to go out and work, as men do. If we send them to the factories, who will look after our domestic and social affairs? If women go out to work, our social life will be ruined and moral standards will decline. To those who advance the example of Europe, asking how it is that thousands of women there do the work of men and that men and women work together, my reply is: 'I don't bother myself about Europe. From what little insight into the laws of social life I have gained, I feel convinced that for men and women to go out for work together will mean the fall of both. Do not, therefore, send your women out to work; protect their honour; if you have any manliness in you, it is for you to see that no one casts an evil eye on them. Today the workers, in their helplessness, are forced to send their women and children out for work, much against their will. It is true, of course, that they should have better wages if they are not to be so obliged. All this could be easy to achieve through a union, if established.

Navajivan, 29-2-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVII, pp.47-51

1. The workers of the spinning departments of various mills had met to consider the formation of a labour union.



44. SPEECH AT AHMEDABAD

February 27, 1920

Perhaps all of you know that for some time past I have been something of an invalid and I shall, therefore, address you sitting. I hope you will excuse me for doing so.

I find my name, too, included in the list of speakers at this meeting. I have been assigned the duty of thanking Sarladevi and the Chairman¹. The sister who addressed you today and the Chairman are known to me very well and it gives me great pleasure, therefore, to perform this duty.

I am, personally, a beggar. In my begging, I especially seek out sisters. Men I have found everywhere. But I try especially to seek out sisters, for I know that, unless our sisters in the country give their blessings to the brothers, India's progress is impossible. In Ahmedabad, particularly, I have found such a sister. At Bombay, Madras and elsewhere, too, I have found someone or other. In the Punjab, I found Sarladevi. I first came to know her in 1910 and then I saw the husband and wife again in Hardwar. Sarladevi invited me to the Punjab. I accepted the invitation but felt nervous. At the time she extended it, she was separated from her husband. That made me wonder whether it would be proper for me to accept her hospitality. However, I look upon it as my good fortune if I can share others' suffering and so I stayed with her in the Punjab. I had from her as much service as from one's own sister and thus became her debtor.

If any sister carries my message to the country, I would bow to her in all reverence. But, at the moment, I want to tell you that she has delivered to you not my message but Pandit Rambhuj Dutt Chowdhari's. On an occasion such as this, this lady, ever dotting on her husband, thought only of conveying her husband's message, and so put him on a pedestal. Well, Chowdhariji's message is the message of the entire



Punjab. It asks you never to fear, never to accept defeat come what may, to love God and work on with patience and fortitude. We would do well to inscribe this message in our hearts.

I go after good men as I do after good women. The Chairman at today's meeting is known for his simplicity, his amiable nature and other fine qualities. He has added to the achievements of his father and earned greater fame for himself. As a reformer as also in other capacities, Shri Ramanbhai has done much. If we learn his virtues and achieve something, that will be doing a great deal.

I once again thank Sarladevi and the Chairman on behalf of you all.

Navajivan, 7-3-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVII, pp.53-54

1. Sir Ramanbhai Mahipatram Nilkanth.



45. MANIANWALA AND NEIGHBOURING PLACES

Gurdevi, the aged widow of Mangal Jat, stated before Mr. Labh Singh:

One day during the Martial Law period, Mr. Bosworth Smith gathered together all the male persons of our village, over 8 years, at the bungalow, which is some miles from our village, in connection with the investigations that were going on. While the men were at the bungalow, he rode to our village, taking back with him all the women, who met him on the way, carrying food for their men to the bungalow. Reaching the village, he went round the lanes and ordered all the women to come out of their houses, himself forcing them out with sticks. He made us all stand near the village *daira*. The women folded their hands before him; he beat some with his stick, spat at them and used the foulest and most unmentionable language. He hit me twice and spat in my face. He forcibly bared the faces of all the women, and brushed aside their veils with his own stick. He called them “she-asses, bitches, flies”, and “swine”, and said, “You were in the same bed with your husbands; why did you not prevent them from going out to do mischief? Now your skirts will be looked into by the police constables.” He gave me a kick also, and ordered us to undergo the torture of holding our ears by passing our arms under and around the legs, while being bear double. ...

This statement is supported by several women of Manianwala.

Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the Punjab Sub-committee of the Indian National Congress

CWMMG, Vol. XVII, pp.256-57



46. MORE THOUGHTS ABOUT WIDOWS

The ideal of widowhood is one of the glories of the Hindu religion. If the vow of unswerving devotion to the husband has any meaning, it is that, once a woman has, with full knowledge, accepted and looked upon a man as her husband, even when he has died she should cherish his memory and rest in it, nay, find joy in it. It is by living in this way that thousands of widows in India have become sacred names worthy of remembrance in one's morning prayers. Only recently I had occasion to call on *Gangaswarup*¹ Ramabai Ranade² and saw her in her own room. In the centre of the room, I saw a couch, with a portrait of the late Justice Ranade placed on it. I understood its significance but to make sure I asked her why the portrait was kept there. She replied: "Well, this was his couch; it was on this that he generally sat and so I have reserved it for his portrait. I pass my day and also sleep at night under its shadow." I was filled with joy to hear these holy words and I understood the glory of widowhood the better. I know that chaste and devoted wives like Ramabai are to be found everywhere in India.

But where shall we find men with the ideal of devotion to one wife? If there are none such, are the men merely to honour chaste and devoted wives and be satisfied with that; should they not honour such wives by themselves following with absolute firmness the ideal of devotion to one wife? What can be better worship than emulation? Where, on the contrary, there is not the slightest desire to emulate, what value is to be put upon mere lip-worship? I have been in India for five years and have gathered a good deal of experience of every aspect of Indian life. I have seen many a young man generally considered to have good character and to all appearances bearing great love for his wife, getting engaged and marrying soon after the wife dies. And this has pained me a great deal. If we had not been slaves of certain customs, the very idea that a man who had lost his wife should, even before he has returned home



from the cremation, think of remarriage would be harrowing. Actually, the mother wishes to see her widowed son married again at the earliest. Even the mother-in-law encourages her widowed son-in-law to get married and the son-in-law is not in the least embarrassed when so advised. What is the meaning of such a man shedding tears [over his dead wife]? What is the value of innumerable efforts such a man may make to perpetuate the memory of his former wife? Again, how much value should the new wife attach to the love which he may shower on her? How can such a life be considered as guided by thought? I see nothing but wickedness in it and, as long as men do not mind being thus brazen-faced, to praise widowhood seems to me sheer hypocrisy and the very height of selfishness on their part.

A man who has been a friend to his wife for some years, has shared her joy and sorrow, has enjoyed life with her, should he not observe mourning even as long as one does on the death of a mere friend? Even in England, where widows can remarry, a woman of good family does not, maybe for fear of public opinion, venture to seek another man's company for a period of one year. The nobility of an Indian husband, however, does not last beyond the cremation ground and, at times, in the very precincts of the crematorium, even as the body of his holy wife is being consumed to ashes on the pyre, his relatives do not hesitate to propose to him remarriage and the widowed man feels no shame in lending his ear to such talk. It is essential that India saves herself from this pitiable plight. I see man's selfishness, conscious or otherwise, even in the movement for encouraging widows to remarry. By helping them to do so, men want to forget their own shame. If men believe that widows really suffer, they can help the latter to forget that suffering by themselves following uncompromisingly the ideal of taking only one wife. In such matters, public opinion has become so feeble that I have seen, all over India, educated men of noble families entering into ill-matched unions or, on the death of their wife, remarrying immediately.



Whether or not men do their duty, why should the women not have their rights? Women must have voting rights, by all means; but what will women, who do not understand what rights are or, if they understand them, do not have the strength to secure them, do with voting rights? Let them have these rights, there is no harm in that; let them become members of legislatures in India; but the foremost duty of women is to save themselves from the intentional or unintentional tyranny of men and make India glorious and strong. It is only when an ignorant woman is ready to sacrifice her equally ignorant daughter to the fire of a recent widower's lust that the man, whose tears of grief on the loss of his wife have not yet dried, can think of remarrying. For my part, I believe that it is women's right, nay, it is a duty they owe to themselves, to their menfolk and to India, to bring about reforms of this kind.

Navajivan, 16-5-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVII, pp.423-25

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1. Literally, in a state like Ganga's. According to the Mahabharata, the sacred river took human form and lived as wife of King Shantanu for some time. Among Hindus, the term is prefixed to the name of a widow.
 2. Widow of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade who died in 1901; a social reformer of Maharashtra.



47. KHILAFAT AND SWADESHI

Pathan Alamkhan Jivakhan writes¹ from Damnagar².

This is really a heartening letter. It is plain that the Khilafat agitation will benefit the cause of swadeshi. But the resolve not to use articles made in Europe only so long as the Khilafat issue remained unsolved does not seem to me proper. Muslims ought not to use European goods even if they get full justice on the Khilafat question. It is, moreover, not enough to boycott European goods alone. No foreign goods, including Japanese goods, should be used. The swadeshi movement is intended as a permanent change. No matter how justly Europe deals with us, it is our duty to use only swadeshi goods so that India may ever get perfect justice. The country, thus, can prosper only through the spinning-wheel and the handloom. Lakhs of Muslims have given up spinning and lakhs of Muslim weavers have given up weaving. If Hindu and Muslim women again take to spinning and Hindu and Muslim weavers to weaving, within a short time the country will be able to produce all the cloth it needs. I wish, therefore, to draw the attention of all, specially of women, to the example that Damnagar has set. But what can women do about it, so long as men do not provide them with spinning-wheels and slivers of cotton by getting cotton carded by the local carders? I trust, therefore, that at least a few public-spirited men will come forward in every village, who, at a little trouble to themselves, will undertake to procure cotton, get it carded and turned into cotton rolls and supply them to women who: may be prepared to spin. This is a business in which no loss is possible. Only last week we saw the instance of Dhasa³ where men and women not only spin and weave but for the most part use cloth made in their own village and send out the surplus, if any, to other villages. There is no starvation, there cannot be any, in that village. With a little effort, things can be planned in a similar way in every village in India.

Navajivan, 4-7-1920 [From Gujarati]



CWMMG, Vol. XVIII, p.8

1. The letter is not given here. It said that, on the Id day, about 300 Muslims had resolved not to use foreign articles so long as the Khilafat question remained unsolved.
2. A village in Saurashtra.
3. In Saurashtra. *Navajivan*, 27-6-1920, had published an account of D. B. Kalelkar and Narahari Parikh's visit to the village.



48. DUTY OF WOMEN

At a meeting held under the presidentship of that good lady Mrs. Jaiji Jehangir Petit, the women of Bombay have given expression to their view on the atrocities committed in the Punjab. The meeting has served two purposes. In the first place, the women have joined the country in her suffering and understood what that suffering is. Women ought not to remain unconcerned in the face of such atrocities. They cannot afford to keep silent when events happen which deprive women of their womanhood and men of their manhood. It is not men alone who have been humiliated in the Punjab. Women, too, have been humiliated. That arrogant officer, Mr. Bosworth Smith, left nothing undone in disgracing women in Manianwala in the Punjab. In holding the meeting, therefore, the women of Bombay have done nothing more than their duty. I hope the women of Gujarat, too, will hold similar meetings in the principal cities of the province and pass appropriate resolutions.

Women cannot disown such duties thinking that they are but weak creatures. The soul can never be described as weak; it is the body which may be so described. Even a little girl who has, and knows that she has, a soul of shining purity can stand up to an overbearing Englishman, six-and-a-half foot tall. A woman conscious of her dignity as woman sheds lustre on her womanhood through soul-force. The woman who, knowing that she is weak in body, becomes weak [in mind] cannot do this. Our shastras tell us how Sita¹, Draupadi² and other women filled the wicked with awe. Just as the strength of an elephant's body is unavailing before the power of human intelligence, so also a man's intellectual and physical strength is quite helpless before the soul-force either of a man or a woman.

I, therefore, want the women of India not to believe themselves weak and give up their right and privilege of protecting their progeny. It is sheer ignorance to call woman weak, woman who has been the mother of mighty heroes like Hanuman³



Maybe she has been so called simply in order to impress upon the male his duty towards her, to tell him that, being physically the stronger, he must not be a monster and, in his pride, oppress woman who is weak, but that, on the contrary, he must do her service by protecting her and providing her with the means through which she may cultivate strength of soul.

Victims of the illusion that this is an age of sheer physical power, we feel perplexed and puzzled and wonder what the weak and miserable people of India can do. Thinking thus, even our menfolk feel themselves quite as helpless as women. If only the country realized that this is not true at all! The day the people of India come to have self-respect, they will be strong and no General Dyer will then remain in the country.

How may we acquire such strength? No elaborate training is necessary. We have only to put our trust in God and stop being afraid of anybody's physical strength. The physically strong have at the most, the power of destroying our body. When we shed all fear for the safety of our body, we become lions among men. Real power, therefore, consists not in having the physical strength of a giant but in strength of mind, knowledge of the Self and freedom from the fear of death.

Navajivan, 18-7-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.57-58

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1. Of the *Ramayana*, held in reverence as the ideal wife.
 2. Of the *Mahabharata*, admired for her dauntless spirit.
 3. A prominent character in the *Ramayana*; lieutenant of Rama and God of strength.



49. WOMEN'S ROLE

“What can we do to help non-co-operation?” This question was asked of me in all seriousness by the women in Shantiniketan. The question has also been asked by a gentleman on behalf of women. I wish to give here the substance, with some variation, of the answer I gave to the Shantiniketan sisters. It would be in vain to hope for swaraj so long as women do not make their full contribution to the effort. Men are not as conscientious as women in such matters. If the women do not know or do not accept their duty of preserving the nation's freedom, or of winning it back when it is lost, it will be impossible to defend it.

Going to temples, I grant, is important for strengthening one's faith. If, however, women believe this to be the whole of religion, the idea becomes a superstition and harms the nation. The women who understand that the Lord's darshan¹ is a means to self-realization will also know that even temples must speak to us of freedom, for without freedom it is impossible to protect religion. Could the people protect their religion when General Dyer let loose a reign of terror in Amritsar? Even at that time, women used to go to temples, and a few men as well; what did this avail them?

Had the women been aware that it was the primary duty of the people to free themselves from the tyranny of this man, they would have filled with courage their husbands and sons, made them shake off their cowardice and defend their self-respect. But, in the present age, the women keep aloof from the things which really matter for the nation's welfare and, hence, we get little help from them.

It was not so in ancient times. Sita set out for the forest with Ramachandra and there was nothing he did of which she remained in ignorance. Draupadi, making herself a true partner in life, accompanied the Pandavas in their wanderings and, when her honour was threatened, she proved to the world that she had the strength to



protect herself with soul-force. Damayanti stood by Nala's side in all he did;² not only that, but she even proved to be his protector when he was not in his right mind.

Speaking generally, we can say that men and women seem today to be going in opposite directions. Men do not interfere with women in anything the latter may wish to do; many of women's superstitions are growing stronger, though their faith has remained unshaken. Men do as they like, and women do not interfere with them.

Hence the first reform for the women should be to understand the important idea of freedom and cherish it as a part of dharma. The woman who has understood this should enlighten her sisters. Women alone can work and achieve great results among women. There is a limit to what a man can do. He can never understand their deepest feelings.

A woman nourishes the bodies of her children. In the same way, she should inculcate in their minds the qualities of independence, fearlessness, firmness, etc. She should not worry about livelihood but should realize that, if she and her children are ready to work, livelihood should be no problem.

The immediate duty before women is, if their children are attending Government schools, to withdraw them from those schools.

But the most important work—work which should become a permanent activity—is promoting swadeshi. The nation simply cannot be kept alive without swadeshi. The main reason why the people are suffering from lack of food and clothing is that they have no money. Though they can produce their own cloth, still, instead of doing so, they wear imported cloth and, in consequence, the nation is bled whiter every year. This weakness cannot be overcome unless women undertake the task. They have been spinning, in this country, from time immemorial. From the time that



they gave up this work began the economic and spiritual degradation of the people. It is no exaggeration to say that India's freedom hangs solely by a cotton thread. ...

Navajivan, 3-10-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.319-21

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1. Sight of a person, place or thing considered holy.
 2. The story is told in the Mahabharata.



50. HOW THE VICEROY DISCHARGES HIS TRUST

The reader will find reproduced elsewhere the Viceroy's cablegram to Mr. Montagu in refutation of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu's¹ allegations regarding the ill-treatment of women in the Punjab during the martial law period, as also Shrimati Sarojini's spirited reply. It seems that every responsible statement made by His Excellency only strengthens the opinion of the public that he is totally unfit for the great trust which has been reposed in him. I do not wish to add one word to what Shrimati Sarojini has said in condemnation of the Viceroy's attitude; but I would draw the readers' attention to the ignoring of some very material allegations that were made by the Shrimati. Even assuming the propriety of rejecting the evidence of prostitutes because they are engaged in the unfortunate traffic, what has His Excellency to say regarding the evidence of the many women of Manianwala against whom, in so far as I am aware, not a word of reproach has been whispered? I give below in full the statement of Guredevi, the widow of Mangal Jat. That statement was corroborated by several other women. This is the statement:

One day, during the martial law period, Mr. Bosworth Smith gathered together all the males of over 8 years at the Dacca Dalla Bungalow, which is some miles from our village, in connection with the investigations that were going on. Whilst the men were at the Bungalow, he rode to our village, taking back with him all the women who met him on the way carrying food for their men at the Bungalow. Reaching the village, he went round the lanes and ordered all women to come out of their houses, himself forcing them out with sticks. He made us all stand near the village Daira. The women folded their hands before him. He beat some with his stick and spat at them and used the foulest and most unmentionable language. He hit me twice and spat in my face. He forcibly uncovered the faces of all the women, brushing aside the veils with his own stick.

He repeatedly called us she-asses, bitches, flies and swines and said: "You were in the same beds with your husbands; why did you not prevent them from going out to do mischief? Now your skirts will be looked into by the police constables." He gave me a kick also and



ordered us to undergo the torture of holding our ears by passing our arms round the legs, whilst being bent double.

This treatment was meted out to us in the absence of our men who were away at the Bungalow.

If the facts set forth are true, can anything be more brutal or more loathsome? And yet the perpetrator of the crime will probably receive a pension from the Government treasury. The curious reader will find in the evidence collected ample material in proof of the depravity of the officer concerned. The evidence was first collected by Mr. Andrews. Mr. Labhsingh, M.A., Bar-at-law, was specially deputed to go to Manianwala to see the ladies concerned. He held a kind of public enquiry which anybody was free to attend.

Mr. Montagu had his attention drawn to these statements when he hastily rebuked Shrimati Sarojini for her so-called recklessness of speech. And it was due to this that Mr. Montagu pompously ordered an inquiry. The Viceroy seems quietly to have ignored the instructions issued to him, and has held no inquiry. He has laid down a new canon of evidence, hitherto unknown, and the law upon it that the evidence of prostitutes is not to be trusted. In other words, the legitimate corollary to be drawn from the Viceregal pronouncement is that prostitutes may not get justice done to them, unless their complaint is supported by other evidence. Any way Mr. Montagu has evidently accepted the Viceroy's explanation, and has thus strengthened the cause of non-co-operation. Can India for one moment associate herself with a Government that condones offences of a most barbarous nature committed against her own folk by its officers?

Young India, 6-10-1920

CWVG, Vol. XVIII, pp.324-25

1. 1879-1949: poet, patriot, Congress leader and a close associate of Gandhiji.



51. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, DAKOR

October 27, 1920

SISTERS,

All of you should listen to me in silence. I will finish what I have to say in a few words. While some of you belong to Dakor, others must be visitors to this place of pilgrimage. I am sure there is hardly any among you in this large gathering who is fully aware of the present plight of India. What is our duty, our dharma, in the condition in which India is placed today? You have all come to this place of pilgrimage with feelings of devotion. You probably believe that you will be rid of your sins through the *darshan* of the Dakor shrine, that you will have your heart's desire granted if you take a dip in the Gomati. Some of you may be thinking that by having *darshan* of a mahatma like this Gandhi, they will be sanctified. This is far from the truth. In fact, you pollute the Gomati if you merely bathe in it without purifying your hearts. It will avail you little if, going for the darshan of Dakorji, you leave behind there only the dirt on your feet. The *darshan* can bear fruit only if we purify our hearts, fill them with good thoughts and attain self-knowledge. You yourselves will ask what good such *darshan* can do to a sceptic like myself or to a Christian. I wish to make it clear to you that so long as the heart is not purified and the mind not cleansed, *darshan* of Ranchhodraiji or bathing in the Gomati can bear no fruit.

First of all, I request you, my sisters, to understand the true meaning of religion. So long as you do not do this, you will not realize what the present condition of India is. While you look upon the present Government as your parents and believe that you live in peace under it, you will not be able to free yourselves from slavery. I believe that the Government has enslaved us. For thirty years, I thought that we were happy under the protection of the British Government, but now I am convinced that, instead of being sheltered by the Government, we burn in its scorching heat. We are about to



lose all sense of dharma. On my way, I saw a signboard which said that we lose caste by eating in hotels. This is true enough, but it is not the whole truth. When were these hotels introduced? It was under the present Government. Why were they introduced? Because the present Government taught us to lead a life of ease and luxury. We now prefer bazar-made preparations to what is cooked at home and violate the strict restrictions of the *Vaishnava* way. This is a Government which collects hundreds of thousands of rupees by trafficking in liquor and opium. It is said in the Shastras that a king who carries on trade is of the middle order, one who raises money from his subjects just enough to help him protect them is of the highest order, but one who collects revenue by making addicts and drunkards of his subjects is of the lowest order. I have come here to make you, my sisters, realize that our present Government is of this last order.

We have been taught in the *Bhagavad Gita* to treat all men as equals. The Hindus and Muslims are like the two eyes of the country. There should be no enmity between them. But we look with contempt upon them, do not associate ourselves with them, and treat them as our enemies. Today this Government is bent upon destroying the religion of the Muslims. If it can destroy their religion today, it can destroy ours tomorrow.

And now about the Punjab. Perhaps you have not even heard of the Punjab. But it is through the Punjab that our *rishis* entered India. The Punjab is the land in which the *rishis* wrote the Shastras. It is in this same Punjab that the Government humiliated our men and women, whipped the children, and forced the people to crawl on their stomachs like serpents. It is against dharma to accept the authority of such a Government. That is why I tell you that we should overthrow this *Ravanarajya* and establish *Ramarajya* in its place.



My second request to you is that you should adopt swadeshi. This Government has taught us false ways. We have come to believe that foreign cloth adds to one's beauty. Even the clothes worn by you, in this gathering, have the odour of foreign cloth. Even mill cloth is not swadeshi. The cloth produced by the mills is not sufficient to meet the needs of the country. You are not quite so poor. I have seen people who are poorer than you. I have seen men who have only a loin-cloth with which to clothe themselves and women who have no more than a torn skirt. We can set ourselves free this very day if India adopts swadeshi, if all women take to the good old spinning-wheel and if they put on clothes made only with yarn spun by themselves. To the women of the past, virtue was beauty. Wearing of foreign cloth makes a woman ugly. There is a touch of the harlot in a woman seeking loveliness by fine dressing. What is our image of Sita and Damayanti, whom we adore? Is it that of women clad in finery? We revere Damayanti who wandered in the forest, half-clad, and Sita who suffered *vanavasa* for fourteen years. Was Harishchandra's¹ queen, who served as a maid, dressed in fine clothes? In those days, people covered themselves with nothing more than leaves. To seek beauty by adorning oneself is to imitate the harlot. If you want to follow your dharma, you must first understand the swadeshi dharma. It consists in using cloth made with yarn spun by yourselves and woven by your menfolk, singing as they work. I am truly handsome, since the clothes I am wearing are made with yarn spun by women and lovingly woven by men. If you wish to deliver yourselves from *Ravanarajya* and establish *Ramarajya*, you must adopt swadeshi and introduce the spinning-wheel in your homes. There are many women now who will be able to teach you how to work it. Each one of you should spin for at least an hour daily, singing devotional songs the while. Get the yarn, afterwards, woven into cloth.

You will no doubt find it difficult at first to use hand-spun cloth in place of foreign muslin. Some women in Bombay complained to me that their saris, which previously weighed less than forty tolas² now exceeded seventy tolas in weight. I replied to them



in figurative language, saying that, they had till now lowered their own weight by reducing the weight of their clothes. During pregnancy, women cheerfully carry their load for nine months and suffer the severe pains of child-birth with joy. This is the time for the birth of new India. Will you not be ready at least to carry the weight of heavy clothes at this hour? You can make India free only if you bear this burden. If you wish to give birth to a new India, every woman must bear this burden not merely for nine months but for nine years.

Secondly, do you know to what kind of schools you send your children? You send them to the schools of *Ravanarajya*. Would a devout *Vaishnava* ever send his or her children to the schools of an irreligious Government? Would I ever go to the wicked to learn the *Gita* or the *Bhagavat*³ from them? Our present schools are run by a wicked Government. So long as these schools are not run by us, do not send your children to them. Teach them *Ramaraksha*⁴, teach them devotional songs, or go to the wise men of your town and request them to educate your children. But do not, under any circumstances, send them to the present schools.

A sister came and left Rs. 5 for me. Till today, I have accepted nothing in this way. What I need, I obtain from friends. But now I want swaraj to be established and to run many schools; I cannot do all this by raising money from friends. If you want *Ramarajya*, you must work to that end. Contribute whatever you wish to. I shall use the amount for the cause of swadeshi and for running schools for your children. At present, some wicked men among us have made the shrine of Dakor a subject of litigation. Should we take disputes concerning our shrines to courts of law? This is wickedness. We must compensate lawyers for giving up their practice. If the arguments put forward by my colleagues and myself hold good, every pice you contribute will bring you two in return. With this money, your own law-courts will be



run and the swadeshi movement will be carried on. The money that we contribute to these sacred places is being squandered by the wicked.

If you wish to be pure like Sita, if you would give up the many forms of subtle mental degradation of the kind I have described and make others give them up, if you wish to understand your true dharma rather than wickedness, then you must wholeheartedly join in the movement for swaraj. Each one of us must be able to distinguish between true dharma and wickedness. Many fraudulent men will also come to you for contributions. I would ask you not to contribute to any of them. I hold out my hand to you only because I feel certain that you have trust in me. I shudder to introduce the corrupting influence of money in my work. Had I the strength and the *tapascharya* to be able to carry on my work without money, I would most certainly not ask for it. But I do not have such *tapascharya* and such strength. I also am a man of *Kaliyuga* and am full of failings, but I know that I am constantly striving to overcome these failings. So, if you trust me, contribute anything you wish to, from a pice onwards. The funds will be handled by the Swarajya Sabha.

Finally, I request you to see that these few things I have placed before you do not go in at one ear and come out at the other. By adopting swadeshi, you will be able to save some money on clothes. You will be able to give your children milk and ghee out of this. At present, you spend on your comforts and luxuries the money which could buy milk and ghee for your children. I, too, want a small share from the amount you will save. But contribute only if you wish to. Even if you do not give money, you should at any rate follow the dharma of spinning which I have explained to you. We have today to wash off the pollution caused by the eclipse. The right way of doing so is to purify our hearts. If all of you take the name of Rama in good faith and pray for *Ramarajya* in place of *Ravanarajya*, I can assure you that you will find that Rama is the



strength of the weak. I May your hearts be ruled by God and may He set you free from all other forms of enslavement.

Navajivan, 3-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.391-95

1. King of Ayodhya who suffered great hardships while in the service of a *Chandala* (outcaste); he was even ready to kill his wife Taramati for the sake of truth.
2. Forty tolas make about a pound.
3. One of the 18 Puranas, sacred narrative poems in Sanskrit, part history and part legend; it depicts the love of Radha and Krishna as symbolic of the love of the human soul for God.
4. A prayer in Sanskrit, believed to be efficacious in securing Rama's protection and grace.



52. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, AHMEDABAD

October 31, 1920

Wherever I go in India in the course of my tours, women bless me with their *darshan*. At every place, I meet thousands of them. Today, I shall tell you a beautiful story. By now there must be hardly any of you who has not heard of Amritsar. A few days ago I was in this very town, where there had flowed the blood of thousands of our brethren and General Dyer had killed or wounded a thousand or fifteen hundred innocent people. When I was in Amritsar, one day four women came to me early in the morning, at half past six. There, the cold is much severer than it is here. But the women felt that they ought to caution the man who, they thought, had been doing so much in their service. One of them said to me: "Brother, what you are doing is good indeed, but you do not know that our men, and the women too, in some degree, have been deceiving you." I was simply taken aback. I asked them: "Why should they deceive me? What can they hope to gain thereby?" She said: "The men are cunning. They lie to you. We have understood, of course, that you need only pure men and women to help you in your work and this is the reason why we, women, follow you everywhere, that we may be filled with your ideals." The sister then used a Sanskrit word. One would not expect to hear a Sanskrit word like this from a Punjabi woman. Perhaps you also do not understand its meaning. She told me that their men were not *jitendriya*, and that the women, too, were not so to the extent I wanted them to be or believed they were. I understood from this hint what they meant. *Jitendriya* means one who has the senses under control. In other words, a man or woman who does not mind hearing evil with the ears or speaking evil with the tongue is not *Jitendriya*. In this context, what is specifically meant is that a man who is not loyal to one woman, his wife, or a woman to one man, her husband, is not *jitendriya*. The sister asked me:



“You want us to control our anger, but how can one who cannot restrain carnal desire restrain anger? And how can one who is unable to restrain anger make sacrifices?”

* * *

Tulsidas and the *Gita* teach that association with the wicked is to be shunned. The present rule also is a rule of the wicked, of the base. Rather than that the children be educated in the schools of this Government, it is better that they should go without education. “Who will maintain us if the son is not educated?”—such fears are unnecessary. How do they, who have no sons, maintain themselves? It is God who maintains us.

* * *

If you can make only thick rotlas¹ and another woman can make them thin, will you eat your thick ones or beg thin ones from the other? Wearing mill-made cloth, even Indian, is not enough for following the swadeshi dharma. By doing so, on the contrary, you will make the poor man’s cloth dear for him.

* * *

There can be no happiness without suffering. It is because Rama had suffered *vanavasa* for fourteen years that he could rescue Sita; it is because Nala went through so much suffering that his name became immortal: it is because Harishchandra, Queen Taramati and Rohit² suffered so much that their truthfulness shone like the sun and its brightness filled the world. Do not, therefore, be afraid of suffering; instead of feeling ashamed of thick saris, use cloth woven with yarn spun by your own hands.

Again, it is necessary to have God’s name constantly on one’s lips, but repeating *Ramanama*³ parrot-like will not bring you *moksha*. If you have Rama in your heart, you will feel compassion and, with compassion in your heart, you will not behave so as to hurt others. I tell you that, if you do not wear hand-spun, hand-woven cloth, thousands



of women will have to go without clothes or have only rags to wear. Even today, I can show you thousands of Damayantis⁴ in the country. I once suggested to a woman that she should bathe regularly. She replied that she would do so if I gave her another garment to change into. Such is the miserable plight of the country today.

* * *

To secure swaraj, to start new schools—this requires money and I cannot collect it from a tree. When I started this begging in Dakor, one woman who made her living by working a quern parted with her ring to me. Two or three other women gave me rings, necklaces, etc. One friend took off his gold wristlet. It was his faith, he said that anyone who gave a pice would get two in return.

* * *

This is *Kaliyuga*. Falsehood reigns everywhere. I would be very happy if I could carry on without begging: I would then never beg. I or my co-workers are not likely to put the money to wrong use. Nevertheless, give something only if you are convinced of what I say.

* * *

The *Diwali* festival celebrates Rama's success in rescuing Sita. So long as we are unable to achieve another victory like Rama's against Ravana, we have no right to enjoy ourselves, to dress ourselves in finery, to indulge the palate or fire crackers.

* * *

This money⁵ is more sacred than gifts of millions by the rich. In everyone of these copper coins is the soul of one sister in Ahmedabad; she has poured forth with it her love of the country. With this sacred money, I shall educate the children in this country. With such sacred gifts, I shall have my swaraj.



Navajivan, 3-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.401-403

1. Unleavened bread of bajra or jowar flour.
2. Son of Harishchandra.
3. Sacred name of Rama.
4. Nala's wife. The husband and wife were reduced to such straits that they had to go covered with a single garment between them.
5. Small change donated by the people in response to Gandhiji's appeal.



53. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, BROACH

November 2, 1920

To the women, I say humbly that the success of swadeshi is in your hands. It is your dharma to spin. You should set an example to the men. Mothers can hardly complain about the weight of khadi. How can a mother, who is cheerfully prepared to carry for nine months the burden of pregnancy, say that she cannot bear an added weight of a seer? A woman could say this only if she would prefer to remain childless. But so long as women have no desire to remain childless, would rather like to be mothers of brave boys and girls, I would not hear such talk from them. I fail to understand how you can use saris made in the mills of Japan, China, England or France at a time when men and women in your country go naked.

Navajivan, 10-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.416-17



54. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, POONA¹

November 6, 1920

I know that in all communities, Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and others, it is the women who preserve dharma. The day they forsake dharma, it will be destroyed. Our Shastras say that a country in which the king and the women have abandoned dharma perishes. In our country, the women have not totally abandoned it, but the king has. Our country is governed in the same way as *Ravanarajya*—as the kingdom of a monster.

* * *

This Empire has made cowards of men. Had we not been cowards, had the women brought forth brave men, the atrocities [in the Punjab] would have been impossible. But alas! these days the men in our country are no longer men. I want the mothers in India to shed fear. So long as they do not rear brave men, India's deliverance is impossible. ...² But how is this to be done? The country will produce brave men only when the women have courage in their heart, have *bhakti*³ and faith, when God has become the lord of their heart and they have learnt to fear Him alone, and to fear no man. If we want to end *Ravanarajya*, we must have *Ramarajya* prevail. How can we hope to have the strength to bring this about so long as the women do not do *tapascharya* like that of Parvati⁴ or Kausalya,⁵ do not follow dharma as conscientiously as Draupadi and Damayanti did? Till they do this, it is impossible that we shall have brave men.

Navajivan, 18-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.440-41

1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's account of the tour.



2. Omission as in the source.
3. Seeking God through love and devotion.
4. Daughter of the Himalayas and consort of Siva.
5. Rama's mother.



55. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BELGAUM

November 8, 1920

My REVERED¹ SISTERS,

In this holy temple², I have been sanctified by the *darshan* of you all. What makes me especially happy is your having expressed eagerness to see my friend Shaukat Ali as well. We had all been tired and were resting for a while but, when I heard that you wanted Shaukat Ali also to be brought along, I sent for him. I see in this expression of goodwill an assurance of India's success, for I know that, so long as our Hindu women do not look upon Muslims as our brethren, the days of our misfortune will not be over. Sitting in this temple, I do not want to hurt your religious sentiments in any way. I am a *sanatani* Hindu, but I have learnt from Hinduism that one should not disrespect or despise the religion of anyone else. I have also realized that, till we have learnt to cherish love for people of all other religions and for all our neighbours, we shall not succeed in our efforts for the country's welfare. I have not come here to tell you that you should change and permit people to eat in the company of Muslims or marry among them, but I have certainly come to tell you that we should bear love to every human being. I pray that you teach your children to love members of other faiths.

I also ask of you that you understand the state of national affairs in the country. For this, you do not need to be highly educated or to read any big books. I want to tell you that our Government rules like a monster. The condition is the same today as in *Ravanarajya* of old; the Government has deeply wounded the feelings of our Muslim brethren, has perpetrated terrible atrocities on men, women and children in the Punjab and, even after all this, it does not acknowledge its error, does not repent; on the contrary, it asks us to forget the cruelties. That is why I liken this Government to the rule of a monster. Our men and women should now resort to non-co-operation



with the Government, much like Sita's or Ramachandra's non-co-operation with Ravana. The latter held out inducements to Sita, sent her various good things to eat, but she disregarded them all and practised the most rigorous *tapascharya* to be free from the clutches of Ravana. Until she was free from his hands, she would wear no fine dresses or ornaments. ...

Navajivan, 28-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XVIII, pp.453-55

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1. *Pratasmraniya*, literally, worthy of remembrance in morning prayers.
 2. Maruti temple.



56. TO WOMEN

I started begging for money at Dakor and, fortunately, I made a beginning with women.¹ Among them, the sister who first gave me a piece of jewellery made a living by grinding flour for others. When she took off her ear-ring and handed it over to me, that same moment I was convinced that India's women had understood the holy nature of peaceful non-co-operation. The experiences which followed were marvellous indeed. Girls in Ahmedabad parted with their bangles, rings and chains. In Poona, they literally showered jewellery on me. There were similar scenes in Belgaum, Dharwar and Hubli. Muslim women in Delhi, from behind their purdah, gave jewellery, currency notes and cash.

When the women in the country have woken up, who can hinder swaraj? Dharma has always been preserved through women. Nations have won their independence because women had brave men for sons. By preserving purity of character, they have kept dharma alive. There have been women who sacrificed their all and saved the people. When women, who have done all this, have become alive to the suffering of the country, how long can that suffering last?

The women among whom I see this awakening cannot be described as educated, but they have understanding. They fully understand the obligations of dharma. What the educated classes take a long time to see, the women, with their gift of intuition, have understood at a mere hint. They have not taken long to realize that swaraj means *Ramarajya*.

Everything has been put clearly before them. The nature of the [country's] suffering has been explained. They have also been told that the remedy for this suffering is non-co-operation, and also what non-co-operation means. They have realized their duty in helping to preserve Hindu-Muslim unity, while everyone understands and remains faithful to her own religion.



If women keep up what they have so wisely begun, I am sure we can provide education for the whole country with the help of the jewellery which they can spare. The women who have offered their ornaments have done so on the understanding that they will not ask them to be replaced before we have got swaraj, but will do without them. Thus, with a little sacrifice of jewellery on women's part, we can arrange for the country's education and promote swadeshi. I hope, therefore, that they will continue the great *yajna*² which commenced at Dakor and that the husbands or other relatives will not restrain any of them in this sacred effort.

Navajivan, 28-11-1920 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XIX, pp.39-40

1. A centre of pilgrimage in Gujarat. The reference is to Gandhiji's visit to it; *vide CWMG*, Vol. XVIII, pp.390-1 & 394-5.

2. Sacrifice.



57. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, ALLAHABAD

November 29, 1920

Mahatmaji appealed to the ladies not to neglect to do their part in the country's struggle for freedom. He urged them to exhort and encourage their husbands and sons to pursue the path of duty, and urged them to help vigorously and effectively in the building up of a free India by taking up swadeshi. In the days of Ravana's government even Sita Devi had to wear for fourteen years the rough garment made from the bark of the tree. Even so, today, when the adoption of swadeshi meant a long step in the path of freedom for India, the Indian ladies should make it a matter of religious duty with them not only to wear only khaddar clothes both hand-spun and hand-woven, they must also devote one hour at least daily to hand-spinning and help in the hand-weaving of cloths. The women of India owed it as a duty to their country to discard fineries in clothes and to be simple in their dress.

In swadeshi there is an effective way to swaraj and redress of the Punjab and the Khilafat wrongs and vindication of the national honour. The main burden of the task of propagating swadeshi lay on the women of India and they must rise to the occasion.¹

The Bombay Chronicle, 1-12-1920

CWVG, Vol. XIX, pp.44-45

1. After the speech many ladies gave their jewellery as a gift in the national cause and evinced great enthusiasm about taking the swadeshi vow.



58. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, PATNA1

December 3, 1920

Mahatmaji then began addressing them in Hindi, seated on a chair, on account of his ill health, for which he begged their pardon. He begged four things of them. He and Maulana Shaukat Ali, whom he considered as his own brother, had appeared before them to beg of them some service in the cause of the Motherland. He knew that they were more humble and kindhearted than men and so he hoped not to be disappointed at the hands of their mothers and sisters.

First of all he begged of the Hindu and Mussulman ladies not to consider each other as enemies and also to teach the same to their children from boyhood so that they might not even ever think the two to be each other's enemy. By this he did not mean that the two should be one, that Hindus should take to reading and believing in the Koran, giving up the study of and belief in the Vedas and Shastras; nor that the Mussulmans should discard the Koran and begin studying and believing in the Hindu Shastras and Vedas. Everyone of them should remain firm to their religion. As there could be no marriage between a brother and a sister but all the same they could love each other, so Hindus and Mussulmans also should have love and respect for each other.

His second *bhiksha*² was that every woman should take to spinning yarn on the charkha, Those who wanted to sell that yarn might do so, but those who did not want to sell that should give it away as charity to others because of all the charities the charity of cloth was the best. India became poorer all the more from the time this charkha was given up. Women, who formerly used to live upon the charkha, were now leading a very miserable life in the bondage of slavery, breaking bricks and stones and being abused by overseers. He had come across many women in Champaran who had got only one sari to cover their body with and hence they could not go for a bath in



the Ganges when they wanted to do so. Their life of freedom, when they used to have clothes made of the yarn spun by their own hands, was no more.

The third *bhiksha* which he begged of them was that they should not allow their sons and brothers to remain in a school owned and aided by the Government as that only meant fettering oneself with the chain of dependence and slavery. They did not receive any social or religious instruction in such institutions. They learnt only to drink wine, to visit theatres and to lead the life of a vagabond. Proceeding, he said that co-operation with a government, so unjust, so treacherous to our Mussulman brethren, so cruel to our mothers and sisters in the Punjab, was absolutely impossible. How could they ever like to remain under such an administration? There could be no co-operation between Satan and God. Likewise they also could not help the Government, nor take any kind of help from it. That raj was no better than the *Ravanarajya*. He wanted to establish *Ramarajya*. In other words he wanted to have full, complete swaraj and that could not be achieved without non-co-operation.

His fourth *bhiksha* was for money. India, he said, was very badly in need of money. There were three crores of people here who barely got one meal a day. They had not got sufficient money to buy a charkha or cotton. They should be supplied with both so that they might spin yarn and thus once again spread swadeshi cloth in the country. Then again, for boys national universities must be started. And for those money was very badly needed. Proceeding, he remarked that it pained him much to see that many had gone to the meeting with plenty of valuable ornaments on their bodies. In that very country there were so many who actually starved while there were others who had got plenty to spare for their ornaments, etc. He begged of them to give as much money as they could and also those ornaments which they desired.³ But they must remember that in place of the ornaments which they would give away, they should not get others made until India had won full swaraj.



The Searchlight, 8-12-1920

CWMMG, Vol. XIX, pp.67-68

1. This meeting was attended also by Abul Kalam Azad and Shaukat Ali.
2. The thing begged.
3. In response to this appeal, many of the women present there gave away articles of personal jewellery.



59. SPEECH ON NON-CO-OPERATION, CALCUTTA

December 13, 1920

The women of India have intuitively understood the spiritual nature of the struggle. Thousands have attended to listen to the message of non-violent non-co-operation and have given me their precious ornaments for the purpose of advancing the cause of swaraj. Is it any wonder if I believe in the possibility of gaining swaraj within a year after all these wonderful demonstrations? I would be guilty of want of faith in God if I underrated the significance of the response from the women of India. I hope that the students will do their duty. The country certainly expects the lawyers, who have hitherto led public agitation, to recognize the new awakening.

Young India, 22-12-1920

CWMMG, Vol. XIX, p.106



60. BEHOLD THE WOMAN

We may learn much from the women of India. I wish the Englishmen as well as our own unbelievers in the efficacy or the necessity of non-co-operation were to witness the demonstration of the women of India in favour of non-co-operation. Everywhere they have flocked in their hundreds and thousands. They have even come out of their *purdahs* and given Maulana Shaukat Ali and me their blessings. They have instinctively understood the purity of the movement. Their hearts have been touched. They have given up their pearl and diamond bangles, their necklaces and their rings. All have come—both rich and poor—and given us their blessings and accompanied them with rich gifts, rich because of the absolutely voluntary nature thereof. They have understood, too, that the purity of the poor women of India is hidden in the music of the spinning-wheel. They do not flock to the standard of non-co-operation through hatred.

Young India, 22-12-1920

CWVG, Vol. XIX, p.143



61. HOW TO FINANCE THE MOVEMENT

If the women of India were to surrender their superfluous ornaments, if the wine-bibbers were to give up their drink and hand to the movement half their savings, if the smokers were to suspend their smoke pending attainment of swaraj and give to the cause half their savings, we would get all the money we need for bringing the movement to a successful close. ...

Young India, 12-1-1921

CWMG, Vol. XIX, p.221-22



62. SPEECH AT MERCHANTS' MEETING, CALCUTTA

January 26, 1921

In Champaran, people are dying of starvation. There is one remedy for all these and that is the charkha. If all women and girls spin yarn, then they will be able to feed themselves as the price of khaddar will look up then. If swaraj is attained then *malmal* also will be manufactured. I myself am a good workman and I can work it but I say that you have got to make thread from No. 7 to 20 and that will be used in making saris and *pathis*¹, No. 80 thread has been used in making your puggrees. It is foreign and it is irreligion. The Marwaris have given up their religion. Give up your foreign trade, not all immediately, but of piece-goods only, clear your house of foreign cloths and ask your mothers and wives to throw them out and not to wear them again. This will not cause you any loss. Send all these to South Africa and sell them there. They will be in demand there, as there are no spinning machines there. India rested on the dharma of faithful wives. Mussulman women do much work on charkhas.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30-1-1921; The Hindu, 1-2-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XIX, p.282

1. Pieces of cloth used as veils.



63. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, CALCUTTA¹

January 25, 1921

Mr. Gandhi, in the course of his address, first compared the British Government to the kingdom of Ravana, in which the wicked were happy and the good were unhappy. The present Government was, he continued, a kingdom of sin. As Rama was born to destroy Ravana's kingdom of sin, the Present non-co-operation movement might serve the same purpose. The Mahatma suggested that the mothers and daughters of India ought to take away their sons and brothers from the Government schools and colleges where education meant nothing but slave mentality.

Turning to the question of the luxury that was prevalent amongst all sections of the community, Mr. Gandhi asked them to give it up. The clothes that they were wearing were not holy. To worship one's God and Goddess they must wear holy clothes. Similarly when they were engaged in a holy battle for the country's cause they must wear holy clothes, clothes hand-woven and hand-spun.

Continuing, Mr. Gandhi said that there should be a spinning-wheel in every home and he hoped that within two or three months every home in Bengal would have charkhas. He held out to the audience the example of the family of Vidyasagar² who were spinning yarn.

Mr. Gandhi then spread his chaddar³ and wanted the ladies to part with what they loved most. He said he did not want money but wanted their sacrifice. At this there was a general whisper amongst the audience, whereupon Mr. Gandhi intervened and said that he did not want anything which they gave after anxious deliberation, but that their gifts must be spontaneous. At this stage there was a shower of gifts which literally filled up the *chaddar*.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28-1-1921



CWMMG, Vol. XIX, p.274-75

1. Held at the residence of C. R. Das, Gandhiji himself presiding.
2. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1901); famous Sanskrit scholar and social reformer of Bengal.
3. Shawl.



64. SPEECH TO POST-GRADUATE AND LAW STUDENTS, CALCUTTA

January 29, 1921

The women who surrounded me this afternoon asked me to give them a message. As I went round them asking for donations for your sake, they asked me for a message and my unhesitating message was: "Take up the spinning-wheel. Purify yourselves, sacrifice yourselves for the sake of the country," and that is my humble message to you also. Purify yourselves by withdrawing yourselves from slave-owning institutions and take up the spinning-wheel and, if you will do that, I promise you swaraj within one year.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30-1-1921

CWMG, Vol. XIX, pp.293-95



65. SPEECH AT PATNA

February 6, 1921

Girls and young married women in Bengal had come to him and told him that they could not use jewellery for they were at present in a state of widowhood without swaraj. He wanted to realize the present situation even as these girls and young ladies had realized it. ... He almost wept—though he suppressed it as they had to be brave at the present moment—when little girls came to him with their jewellery and he hoped they would make themselves as pure as these girls.

The Searchlight, 9-2-1921

CWMG, Vol. XIX, p.335



66. RAWALPINDI SISTERS

I have been receiving the blessings of sisters from Bengal and other regions for the cause of swaraj. I have seen young girls handing over all their ornaments. Those who were moving in very fine muslins in the past, are seen wearing khadi saris. When this has become a common thing, I wonder which experiences I should narrate and which I may pass over.

Rawalpindi is considered to be mainly a town of soldiers. Its residents are wealthy people. The sentiments which I observed among the women of Rawalpindi were, however, beyond my imagination. The women's rally was held at eleven in the morning.¹ Its venue was an open ground in a garden. Menfolk were prohibited from entering the garden while the meeting was going on. The sisters were seated around a dais. I was accompanied by Lalaji². The sisters sang a couple of songs composed by themselves. Quite a large number joined in the chorus. One of the songs related to Amritsar and the other was about swadeshi. This was about their resolve to ply the spinning-wheel, not to idle away time, to chant God's name while plying the wheel, to give up fine cloth in favour of khadi and to make our land happy by encouraging carpenters, smiths and cobblers. The song-leader seemed to be a girl of about twenty years. She was in a white dress. She was rich, but I did not notice on her person any ornaments except a ring. There is no custom in the Punjab that an unmarried girl or a woman whose husband is alive must wear bangles. The sisters had also brought yarn and khadi as gifts.

Our speeches were hardly listened to in the midst of all their happy chatter. They simply didn't wish to listen, since the appeal we were going to make was already imprinted on their hearts. We must end *Ravanarajya* and establish *Ramarajya*. The way to do that was indicated by Sita. She had rejected all sweets, ornaments and other temptations offered by Ravana, and the daughters of India should act in like manner.



The hearts of the poor will not pour out blessings as long as they are hungry. This hunger can be satisfied only by the spinning-wheel. The blessings of only pious women can bear fruit. Therefore, women should become more virtuous, simple and upright. These simple truths were already imprinted on their hearts. Why, then, should they listen to us? They started bringing out money and ornaments. The white-clad sister became envious of her ring. She struggled to remove it but it would not come off. Only when she had succeeded and dropped the ring in my sack did she feel relieved. The sisters spread out all around us. Some collected money and ornaments in their scarfs. Some collected money and threw it with such skill that another sister would neatly gather it in the fold of her garment. This commotion went on for about an hour and there was a shower of rupees and notes.

These sisters knew why I needed money. They knew what swaraj meant and what the Khilafat meant, and knew all about the atrocities in the Punjab. The sisters were donating money for these causes. Why, then, should I not feel confident that swaraj can be attained within a year? The fact is that I don't believe swaraj will be won by any individual. If any good deeds of India are ripe for their reward and if the country as a whole has taken to the path of virtue, swaraj is bound to come. The conditions are clear enough, but I have made them a little clearer. They are:

(1) Peace, (2) Swadeshi (popularizing spinning-wheel and khadi), (3) Co-operation among ourselves, (4) Donating of necessary funds and (5) Arrangements in every region to work in accordance with the constitution of the Congress.

Navajivan, 27-2-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XIX, pp.389-90

1. Of February 20, 1921.

2 Lala Lajpat Rai.



67. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, BOMBAY

April 10, 1921

Mahatma Gandhi said he wanted the co-operation of ladies in his task and he wanted their blessings too. But, in the first place, they must be fit to do so. It was not possible for them to bless him unless they purified themselves by wearing Indian clothes and discarding foreign ones. Unless they wore swadeshi clothes, they could not give him their blessings. He appealed to them to set before themselves the ideal of Sita; let them suffer like Sita; let them live like Sita—simply and plainly. Only then could India attain swaraj. Let them wear only country-made clothes and let them give their blessings and co-operation to the workers in the cause of their country and then they would have *dharmarajya* in this country. It was the aim of the Congress to join together, heart and soul, Hindus and Muslims to fight for swaraj. In Bengal and Orissa, women had contributed their share liberally towards the Tilak Fund. He appealed to his Parsi sisters to help liberally the Swaraj Fund. He appealed to his sisters to give their share to the Swaraj Fund.

In conclusion, he prayed to God that Hindus and Muslims, Parsis and Jews would join together and do their best for this country and do their duty.

The Bombay Chronicle, 11-4-1921

CWMG, Vol. XIX, pp.553-54



68. SPEECH AT RAJAHMUNDRY

April 3, 1921

Addressing the women in the audience he said:

You, my dear sisters, I want to warn you and to bring you to a sense of duty and religion. If there is a dancing girl amidst you, I ask you to make her life not one of shame.¹ Take up the spinning-wheel and take the few pies that the work brings you, and it will bring pies and God into your house. Do you suppose that Rama and Sita would rest for a single moment if they knew a single woman might have to sell her honour for lust of men and for a mess of pottage? I ask you to discard all your fine garments and ornaments, if only for the protection of these dancing girls. Take up the spinning-wheel for their sake, if not for the sake of India. Take up the spinning-wheel for the sake of the purity of India. Take up the sari that the charkha can give you. Let the spotless sari of India be the Protection of the virtue of man and woman in India. I ask you to consider that to wear fine foreign saris is a sin.

The Hindu, 8-4-1921

CWVG, Vol. XIX, pp.509

1. On the previous evening in Cocanada, a group of dancing girls had visited Gandhiji and described to him their life of shame.



69. IN ANDHRADESH

I must however descend from the soul-stirring to the soul-killing discoveries. At Cocanada, just after the great public meeting, on my return to the bungalow at about 9 p.m. I had a visit from some women and girls. The light was very dim as I entered. There was something uncanny about their movements and their looks. Somehow or other the usual greeting, "Do you spin? what will you give me for the Tilak Swaraj Fund?" would not come to my lips. On the contrary, I asked my host who the ladies were. He did not know. He inquired, and after some hesitation the answer came, "We are dancing girls." I felt like sinking into the bowels of the earth. My host soothed me by saying that there was a ceremony attached to the commencement of life. It made matters worse for me. It gave the damnable thing an air of respectability. I cross-examined. They said in the politest tones they had come to have *darshan*. "Will you¹ take up some other occupation?" "Yes, if it gives us our livelihood." I had not the heart to close with them there and then. I felt ashamed of my sex. I spoke straight the next morning at Rajahmundry, the next halting place. It was the one most painful experience in Andhra. I suppose the sin is common enough in one shape or another in the rest of India. All I can say is that, if we will have swaraj through self-purification, we may not make women a prey to our lust. The law of the protection of the weak applies here with peculiar force. To me the meaning of cow protection includes the protection of the chastity of our women. We will not have a regenerate India unless we learn to respect our women as we respect our mothers, sisters and daughters. Let us cleanse ourselves of the sins that kill the man in us and make us brute.

Young India, 13-4-1921

CWMG, Vol. XIX, pp.565—66

1. The source has "they" here.



70. TO GUJARATIS

I have marvelled at the awakening among the women of Gujarat. They have great power in their hands. In the programme of work for swaraj, the women's share is as great as, in fact greater than, the men's. I pray to God that the women of Gujarat may play their part to the full and win glory for themselves and for the name of Gujarat and of India.

Navajivan, 1-5-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.50-51



71. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, KATHLAL

May 4, 1921

It is not in the hands of the Brahmins, or of men, to preserve dharma. It is entirely in the hands of women to do so. The foundation on which society rests is the home and dharma is to be cultivated in the home. The fragrance in the home will spread all over society. A city may have flourishing trade and a big population but, if the homes there were not well-kept, I would unhesitatingly say that that city was not good. Women are the presiding deities of the home. If they do not follow dharma, the people would be totally destroyed. The reason why Shri Krishna destroyed the Yadava clan was precisely this, that the Yadava women had taken to immoral ways and forsaken their dharma. I urge you, therefore, to be pure and follow dharma, and pray that, having made yourselves pure, give me and Maulana Shaukat Ali, i.e., the Hindus and the Muslims, your blessing that we may win success in this fight for swaraj, in this fight for dharma.

Navajivan, 8-5-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XX, p.63



72. IN ANDHRADESH

I had my full say at Rajmahendry on an important matter, and I hope that some Telugu friend will reproduce that speech, translate it, and spread it broadcast among hundreds of our countrymen. It was at about ten o'clock last night in Cocanada that dancing girls paid me a visit when I understood the full significance of what they were. I felt like sinking in the earth below. I ask you to blot that sin out of us. It is not right that for our lust a single sister should have to live a life of shame and humiliation. In this movement of purification we are in duty bound to regard these girls as our sisters and daughters. Let us, who feel the pricks of violence that this insolent Government inflicts on us not commit worse violence by ruining the life of a single girl in India. I ask you, brothers and sisters, to send me assurance, as early as possible, that there is not a single dancing girl in in this part of the land. I charge these sisters who are sitting behind me to go about from place to place, find out every dancing girl, and shame the men into shunning the wrong they are doing.

Young India, 11-5-1921

CWVG, Vol. XIX, p.512



73. ENGLISH LEARNING

Elsewhere the reader will see my humble endeavour in reply¹ to Dr. Tagore's² criticism of non-co-operation. I have since read his letter to the Manager of Shantiniketan. I am sorry to observe that the letter is written in anger and in ignorance of facts. The Poet was naturally incensed to find that certain students in London would not give a hearing to Mr. Pearson,³ one of the truest of Englishmen, and he became equally incensed to learn that I had told our women to stop English studies. The reasons for my advice the Poet evidently inferred for himself.

How much better it would have been if he had not imputed the rudeness of the students to non-co-operation, and had remembered that non-co-operators worship Andrews, honour Stokes, and gave a most respectful hearing to Messrs Wedgwood, Ben Spoor and Holford Knight at Nagpur, that Maulana Mahomed Ali accepted the invitation to tea of an English official when he invited him as a friend, that Hakim Ajmal Khan,⁴ a staunch non-co-operator had the portraits of Lord and Lady Hardinge unveiled in his Tibbia College and had invited his many English friends to witness the ceremony. How much better it would have been if he had refused to allow the demon [of] doubt to possess him for one moment, as to the real and religious character of the present movement, and had believed that the movement was altering the meaning of old terms, nationalism and patriotism, and extending their scope.

If he, with a poet's imagination, had seen that I was incapable of wishing to cramp the mind of the Indian woman, and I could not object to English learning as such, and recalled the fact that throughout my life I had fought for the fullest liberty for women, he would have been saved the injustice which he has done me, and which, I know, he would never knowingly do to an avowed enemy. The Poet does not know perhaps that English is today studied because of its commercial and so-called political value. Our boys think, and rightly in the present circumstances, that without English



they cannot get Government service. Girls are taught English as a passport to marriage. I know several instances of women wanting to learn English so that they may be able to talk to Englishmen in English. I know husbands who are sorry that their wives cannot talk to them and their friends in English. I know families in which English is being *made* the mother tongue. Hundreds of youths believe that without a knowledge of English, freedom for India is practically impossible. The canker has so eaten into the society that, in many cases, the only meaning of education is a knowledge of English. All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been. I cannot tolerate the idea of parents writing to their children, or husbands writing to their wives, not in their own vernaculars but in English. I hope I am as great a believer in free air as the great Poet. I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave. I refuse to put the unnecessary strain of learning English upon my sisters for the sake of false pride or questionable social advantage. I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like, and then expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world, like a Bose, a Roy or the Poet himself. But I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother-tongue, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his or her own vernacular. Mine is not a religion of the prison house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolence, pride of race, religion or colour. I am extremely sorry for the Poet's misreading of this great movement of reformation, purification and patriotism spelt humanity. If he will be patient, he will find no cause for sorrow or shame for his countrymen. I respectfully warn him against mistaking its excrescences for the movement itself. It is as wrong to judge non-co-



operation by the students' misconduct in London or Malegaon's in India, as it would be to judge Englishmen by the Dyers or the O'Dwyers.

Young India, 1-6-1921

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.158-59

1. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XX, pp.161-164.

2. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941); poet and author; was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 1913; founder of Santiniketan, now a university.

3. W. W. Pearson; had worked as a missionary in Bengal; an associate of C. F. Andrews; sometime teacher at Santiniketan.

4. 1865-1927; eminent Muslim physician and politician who took a leading part in the Khilafat Movement; President, Indian National Congress, 1921-22.



74. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING IN WADHWANL

June 9, 1921

The women will not suffer as they do if they lay as much store by God as by ornaments. How can we believe that the children of the land of Sudama¹ and Shri Krishna are effeminate? The spinning-wheel will feed people and will support widows, but it will not provide means for extravagance at the time of a daughter's marriage.

Kathiawad should assure me that I can write out and present demand drafts on it any time I choose. If it will, Kathiawad can completely boycott foreign cloth in a year's time. Khadi is not a sannyasi's garb. I am not a sannyasi. I have sons, a wife, sisters and relatives of every description. I love them. I accept their services. I am a fond householder and do not profess to be a sannyasi. Khadi is a symbol of nobility. I have been asking prostitutes to wear khadi, and I tell chaste women, too, that I look upon the body as unclean unless it is dressed in khadi. Just as Sita treated the beautiful clothes sent by Ravana as of less worth than even leaves, so should we regard foreign cloth as inferior to khadi.

How can women have chains of gold round their necks? At a time like this, only necklaces of yarn or *tulsi* beads are proper. At one place, a girl gave me all her ornaments. I told her that her parents might take her to task for that. She replied that she would not ask for the ornaments to be replaced before swaraj was won. I told her that she was yet to marry. She replied: "While India is a helpless widow, how can I think of marrying and becoming the mistress of a house?" What is this but a glimpse of the Age of Truth?

Gujarati, 19-6-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.198-200

1. A poor Brahmin, childhood friend of Lord Krishna.



75. WOMEN'S SACRIFICES

The sight which women presented when I appealed to the public for funds is unforgettable. There was a regular stream of them, one following another. They rained jewellery and coins in profusion. The men also caught the infection and, it must be said, gave handsomely. While, on the one hand, so much generosity was shown by both men and women, on the other I heard that two men were angry with their wives who had offered some articles of jewellery. Jewellery is the wife's property and the husband has no right of any kind with regard to it. It is my humble opinion that men should not object if women use their jewellery to help a good cause.

But I must declare myself to have been as much disappointed in regard to the women's clothes as I felt happy over their generosity. Perhaps in no other part of India has the use of English, Japanese and French saris spread as widely as in Gujarat.

This matter deserves the serious attention of women. For the sake of India, for safeguarding the virtue of the women of the poorer classes in the country, the women of Gujarat should voluntarily put up with the heaviness of khadi saris. An exhibition of khadi, spinning-wheels and hand-ginning tools was organized as part of the Conference. There was no special novelty about the spinning-wheels, but they displayed a number of ingenious devices. While some were light and portable, so that one could carry them about on a journey, some were attractive in appearance or deserved praise for their strength. Perhaps there is nothing on which so much skill is being employed as what artisans at innumerable places are spending these days on the spinning-wheel. It is my prayer that we may succeed in making the forthcoming session of the Congress and the attendant exhibition models for such affairs.

Navajivan, 12-6-1921 [*From Gujarati*]

CWVG, Vol. XX, pp.206-207



76. TO WOMEN

SATYAGRAHA ASHRAM,

Jeth Sud 9, Samvat 1977 [June 14, 1921]

This is my last leaflet. I do not know what effect these leaflets have produced so far. If even a single class of people to whom they are addressed respond fully to the appeal, we should certainly succeed in collecting 10 lakhs by the end of June.

No other class of people in the country has shown evidence of as much awakening as the women. In the past they never attended national meetings in any great number. But now they go in their thousands to meetings everywhere. To a man of faith like me, this very fact is an auspicious sign. It tells me that we are nearing the day when we shall have the rule of dharma.

Even if other classes of people in the country do nothing to uphold its honour, women by themselves can uphold it. They have at all times preserved dharma, have laid down their lives for its sake. Women like Sita and Damayanti have endured untold hardships in following dharma.

Women, in their large-heartedness, even keep alive hundreds of superstitions and senseless practices. If these same women realize the importance of national work, is there anything they cannot do? The national treasury would not remain unfilled after that.

The late Lokamanya Tilak's name is not unknown to women, nor is his memory less dear to them. His strength of character sheds lustre on India and his self-sacrifice is a sustaining memory for the country. Gujarat has been called upon to contribute 10 lakhs to a fund for perpetuating his memory and establishing swaraj. Women can give cash and jewellery to this Fund. What should women have to do with jewellery in these times? How can they have the heart to wear ornaments when crores of Indians go



hungry and tyranny stalks the land? Was Sitaji in Ashokvatika decked in jewellery? Were there any ornaments on Damayanti's person when she went crying in a frenzy of grief in the forest? Was Taramati bedecked in necklaces of pearls and diamonds when she accompanied Harishchandra in his wanderings? To me at any rate it seems an unworthy thing to wear jewellery in these times when *adharma* prevails.

To those women who keep jewellery as provision against a rainy day, I will only say this: "If you trust God, that trust will help you more than your jewellery. Remember that there are crores of women in India who do not own even a small ring of gold weighing no more than a few grains and who have nowhere to lay their heads on. God provides food even to these. If you, too, feel no shame in doing physical work, your sacred hands and feet will serve you better than your jewellery will. God will assuredly give food to those to whom He has given teeth. No honest person who is prepared to work has at any time gone without food. It is only the lazy who feel compelled to depend on jewellery. Let women shake off laziness and also discard jewellery.

The money which women contribute will be so used that it will serve the same purpose as jewellery for it will be spent for supplying spinning-wheels to poor women and imparting the right kind of education to our children. In other words, the money and the jewellery donated by women will profit none else but women. The man who keeps his earnings and spends them for his own pleasures is regarded as a selfish fellow and a traitor to the family, while the man who puts his earnings in the family safe gets the same benefit from their use as the former from his, but is looked upon as a selfless man and a servant of the family. Serving the country means looking upon the country as one's family. Of the money which we contribute to the national treasury, too, we get the full advantage. Just as our fellow-countrymen get the benefit of the money we put into this treasury, so do we have the benefit of the money which



they put into it. Thus, the women who give any money or jewellery to the national fund will lose nothing at all.

Women can also persuade their husbands and other members of their families to help in this matter. It often happens that, owing to the extravagant habits of their womenfolk, men are not able to contribute to national causes as much as they would like to. At times, women actually stop their husbands from contributing. I appeal to them to desist from this and to encourage the men to give something. I am also not ignorant of the fact that there are many women who even urge their menfolk to give more rather than less and succeed in their attempts. Let other women follow the example of these.

It is my prayer to those women who read this leaflet to persuade others to read it. I hope that women will not be content with giving something themselves but will also induce their friends to do so.

Obtain a receipt from the centre where you pay.

Navajivan, 16-6-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.214-15



77. SPEECH ON ROLE OF TEACHERS, BOMBAY¹

June 25, 1921

Mr. Gandhi said, when he was invited by the teachers, he knew for certain that the teachers would not be able to give him much, but still he had accepted their invitation with great pleasure, because he felt, as an experienced teacher, that the key to freedom of India was in the hands of the teachers. During his travels all over the country, he had been telling the people that the key to freedom and the means of redressing their Khilafat wrong and Punjab grievances were in the hands of the teachers, both men and women. He acknowledged that the women of India had done their duty to the country in the right spirit. If Indians were poor and were so much down in the world, they were as much responsible for those conditions as their rulers. For, while it was right to say that a ruler got the subject he deserved, it was also right to say that the subjects got the rulers they deserved. He would also say, at the same time, that the people got the teachers they deserved. It was stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* that what a great man did others also did; what learned men and their rulers did, the rest of the men did. The Congress had passed a resolution asking the teachers as much as the lawyers to do their duty to their country and he was quite sure that the teachers who wanted to serve their country would never have to starve.

When he saw the large number of students being taught, and so many teachers being trained in the training college he felt sorry for his country, because he felt sure that the teachers that would be turned out from these colleges were not the fittest persons to undertake the education and training of the young generation of this country. There was so much slavery in these colleges that he despaired of the future of their country. Shrimati Jasalakshmi, who was trained in a Government college and was now a teacher in the National Girls School in Bombay, had told her experiences to him. She had to leave the college because she felt that it was impossible to preserve



her dignity and freedom as long as she continued to serve Government in that college. When an educated and respectable woman said that, they would realize what it really was to serve in the Government schools. That was one of the reasons why India was so down in the scale of nations. He had no hesitation in telling them that teachers, like any other men, had taken up the profession of teaching, because they wanted to earn their livelihood and not because it was a good and noble profession and that they were doing good to the country. Just as lawyers and doctors had taken up their professions as professions, so had teachers taken up theirs, for the sake of making money and for nothing else. Personally, he became a lawyer and went out of India, because his people thought that he would earn more money thereby. He had no intention then of doing any service to his Motherland. He had since then realized that the best thing was to serve one's country. Therefore, he had given up all those things and he appealed to the teachers to give their share of sacrifice in the great sacrifice that the country was doing now.

It was the duty of the teachers to be good and conscientious. Let them teach the boys to be good, fearless and truthful, let them make their students observe *brahmacharya* (celibacy). He was appalled at the adultery that was prevalent in India and he feared that, if things went on in this strain for ever they would never be fit for swaraj. It was not their business to imitate any other country in such matters. It was the duty of the teachers to teach their boys to be brave and truthful. The swaraj they were going to establish was one based on righteousness and not on unrighteousness. They were out to establish *dharmarajya* and they were not going to do that by means of force or other ways. When thousands of Muslims were ready to die and not to kill, when thousands of Hindus were ready to sacrifice their lives and not to sacrifice the lives of others, then they could feel sure that swaraj was theirs. With the solution of the Khilafat question the question of cow-protection would be solved.



He again asked students to observe celibacy, for in no other religion was so much stress laid on that question as in Hinduism. Indians should also give up adultery. They should consider every woman except their wife as their mother or daughter or sister. When he saw so much sin committed in this country, he felt despair in his heart of having swaraj broad-based on dharma. If they were determined on having *dharmarajya*, then their teachers must immediately realize that they had to train the boys in the proper spirit. Only when they succeeded in inculcating the right principles in the minds of their boys and girls would they have good citizens. For their *dharmarajya*, they wanted righteous men and women. But if the teachers themselves expected the students to be truthful, if they told lies to their official superiors, the students would learn that lesson from their teachers. Therefore, they had to be taught by personal example. We had to purify ourselves of our sins; we must be free from those things and not be slaves of vice.

As long as men and women realized not their duty to their country and wanted to use fine foreign cloth instead of khaddar, they would never get swaraj. If they did not entirely give up the use of foreign cloth that year then they could never get swaraj that year. They should not feel sure that simply because they might be able to collect a crore of rupees they could easily get swaraj. They had to do many things before they could realize swaraj. The money they would collect would be used for starting schools and colleges and many other things; many more things, however, remained to be done. Therefore he would ask the teachers, both men and women, to guard their bodies and keep them pure and undefiled, with as great care as they had to use in regard to their minds. They must keep their bodies pure as well as their soul. They were bound to do that. They had to give up the use of foreign cloth and they had also to teach the boys to use only khaddar on their bodies and not to wear a single piece of foreign cloth. As long as Indians did not do that the poverty of their country would never disappear. It was necessary for Indians to do so because the chastity of their



women would be preserved as they would not have to go out of their homes to break stones on roads. They should introduce charkhas into every home and they should be worked as much by the poor women as by the rich. What good would the rich women do to their country by wasting their time in reading story books, etc.? What was required now in India was the universal use of swadeshi cloth and that could only be done by means of the charkhas.

If everyone of them did their duty, he felt sure they could easily establish swaraj within that year. Swadeshi, non-co-operation and abstinence were equally important in the progress of their country towards the goal. They had to abolish the vice of drink from their midst, and for that purpose they should go to the liquor shops determined to be killed in doing their duty in persuading their countrymen not to drink. When they went to those places, they must be prepared even for their death. If a few men died at the hands of the police who were protecting the liquor shops and at the hands of the liquor-shop-owners, they would easily get swaraj. They had to be ready for their death at the hands of the men protecting the interests of the liquor merchants. Only that day he had read of the trouble at Arthur Road and he was sorry he was not there to bear the brunt of the assault.

Another thing he wanted to impress upon the teachers was this: they must teach the children, both Hindu and Muslim, to have perfectly friendly feelings for each other. We had to teach them to have perfect unity among the two peoples. It was impossible, there could be perfect unity between these two peoples unless both of them followed and loved their religions properly. It was not intended that Hindus should become Muslims or that Muslims should become Hindus by giving up their own religion.

The next thing of importance was the raising of their depressed classes, their *Dheds* and their *Bhangis*. As long as they kept down these people, the higher classes



themselves would be *Bhangis* and *Dheds*. Because by keeping them down, they dragged themselves down to their level. Mr. Gandhi did not ask them to give their children in marriage to the *Bhangis*, or eat with them. What he wanted was that these people should be treated as their brethren, as fellow human beings. So long as these people were down-trodden it was impossible to achieve swaraj.

The Bombay Chronicle, 27-6-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XX, pp.266-268

1. A meeting of teachers and students of primary schools in Bombay was held at Mandvi for presenting Gandhiji with a purse for the Tilak Swaraj Fund.



78. IN PRAISE OF THE CHARKHA

A Christian lady writes:

I shall do my very best in working for winning swaraj by the spinning-wheel. Just before I left, I succeeded in getting good wheels made. *Rathinums* we call them in Tamil. And the poor women came, and asked me to give them a wheel and to teach them to spin so as to earn a little for their living. I then remembered the word of Christ, "I was naked and you clothed me not", "I was hungry and you gave me not to eat." I hope that my Master will not say that hard word to me on the Day of Judgment. India is naked and starving. Her poor women, whose children are crying for bread, have been tempted to sell their honour in order to feed them. And the more is the pity, as India has enough of natural riches within her own borders. She is like a naked starving woman sitting by the roadside in the midst of cotton, rice and wheat fields. Why are the women of India sitting idle, while foreigners grow fat on her produce? Because they take away the work the women of India ought to be doing. The spinning-wheel will give India work, and give the little ones the morsel of food they are crying for. And to the music of the spinning-wheel the women will sing their beautiful songs, tell their stories of old, and the beauty and the contentment of simple home-life will be renewed. If I had the gift of a poet, I would sing the song of the spinning-wheel, of its beauty and its usefulness, of its poetry and its religious value. I would sing a song of praise to God for helping us in our hour of need. I should ask all my sisters in India to take to the spinning-wheel keeping the wolf of hunger and starvation and dishonour from their door. ... But I am not gifted. The song is singing only in my own soul. What can I do then but let the spinning-wheel sing its own song, while I am working it and teaching others to do likewise?

This lady has already become a fairly accomplished and is about to devote her resources to opening a school where spinning will be a special feature.

Young India, 29-6-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XX, p.288



79. SPEECH AT MEETING OF MUSLIM WOMEN, BOMBAY¹

July 19, 1921

Mahatma Gandhi rose to address the meeting. ... He said that he had long connections with Mussulmans and that the gentleman who took him to Africa for the first time was a Muslim friend. He regarded all those present to be his sisters. All their efforts for the attainment of swaraj were meant for safeguarding their religion and there was no distinction whatsoever in his mind between the Hindus and the Muslims.

The Mahatma said that, in his opinion, all religions were good. Sometimes mistakes crept into religion at the instance of some misguided followers. Whatever was written in the holy Koran was all good, and there was truth in all religions. They all stood up for the cause of Islam and they did not want at all a Satanic raj in the world.

In the Satanic raj he could not do any good. He had received a telegram from Aligarh that afternoon intimating him that Mr. Sherwani had been sent to jail notwithstanding the fact that he was working for peace, There might arise an occasion when all good men might be sent to jail, and everybody should be ready for that occasion. In Africa, Hindus and Muslims, regardless of sex, went to jail and preserved the honour of their country. Those who were steeped in luxury would be unable to bear jail life where they would not get tea ten times a day and would not get fine clothes.

For the sake of your religion you should give up all luxury and begin to wear khadi. Until India gets swaraj and the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs are righted, everybody should regard foreign cloth as not permissible. When we get swaraj, we would be able to prepare all kinds of swadeshi cloth and so you shall have to give up all luxury for six months.



He was very happy to hear of the spinning of Mrs. Haji Yousuf Sobhani. They should all keep the charkha near them as they kept their sons in their laps. Remembering God in their heart, they should spin on the charkha for the sake of swaraj and Khilafat at least for some hours every day. By the charkha not only the honour of Indian womanhood would be preserved, but they would be in a position to earn an independent living within doors. They could do more for the cause of their country by the charkha than by the sword. Many Indians got about Rs. 8 to Rs. 15 a month which was not quite sufficient for the maintenance of their families, In Bijapur, Bahen Ganga introduced two thousand charkhas into the homes of poor Indians, and as a result of this they were getting good and commendable hand-spun yarn from that place and they (the poor Indians) were earning thereby an independent living.

Continuing, the Mahatma said that they could manufacture the best Dacca muslin formerly, but owing to the present Government, their weavers were in a sorry plight and were quite unable to do their professional work. They should not go to Manchester for fine cloth. One Indian woman had given him an embroidered sari weighing about twelve seers and if they could wear saris of such weight, why could they not wear saris made of khaddar? Women could undergo greater pains and trouble than men and therefore nothing prevented them from the free use of the khadi. Mrs. Mazhar-ul-Hug gave him four bangles of diamond. Such a sacrifice showed that swaraj was coming nearer for women loved their ornaments very much. That woman was beautiful who had got in her heart the idea of God. They should give up all outward signs of beauty. They should not go to Japan, France and China for fine cloth. They should all pray for the success of Hindus and Muslims, but their prayers would be effective when they had pure hearts and bodies covered with swadeshi cloth. That was a difficult resolution. But if they once determined to resort to it, it would be very easy indeed.



Concluding, the Mahatma exhorted those present by saying that they either should burn foreign cloth or send it to Smyrna. He thanked them for inviting him and giving him a patient hearing.

The Bombay Chronicle, 20-7-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XX, pp.396-98

1. The meeting, attended by over 500 Muslim women, was held at Nepean Sea Road, in the afternoon. Gandhiji spoke in Hindustani.



80. POSITION OF WOMEN

Shrimati Saraladevi of Katak writes:

Don't you admit that the treatment of women is as bad a disease as untouchability itself? The attitude of the young 'nationalists' I have come in contact with is beastly in ninety cases out of a hundred. How many of the non-co-operators in India do not regard women as objects of enjoyment? Is that essential condition of success—self-purification—possible without a change of attitude towards women?

I am unable to subscribe that the treatment of women is a 'disease as bad as untouchability'. Shrimati Saraladevi has grossly exaggerated the evil. Nor can the charge levelled against the non-co-operators of mere gratification of lust be sustained. A cause can only lose by exaggeration. At the same time, have no difficulty about subscribing to the proposition that, in order to fit ourselves for true swaraj, men must cultivate much greater respect than they have for woman and her purity. Mr. Andrews has struck a much truer note than this lady, when he tells us in burning language that we dare not gloat over the shame of our fallen sisters. That any non-co-operator could have been found willing to relate with gusto that there were some of these erring sisters who reserved themselves for non-co-operators is a degrading thought. There can be no distinction between co-operators and non-co-operators in this matter of vital importance for our moral well-being. All of us men must hang our heads in shame, so long as there is a single woman whom we dedicate to our lust. I will far rather see the race of man extinct than that we should become less than beasts by making the noblest of God's creation the object of our lust. But this is not a problem merely for India. It is a world problem. And if I preach against the modern artificial life of sensual enjoyment, and ask men and women to go back to the simple life epitomized in the charkha, I do so because I know that without an intelligent return to simplicity, there is no escape from our descent to a state lower than brutality. I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child-marriages. I shudder to see a child



widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed with brutal indifference contracts another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young men of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realize the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation.

To illustrate what I mean, let me relate the enchanting description a valued Mussulman friend gave me of a talk he had with a noted feminist in London. He was attending a meeting of feminists. A lady friend was surprised to find a Mussulman at such a meeting! She inquired how he found himself there. The friend said he had two major and two minor reasons for so doing. His father died when he was an infant. He owed all he was in life to his mother. Then he was married to a woman who was a real partner in life. And he had no sons but four daughters—all minors—in whom as a father he was deeply interested. Was it any wonder that he was a feminist? He went on, Mussulmans were accused of indifference to women. There never was a grosser libel uttered. The law of Islam gave equal rights to women. He thought that man for his lust had degraded woman. Instead of adoring the soul within her, he had set about adoring her body, and he had succeeded so well in his design, that woman today did not know that she had begun to hug her bodily adornment which was almost a sign of her slavery. He added with his voice almost choked, if it was not so, how could it be that the fallen sisters delighted most in the embellishment of the body? Had we (men) not crushed the very soul out of them? No, he said regaining self-possession, he wanted not only the mechanical freedom for women, he wanted also to break down the shackles that bound her of her own will. And so he had intended to bring up his daughters to an independent calling.



I need not pursue the ennobling conversation any further. I want my fair correspondent to ponder over the central idea of the Mussulman friend's discourse and tackle the problem. Woman must cease to consider herself the object of man's lust. The remedy is more in her hands than man's. She must refuse to adorn herself for men including her husband, if she will be an equal partner with man. I cannot imagine Sita ever wasting a single moment on pleasing Rama by physical charms.

Young India, 21-7-1921

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.409-11



81. TO THE WOMEN OF INDIA

DEAR SISTERS,

The All-India Congress Committee has come to a momentous decision in fixing the 30th September next as the final date for completing the boycott of foreign cloth begun by the sacrificial fire lit on the 31st July in Bombay in memory of Lokamanya Tilak. I was accorded the privilege of setting fire to the huge pile containing costly saris and other dresses which you have hitherto considered fine and beautiful. I feel that it was right and wise on the part of the sisters who gave their costly clothing. Its destruction was the most economical use you could have made of it, even as destruction of plague-infected articles is their most economical and best use. It was a necessary surgical operation designed to avert more serious complaints in the body politic.

The women of India have during the past twelve months worked wonders on behalf of the motherland. You have silently worked away as angels of mercy. You have parted with your cash and your fine jewellery. You have wandered from house to house to make collections. Some of you have even assisted in picketing. Some of you who were used to fine dresses of variegated colours and had a number of changes during the day have now adopted the white and spotless but heavy khadi sari reminding one of a woman's innate purity. You have done all this for the sake of India, for the sake of Khilafat, for the sake of the Punjab. There is no guile about your word or work. Yours is the purest sacrifice untainted by anger or hate. Let me confess to you that your spontaneous and loving response all over India has convinced me that God is with us. No other proof of our struggle being one of self-purification is needed than that lakhs of India's women are actively helping it.

Having given much, more is now required of you. Men bore the principal share of the subscriptions to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. But completion of the swadeshi



programme is possible only if you give the largest share. Boycott is impossible *unless you will surrender the whole of your foreign clothing*. So long as the taste persists, so long is complete renunciation impossible. And boycott means complete renunciation. We must be prepared to be satisfied with such cloth as India can produce, even as we are thankfully content with such children as God gives us. I have not known a mother throwing away her baby even though it may appear ugly to an outsider. So should it be with the patriotic women of India about Indian manufactures. And for you, only hand-spun and hand-woven can be regarded as Indian manufactures. During the transition stage you can only get coarse khadi in abundance. You may add all the art to it that your taste allows or requires. And if you will be satisfied with coarse khadi for a few months, India need not despair of seeing a revival of the fine rich and coloured garments of old which were once the envy and the despair of the world. I assure you that a six months' course of self-denial will show you that what we today regard as artistic is only falsely so, and that true art takes note not merely of form but also of what lies behind. There is an art that kills and an art that gives life. The fine fabric that we have imported from the West or the Far East has literally killed millions of our brothers and sisters, and delivered thousands of our dear sisters to a life of shame. True art must be evidence of happiness, contentment and purity of its authors. And if you will have such art revived in our midst, the use of khadi is obligatory on the best of you at the present moment.

And not only is the use of khadi necessary for the success of the swadeshi programme, but it is imperative for everyone of you to spin during your leisure hours. I have suggested to boys and men also that they should spin. Thousands of them, I know, are spinning daily. But the main burden of spinning must, as of old, fall on your shoulders. Two hundred years ago, the women of India spun not only for home demand but also for foreign lands. They spun not merely coarse counts but the finest that the world has ever spun. No machine has yet reached the fineness of the yarn



spun by our ancestors. If, then, we are to cope with the demand for khadi during the two months and afterwards, you must form spinning-clubs, institute spinning competitions and flood the Indian market with hand-spun yarn. For this purpose some of you have to become experts in spinning, carding and adjusting the spinning-wheels. This means ceaseless toil. You will not look upon spinning as a means of, livelihood. For the middle class it should supplement the income of the family, and for very poor women, it is undoubtedly a means of livelihood. The spinning-wheel should be as it was the widows' loving companion. But for you who will read this appeal, it is presented as a duty, as dharma. If all the well-to-do women of India were to spin a certain quantity daily, they would make yarn cheap and bring about much more quickly than otherwise the required fineness.

The economic and the moral salvation of India thus rests mainly with you. The future of India lies on your knees, for you will nurture the future generation. You can bring up the children of India to become simple, god fearing and brave men and women, or you can coddle them to be weaklings unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign finery which they would find it difficult in after life to discard. The next few weeks will show of what stuff the women of India are made. I have not the shadow of a doubt as to your choice. The destiny of India is far safer in your hands than in the hands of a Government that has so exploited India's resources that she has lost faith in herself. At everyone of women's meetings, I have asked for your blessings for the national effort, and I have done so in the belief that you are pure, simple and godly enough to give them effect. You can ensure the fruitfulness of your blessings by giving up your foreign cloth and during your spare hours ceaselessly spinning for the nation.

I remain,

Your devoted brother,

M. K. GANDHI

Young India, 11-8-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XX, pp.495-97



82. OF TAMIL WOMEN

A friend writes from Tirupati:

The greatest obstacle in the way of success of our movement in Madras are our women. Some of them are very reactionary and a very large number of the high class Brahmin ladies have become addicted to many of the Western vices. They drink coffee not less than three times a day and consider it very fashionable to drink more. In dress they are no better, they have given up the homely cheap cloth and are running after costly foreign cloth. In the matter of jewels, Brahmin ladies excel all others, Among Brahmins, *Shri Vaishnava* ladies are the worst sinners. When men are trying to return to a purer life, our ladies are becoming extravagant. While going to temples to worship God, they cannot think of a plain, simple dress. They must wear the costliest jewels available and still more costly laces. I know of many honest women who refuse to go to temples because they have not got rich clothes and costly jewels.

I am loth to think that what the friend who is himself a non-co-operating *Vaishnava* pleader says is all true. And I am inclined to disbelieve the statement that the Tamil sisters are worse than the rest in the matter of love of gaudiness. All the same, his letter ought to serve as a warning to the Tamil sisters. They must revert to the original simplicity, and certainly God will be better pleased with those who wear the spotless khadi sari as a symbol of inner purity than with those who are gaudily dressed. Our temples are not meant for show but for expression of humility and simplicity which are typical of a devotional mood. There should be a continuous propaganda amongst women in the Madras Presidency with reference to the evil complained of.

Young India, 11-8-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XX, p.487



83. PLAGUE-SPOTS OF LUCKNOW

An English friend writes to me at Lucknow:

I am just writing to ask you to write a word before you go to someone in authority among your supporters here in regard to the brothels in Lucknow. I was talking to the military police this morning in Aminabad, and it seems that there are some fifty of these places in that locality frequented by soldiers (some of whom have been court-martialled as it is out of bounds)—Europeans and Anglo-Indians. He did not say anything about Indians but I heard the other day that they also go to these women. A word from you as to this debasing of manhood and lack of self-control would do more than anything else to counteract this evil. I will pledge myself to do all I can to help in the matter.

I wish I could share the English friend's belief that my word has the power he attributes to it. As I write this paragraph, the picture of the dear sisters who visited me at Cocanada after nightfall haunts me. They were dearer to me after I learnt of their shame. It was only by suggestion they could tell me what their life was. As the spokeswoman spoke to me, she had shame and sorrow written in her eyes. I could not bring myself to hold them guilty. I devoted my speech after this meeting to the necessity of personal purity. My heart, therefore, goes out to the fallen sisters of Lucknow. They are driven to a life of shame. I am satisfied that they do not go to it from choice. And the beast in man has made the detestable crime a lucrative profession. Lucknow is noted for its love of ease. But Lucknow is also the seat of a Mussulman divine. It has its full share of all that is noble in Islam. For the Hindus Lucknow is the capital of the Province where the spotless Sita and Rama roamed and reigned. It recalls the best days of Hindu purity, nobility, bravery and steadfastness to truth. Non-co-operation is self-purification, and I urge all the non-co-operators and others to deal with this moral plague of Lucknow. I hope no custodian of Lucknow's good name will remind me that Lucknow is no worse than the other cities in India.



Lucknow has come in by chance as an illustration. We are responsible throughout India for the purity and the safety of our womanhood. Why should not Lucknow lead?

Young India, 18-8-1921

CWMG, Vol. XX, pp.521-22



84. TAMIL SISTERS AGAIN

A South Indian lawyer sends me the following note:

Khadi is not as widely used in the Tamil province as in the other provinces, mainly because the womenfolk do not wear it. The spinning-wheel is not much in evidence for the same reason. Plain white cannot be worn by married women here. They can only wear dyed saris. In former times cotton was the only wear of ladies. Now, except by the poorest, cotton saris are discarded, and silk saris form the daily wear. Silk saris were at first locally manufactured at Koranadu (near Mayavaram) and later on at Conjeevaram, and dyed with Indian dyes. They cost from Rs. 10 to 30. They were only occasionally used. Lately the market has been exclusively captured by Bangalore saris dyed with German or English dyes, the least of which costs about Rs. 50. This presses on the poor Brahmin householder, especially as he has to clothe the members of his family only with these; and when it is the daily wear, he has to go in for a number of them. On marriage occasions the minimum cost of a sari fit for presentation is above Rs. 100. Many a decent family is ruined by a marriage, mostly on this account. This ruinous habit, which was confined to the Brahmins, has spread among other classes also.

Besides the question of expense, there is the other aspect of comfort and convenience. Silk is non-absorbing and heavy, and working or cooking in it is martyrdom. It is always hot here except for one or two months of the year. There is also the peculiar insanitary habit of not washing the more costly saris lest they should lose colour and get crumpled. The perspiration and smell emitted are awful.

Many a householder on the verge of ruin would feel grateful to you if you would bring about a return to economy, simplicity and comfort.

I hope the workers in Madras will deal with the evil complained of in the correspondent's letter. I dread my forthcoming visit to Madras. I share the correspondent's feeling that the Tamil woman is over-fond of her silk sari. There is no more unwholesome garment than silk in a hot climate like that of Madras. And one hundred rupees for a sari is a criminal waste of money in a poor country like India. Men are no better, for they are proud of their hand-woven puggrees, dhotis and



uparnas, little thinking that the yarn used for these things is all foreign. Strange as it may appear, absorbent khadi is cooler than the fine garments which are so prized by men. I am hoping, however, that my faith in the spirituality of Tamilians will be realized even in the difficult matter of swadeshi, and that they will perceive the spiritual necessity of complete renunciation of foreign cloth and return to the charkha. In the melting plains of Madras and Andhra, I can imagine no industry so helpful as the gentle-moving charkha. Dravida land is responsible for sending out the largest number of emigrants to a life of servility and exile. Restoration of the charkha automatically solves the difficult problem of enforced emigration. Land alone cannot support the poor peasantry of India even if there was no assessment to be paid.

Young India, 25-8-1921

CWMG, Vol. XXI, pp.10-12



85. WOMEN'S MEETING

Three separate women's meetings were held, one for Marwari¹ sisters, one for Assamese and the third for Bengalis. Of these, the Assamese and the Bengali women came to the meetings clad in their simplest saris instead of in their very expensive foreign ones. Many felt ashamed because they did not have khadi saris. The Marwari sisters were dressed entirely in foreign clothes. But Shri Jamnalalji² informs me that even they have now asked for khadi saris. Maulana Mahomed Ali's wife³ was present at this meeting, and she pleased the people by her khadi dress. She is a good speaker and, wearing a *burka*⁴, even made a speech.

Navajivan, 4-9-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXI, p.56

1. Inhabitant of Marwar in Rajasthan.

2. Jamnalal Bajaj (1889-1942); treasurer, Indian National Congress for many years; Gandhiji regarded him as his fifth son.

3. Begum Sahiba; *vide* "Speech at Madras", 15-9-1921, *CWVG*, Vol. XXI, pp.118-126 and "Notes", 29-9-1921, *CWVG*, Vol. XXI, pp.218-219 under the sub-title 'A Brave Woman'.

4. A veil.



86. FROM 'THE WAY TO SAVE THE COW'

I gathered my idea about the extent of poverty in Bihar, when I was engaged in my work at Champaran. I came to know then, that the women in Bihar had in most cases to be satisfied with a single piece of cloth; indeed, they had no cloth other than the one which they wore. They told my wife,—they felt ashamed to tell me so directly,—that if I went to their houses, I would find nothing but old, worn out and tattered rags. They also said, “Gandhi asks us to bathe every day, but if we are to remain naked after washing the piece of cloth that covers our nakedness, we can’t do so even for the sake of Gandhi.” Such is the extent of poverty in Bihar. And if these women are given charkhas to work and paid two annas each for their daily labour, I have no doubt that they will take up the work in right earnest and pursue it with energy. I have known the indigo planters get work from them at the rate of six pice per head per day, and in that place if they find that the charkha yields them two annas daily, the thing will catch on automatically without any effort at preaching.

Young India, 8-9-1921

CWVG, Vol. XXI, p.76



87. FALLEN SISTERS

There are many other experiences of Barisal worth recording. But I do not have the time to narrate all. There is one, however, which I simply cannot omit and that concerns the fallen sisters of Barisal. I shall never forget that scene. Some of these sisters of Barisal are enrolled on the Congress register and have even contributed to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. There are about 350 of them. They had written to me, asking me whether they could meet me. They wished to take greater part in Congress work. Why should they not, if elected, hold offices as well? On my return at night, from the meeting, I saw about a hundred women standing on one side. I took the hint. Very cordially, I led them to the terrace. I kept an interpreter with me and dismissed all the other men. I asked them to speak out without any reservations. There were, among them, four or five girls too about ten years of age. Some were past their youth. The remaining must have been between twenty and thirty. I give a summary of their conversation with me in the form of questions and answers.

QUESTION: I am glad, sisters, that you have come. You are as sisters and daughters to me. I wish to share your suffering. If, however, you keep anything from me, I shall not be able to help you.

ANSWER: We shall give truthful replies to all your questions.

Q: Some of you look advanced in age. Do these still follow your profession?

A: No, sir. Those of us who are advanced in age beg for a living.

Q: Does this become you?

A: Hunger drives one to do anything.

Q: Are these little girls in the same plight?



A: We have come here with the hope that you will show us some way out. None of us wishes to continue in this profession.

Q: What about those of you who are young? Are they not allured by the pleasures which this profession offers?

A: There may be a few who are.

Q: Do any of you get children?

A: Some get them.

Q: How many of you are there?

A: Three hundred and fifty.

Q: How many children in all do you have?

A: About ten at present.

Q: Are they boys or girls?

A: Six are girls, and the rest, boys.

Q: What do you do with your sons?

A: One is grown up and married to one of the girls among us.

Q: Would you entrust your daughters to me?

A: We would if you undertook to look after them.

Q: How many of you are serious about giving up your profession?

A: All.

Q: Will you do the work I suggest?

A: We know what you want. Some of us have already started spinning.



Q: I am very glad to know that. But have those sisters who have started spinning given up their profession?

A: Do we not have our debts? How can we maintain ourselves by this work alone?

Q: How much do you earn at present? You feel ashamed in replying. I can understand your hesitation. I am talking to you, but my heart is in agony. Do let me know what you earn at the moment.

A: Many of us earn sixty rupees, which comes to two rupees a day.

Q: I know that you cannot earn that amount by spinning. You should, however, give up now the many tempting pleasures in which you indulge at present. It is not you alone whom I ask to do this. My wife also has stopped wearing jewellery. There are girls of tender age with me. Their parents can afford to give them jewellery and other things and yet they dress themselves in half-length saris of khadi and wear no jewellery. So it does not pain me at all to request you to give up your adornments.

A: We shall try to make our lives simple. Some will do so immediately, and some others by and by. One of us gave away all she had to the Ramakrishna Mission and now lives by begging.

Q: I bow to that sister. It is certainly good that she has given away everything. But I find that (turning towards her) you have sound limbs; it would, therefore, be more virtuous for you to live in a simple manner by spinning. I should like every man and woman in the country who is not a cripple to feel ashamed to beg. It is now possible to say this. We have discovered the spinning-wheel, which is our *kamadhenu*¹. I would not be satisfied even with you sisters taking up spinning. You should learn to weave and card as well. If you do, you will be able to earn all you need for a living.

A: Show us the way and we shall follow it.



Q: How many of you are ready to give up your profession to-morrow?

In response to this, eleven sisters stood up at once. I asked them to think it over. They told me that their decision was final. They had already thought over the matter. The problem was how to make the thing possible. So I said:

Marriage is now out of the question for you. So, no matter how you have lived in the past, if henceforth you live pure lives the world will forget your sins. Further, you may keep yourselves aloof from the affairs of the people with homes and families, that is, can become *sannyasinis*. You can serve Bharatavarsha. You could almost clothe the whole of Barisal if a large number of you spin and weave for twelve hours daily, singing devotional songs the while. If all the women of your class in the country give up their unworthy profession and take up the sacred work of spinning and weaving, the country will prosper in no time. I hope, therefore, that you eleven sisters will stick to your decision. I am here just on a tour, but I shall commend your case strongly to the local leaders and I am certain that the local Congress Committee will help you in every way. May God bless you.

Reader! I do not know how you, whether you are a man or a woman, will think or feel on reading this. I have not described to you everything. I have painted the scene as best as I could. One can have a true idea of the reality only by seeing it. I was all the while overpowered with shame and was trying to realize the magnitude of the crime perpetrated by man against woman. These women did not choose their fallen life; it is man who drove them to it. For the gratification of his desires, he has committed a great atrocity on women. Anyone who is moved by this should, by way of atonement if for nothing else, give a helping hand to fallen sisters. As the picture of these sisters grows more vivid in my mind, the thought strikes me,—what if they had been my sisters or daughters? Why this ‘if’? They are so indeed. It is my and every man’s task to work for their uplift. This is why the music of the spinning-wheel is so dear to me.



The wheel is a kind of wall for the protection of women. I cannot think of any other thing which may serve as a support for such sisters in India. The task, however, cannot be accomplished till good men in every city take it up. In Barisal, the persons who are working among these sisters are the noble-minded Shri Sharat Kumar Ghosh and his co-worker, Shri Bhupati Babu, a lawyer who has joined non-co-operation. I merely took advantage of the ground prepared by them.

Sisters, now that you know, you too must reflect on this. You alone can reach the inner shrine in the hearts of the fallen sisters. Till you come forward to work for the emancipation of such women, efforts by a man like me will be unavailing.

Swaraj means the emancipation of the fallen.

Navajivan, 11-9-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXI, pp.92-95

1. Sacred cow which according to fable, yielded all that one desired.



88. OUR FALLEN SISTERS

The first occasion I had of meeting those women who earn their livelihood out of their shame was at Coconada in the Andhra province. There it was a few moments' interview with only half a dozen of them. The second occasion was at Barisal.¹ Over one hundred of them met by appointment. They had sent a letter in advance, asking for an interview and telling me that they had become members of the Congress and subscribed to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, but could not understand my advice not to seek office in the various Congress Committees. They wound up by saying that they wished to seek my advice as to their future welfare. The gentleman who handed me the letter did so with great hesitation, not knowing whether I would be offended or pleased with the receipt of the letter. I put him at ease by assuring him, that it, was my duty to serve these sisters if I could in any way.

For me the two hours I passed with these sisters is a treasured memory. They told me that they were over 350 in the midst of a population of about 20,000 men, women and children. They represent the shame of the men of Barisal, and the sooner Barisal gets rid of it, the better for its great name. And what is true of Barisal is true, I fear, of every city. I mention Barisal, therefore, as an illustration. The credit of having thought of serving these sisters belongs to some young men of Barisal. Let me hope that Barisal will soon be able to claim the credit, too, of having eradicated the evil.

Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. A woman's intuition has often proved truer than man's arrogant assumption of superior knowledge. There is method in putting Sita before Rama and Radha before Krishna. Let us not delude ourselves into the belief, that this gambling in vice has a place in our



evolution because it is rampant and in some cases even state-regulated in civilized Europe. Let us not also perpetuate the vice on the strength of Indian precedents. We should cease to grow the moment we cease to discriminate between virtue and vice, and slavishly copy the past which we do not fully know. We are proud heirs to all that was noblest and best in the by-gone age. We must not dishonour our heritage by multiplying past errors. In a self-respecting India, is not every woman's virtue as much every man's concern as his own sister's? Swaraj means ability to regard every inhabitant of India as our own brother or sister.

And so, as a man I hung my head in shame before these hundred sisters. Some were elderly, most were between twenty and thirty, and two or three were girls below twelve. Between them all, they told me, they had six girls and four boys, the eldest of whom was married to one of their own class. The girls were to be brought up to the same life as themselves, unless something else was possible. That these women should have considered their lot to be beyond repair, was like a stab in the living flesh. And yet they were, intelligent and modest. Their talk was dignified, their answers were clean and straight. And for the moment their determination was as firm as that of any satyagrahi. Eleven of them promised to give up their present life and take to spinning and weaving from the following day, if they received a helping hand. The others said they would take time to think, for they did not wish to deceive me.

Here is work for the citizens of Barisal. Here is work for all true servants of India, men as well as women. If there are 350 unhappy sisters in a population of 20,000, there may be 52,50,000 in all India. But I flatter myself with the belief that four fifths of the population of India, which live in the villages and are purely agricultural, are not touched by the vice. The lowest figure for all India would therefore be 10,50,000 women living on the sale of their own honour. Before these unfortunate sisters could be weaned from their degradation, two conditions have to be fulfilled. We men must



learn to control our passions, and these women should be found a calling that would enable them to earn an honourable living. The movement of non-co-operation is nothing, if it does not purify us and restrain our evil passions. And there is no occupation but spinning and weaving which all can take up without overcrowding. These sisters, the vast majority of them, need not think of marriage. They agreed that they could not. They must therefore become the true *sannyasinis* of India. Having no cares of life but of service, they can spin and weave to their heart's content. One million fifty thousand women diligently weaving every day for eight hours means that number of rupees per day for an impoverished India. These sisters told me they earned as much as two rupees per day. But then they admitted, that they had many things needed to pander to man's lust, which they could discard when they took to spinning and weaving, reverting to a natural life. By the time I had finished with my interviews, they knew without my telling them, why they could not be office-bearers in Congress Committees if they did not give up their sinfulness. None could officiate at the altar of swaraj, who did not approach it with pure hands and a pure heart.

Young India, 15-9-1921

CWMG, Vol. XXI, pp.104-106

1. *Vide* "The Fallen Sisters", 11-9-1921, *CWMG*, Vol. XXI, pp.104-106.



89. SPEECH AT MADRAS

The spinning-wheel is the symbol of the chastity of the womanhood of India. In the absence of the spinning-wheel I give you my testimony that thousands of our poor sisters are giving themselves to a life of shame and degradation. The spinning-wheel is the widow's companion.

The Hindu, 16-9-1921

CWMG, Vol. XXI, p.123



90. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, MADRAS

September 16, 1921

Under the auspices of the Sarvajanik Mitra Mandal, Mahatma Gandhi addressed a ladies meeting in Soundarya Mahal at 4.45 p.m. on Friday last. ...

Mahatmaji ... addressed the meeting in Gujarati... and impressed upon the audience the desirability and necessity of using swadeshi clothes. He felt sorry to see that the ladies present were all dressed in foreign clothes. He said that if they were offered *rotis* prepared in Japan and England they will unhesitatingly refuse to consume them however delicious they may be. In the same way they must make it a religious point not to use foreign clothes and fineries at all because they are the source of the national degradation. He advised the ladies to burn their foreign clothes and to make resolute determination to use only the hand-woven swadeshi clothes which must be prepared by their own hands. He then dwelt upon the utility of the charkha and said that it is the life-support of a widow, a companion of any forlorn woman and now it must be a dear friend of every self-respecting Indian lady. Charkha is a mechanism which does not require any great strength or skill to use it. Even a poor weak boy can work at it.

Introducing Mrs. Mahomed Ali, Gandhiji said, that the ladies should follow the example of Begum Sahiba. Her husband has been recently arrested by the Government but she did not show the least sign of fear or nervousness. She is dressed in khaddar although she has to wear heavier clothes than any of you will have to do. He said that the ladies have a fancy for fineries but they must always bear in mind that beauty does not lie in anything outward. If a woman is good and dutiful she is beautiful, otherwise she is ugly. Exhorting the audience Gandhij said that if they have any sense of self-respect and if they want to keep honour of their children and the nation at large, then they must give up their liking for pomp and show and lead a simple,



rigorous life. Sitaji, when she was a captive in the Ashokavatika was offered all sorts of fine things by Ravana but she indignantly refused to use any of them, she preferred to live on fruits and cover her body with the bark of the trees. So, as long as India is in the chains of slavery and dharma raj is not established, every man and woman of India must look down upon the foreign clothes as something really untouchable.

In the end he advised the northern ladies to mix freely with their Madrasi sisters and said that they must bring up their children properly. They must infuse bravery, courage in them.

The Hindu, 19-9-1921

CWMG, Vol. XXI, pp.126-27



91. TO WOMEN

[October 2, 1921]

DEAR SISTERS,

I have been thinking all this time about the kind of message I should send to you on my birthday, which falls today. What interest can our sisters have in my birthday? What is the reason that they know me? Pondering on this question, I feel that they do so because they recognize my love for them. They know that I value their honour and that I have shown the best means of safeguarding it. This means is swadeshi. In following swadeshi, women can do much more than men. When, in the past, the daughters of India spun and clothed themselves and others, India may have been poor but she was not as abject as she is today. It is plain to me that today the women in the country are unable to preserve their virtue as they could do in the old days. I, therefore, once again put before them the same idea.

All women should devote at least one hour daily to spinning. Realizing that simplicity is dharma, women should regard themselves adorned through it, regard as sacred whatever quality of cloth is produced from yarn spun by girls and wear such cloth for the purpose of covering their bodies.

I see, too, and I want women as well to see, that this is the only way to win swaraj.

The best way to show our regard and affection for a person is to follow his example.

My aim in everything which I ask my countrymen to do is to revive the *satyayuga*¹.



Our first task in the country is to educate women. Education will help them to safeguard their virtue. For doing this what we require is not much erudition but strength of character.

The love you have shown me today encourages me to ask you to show love of another kind by resolving to bring back the *satyayuga*. India is certainly capable of defending herself. If we decide to use exclusively cloth made in India we shall in a very short time have ensured strong protection for the country. That is why I am trying to popularize the spinning-wheel. It enables women to safeguard their virtue. There is no other occupation which will help millions of our women to spend their time usefully sitting at home. To ply a spinning-wheel does not require much of intelligence either. The country should learn to be self-reliant. It will be so when it has brave men and brave women. The courage we should display is of the kind required in satyagraha, which is superior to the courage of arms. If we can do this, we are bound to be free. Save the millions of rupees which are drained out of the country and protect your sisters.

If you are convinced that the work I am asking you to do needs to be done, come forward, for the sake of the country, to take it up.

1. Go among the poor and, wherever you find people suffering for want of food and clothing, introduce the spinning-wheel, banish hunger and help people to become self-supporting.

2. Wherever you find the surroundings very dirty, women and children disease-ridden and the general state one of moral laxity, the people should be provided with the means for a sober, clean, healthy and pure life and, in this way, be made aware of their present condition and ways of living.



3. Wherever you see the need for efforts to spread knowledge and a desire to undertake such efforts, you should provide the necessary means and should, yourselves, work actively.

For this work, it is first necessary to cultivate self-purification, that is, spiritual growth, sisterly regard for others and intellectual humility.

There is, thus, an excellent and fruitful field of work for the Bhagini Samaj², if the Samaj would take it up. The field is so large that, if it does solid work, seemingly bigger tasks will count as nothing by comparison and great service will have been rendered to the cause of Home Rule without the phrase being so much as even mentioned. In the past, when there were no printing presses and few facilities for public speeches, when we could cover 24 miles in as many hours instead of a thousand as now, there was only one effective means of propagating ideas, namely, one's work. Today, we rush from place to place with the speed of air, deliver speeches and write articles, and yet we find it almost impossible to persuade people to act as we want them to. From every direction we hear words of despair. To me it is clear that, as in the past, so in the present too we shall not succeed in impressing the people with speeches and writings as effectively as we can with work. It is my humble prayer to the Bhagini Samaj that it should attach the first importance to quiet work.

It is a huge waste if, from all these books which people read, nothing is put into practice. Try, therefore, to act upon at least an ounce of what you read in books rather than attempt to read a ton-load of them.

I do not want to name the many sciences there are in the world, but it is safe to believe that you have grasped the meaning of any science to the extent that you put it into practice.



It is not proper that we pay no attention to acting on the numerous pledges that we take. Any pledge once taken should be scrupulously kept, at the cost of one's life if necessary.

Let your life be governed by high ideals. In Rome, the ideals themselves changed, but in India we have still not forgotten ours. Whether Hindus or Muslims, we are all heirs to our forefathers. We can hope to preserve that heritage only by constantly fixing our attention on high ideals of life. With our forefathers, aspiration for goodness was the central motive of their life, but it seems to have vanished from us. Wherever we turn, we find hypocrisy. We have got into the habit of resorting to lies in every small matter. We must root that out and fill our lives with truth.

Your humble brother,

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

Navajivan, 6-10-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXI, pp.227-29

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1. The age of truth.
 2. A social service organization of women in Bombay.



92. PITFALLS IN SWADESHI¹

But it is about the women that I am most worried. We have so far kept them totally ignorant about such vital issues and it is only recently that they have started taking interest in them. Until their love of foreign cloth is exorcised from them, the cause of swadeshi will not prosper. Fortunately, there has been, within a short time, so great an awakening in their midst that I observe profound changes coming over them. It is most necessary, however, that men atone to the full for their indifference in the past. Once foreign cloth has disappeared completely from their midst, the women will not take long to catch up. But even men have not ceased to care for outward show. They have not yet completely overcome their fondness for fine cloth. Dhotis, for example, they must always have mill-made, and the heaviness of khadi seems an inconvenience. How can we expect anything from women when men themselves have not completely turned away from such things? There are, thus, many obstacles in our path of swadeshi. When we have removed them all, we are sure to see the sun of swaraj rising on the horizon.

Navajivan, 6-10-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXI, pp.254-56

1. There was a letter which drew attention to the danger posed to the swadeshi movement by people's growing interest in mill cloth in preference to khadi.



93. WHAT WILL BOMBAY DO?

The women of Bombay, like its merchants, are awake. Where shall we find women as advanced as in Bombay? The swadeshi movement can make no progress without their support, which means that we cannot win swaraj without it. We should not ask their help merely that they may give us the benefit of their presence. They are not invited just to make speeches. The country today begs of them the favours of utmost simplicity and hard work. Women will have to have good understanding and patriotism. If they do not shake off their fascination for foreign cloth and they obstinately insist on having dreadfully coloured saris, satins and muslins, what can poor men do?

Nor can women be forced to take the vow of swadeshi. If that is the only way to make them swadeshi-minded, I would rather that they continued with foreign cloth. Swaraj lies in their awakening, in the sacrifices voluntarily made by them. If women give up foreign cloth, they must do so out of a sense of duty. Muslim women should understand the cause of the Khilafat, Hindu women should understand the importance of the cow and all women should understand their responsibility for the eradication of poverty, which is a duty they owe to their neighbours. If, thus, the women in the country realize that it is morally wrong to wear foreign cloth, regard it as their duty to wear khadi and to ply the spinning-wheel every day, swadeshi will spread with the speed of wind. Bombay women can do this.

Navajivan, 16-10-1921 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXI, p.293



94. CONVOCATION ADDRESS¹

November 9, 1921

He would think of only one occasion when it would be better to kill oneself. That was when a man cast an evil eye on another woman. Another occasion was for a woman when she found a man bent upon wickedness towards her. At such a time it was better for her to immolate herself. Indian ladies were chaste even as was Sita.

The Hindu, 19-11-1921

CWMMG, Vol. XXI, p.401

1. Delivered at national college, Lahore in Hindi at Bradlaugh Hall; Lala Lajpat Rai presided.



95. WOMEN'S PART

The women of Calcutta have obstructed the gentlemen of Calcutta by trying to sell khadi and a telegram in the newspapers has announced that they have been consequently arrested¹. The company includes the devoted partner of the President elect², his widowed sister and his niece.³ I had hoped that in the initial stages, at any rate, women would be spared the honour of going to jail. They were not to become aggressive civil resisters. But the Bengal Government, in their impartial zeal to make no distinction even of sex, have conferred the honour upon three women of Calcutta. I hope that the whole country will welcome this innovation. The women of India should have as much share in winning swaraj as men. Probably in this peaceful struggle woman can outdistance man by many a mile. We know that she is any day superior to man in her religious devotion. Silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex. And now that the Government of Bengal have dragged the woman into the line of fire, I hope that the women all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves. In any case, they were bound, when a sufficient number of men had been removed, for the honour of their sex to step into their places. But now let it be side by side with men in sharing the hardships of jail life. God will protect their honour. When, as if to mock man, her natural protectors became helpless to prevent Draupadi⁴ from being denuded of her last piece of cloth, the power of her own virtue preserved her honour. And so will it be to the end of time. Even the weakest physically have been given the ability to protect their own honour. Let it be man's privilege to protect woman, but let no woman of India feel helpless in the absence of man or in the event of his failing to perform the sacred duty of protecting her. One who knows how to die need never fear any harm to her or his honour.

I would suggest to the women of India quietly but without loss of time to collect names of those who are ready to enter the line of fire. Let them send their offer to the



women of Bengal and let the latter feel that their sisters elsewhere are ready to follow their noble example. It is likely that there will not be many forthcoming to brave the risks of a jail life and all it must mean to women. The nation will have no cause to be ashamed if only a few offer themselves for sacrifice in the first instance.

Men's duty is clear. We must not lose our heads. Excitement will not protect our women or our country. We have asked Government neither to spare women nor children. It certainly did not in the Punjab during those martial law days. I consider it decidedly more civilized that the officials in Calcutta should under a legal pretence arrest our sisters in Calcutta for what they consider is a crime than that a Bosworth Smith in the Punjab should spit upon, swear at and otherwise humiliate the women of Manianwala.⁵ We did not offer our women to be insulted thus wise. But we do offer our women for imprisonment if they will arrest them in the prosecution of public service. We must not expect the Government to look on with indifference whilst the women are spreading the gospel of swadeshi and undermining the very basis of its existence—its traffic in foreign cloth and the consequent ability to exploit India's resources. If, therefore, we men allow our sisters to take part in the swadeshi agitation, we must concede the right of the Government to imprison them equally with men.

We must, therefore, control our anger. It will be cowardly to challenge a duel and then swear at the adversary for taking up the challenge. Men must fill the jails. Men must prove to the Government that the awakening is not confined to a few men but it has permeated the masses, that the spirit of non-violence possesses not merely a select number but that it possesses the best part of India. We must show by our conduct that the sudden eruption was an exception and not a symptom of a general disease. And now, when the cause for irritation is almost the greatest, is the time for showing the greatest forbearance and self-restraint. I modify the adjective by using an adverb before it. For, I do not think that the greatest irritation has yet been offered. I



can conceive occasions which may cause irritation to the straining point. If we are to gain freedom and vindicate the honour of the Khilafat and the Punjab, we must pay a much higher price and not lose equanimity in the midst of the greatest possible irritation. Let us prepare for the worst and give credit to the Government for decency by expecting the least. Let us acknowledge frankly that in most cases they are obeying the laws of war by being courteous. If they handcuffed Pir Badshah Mian and Dr. Suresh Banerjee, they have not done so in the case of the Ali Brothers, Lala Lajpat Rai, Maulana Mohiuddin or Pandit Motilal Nehru. Nor would I quarrel with handcuffing if they imposed it on all. It is a jail regulation to handcuff a prisoner. I should certainly have loved to travel to Allahabad to see Pandit Motilal Nehru and his son being handcuffed together and made to walk to their destination. I would have loved to watch the radiant smiles on their faces in the consciousness of their handcuffs hastening the advent of swaraj. But the Government did not provide any such treat. What I do not expect, what I do not want for the sake of man's dignity, is a repetition of the petty and degrading insults of the Punjab or the unthinkable inhumanities of the Moplah death wagon. But non-co-operators have stipulated for no such immunity. We have conceived the possibility of the worst happening, and under a full sense of our responsibility pledged ourselves to remain non-violent. Swaraj is within our grasp; let it not step away from us by self-forget-fulness.

With leaders in jails, there should be hartals wherever the Prince goes. No meetings are necessary to organize them. The people have sufficient training for spontaneous action. Let the Government realize that it was not force but willing response that brought about hartals. There must be nowhere any unauthorized or ill-conceived civil disobedience. Every forward step must be taken with the greatest deliberation and calmness. The people can discuss things in their own homes. The merchants meet a thousand times for business. They may easily discuss and decide matters arising out of the situation as it develops hourly. But whilst I would like hartals



to follow the Prince, I would take no risk of violence and would not countenance the slightest exercise of force or threat of it. Absence of prescribed hartal would somewhat discredit us, but an outbreak of violence would retard our progress and may even indefinitely postpone swaraj.

I hope, too, that every vacancy in the ranks of delegates will be filled and that there will be a full attendance at the Congress of members who will have made up their minds as to what they want and how they will have it.

Young India, 15-12-1921

CWMG, Vol. XXII, pp.21-24

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1. On December 7, 1921, on a charge of obstructing the highway.
 2. C. R. Das.
 3. They were released subsequently.
 4. Heroine of the *Mahabharata*; admired for her dauntless spirit.
 5. Vide *CWMG*, Vol. XVII, pp.114-292.



96. WOMEN OF GUJARAT

When Smt. Vasanti Devi Das, Urmila Devi Sen and Suniti Devi were arrested, some sisters from Ahmedabad decided to form a Volunteer Corps and court arrest. Consequently, forms of the pledge were placed before them. The first idea was to publish the list after fifty names had been enrolled. This happened before the Congress session.

Meanwhile, the Bengali ladies were released. The Government did not have the strength to hold them for long. In consequence, the publication of the Ahmedabad list was suspended, though signatures continued to be obtained. As a result of the effort, about 140 women signed up and more are following suit. Of these, three women have had some experience of jail in the past.

Of what consequence, however, are the signatures by themselves? What is of inestimable value is the firm determination which, we hope, has inspired them.

If, in this way, the signatures have value, the responsibility of those who have obtained them has also increased. And since I am the author of this idea, my responsibility is the greatest.

If it had been merely a matter of replacing one Government by another, I would never have advised women to come forward. I have seen that there is much sordid work in an effort to secure that. But, at the end of this struggle, we hope to establish *Ramarajya*¹ and the poor hope to get protection, women to live in safety and the starving millions to see an end of hunger. When the struggle ends, we hope to see the resurrection of the spinning-wheel, decrease in the poison of communal discord, eradication of the practice of untouchability so that the so-called untouchables may look forward to being treated as our brothers, the dosing of the liquor shops and the disappearance of the drink-habit, the preservation of the Khilafat and the protection of the cow, the healing of the Punjab wounds, the restoration of our traditional culture



to its rightful place and the introduction, in every home, of the spinning-wheel to take its place along with the oven.

How can women stand aside from a movement which is inspired by such great hopes? I have, therefore, been requesting women to come forward and take part in it. It is these hopes, I think, which have roused women throughout the country.

But should I, trusting to this enthusiasm, advise women to go to jail? I feel that I cannot do otherwise. If I did not encourage them to do so, that would be a reflection on my faith in them. A *yajna* is incomplete without women taking part in it. Fearlessness is just as essential for women as it is for men. I thought, therefore, that it would be good if women give their signatures and get used to the idea of going to jail. It also occurred to me that if women ceased being frightened by the thought of jail, it would be easier for men to court arrest.

But just as I have a responsibility, so also have these sisters who have made a beginning. Having given their signatures, they should start work. Women can picket liquor shops. Customers will surely be put to shame by their presence. If any women want to take up this work, they will have to carry wooden plates round their necks², like Abbas Saheb. They will also have to find out the homes of drink-addicts and persuade them to abstain. I would first suggest to the women that they should postpone the picketing of liquor shops for the present and start going round to sell khadi. Pure khadi is not available in all khadi shops. Moreover, those who have not so far thought about swadeshi will not go to these shops and will wear khadi only if it is taken to their doors. If women carry khadi with them, they can display it and thus tempt even those who wear foreign cloth or mill-made cloth to buy it. They should go from house to house and sell khadi. They should also keep a stock of khadi caps and sell these. As they go about doing this, they will lose their fear and the Government then will feel impelled to arrest them. As long as the work does not affect the



Government's revenues nor increase the people's strength in any way, it will not arrest women. Besides, it will be more fitting if women think of going to jail after they have developed capacity for organized work.

I also hope that women will fulfil the conditions of the pledge they have taken. I believe that they will remain peaceful and bear love for Hindus, Muslims and all others. But will they wear pure khadi even in their homes? Will they regard *Dheds*³ and *Bhangis* as brothers? Will they stop giving left-over and rotten food to them and cease to regard themselves as defiled by contact with them? The women who have given their signatures belong to all communities. If these women can fulfil their pledge in its true spirit, then the 140 will soon become 1,400 and this number will rise to 14,00,000.

It is in this hope and faith that I give the sacred names of these women.

Navajivan, 15-1-1922 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXII, pp.181-83

1 Rule of Rama, traditionally regarded as the ideal political and social order.

2. *Vide* "Nadiad's Effort", *CWMG*, Vol. XXII, p.183.

3. A backward Hindu Community traditionally regarded as untouchable.



97. PEOPLE'S SPIRIT

The spirit of the people of Surat, Ahmedabad and Nadiad is being tested. The municipalities in all these cities are non-cooperating in the matter of education.¹ In all three, the people's chosen representatives have, by a majority, nationalized the education being given by the municipality. The Government's action in taking possession of the school buildings cannot be tolerated.

It is for the people to see that this robbery perpetrated by the Government is not rewarded. If parents refuse to send their children to schools run in the name of the Government and teachers refuse to serve in them, the buildings forcibly taken over by it will remain empty and the funds which have been illegally confiscated will be returned. We must not get frightened by the Government's robbery but rest confident that we shall get back the buildings and the funds which the Government has taken over.

But, until then, what about the children? If the public is enlightened, we should be able to use the community buildings for teaching children; if even these are not available, we can teach them in open spaces, make them spin and sing hymns and teach them drill. In accordance with the Congress Resolution², most of the teachers should get ready to go to jail. We should, therefore, change the present system of education so that a minimum of teachers will be required. I would have no hesitation in handing over the children to the care of elderly women. They will, of course, be spinning; in addition, they will keep an eye on the pupils. If the latter have been taught good manners, they will be more respectful to these women and learn to be more courteous. The women, on their part, will be doing a service.

Navajivan, 15-1-1922 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXII, p.185



1. *Vide* "Municipalities in Trouble", 15-12-1921, *CWMG*, Vol. XXII, pp.29-31 and "My Notes", 8-1-1922, under the sub-title "Gujarat's Good Fortune", *CWMG*, Vol. XXII, pp 154-155.
2. Adopted at Ahmedabad in December 1921; *vide* "Speech at Congress Session, Ahmedabad-I", 28-12-1921, *CWMG*, Vol. XXII, p.99-104.



98. WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

Women must make their full contribution in this struggle. They served as volunteers and made the Congress session a great success. This was the first experiment of its kind in the history of the Congress. It is a matter of joy for Gujarat that this good fortune fell to its women. The experiment was a complete success and created a good impression on all. If women start contributing their share in every field of service which is safe for them, our capacity for work will be doubled.

We also know that the Government will not, as far as possible, arrest women. Men, of course, are to get themselves arrested. Women, therefore, will have to take over much of the men's work.

Navajivan, 15-1-1922 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXII, p.185-86



99. NEED FOR FEARLESSNESS

All that is needed for this purpose is fearlessness. Only those who are pure can possess it. Our minds have become so corrupt that we are always apprehensive about women's purity. In acting thus, we defame all people in the world. We regard woman as so weak that we think she is incapable of preserving her virtue, and man so fallen that his attitude towards woman can be only lustful. Both these notions are disgraceful. If our men and women are really what we think them to be, then we must confess that we are entirely unfit for swaraj. We have no reason to assume that Englishmen and women observe no restraints. Englishwomen do all kinds of work by way of service, whereas if we require a nurse, we find it difficult to get anyone who will do the work.

If swaraj is really drawing nearer, women will daily become more capable of protecting their honour. They must shed their fear. The notion that a woman is incapable of preserving her virtue is false. It is contrary to experience and a matter of shame for both men and women. There certainly are brutish men in the world who commit such crimes, but that man does not exist nor will he ever be born who can force himself upon a woman who values her chastity. It has, of course, to be admitted that not every woman possesses this spiritual strength and purity. We ourselves have brought this about. From the very start, we train our girls in such a way that they become incapable of protecting themselves. By the time the girl has become a woman, the false teaching has taken firm hold of her and she is convinced that a woman is utterly helpless before a man, whoever he may be. If, however, there is such a thing as truth and purity in the world, I wish to state categorically that woman has within her sufficient strength to preserve her chastity. The woman who calls upon Rama when in danger will surely be protected by Him. Which evil man will dare to approach



a woman who is prepared to die? Her very eyes will shine with such light that nay vicious man will be unnerved by it.

The power to die everyone has but few desire to use it. When someone wishes to dishonor a woman, when a man is in danger of being overmastered by lust, such a man and woman have a right to commit suicide. It is indeed their duty to do so. Those who have the necessary strength of mind can do it with ease. Even in the grip of no matter how strong a person, any man or woman can kill himself or herself by biting off the tongue or, if the hands are free, by pressing the wind pipe. If a person is prepared to risk death, no matter how securely he or she is tied,—tied to a tree—he can struggle himself free provided he does not mind broken bones. The strong overpower the weak because the latter cling to life and, therefore, do not resist to the point of death. A black ant sitting on a lump of jaggery will rather let its leg be broken than allow itself to be dragged away from it. If a child pulls very hard, its parents let go of its hand for fear that the arm may get dislocated. Every person has the strength necessary to let any limb of his be broken, but he cannot endure the resulting pain, the pain of dying. It is, however, the duty of every man or woman fighting for freedom to be ready to suffer this pain. If we pray to God daily for such strength, we shall surely receive it. I urge every sister to pray thus on arising every morning: “O God, keep me pure, give me strength to preserve my chastity, strength to preserve it even at the cost of my life. With Thee as my Protector, whom need I fear?” Such a prayer made with a pure mind will surely protect every woman.

BUT WHAT ABOUT MEN?

As I discuss this matter, I feel ashamed of being a man. Is man, who was born of woman, whose mother carried him for nine months, for whom she suffered pain, who slept only after putting him to sleep and ate only after she had fed him, -- is man born on enemy of that mother's kind that they should live in fear of him? A woman does



not run away from a tiger; she runs away only from man's lust. I have already pleaded with women. I wish to plead with men as well. Is not a man bound to remove the fears of women, of whom his mother was one? Should he not always pray: "Take my life before I cast lustful eyes upon any woman. If I ever incline to immorality, give me the strength to kill myself. Remove from me all uncleanness so that no woman will fear me but will feel safe with me as with a brother"? I pray to God that, as long as our men are incapable of protecting our women, He should keep us in slavery. If in a country the men do not protect the women, they are not men at all and are fit only to remain slaves.

MY HOPE

But I am confident that in India both men and women know the limits they should observe. Both have tasted the sweetness of purity. The girl volunteer whom I saw was without fear. I was filled with joy to see a girl standing fearlessly near the Ellis Bridge and selling khadi caps. Did she fear anyone? She knew that all men were her brothers. If one is good oneself, so is the world. The women who flocked in their thousands to the Congress *pandal* went there without fear. If, therefore, women refrain from taking part in activities which are safe for them, it will be because of men's selfishness or the women's laziness or ignorance. If a woman is not allowed freedom from household chores or if she wastes her time in decking herself up or in gossiping, what service can she do to her country?

Navajivan, 15-1-1922 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXII, p.186-88



100. POONA'S COURAGE

I had hoped that the women of Gujarat would really take the lead in this matter. Bengal started, but the Government did not take up the challenge. The Poona women, by their action, seem to have created a situation in which either the Government must arrest them or repeal its law. Smt. Kelkar, Smt. Gokhale, Shri Gokhale's sister, Smt. Indumati Naik, Smt. Yashodabai Phadke and four other women set out to picket liquor shops. They were removed to the police-station and there set free. It is clear that there cannot be even a suggestion of force in this picketing and the liquor-booths are sure to close down as a result of it. Poona's women are intelligent and strong-minded. I have no fear about the outcome of the movement which they have started. It cannot but gather momentum and the Government will have to admit defeat. The fighters of Maharashtra have accepted the method of non-violence as a practical policy and there is no doubt, therefore, that they will proceed non-violently. And where there is a confluence of non-violence, sacrifice and wisdom, there can be no result other than victory.

It now remains for the women of Gujarat to compete with those of Poona.

Navajivan, 16-1-1922 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXII, p.206



101. MESSAGE TO BOMBAY¹

SABARMATI JAIL,

March 11, 1922

I do not want Bombay to mourn over the arrest of one of its mute Secretaries and myself, but to rejoice over our rest. Whilst I would like an automatic response to all the items of non-co-operation, I would like Bombay to concentrate upon the charkha and khaddar. The moneyed men of Bombay can buy all the hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar that could be manufactured throughout India. The women of Bombay, if they really mean to do their share of work, should religiously spin for a certain time every day for the sake of the country. I wish that no one will think of following us to jail. It would be criminal to court imprisonment till a complete non-violent atmosphere is attained. One test of such atmosphere will be for us to put the Englishmen and Moderates at ease. This can be done only if we have goodwill towards them in spite of our differences.

M. K. GANDHI

The Hindu, 14-3-1922; also from a photostat: S.N. 8059

CWVG, Vol. XXIII, p.87

1. The message was sent through Sarojini Naidu who met Gandhiji in Sabarmati Jail.



102. MESSAGE TO “BHARATI”

[End of March 1924]¹

The only message that I have for men and women of India, but more especially for the latter, is that of the spinning-wheel. The non-violent movement is one to enable the weakest of human beings to vindicate their dignity without an earthly protector. Woman has been regarded as weakness personified. She may be weak in body, but she can be as strong in soul as the strongest. The spinning-wheel, with all its implications, is the weapon, in India at least, of the strong in soul. The universal adoption of that wonderful wheel robs Great Britain of her purely selfish interest in India. It is only then possible for the connection between India and England to become pure and predominantly unselfish, and therefore, for the good of the world. May the women of India adopt hand-spinning as a part of their daily duty, and take their full share in the struggle for the freedom of the weakest in body of our country.

From a photostat: S.N. 8618

CWMMG, Vol. XXIII, p.337

1. The exact date of this message which Gandhiji sent to Saraladevi Choudhrani is not ascertainable. She proposed to start a journal at Lahore in the third week of March 1924. The photostat source is also located among S.N. records and papers relating to that month.



103. SISTERS OF KARNATAK

Last week, about 50 Karnatak sisters living in Bombay came to see me. They had brought with them yarn spun by them. Along with it, they had brought Rs. 500. One of them had written a play called *Samaj Seva*. The others staged it. Admission was by tickets. The sum of Rs. 500 was saved out of the money received from the sale of tickets for the performance. They spent only Rs. 50 on staging the play.

Would not other sisters follow their example?

Not many sisters can write plays which are readable and fit for the stage and not many can stage plays either, but all can surely spin. One sister told me that Maharashtrian women were active and industrious, but Gujarati women were easy-going. How can Gujarati sisters tolerate such a charge? Of course, I must admit that I do not know of Gujarati sisters having spun as much yarn as Smt. Avantikabehn¹ succeeded in getting Maharashtrian sisters in her circle to spin. We shall certainly find other proofs of the superiority of Maharashtrian sisters if we look for them objectively. Yet, being myself a Gujarati, how can I, writing about Gujarati sisters, be objective? I accept the principle of being objective. Still I must be partial to Gujarati sisters and request them in this article to prove themselves as active and industrious as their sisters in Maharashtra. If they do not heed my humble entreaty, I shall have to believe that the charge levelled by that Gujarati sister against them is true.

Both men and women may spin, but it is the special duty of the latter to do so. Wealthy sisters may spin either for their own clothes or to help others. Poor women may spin either for earning their livelihood or to supplement their income so as to earn the expenses on food. In cities, hand-spinning will be mainly of this type. Poor women living in cities can earn more by working as labourers than by spinning. It is useless to ask them to take to spinning. It would be harmful to ask them to do more spinning



than they actually need to do and, moreover, the purpose underlying the spinning programme will not be served by doing so.

Navajivan, 27-4-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXIII, pp.500-501

1. Avantikabai Gokhale, a leading Congress worker of Maharashtra.



104. RENUNCIATION PERSONIFIED¹

God created nothing finer than the Hindu widow. Whenever I hear men recounting their misfortunes, the picture of the widow comes vividly before my eyes and I laugh at the man who bewails his misfortunes.

Self-control has been carried by Hinduism to the greatest height and, in a widow's life, it reaches perfection. Man can find a remedy for his misfortunes, which are usually the consequence of his own folly. Much of his misery is due merely to greed. But what of the widow? She, poor woman, is in no way responsible for her misfortune. Nor is the remedy for it open to her, for custom has barred that door. A great many widows do not even look on their suffering as suffering. Renunciation has become second nature to them, and to renounce it would be painful to them. They find happiness in their self-denial.

This is not an undesirable state. On the contrary, it is good. It is Hinduism at its best. I regard the widow's life as an ornament to Hinduism. When I see a widow, I instinctively bow my head in reverence. I never regard the sight of a widow as an ill omen. I feel blessed if I see the face of one in the morning. A widow's blessing is to me a gift which I prize. Seeing her, I forget all my sorrows. Man is but a clod before her. A widow's patient suffering is impossible to rival. Compared to her inheritance of ages, of what worth is a man's self-acquired wealth of brief renunciation?

If a widow suffers, before whom can she pour out her grief? If there is anyone in this world before whom she can do so, it is her mother. But what is the use? What help can the mother give? All she can do is to ask her to be patient and go and attend to her work. For a widow, her mother's house is no longer her home. She must live with her father-in-law's family. Only a daughter-in-law knows what it is to be harassed by a mother-in-law. A widow's duty is to serve others. The brother-in-law, the mother-



in-law, the father-in-law and every chance visitor—she must serve them all. She is never weary. She only prays for strength to enable her to serve better.

If this holy life lived by widows becomes a thing of the past, if this living image of service is destroyed through ignorance or pride, incalculable harm will be done to Hinduism.

How can this way of life for widows be kept alive? What share of the virtues of following it can be claimed by parents who marry off a daughter only ten years old? Can the girl who becomes a widow on the very day she is married be regarded as a widow? Are we not committing an unforgivable sin by regarding as dharma the extreme length to which the rules about a widow's life are carried? If this way of life is to be kept alive, is it not essential that the men give thought to their own duty? Can a woman, who is innocent of what widowhood means, possess a body that can follow the widow's life? Who can imagine how a girl married today feels? What is her father's duty towards her? Or, was it over when he put a knife to her throat?

It is my humble opinion that the following rules are necessary for preserving the sanctity of the widow's life, for preserving Hinduism and for order in Hindu society.

1. No father should get a daughter under the age of 15 married.
2. If a girl below this age has already been married and has become a widow, it is the father's duty to get her married again.
3. If a fifteen-year-old girl becomes a widow within a year of her marriage, her parents should encourage her to marry again.
4. Every member of the family should look upon the widow with the utmost respect. Parents or parents-in-law must provide her with the means of improving her knowledge.

I have not suggested these rules to be generally followed. They are to serve only as a guide. I am convinced that our duty towards widows is along the lines indicated in them.



Who should ensure that these rules are followed? In Hindu society, castes are the natural agencies for this purpose. But till such time as they are reformed, what should those parents do who are ready to follow these rules? They should make efforts to persuade their community to introduce reforms and, if they do not succeed, free themselves from the shackles of the caste and search for a suitable bridegroom for the widow. Both the parties should be ready to live outside the caste and appeal to its members from outside. They should do nothing which would shock the leaders, nor should they think of resorting to satyagraha; if at all they want to offer satyagraha, they should understand that staying humbly outside the caste is in itself satyagraha. If the marriage had been thought of as the only possible course in the circumstances, if the motive behind it was to live a life of self-control and if the ostracized family's life is blameless in every way, then the elders will not only take them back into the caste, but will also accept this reform and other poor widows will be spared the torture which would have been theirs otherwise.

Such reforms cannot be brought about immediately, but it is enough if their seeds are sown. In time, the seeds will surely grow into trees.

I have suggested only a minor reform. I have done this because a really big reform may seem impossible. This reform would be that, man too, like woman, should not remarry after the death of his partner. If we understand the true meaning of Hinduism, we would not reduce the rigour of a restraint which is difficult to practise, but would on the contrary introduce in our lives other similar restraints and thus practise the former more rigidly. If widowers do not marry again, widows would not feel life to be a burden, and marriages of ill-matched pairs and of children which are so common today would stop.

There is in all this one danger which we should guard against. I have heard the following argument: "The widow's customary life is a great ideal in every way. Why,



then, bother to get a few child-widows remarried? We want even widowers to refrain from marrying again. Besides, we want the custom of child-marriage also to end. It is not necessary, therefore, to encourage widows to remarry under any circumstances.” This is a dangerous argument, for it is mere sophistry. It resembles an argument put forward by some British friends: “You believe in non-violence and want us also to practise non-violence. Hence, no matter what force we use, you ought not to ask your people to resist us with force.” This is what some of them tell me. The fallacy in this reasoning is plain enough. All of us commit similar fallacies knowingly or unknowingly. The British friends who argue in this way forget that I wish to teach non-violence to both parties. But how can I advocate non-violence to those who are incapable of understanding it, who are, in other words, cowardly? I could not convince my son of the duty of remaining non-violent. Nor could I get it accepted by the poor and harassed villagers of Bettiah.² I had to tell them: “If your choice lies between running away and leaving a woman to her fate or defending her by force against a miscreant, if you cannot, resolutely, remain where you are and, looking upon him as your brother and using no force against him, oppose him with satyagraha unto death, then by all means attack him with force and defend the woman.” The path of satyagraha is not for cowards. It is only when a person has shed his cowardice and become a man that he is fit for the method of non-violence.

If we now examine the sophistic argument in regard to widows, we shall see that only widowers who are ready to remain unmarried have a right to advance it. Others who do not appreciate the idea of a widower remaining unmarried or who, though they appreciate the idea itself, are not ready to act upon it, have no right to use that as an argument for defending the custom of compelling widows to remain unmarried. Imagine a sixty-year-old man, who had remarried, cheerfully contemplating the possibility of his nine-year-old wife, so-called, becoming a widow, writing admiringly in his will about her state, saluting his poor child-wife doomed to be



a widow and saying: "If, through misfortune, I die before my most virtuous wife, my partner in dharma, I know that she will remain a widow and shed glory on me, on my and her parents' families and on the Hindu way of life. Having married this girl, I have realized that a widower should remain unmarried. I would have done better if I had done so. I admit my weakness. But a man's weakness adds to the lustre of a widow's life. Concerning my child-wife, therefore, I desire that, after my death, she should remain a widow and illustrate the glory of self-control." What effect will this argument have on that child-widow or on those who read the will?

It was necessary to examine this argument, since, under cover or in the name of loyalty to a noble ideal, many unholy practices which have the appearance of being holy are defended. The definition of a widow can have no reference to child marriages. A widow means a woman who, at the proper age, married a person of her choice or was married to him with her consent, who has had relations with her husband, and who has then lost her husband. A wife who has not known consummation of marriage or a girl of tender age sacrificed by her parents cannot and must not be included in this definition. It is, therefore, perversity to defend the custom forcing girls to submit to their so-called widowhood. But, when men advocate enforced widowhood for girls by admitting the necessity of widowers, too, remaining unmarried, they add either impudence or profound ignorance to their perversity.

Navajivan, 4-5-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXIII, pp.523-27

1. *Vide* also *CWMG*, Vol. XVII, pp.398 & 423-5.

2. *Vide* *CWMG*, Vol. XIX, pp.88-91.



105. THE LATE MRS. RAMABAI RANADE

The death of Ramabai Ranade¹ is a great national loss. She was the embodiment of all that a Hindu widow could be. She was a true friend and helpmate to her illustrious husband in his lifetime. After his death she chose as her life-work one of her husband's activities. Mr. Ranade² was a reformer and deeply interested in the uplift of Indian womanhood. Ramabai therefore threw herself heart and soul into the Sevasadan. She concentrated her whole energy upon it. The result is that the Sevasadan has become an institution without a second of its kind throughout all India. It educates nearly one thousand girls and women. Col. Maddock³ told me that it was his hospital that turned out the best and the largest number of Indian nurses. All these sisters belong to the Sevasadan. No doubt, Ramabai had in Mr. Devdhar⁴ a worker of tireless energy and great capacity for detail. But it only enhances Ramabai's merit that she had capable and devoted co-workers. The Sevasadan will always remain a living monument to her sacred memory. I tender my humble sympathy to the deceased sister's family and her many children of the Sevasadan.

Young India, 8-5-1924

CWMMG, Vol. XXIV, pp.4-5

1. 1862-1924; wife of Mahadev Govind Ranade.

2. 1842-1901; eminent judge, and a founder of Indian National Congress.

3. Surgeon-General at Sassoon Hospital, Poona, who operated upon Gandhiji for appendicitis in January 1924.

4. G. K. Devdhar; member, later president, of the Servants of India Society.



106. FAMILY QUARREL

An *Anavil*¹ gentleman, who has supplied his name and address, has this complaint to make:²

I can understand that the condition of many men must be as pitiable as this gentleman's. The relation between a man and his wife is so delicate that a stranger's intervention can do little good. Satyagraha signifies pure love. When love between husband and wife becomes wholly pure, it reaches its perfection. There is no place in it then for sensual pleasures nor for any touch of selfishness. That is why the poets have conceived and expressed the longing of the individual self for the Supreme Self in terms of conjugal love. Such pure love is rarely to be found anywhere. Desire for marriage springs from attachment, from intense attachment. When that attachment has developed into an unselfish bond and one has no desire for physical contact—does not even think of it—when one *atman*³ completely merges itself in another, we then see that one gets a glimpse of the love of the Supreme *Atman*. This is a rather crude way of expressing the idea. The love I want the reader to conceive is completely free from desire. I have not become so free myself as to be able to describe it aright and I know, therefore, that I cannot command the language which can describe it. But a pure reader will be able to imagine for himself what that language ought to be. Since I believe in the possibility of such love between husband and wife, what can satyagraha not do? The satyagraha I mean is not what is nowadays known by that name. Parvati⁴ resorted to satyagraha against Shankar by doing penance for thousands of years. Rama did not do what Bharata⁵ wished and so the latter retired to Nandigram. Rama was in the right and so was Bharata. Either kept his pledge. Bharata took away Rama's wooden sandals and, worshipping them, attained to the perfection of yoga. Rama's *tapascharya*⁶ did not exclude external happiness; Bharata's was unparalleled. For



Rama it was possible to forget Bharata, but Bharata had Rama's name on his lips continually. God, therefore, made himself the servant of his servant.

This is an example of purest satyagraha. ...

If my correspondent would forget for a while the physical aspect of love and cultivate the spiritual feeling which lies behind the love of husband and wife—I know that it cannot be cultivated by conscious effort, that it reveals itself, if at all, spontaneously—I can say with confidence that his wife will burn her foreign clothes that very day. Let no one ask why I advise such a big effort for a trivial thing or say that I have no sense of proportion. Small events bring about changes in our life which deliberately planned occasions or so-called important events do not.

I can quote from my experience no end of examples of satyagraha between husband and wife, but they, too, I know, may be misused. I think the present atmosphere is poisonous. In view of this, I would not commit the sin of confusing the judgment of this correspondent, who has put to me a frank question, by citing my experiences. I have, therefore, merely explained the highest state. I leave it to him to choose a suitable remedy conforming to it for meeting his difficulty.

The position of women is delicate. Whatever one does about them smacks of the use of force. Life in Hindu society is hard, and that is why it has remained comparatively pure. I think a husband has the right to exercise only such influence as he can through pure love. If one of them at any rate overcomes carnal desire altogether, the task will become easy. It is my firm opinion that mainly, if not wholly, the man himself is responsible for the defects which he sees in woman. It is he who teaches her love of finery, who decks her out in what is regarded as attractive apparel. Then the woman gets used to these things and, later, if she is not able to follow her husband the moment he chances to change his way of life, the fault lies with him, not with her. Hence the man will have to have patience.



If India is to win swaraj by peaceful means, women will have to contribute their full share in the effort. Swaraj will certainly stay far off as long as women hanker after foreign cloth or mill-made cloth or silk.

Navajivan, 18-5-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.74-76

1. A community in Gujarat.
2. The letter is not translated here. The correspondent had asked whether he should not start satyagraha against his wife, who would not give up wearing foreign clothes while attending marriages, cinemas, etc., though she had stopped buying foreign cloth.
3. Self.
4. Consort of Shiva.
5. Step-brother of Rama; during the period of Rama's exile, Bharata did not enjoy kingly privileges, but ruled the kingdom in Rama's name.
6. Self-suffering as moral discipline.



107. “CHHOP” OR SPINNING COMPETITION

A Punjabi friend writes thus about spinning competitions that once were universal in the Punjab and which, let us hope, will not be allowed to die out. The gentleman sends with it a drawing, made by himself, of sisters at their wheels taking part in one such competition.

About twenty or twenty-five years ago, it was a very common practice in the Punjab among women, in villages as well as in towns, to hold spinning competitions called *chhops*. Women of all ages participated in the general competition. Even small girls with their little charkhas joined as auxiliary forces. The competitors would get up so early as 2 o'clock in the morning and, taking an equal weight of carded cotton done into *punis*, they all sat to work in right earnest, the competition generally coming to an end at seven or eight to enable them to attend to duties personal and domestic. While working the machines with their hands, they sung happy and sacred songs such as the exile of Rama, *virag*¹ of Gopi Chand, virtuous life of Puran Bhagat, the melodious hum of the charkha supplying the music. The healthy and pure atmosphere surrounding the *chhops* can be better imagined than described. Alas, such happy scenes have become now very rare and it is very seldom that one witnesses them.

Young India, 12-6-1924

CWMG, Vol. XXIV, p.241

1. Renunciation.



108. THE “PURDAH” AND THE PLEDGE

When women were regarded as chattels and were often kidnapped, the *purdah* might well have been necessary. If men were kidnapped, they too might have to remain under *purdah*. In places where a man, when seen, is made to do forced labour, the men observe *purdah* even today, that is, they hide themselves. The *purdah*, however, is not the means of saving women from men’s evil eye; the only means is men’s own purity of character.

A woman can take a big hand in teaching men such purity. But how can a woman who remains in *purdah*, suppressed, teach a man purity? If she is taught to live in fear of men right from the beginning, how can she reform them? Moreover, the very fact of keeping a woman behind *purdah* has the effect of creating moral weakness in her. I believe that *purdah* helps not the maintenance but the destruction of morality. What is necessary for promoting it is education in morality, a moral environment and moral conduct among the elders. ...

Note:

At the time of the Kathiawar Rajput Conference, a thousand of women were present there. But the curtains were so effectively disposed that a stranger could not know that somewhere in the conference Pandal there were women to present.

Navajivan, 22-6-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXIV, pp.277-79



109. LETTER TO GANGABEHN VAIDYA

*Jeth Vad 6 [June 22, 1924]*¹

PU. GANGABEHN,

I have your letter. I am glad to know that you will be able to come within a month.² When we are unhappy, it is certainly better to find fault with ourselves rather than with others.

You cannot abandon your daughter-in-law. If you persuade your son and with his consent stay away for a fairly long period, she will, I believe, come round. If, however, such separation even for a short period is not possible, you must consider the unhappiness as inevitable and suffer it. There is nothing unusual if a mother lives away from her eldest son. Your son is obedient; you will therefore have no difficulty even in separation. If he provides you with the necessary money, his wife need not know it or have anything to lay against it. If this is done with perfect sweetness, reconciliation is bound to take place in the end. This is what is called domestic non-co-operation. The non-co-operation which aims at ultimate co-operation is moral.

Blessings from

MOHANDAS

From the Gujarati original: C.W. 6012. Courtesy: Gangabehn Vaidya

CWVG, Vol. XXIV, p.263

1. & 2. The addressee went to the Ashram in 1924 with her daughter's two children. In that year Jeth Vad 6 fell on June 22.



110. INFANTICIDE OF GIRLS

I have kept the following letter¹ with me for a number of days.

I have not reproduced some part of the letter which contains details. How far the evils mentioned in the letter are real—*Patidars* alone know. I am supposed to have stayed among them for a time and yet, my task being to know the good qualities, I made no attempt to acquaint myself with their defects, nor did anyone draw my attention to them.

But if the account given in the letter is true, that should put us to shame. The sinful superstition that the birth of a baby girl is inauspicious is common among us. This superstition has as its basis mere selfishness. It might well have originated in the dark ages. That people should have detested the birth of a female child in the age when virgins were being kidnapped is in some measure understandable. Today that fear is practically non-existent. Even if it were there, we are in a position to take remedial measures. If there is any reason to rejoice at a birth, we should rejoice whether it is the birth of a boy or a girl; both should be equally dear to us. The world certainly needs both. One is a complement to the other. That being so, to rejoice at the birth of one and to feel depressed at the birth of the other benefits neither. In a well-balanced society, the proportion of men and women ought to be equal.

It is common in Hindu society that the father of a girl has to bear heavy expenses on the occasion of her wedding. Perhaps this custom assumed grave proportions among the *Patidars*. There cannot be two opinions on the absolute need to do away with this expenditure. A very expensive custom only ruins poor parents and it becomes almost impossible for them to get their daughters married and consequently there arises the practice of administering poison to girls.

Navajivan, 13-7-1924 [From Gujarati]



CWMG, Vol. XXIV, pp.381-82

1. Not translated here.



111. SPEECH AT NATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE¹

August 2, 1924

Shri Chandulal has not understood what I said. This question is grave, important; it is too grave for this Conference to discuss. I was startled to hear the words of Padmabehn.² To me dancing girls are like sisters. Wherever I went, I have seen them and in future, too, I shall see them and place before them the spinning-wheel. My ideas have not grown weaker after I went to jail. I am too full of thoughts about women's education to be able to present them here. It is my contention that I have thought more about this matter than anyone else. I also maintain that this movement has brought about greater awakening among women than among others.

The spinning-wheel cannot but touch the hearts of women. That alone is their true education, the education of the heart. And what is the use of moving resolutions here about something which they are already doing? These resolutions are empty words. We do not see what grows in our own garden. Are we able to give better education over many years than that which makes a woman, who had been looked upon as uncultured and uneducated, discard her veil and come out in the open? Women's education is being carried on only because of this movement; nay, if women were not being educated, this movement would not have been possible.

The task of women's education is beyond the capacity of you, me and the entire community. To think about it is like pushing back the sea, it is like trying to grasp with one's hand the water of a mirage. To woman, the better half of man, who can impart education? What does it avail us if a few women become graduates of Karve University³? Education will not be imparted thereby. To know that a woman is more than a man is in itself true education.

We should sit down at leisure and think about it, we should discuss it with groups of persons. If you think that as Chancellor of the Vidyapith I must do something,



then I should say that the burden which Shri Chandulal and others propose to impose on us is too heavy. We have neither the resources nor the number of women required therefore. The Chancellor entertains many expectations. But what can the poor man do? One cannot educate women by spending a few rupees and opening a few girls' schools. Hence I sit quiet. Our schools and colleges are of course willing to admit girls. The Vidyapith is willing to consider a plan if someone places it before it, but it will not draw up one itself. Those who are 'experts'⁴ should take up the responsibility, present their ideas, cause a stir and join the managing committee. The Vidyapith does not want to shirk that work. But if someone presents any big plan of education connected with swaraj, the Vidyapith will certainly decline to consider it. The Vidyapith does not want to disregard this subject, does not want to forget it—I am only referring to the Vidyapith's inability. I myself am unable to give a thought to this resolution in a quarter of an hour. As a leader and soldier, I humbly request you, in order that we may not be objects of ridicule, to remove the suspicion that I have no interest in women's education and to withdraw this resolution.⁵

The credit for the work accomplished here is yours alone. You have crushed me under the weight of obligation; crush me more by implementing the resolutions. My only request to you is: do not leave the resolutions here, but take them with you. Reap sweet fruits by implementing them and feed Gujarat too with them. May God grant you the strength to do so.

Navajivan, 10-8-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XXIV, pp.503-505

1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's account of the Conference. The speech was made in connection with Chandulal Dave's resolution urging the National University at Ahmedabad to make some definite arrangements for the education of women.



2. While seconding Chandulal Dave's resolution, she had said, "What will be our plight if Gandhiji who shows great sympathy for dancing girls would thus remain unmindful of us?".
3. S.N.D.T. Women's University, Poona, founded by D. K. Karve.
4. The English word is used in the original.
5. At this point Chandulal Dave withdrew his resolution. Thereafter, winding up the proceedings of the Conference, Gandhiji made the remarks which follow.



112. SPEECH AT NATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE¹

AHMEDABAD,

August 1, 1924

I had wanted to speak at length about women's education. But this is a serious subject. In a sense, it has no bearing on our struggle. Of course, we do not want our women to remain uneducated. But what should be the method of education for them, at what point education for a girl should end and that for a woman should begin—this is a separate, a purely educational problem. At present, our approach to the problem is a limited one. For the time being I would get girls to attend primary schools and only make them turn the spinning-wheel. I have not thought about other complicated issues, though few others are likely to have made as many experiments in girls' education as I have. I have kept young boys and girls together while teaching them, and I do not regret having done so. True, I have burnt my fingers, but not too much, for I stood guard over them like a roaring lion. Please do not think, since I do not speak about the problem, that I make light of it.

Navajivan, 3-8-1924 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXIV, p.498

1. The Conference of the teachers of national schools in Gujarat, over which Gandhiji presided, was called "to organize the educational work in Gujarat and to find means and ways of producing a better type of teachers and creating a brotherly feeling and co-ordination of efforts among those engaged in the work of education".



113. MESSAGE TO “GUNASUNDARI”

The cord of swaraj is in the hands of women. At present they have lost hold of it. If they spin strong and beautiful yarn they would be able with its help to draw swaraj from wherever it may be.

MOHANDAS GANDHI

Gunasundari, October 1924 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXV, p.218



114. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, SOJITRA¹

January 16, 1925

To women I talk about *Ramarajya*.² *Ramarajya* is more than *swarajya*. Let me therefore talk about what *Ramarajya* will be like—not about *swaraj*. *Ramarajya* can come about only when there is likelihood of a Sita arising. Among the many *shlokas*³ recited by Hindus, one is on women. It enumerates women who are worthy of being remembered prayerfully early in the morning. Who are these women by taking whose names men and women become sanctified? Among such virtuous women Sita's name is bound to figure. We never say Rama-Sita but Sita-Rama, not Krishna-Radha, but Radha-Krishna. It is thus that we tutor even the parrot. The reason why we think of Sita's name first is that, without virtuous women, there can be no virtuous men. A child will take after the mother, not the father. It is the mother who holds its reins. The father's concerns lie outside the home and that is why I keep saying that, as long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country. Only those can take part in public life who are pure in body and mind. As long as women whose body and mind tend in one direction—i.e., towards the path of virtue—do not come into public life and purify it, we are not likely to attain *Ramarajya* or *swaraj*. Even if we did, I would have no use for that kind of *swaraj* to which such women have not made their full contribution. One could well stretch oneself on the ground in obeisance to a woman of purity of mind and heart. I should like such women to take part in public life.

Who shall we say is a woman of this kind? It is said that a virtuous woman can be recognized by the grace of her face. Must we then accept all the prostitutes in India as virtuous? For it is their trade to deck themselves up. Not at all. The thing needed for grace is not beauty of face but purity of heart. A woman who is pure of heart and mind is ever fit to be worshipped. It is a law of nature that our outward appearance reflects



what we really are within. If inwardly we are sullied, so shall we appear without. The eyes and the voice are external signs. The discerning can recognize virtue by voice.

Then what does it mean to be virtuous⁴? What is the sign of virtue? I accept khadi as the symbol of virtue. I do not suggest that anyone who wears khadi has become sanctified for that reason alone.

I ask you to participate in public life. What does it mean to participate in public life? Public work does not mean attendance at meetings, but wearing khadi—the symbol of purity—and serving the men and women of India. After all, what service can we render to the Rajas and Maharajas? If we try to approach the Maharajas, the sentry at the gate may not even let us in. Likewise, we do not have to wait on millionaires: To serve India therefore is to serve its poor. God we cannot see with our eyes; it would do if we serve those whom we can see. The object of our public life is to serve the visible God, that is, the poor. If you want to serve them, take the name of God, go amidst them and ply the spinning-wheel.

To take part in public life is to serve your poor sisters. Their lot is wretched. I met them on the banks of the Ganga where Janaka⁵ lived, where Sitaji lived. They were in a pitiful state. They had scanty clothes, but I could not give them saris because I had not found the charkha then. Indian women remain naked even if they have clothes, because as long as one Indian woman has to go naked it must be said that all are naked. Or even if a woman is adorned in a variety of ways but is of unworthy soul, she would still be naked. We have to think of ways of making them spin, weave and thus covering themselves truly.

At present when people go to the villages to render service, the villagers imagine that they have come to exact *chauth*⁶. Why do they imagine this? You must realize that you go to the villages to give and not to take.



Were our mothers mad that they used to spin? Now when I ask you to spin, I must appear mad to you. But it is not Gandhi who is mad; it is yourself who are so. You do not have any compassion for the poor. Even so you try to convince yourself that India has become prosperous and sing of that prosperity. If you want to enter public life, render public service, then spin on the charkha, wear khadi. If your body and mind are pure you will become truly swadeshi. Spin in the name of God. To spin for your poor sisters is to worship God. Giving in charity to the poor means an offering to God. That alone is charity by which the poor become happy. If you give in charity to whomsoever you please, it would be said that you indulge your whims. If you give in charity to those who have a pair of hands, a pair of legs and good health, it would be said that you were out to impoverish them. Do not give alms to a Brahmin because he is a Brahmin. Make him spin and give him a handful of jowar or rice. The finest sign of purity of mind is to go and work for khadi amidst such people.

The second sign of virtue is service to *Antyajas*⁷. Brahmins and gurus of today regard touching an *Antyaja* as sinful. I say that it is a meritorious act, not a sin. I do not ask you to eat and drink with them, but to mix with them in order to render service. It is meritorious to serve sick *Antyaja* boys who are worthy of service. *Antyajas* eat, drink, stand and sit, and so do we all. It is not that doing this is either sinful or meritorious. My mother used to become *Antyaja* for some time and then she would not allow anyone to touch her. My wife similarly used to become an *Antyaja*. At this time she became an untouchable. Our *Bhangis* also become untouchable when they do their work. As long as they do not bathe, one can understand not touching them. But if you would not touch them even when they have bathed and tidied up, for whose sake do they bathe then? They have no God even. They think others have the same kind of nose and eyes and yet the latter despise them. What then should they do? Think of this: Did Ramachandraji despise the *Antyajas*? He ate berries already savoured by



Shabari and he hugged the king of Nishadas, and they were both untouchables. You can see for yourselves that there is no untouchability in the Hindu religion.

The third sign of virtue is furtherance of friendship with the Muslims. If someone tells you that “they are Mias” or “Mia and Mahadev cannot get on”, then tell him that you cannot harbour enmity towards the Muslims.

If you do these three things, you will be said to have taken full part in public life. By doing so you will become worthy of being prayerfully remembered early in the morning; and it would be said that you have worked for India’s salvation. I beseech you to become thus worthy.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. VII, pp.87-90 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXVI, pp.2-5

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1. In Petlad district, Gujarat.
 2. The ideal rule of Rama.
 3. Verses.
 4. The Gujarati word is *pativrata*, which literally means “devoted to her husband”.
 5. The philosopher king of Videha; father of Sita.
 6. One-fourth of the farm-produce formerly collected as land revenue.
 7. Hindus traditionally regarded as untouchables, whom Gandhiji later described as Harijans, God’s folk.



115. WOMEN IN CONFERENCE

This Conference was a stirring sight. *Patidar*¹ women observe modified seclusion. Sojitra has a population of not more than seven thousand. There must have been present nearly ten thousand women. I have hardly known a women's meeting more largely attended even in big cities. These ladies listened to the speeches with attention and without noise. Often I have found it difficult to secure silence at ladies' meetings. This meeting was therefore an agreeable surprise to everybody including the organizers. No resolutions were taken at this Conference. Speeches were chiefly devoted to khaddar and the wheel. The Farmers' Conference lasted five hours spread over two days. The others lasted an hour each.

Young India, 22-1-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, p.25

1. A community of cultivators and farmers.



116. WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The number who attended the women's conference at Sojitra exceeded all estimates. One finds that most *Patidar* women observe *pardah*. In spite of this, the Conference pavilion was filled with women. The attendance was enough justification for the Conference. No resolution seemed to be necessary. It should be a matter of satisfaction that they listened attentively to speeches on the spinning-wheel. If a resolution had been proposed hands would have been raised but it was all unnecessary.

Navajivan, 25-1-1925 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XXVI, p.40



117. SPEECH IN REPLY TO WELCOME ADDRESS, PORBUNDER¹

February 19, 1925

I should like to tell the women that I will regard myself sanctified by their sight only when I see them adorned with khadi and know that they spin. You go to the temple regularly to preserve your dharma, but only those among you who spin will have hearts as holy as temples. I want to know from you whether you will listen to me only if I tell you about some miracles in the Himalayas. Will you say that I have lost my head because I tell you that you should have a spinning-wheel in each home as you have a stove? I am quite sane. I am wise, and have been proclaiming what I have known from experience.

Navajivan, 1-3-1925 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.173-74

1. The whole speech is not reproduced here—only that part of the speech, where he talks to the women is cited here.



118. A WOMAN'S OBJECTION

This gentleman further writes: "When I went to persuade a woman to wear khadi, she objected: 'If I wear khadi, my husband may be attracted by a woman using foreign or mill-cloth and thus lose his character.' " I cannot expect such a reply from any virtuous woman. But since the issue has been raised it should be considered. If any husband deviates from his moral course simply because his wife observes simplicity or performs her duty, then the virtuous wife should scarcely care for him. A man's character is not worth anything if he could be tempted merely by another woman's clothes. A husband who is seduced by a change in dress can also be seduced by a more beautiful woman.

My experience, however, is contrary to the statement of this woman. I know hundreds of husbands who have been delighted to find their wives in khadi clothes. Their household expenditure has been reduced and their love for their khadi-clad wives has grown. But it is also possible that this sister had no mind to use khadi and so unawares she might have raised this unworthy objection. I appeal to the sisters who think like her to take boldly to khadi and realize that beauty does not consist in dress but in purity of character, and clothes are not meant for adornment but for protecting the body from heat and cold.

Navajivan, 22-2-1925 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXVI, pp.185-86



119. AN OASIS IN THE DESERT

In the midst of complaints against Bombay in the matter of khaddar, one is glad to find that a group of ladies are doing silent and effective work in spreading khaddar. A letter before me says:

This month we are selling over Rs. 2,000 worth of khaddar vests for the work guild and schools. Moreover we have sent some to Bhavnagar. Add to this the usual money sales. A new class is being opened in the Seva Sadan¹ on the condition that only those children are to be admitted to it who are prepared to do a certain amount of spinning every day. When they have mastered the art, they are to contribute 2,000 yards per month. This is impressing the existing classes. The girls are to commence hand-spinning in some of them.

Another friend properly remarks that it is not the people that are apathetic. It is the workers, the leaders. They are doing nothing to spread the gospel. The people have not yet developed that liking for khaddar as to make them go out of their way to procure khaddar, but if it is brought to their doors, they would gladly take it. The harvest is indeed such but the labourers are few. Why will not every worker make it a point to sell a given quantity of khaddar per month? I know that we have made sufficient progress in the manufacture of khaddar to be able to supply the most fastidious tastes. I was shown the other day a rich bride's trousers. It was all made of khaddar and silver and gold embroidery. There was nothing wanting from a rich man's point of view. And the khaddar saris were as fine as one could possibly desire. There was the inevitable richly-coloured shawl too made of khaddar which the bride has to wear on her being given to the bridegroom. Let no one therefore pretend that he or she does not use khaddar because it is not fine enough or coloured according to one's tastes. Will the workers all over India please note and copy the example of the silent sisters whose efforts I have brought to their notice?

Young India, 5-3-1925

CWMMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.227-28

1. Sarasvat Hall; *vide* "A Correction", 26-3-1925, *CWMMG*, Vol. XXVI, p.411.



120. SPEECH IN REPLY TO MUNICIPAL ADDRESS, QUILON

March 12, 1925

I have fallen in love with the women of Travancore. They do not need the inordinate lengths that the women of the Tamil land require. I am glad that the women of Travancore consider themselves sufficiently elegant if their limbs and bodies are covered. Their white dress has captivated me. I hope and believe that it is a symbol and emblem of the purity within, (Cheers.) but I am distressed to find that they wear the calico of Manchester or even the calico of Ahmedabad. I ask them to copy their sisters of Assam. Every woman in Assam knows how to weave, and almost every household in Assam even at the present moment has a handloom. I ask everyone of you, man and woman, to clothe yourselves in khaddar, hand-spun and hand-woven. You will thereby place yourselves in direct touch with the poorest of the land and if you will kindly adopt the advice that I have humbly ventured to tender to you, you will find that this will be a land of plenty.

The Hindu, 14-3-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.292-93



121. SPEECH AT ASHRAM, PUDUPALAYAM¹

March 21, 1925

I have read the translation of the address very carefully. Naturally my sympathies are entirely with you. It was at Cocanada that for the first time I came into touch with this class of people and ever since that time, I have been deeply interested in their problems and difficulties. It is a very horrible thing what we are practising everyday in the name of religion. I agree that it is very difficult to solve the problem so long as there are men who are willing to tamper with the chastity of women and so long as there are women ready to sell away their honour for the sake of money. So long as there are such people, so long will this go on. But one thing we can do is to bring discredit on this profession and destroy the air of respectability which it now has. We must rob it of every vestige of respectability. That we shall do by mercilessly condemning the custom.

I would advise you to take census of every family in which the custom of setting apart a girl for prostitution exists. We must persuade these people to consider such a course as absolutely wrong. Secondly, we must take up the case of these unfortunate women and find them suitable employment. I discussed this matter for over two hours with such classes of women in Barisal, Bengal.² The income of these women is large; we cannot promise them the same income in their alternative professions as they are getting from their sinful practice; nor would they require such an income if they lead a reformed life. Spinning may not secure a living for them. They could take to it only as a recreation, as a sacrificial practice. I place it before them only as purification. But other occupations can be found for them which they can easily learn and follow. There is weaving, tailoring or fancy-work on khaddar. Some Parsi women have taken to fancy weaving. There is also lace-work, embroidery and other handicrafts which can easily yield them an income of three quarter of a rupee to one and a half rupees per day.



The *Devadasi*³ class being small, it must not be a difficult matter to find five or six handicrafts for them. We require men and women—preferably women who have been trained in these handicrafts and lead a pure life—to take up this cause of reformation of their fallen sisters. You may also study and copy the institutions with similar objects working in other places. There should be a specialist to devote his life to this noble work of reclamation.

The Hindu, 23-3-1925

CWVG, Vol. XXVI, pp.351-52

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1. In reply to a welcome address presented in Tamil by the members of the Coimbatore District Sengunthar Mahajana Sangham who had specially come for the purpose.
 2. *Vide CWVG*, Vol. XXI, pp.92-5.
 3. Literally, servant of God; a female dancer attached to a temple.



122. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, MADRAS

March 24, 1925

As you know, throughout my journey in India, I meet students, both boys and girls, but whenever I come to the South, I meet many more girls than I meet elsewhere except, perhaps in Bengal, because in Bengal the education of girls has gone forward much more than in other parts of Upper India but, by no means, so much as in south India. I was really surprised to see the stride that education among girls had taken in the State of Travancore. It was a perfect eye-opener to me. The question has always occurred to me: "What will India do with its modern girls?" I call you modern girls of India. The education that we are receiving in these institutions, in my opinion, does not correspond with the life around us, and, when I say life around us, I do not mean the life around us in the cities but the life around us in the villages. Perhaps some of you girls, if not all of you, know that real India is to be found not here in the very few cities but in the seven hundred thousand villages covering a surface of 1,900 miles long and 1,500 miles broad. The question is whether you have any message for your sisters in the villages. Men do not need the message perhaps so much as the women, and I have long before come to the conclusion that unless women of India work side by side with men, there is no salvation for India, salvation in more senses than one. I mean political salvation in the broadest sense, and I mean economic salvation and spiritual salvation also.

We may call ourselves Christians, Hindus or Mohammedans. Whatever we may be, beneath that diversity there is a oneness which is unmistakable and underneath many religions there is also one religion. As far as my experience goes, at one time or other, we, the Mohammedans, Christians or Hindus, discover that there are many points of contact and very few points of difference. Then I would like you to ask yourselves whether you have any message for the villages, for the women of the



villages, for your sisters there. I am afraid you will also come to the same conclusion as I have, that you will never have a message unless something is added to your education. It is true that the present educational system takes no notice of the village life. It is not so in other parts of the world. In the other parts of the world, I have noticed that those in charge of education take note of the masses of the people among whom these products of schools and colleges have to live and have to disperse, among whom they have to act. But in India, I have noticed that the student world is isolated from the masses of the people. I have no doubt that some of you are poor girls descended of poor parents. If you have not made that discovery yourselves, I ask you to make it for yourselves and ask yourselves whether the things that you learnt here you are able to take to them or whether there is real correspondence between home life and school life. The lack of that correspondence has appeared to be the tragedy. I have suggested, therefore, to the whole student world of India to add something to what they are learning in schools, and then you will find there will be some satisfaction for themselves and some satisfaction for the masses also and to those who will be so good as to think of the masses.

I have known that Christian girls and Christian boys, at least some of them, consider that they have nothing in common with the vast masses of people. That is mere ignorance. No good Christian nowadays says that and, I am sure, no one here in charge of your education gives you that training and teaches you that you have nothing in common with the masses. No matter to what religion you belong, I say that you were born in India, take Indian food and pass your life in India. Your life would be incomplete in more senses than one unless you can identify yourselves with the masses. What is that bond between the masses and yourselves? You may know or you may be told about the ridiculous percentage of literacy in India. You will perhaps be told that the literacy in India is on the decrease whilst higher education is increasing. Somehow or other, education among the masses is decreasing. Whereas every village



had a school 50 years ago, these schools have gone for want of patrons. The Government had established new schools but unfortunately those in charge of the educational system took no notice of these village schools. The proportion of literate people in India today is really less than the proportion that existed 50 years ago.

What is the message? I suggest the spinning-wheel because of the deep poverty of the Indian masses. Some of us know that in this country, at any rate among the masses, women have to earn side by side with the men. This is perhaps one of the few countries in the world where women do the hard task also. I am coming from a part of India where women take up even a shovel or a pickaxe. They do the work on the roads and break stones. One hundred years ago, they did not do this. Whenever social workers go to work among the masses, women surround them and ask for the spinning-wheel so that they might get a few pice. This may mean nothing to you but they mean a fortune to them. I wish that your Principal will one day take you to the surrounding villages so that you might have an ocular demonstration of what the women of India are doing. You will not then need that I should press this message home to you. You will have to take up the spinning-wheel, which is the bond that will tie you indissolubly to the masses. Let it be forever a reminder to you. After your education is finished you will not disappear from public life; you will not disappear in the household simply doing the household work but you will extend your helping hand to the poor and needy, who need all the help that can be given to them. I hope this will serve as an inestimable instrument in your hands to bring cheer into those unhappy homes where extreme desolation prevails. The historians of India will tell us that about one-tenth of the population lives in semi-starvation. Can you contemplate that with any degree of satisfaction? Can I not hope to fire you with the ambition to serve them? I see that a majority of you are Christians. Let me remind you of one saying of Jesus. He said: "It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle



than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Remembering this, dedicate the education that you are receiving for the use of the poor.

May God bless you!

The Hindu, 25-3-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.395-98



123. ALL ABOUT TRAVANCORE

HER HIGHNESS THE MAHARANI REGENT

But I do not wish to write this note in a critical spirit. For the photograph I have on my mind of Travancore is altogether pleasing. My visit to Her Highness was an agreeable surprise for me. Instead of my being ushered into the presence of an over-decorated woman, sporting costly diamond pendants and necklaces, I found myself in the presence of a modest young woman who relied not upon jewels or gaudy dress for beauty but on her own naturally well-formed features and exactness of manners. Her room was as plainly furnished as she was plainly dressed. Her severe simplicity became the object of my envy. She seemed to me an object lesson for many a prince and many a millionaire whose loud ornamentation, ugly looking diamonds, rings and studs and still more loud and almost vulgar furniture offend the taste and present a terrible and sad contrast between them and the masses from whom they derive their wealth. I had the honour too of waiting on the young Maharaja and the junior Maharani. I found the same simplicity pervading the palace. His Highness was dressed in a spotlessly white dhoti worn in the form of a *lungi*, and vest reaching just below the waist. I do not think he had even a finger ring for an ornament. The junior Maharani was as simply dressed as the senior Maharani the Regent. It was with difficulty that I could see on her person a thin delicate *mangala mala*¹. Both the ladies had on their persons spotlessly white cotton hand-woven saris and half-sleeved jackets of similar stuff without any lace or embroidery.

The reader must pardon this minute description of the Travancore royalty. It has a lesson for us all. The royal simplicity was so natural because it was in keeping with the whole of the surroundings. I must own that I have fallen in love with the women of Malabar. Barring Assam I have not seen the women of India so simply yet elegantly dressed as the women of Malabar. But let the Assamese sisters know that the women



of Malabar are, if possible, simpler still. They do not require even borders to their saris. The length needed is under four yards, a sharp contrast to the Tamil sisters on the east coast who need nearly ten yards heavily coloured saris. The Malabari women reminded me of Sita as she must have been dressed when she hallowed with her beautiful bare feet the fields and forests of India along the route she traversed. To me their white dress has meant the emblem of purity within. I was told that in spite of the utmost freedom they enjoyed, the women of Malabar were exceptionally chaste. The eyes of the most educated and advanced girls I met betokened the same modesty and gentleness with which God has perhaps endowed the women of India in an exceptional degree. Neither their freedom nor their education seemed to have robbed them of this inimitable grace of theirs. The men of Malabar in general are also just as simple in their taste as the women. But, sad to say, their so-called high education has affected the men for the worse and many have added to the simple articles of their original dress and in so doing have purchased discomfort in the bargain. For, in the melting climate of this country the fewest white garments are the proper thing. In making unnatural unbecoming additions they violate the laws of both art and health.

Young India, 26-3-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.403-404

1. Auspicious necklace.



124. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BOMBAY¹

March 26, 1925

Gandhiji said the yarn spun here was not of the requisite quality and fineness but the fault was their own, for the high hopes they had first entertained when they had met in such large numbers on the Chowpatty some four years ago were not fulfilled. He wanted 40s and higher counts if they were to supply their personal requirements as far as cloth was concerned. He had 800 counts spun in this country, and it was such fine yarn that made the Dacca mulls possible. He asked the women of Bombay to make it possible for him to realize the high hopes he had entertained in regard to khadi and spinning. He had recently toured in Southern India and had been even to Kanyakumari and had seen all sorts of people from the Maharani of Travancore downwards and he was glad to tell them that the Maharani had promised him to wear nothing but khadi, and also to spin yarn. He had seen evidence for himself that in Travancore, until a few years ago, every household spun its own yarn and made its own cloth. In Cochin the royal family was wearing khadi and also spun yarn. But how many of the women who were there that day were wearing khaddar? He fully realized that the people of Bombay could not well realize the importance of the spinning-wheel—they who spent money so heedlessly. But the famine-stricken men and women of Orissa who looked like mere bundle of bones, did realize the importance of khadi and the charkha. Even these starving people of Orissa had helped him with their offerings when he had been there to make collections for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. To starving people like these, the charkha was of greater importance than to the women of Bombay. Mrs. Naidu had informed him that the Begum of Bhopal had ordered a lot of khaddar for her use. The reason why he asked Begums and rich men and women to devote a small portion of their time to spinning was in order that they might bring themselves to the level of the poor in this country and realize to some extent at least



their trials and tribulations. In this connection he said those who endowed *sadavrat*² for the poor were really committing sin, although unintentionally.

Why were so many lakhs of able-bodied men in this country, who were well able to earn an honest livelihood, starving and loafing? It was because they had no work and could not find any work. At best the mills in India could employ a few lakhs, but not the many crores who were there starving and workless. He did not ask the women to give him any money for these people, but to dedicate at least 30 minutes a day to spinning for the sake of the starving masses. Let them wear khaddar for the sake of these poor men and women; they must give up all foreign cloth, even mill-cloth, and until they did so, they could not be free, could not have swaraj and *Ramarajya*. He invited the women of Bombay to take part in the national functions which would be held in the Congress House, which would be the centre of all national activities in this city. The women of Bombay had given him much, but he asked them to give him something more for the country and that was half-an hour daily devoted to spinning.

The Bombay Chronicle, 27-3-1925

CWVG, Vol. XXVI, pp.419-20

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1. Under the auspices of the Rashtriya Stree Sabha at the Congress House, Girgaum. Sarojini Naidu presided.
 2. Alms or charity



125. UPHOLDERS OF DHARMA

At a time like this, you should understand that you will not succeed if you try to preserve Hinduism in an unclean box. All your sacred marks on the forehead and your temples will avail you little so long as your hearts are not saturated with love for all human beings, all creatures. This explains why the women did not raise their hands against admitting *Antyajias*, a fact which shows that the virtue of pure womanhood is still alive among us. I have seen all over the country that it is only the women who follow the right path.

Navajivan, 19-4-1925 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXVI, p.481



126. OUR UNFORTUNATE SISTERS

Of all the addresses I received in the South the most touching was one on behalf of the *Devadasis*—a euphemism for prostitutes. It was prepared and brought by people who belong to the clan from which these unfortunate sisters are drawn. I understood from the deputation that brought the address¹ that reform from within was going on but that the rate of progress was still slow. The gentleman who led the deputation told me that the public in general was apathetic to the reform. The first shock I received was at Cocanada. And I did not mince matters when I spoke to the men of that place. The second was at Barisal where I met a large number of these unfortunate sisters. Whether they be known as *Devadasis* or by any other name, the problem is the same. It is a matter of bitter shame and sorrow, of deep humiliation, that a number of women have to sell their chastity for man's lust. Man the law-giver will have to pay a dreadful penalty for the degradation he has imposed upon the so-called weaker sex. When woman, freed from man's snares, rises to the full height and rebels against man's legislation and institutions designed by him, her rebellion, no doubt non-violent, will be none the less effective. Let the Indian man ponder over the fate of the thousands of sisters who are destined to a life of shame for his unlawful and immoral indulgence. The pity of it is that the vast majority of the men who visit these pestilential haunts are married men and, therefore, commit a double sin. They sin against their wives to whom they have sworn allegiance and they sin against the sisters whose purity they are bound to guard with as much jealousy as that of their own blood-sisters. It is an evil which cannot last for a single day, if we men of India realize our own dignity.

If many of the most respectable among us were not steeped in the vice this kind of indulgence would be regarded as a greater crime than the stealing of a banana by a hungry man or the picking of a pocket by a youngster who is in need of money. What



is worse or more hurtful to society—to steal property or to steal the honour of a woman? Let me not be told that the public woman is party to the sale of her honour, but not the millionaire on the race-course whose pocket is picked by a professional pickpocket. Who is worse—an urchin who picks a pocket or a scoundrel who drugs his victim and then makes him sign away the whole of his property? Does not man by his subtle and unscrupulous ways first rob woman of her noblest instinct and then make her partner in the crime committed against her? Or are some women, like *Panchamas*, born to a life of degradation? I ask every young man, married or unmarried, to contemplate the implications of what I have written. I cannot write all I have learnt about this social disease, this moral leprosy. Let his imagination fill in the rest and then let him recoil with horror and shame from the sin if he has himself been guilty of it. And let every pure man, wherever he is, do what he can to purify his neighbourhood. I know that the second part is easier written than practised. It is a delicate matter. But for its very delicacy, it demands the attention of all thoughtful men. Work among the unfortunate sisters must be left everywhere to experts. My suggestion has reference to work among the visitors to these houses of ill-fame.

Young India, 16-4-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVI, pp.516-17

1. For Gandhiji's reply, *Vide*, "Speech at Ashram, Pudupalayam", 21-3-1925, *CWMG*, Vol. XXVI, pp.351-352.



127. REPLY TO WOMEN'S ADDRESS, NOAKHALI

May 14, 1925

Who says that woman is dependent on others? The Shastras say nothing of the sort. Sita was Rama's better half and enjoyed empire over his heart. Neither was Damayanti¹ dependent. Who will say, after reading the *Mahabharata*, that Draupadi² was dependent on others? Who will call Draupadi dependent, Draupadi who, when the Pandavas failed to protect her, saved herself by an appeal to Lord Krishna? We cherish as sacred the names of seven women as chaste and virtuous wives. Were they dependent? A woman who has the strength to preserve her purity, to defend her virtue—to call such a woman dependent is to murder language and violate dharma.

Navajivan, 31-5-1925 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXVII, p.99

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1. Wife of King Nala, in the Mahabharata.
 2. Wife of the five Pandava princes, in the Mahabharata.



128. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, COMILLA¹

May 16, 1925

Mahatmaji said in his reply to the address that he felt pleasure in receiving their address and should feel more pleasure when all the sisters would be spinning and wearing khaddar. Mahatma desired them to follow the ideal of Sita, which was an ideal of absolute purity. Cloth made of yarn spun on charkha was then in use and there was no poverty then in the land. Foreign cloth was impure and not to be worn on their pure body. He expected the ladies to take a vow not to wear foreign cloth. Mahatmaji appealed for the removal of the blot of untouchability and said those who showed contempt to fellow human beings on the alleged sanction of religion committed an impious and irreligious act. Ramachandra became purer by embracing Guha, a Chandal.²

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17-5-1925

CWVG, Vol. XXVII, p.107

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1. Gandhiji was presented with an address to which he replied in Hindi.
 2. Member of a community treated as untouchable.



129. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, MYMENSINGH¹

May 19, 1925

Mahatmaji after having thanked the ladies on their address and presents said that by swaraj he meant dharma raj or Ram raj. Without dharma and morality there could be no swaraj for India. For Ram raj, he wanted to have Sitaji. It was for Sitaji that we could worship Ramachandra. If Sita did not take birth, there would have been no existence of Ramachandra. Mahatmaji prayed that his sisters be like Sita. Sita kept heart as well as body pure. He urged his sisters to purify their body by wearing khaddar. Sitaji used to wear cloth made in India. In her days not a bit of foreign cloth was imported into India. But ladies of the present day wanted cloth from France, Japan and Manchester. To use foreign cloth was impurity. For it implied that they forgot their poor brothers. There was a time when millions of his Indian sisters earned their bread by spinning with charkha. But for our use of foreign cloth their work on the charkha had not been stopped. Sisters ought to spin at least half an hour every day. Mahatmaji called mill-made cloth. "half-khaddar". He remarked that, although all his sisters, who had come to the meeting, wore khaddar, they must have done so either to express their love for him or to deceive him. But their love for India was what was required most—this would prompt them to use khaddar. He would feel quite satisfied if his sisters in Mymensingh undertook to do the following three things:— (1) Spinning on the charkha for half an hour a day, (2) use of khaddar and (3) abandonment of hatred of *Namasudras*, erroneously considered to be untouchables.

Mehatmaji, in conclusion, said that the presents that were given to him in the form of yarn, money and jewellery would be devoted to khaddar propaganda.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 22-5-1925

CWVG, Vol. XXVII, pp.125-26



1. At the meeting, held in the morning, hand-spun yarn, jewellery and coins were presented to Gandhiji. An address of welcome was read out in Bengali. Gandhiji replied in Hindi.



130. FALLEN SISTERS

At Madaripur the reception committee had arranged a spinning demonstration by the fallen sisters. I felt pleased at the sight, but I drew the attention of the organizers to the dangers attendant upon handling the question. But, at Barisal, where the movement for their reclamation first took definite shape, instead of its having taken a healthy course, the appearance of it was decidedly ugly. These unfortunate sisters have been organized there. A misleading name has been given to the organization. Its 'present aims and objects' are stated as follows:

1. To help the poor and nurse the sick brothers and sisters.
2. (a) To spread education amongst themselves;
(b) To promote spinning, weaving, tailoring, needle-works and other handicrafts, by establishing a Nari Silpasram;
(c) To give higher musical training.
3. To join with all other institutions, which have satyagraha and non-violence as their creed.

To say the least, this is putting the cart before the horse. These sisters are advised to do humanitarian work before reforming themselves. The idea of giving higher musical training will be accounted as extremely funny if it was not tragic in its consequence. For let it be understood these women do know how to dance and sing. And they may join all organizations which have satyagraha and non-violence as their creed all the time they are, by their trade, doing violence to truth and non-violence!

The document before me says further that they have been enrolled as Congress members and have also been allowed to "do other national work befitting their



humble position". They have been even elected as delegates. I have seen what I regard as an obscene manifesto written in their name.

Whatever be the motives, I cannot but regard the whole of this development as disgraceful. I appreciate spinning, but it must not be used as a passport to vice. I like everybody to subscribe to satyagraha, but I would prevent by all the power at my command an unrepentant professional murderer from signing the creed. My whole heart is with these sisters. But I am unable to identify myself with the methods adopted at Barisal. These sisters have acquired a status which, for the sake of the moral well-being of society, they must not have. We will not incorporate an association of known thieves for the purpose for which these women have formed their association. There is less warrant for this association, for these are more dangerous than thieves. The latter steal material possessions, the former steal virtue. Whilst man is primarily responsible for the existence of these unfortunate members of society, it must not be forgotten that they have acquired tremendously dangerous powers for mischief. I was told in Barisal that the corporate activity of these women had made them unhealthily forward and that they were already producing a corrupt influence upon the Barisal youths. I wish that the association could be disbanded. I am firmly of opinion that, so long as they continue the life of shame, it is wrong to accept donations or services from them or to elect them as delegates or to encourage them to become members of the Congress. There is no legal bar against their entry into the Congress, but I had hoped that public opinion would keep them off the Congress and that they themselves would have the modesty to refrain from seeking Congress membership.

I wish that my words could reach them. I would urge them to withdraw their names from the Congress, forget that they had an association, but quickly and resolutely give up their immoral trade. Then and not till then, they may take up



spinning as discipline, and weaving or any other remunerative and clean occupation for a living.

Young India, 25-6-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXVII, pp.290-91



131. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, GIRIDIH

October 7, 1925

Gandhiji in reply¹ ... thanked the ladies for the kind words expressed in the address. He said that, in order to attain swaraj which was not only the political Home Rule but also dharma raj of the kind which was generally understood as *Ramarajya*, which was something higher than ordinary political emancipation, they must try to become like Sita of yore who was the soul of *Ramarajya*. In the days of Sita every household had its charkha just as they find a hearth in every home. Sita also spun on her own charkha which might have been bedecked with jewels and probably ornamented with gold, but all the same it was still a charkha. Moreover they must try to idealize her in her piety as well. Concluding, he appealed for the A. I. Deshbandhu Memorial Fund in response to which a good collection was made on the spot.

The Searchlight, 11-10-1925

CWVG, Vol. XXVIII, p.295

1. An address was presented to Gandhiji by the Head Mistress of the local girls' school. He also received a purse for the Deshbandhu Memorial Fund.



132. ON THE EVE

The forthcoming session of the Congress will be a landmark in its history. An Indian woman will for the first time enjoy the highest honour in the gift of the nation. Despised we may be. Slaves we may be. Helpless we may be. The world may, if it chooses, therefore think nothing of the national assembly. But for us a President of our assembly must be all in all. That unique honour will be hers this year as a matter of right. Shrimati Sarojini Naidu has a world reputation as a poetess. From the time she entered public life she has never forsaken it. She has made herself accessible to all. She has ever been found ready for any service that the nation has demanded of her. Unity is her creed. Bravery is written in her face. Unperturbed she wandered about the streets of Bombay during the riots of 1921, reproving the mad crowds for their blind fury. If readiness to respond to every call at a moment's notice even at the risk of one's health be deemed sacrifice, she has shown herself to be capable of great sacrifice. Those who were with her during her African tour¹ have told me of her unwearied toil under difficult circumstances, a toil that would put many a young man to shame. Her mission to South Africa showed her to be an ambassador of high merit. In the midst of strange surroundings and able statesmanship, she proved herself equal to the task. If her tour did not bring tangible relief to our afflicted countrymen, it shows not her incapacity but the difficult nature of the problem. No one could have done better. I have no manner of doubt that we could not have superseded Sarojini Devi without being guilty of a gross breach of duty. It was enough to have done so last year.

It is therefore our duty to give her all the support in our power to make her task easy and her burden bearable. She is faced with delicate and difficult problems. I need not enumerate them. They are both internal and external. Our internal difficulties are perhaps greater than the external. The battle is three-fourths won if we can remove them root and branch. Woman is the supreme mistress in domestic matters. Can



Sarojini Devi then succeed in removing our domestic difficulties where men have failed? But woman though she is, unsupported by us she cannot succeed. Every Congressman should regard it his duty to take his due share in the solution. External difficulties may be dealt with by experts. But we are or should be all experts in dealing with internal problems. We can all work to bring peace and cease to quarrel and fight with one another. We can all become patriotic and cease to be parochial. We can all honestly fulfil the obligations that we may impose on ourselves by our own resolutions. Without our co-operation she can do little. With our unstinted support, she can do things which she as woman and poetess is specially fit for. May God bless her with all the strength and wisdom she will need in the discharge of her arduous office.

Young India, 24-12-1925

CWMG, Vol. XXIX, pp.348-49

1. In 1924; *vide CWMG*, Vols. XXIII and XXIV.



133. PATRIOT'S WAIL¹

December 27, 1925

Remarriage of widows is necessary to a certain extent. The reform can be brought about only when our youths have purified themselves. Are they pure? Do they profit by their education? Or why blame their education? From childhood up a slave-mentality is sedulously cultivated in us. And if we cannot think freely how can we act freely? We are alike slaves of the caste, of a foreign education, and of an alien Government. Every one of the facilities provided us have become our fetters. There are so many educated youths amongst us. How few of them have thought of the lot of the widows in their own homes? How few have resisted the temptation of lucre? How few regard them as their own sisters and mothers and protect their honour? How few have had the courage of their convictions and defied their castes to do their worst? Whom is the poor widow to approach? What comfort can I bring her? How few of them are readers of *Navajivan*? How few even of those who read it can act up to their convictions? And yet I have occasionally devoted the columns of *Navajivan* to the widows' wail and hope to do more as opportunity offers itself. In the meantime I would appeal to everyone who has a child widow under his care to consider it his duty to marry her off.

Young India, 4-2-1926

CWVG, Vol. XXIX, p.364

1. The Gujarati original of this appeared in *Navajivan*, 27-12-1925. This is a translation by Mahadev Desai.



134. WIDOW REMARRIAGE

A widow writes:¹

The letter does credit to the correspondent, but her argument does not solve the problem whether widows should have the freedom to remarry. When a child-widow is totally ignorant of any dharma, how can we expect her to understand the dharma of a widow? Living a life of dharma implies an understanding of what dharma means. Can we say that a child who simply does not understand the distinction between right and wrong is guilty of a falsehood? A child-widow of nine years does not understand the meaning of marriage, nor of widowhood. She is, as far as she is concerned, unmarried. How, then, can we say that she has become a widow? She was married by her parents, and it is they who think that she has become a widow. If, therefore, the widow's life earns merit for anyone, it does so for the parents. But can they really earn such merit at the sacrifice of a nine-year old girl? Even if they can, the problem of the girl's future is still with us. Let us suppose that she has grown into a young woman of twenty years. As she gradually came to understand things, she realized from the attitude of the people round her that she was regarded as a widow. But let us suppose she has not understood a widow's dharma, and also that, by the time she was twenty, the natural impulses had grown in her and become strong. What should she do now? She cannot say anything to her parents, for they have already decided that their daughter—a young woman now—was a widow and that marriage was out of the question for her.

This is only an imaginary instance. But there are many Hindu widows in the country, thousands of them, whom this description will fit. As we have seen, they earn merit for none by living as widows. Whom shall we hold responsible for the many sins into which these young women fall in yielding to desire? According to me, their parents certainly share in their sin; but the evil is a blot on Hinduism too, the latter loses its



vitality day by day, and immorality flourishes in the name of dharma. That is why, though I once held the same views as this sister, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion, through experience, that a child-widow who, on growing up to womanhood, may wish to marry, should have complete freedom, and be encouraged to do so; not only that, her parents should make every effort to get her suitably married. As things are, vices flourish in the name of virtue.

Even if, as suggested here, child-widows are remarried, pure widowhood will continue to adorn Hinduism. If a woman who has known conjugal love, on becoming a widow, deliberately refuses to marry again, her self-control will not have been imposed on her from outside. There is no power on earth which can tempt her to marry. Her freedom is forever safe.

It is immoral to assume a spiritual union where there has been none. Such a union simply cannot exist between a child-husband and a child-wife. Savitri entered into a spiritual union, so did Sita and Damayanti. We cannot even imagine such women, should they become widows, ever marrying again. Ramabai Ranade lived such a pure life in her widowhood. Today, Vasantidevi² lives in this manner. Their virtuous life as widows ennobles the Hindu way of life, sanctifies it. Through the supposed widowhood of girls who are only children, Hindu society sinks lower day by day. Women who became widows after they had grown up into womanhood should, while they continue to live worthily as widows, come forward to help child-widows to remarry and to spread the reform among the Hindus. Other women who share the views of this correspondent should see their error in supposing that dharma can be preserved by perpetuating the misfortune of child-widows. I have been led to this conclusion, not by my sympathy for sufferings of child-widows, but by profounder considerations about dharma which guide my heart in this matter; and I have tried to explain them here.



Navajivan, 21-2-1926 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXX, pp.35-36

1. The letter is not translated here. The correspondent had said that she could not understand why Gandhiji advocated freedom for child-widows to remarry, since the life of self-denial which tradition required them to live helped to conquer passion and was, therefore, spiritually uplifting.

2. Wife of C. R. Das.



135. LETTER TO KALISHANKER CHAKRAVARTI

ASHRAM, SABARMATI,

April 1, 1926

DEAR FRIEND,

I have your letter regarding “widow marriage”. Don’t you see the fallacy underlying your letter? Could you consider that to be marriage where the girl knows nothing about what a husband can be, where, perhaps, she has not even seen the man who is to be her partner in life and where they have not even lived together for one single night? I know nothing in Hinduism to warrant such a connection being accepted as marriage. Then again, what is the use of defending widowhood of girls of tender age under plea of advocating purity on the part of men? The latter should certainly be advocated but it cannot be used in order to cover the wrong heaped upon the fair sex. The sanctity of widowhood must be felt by the widow, cannot be imposed upon her. Divorce and other irregularities going on in the West have surely nothing to do with the very simple question of doing elementary justice to the thousands of our own sisters. Hinduism is in grave danger of being undermined by our own fanaticism and the habit of defending every practice of Hinduism no matter how repugnant it may be to the moral sense of the world.

Yours sincerely,

SJT. KALISHANKER CHAKRAVARTI

JYOTI, CHITTAGONG

From a photostat: S.N. 19408

CWMG, Vol. XXX, pp.216-217



136. SILENT SERVICE

That alone is true service which the world comes to know only through its results. A man or a woman dedicated to service never desires publicity for himself or herself. There are persons serving in this spirit at various places in the country. Khadi, too, along with other activities, gets the benefit of such service. Only recently I came to know of one such instance from a letter. Very few people know that some women have been working in Bombay in the field of khadi. Several classes are being conducted under their guidance, and poor women are enabled to earn their livelihood. One such class is being run in the Seva Sadan and 55 girls work there. Another is run in the Congress House, with 65 girls. There are 35 girls in the class at the Saraswat Hall. There is one class in Mazgaon which is attended by Muslim girls. The latter does not mention their number. The classes in the Seva Sadan and Congress House are attended mostly by Parsi girls, and the one in Saraswat Hall by girls from Karnatak. Arrangements are now being made to conduct a class in Bhuleshwar for Gujarati girls. If such work is undertaken in other places too, how many more poor women could we not help with ease?

Navajivan, 21-2-1926 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXX, p.37



137. LETTER TO JAYANTILAL

ASHRAM, SABARMATI,

Thursday, June 3, 1926

BHAISHRI JAYANTILAL,

I have your letter. I do not know if you interpret a love-marriage in a way contrary to mine. But I would regard as desirable a marriage between a man and a woman who have maintained pure relations and wish to be united in wedlock, when the union does not involve a breach of propriety. I cannot understand how in the case of a true love-marriage one partner can after the other's death ever think at all of remarriage. But I do believe that we should not oppose a virgin widow desiring to marry. I would regard the intermingling of the four *varnas* as needless and undesirable as also marriages within the *gotra*, the principle being that there cannot be too much circumscription in regard to marriage.

From a photostat of the Gujarati: S.N. 19592

CWVG, Vol. XXX, p.528



138. RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN IN MENSES

Such a question can be asked only in a wretched country like India which is disgraced by foolish notions about touching and not touching things. Some of the rules forbidding such a woman to touch a particular thing can be justified on grounds of health and morality. During that period, the woman is unfit to do hard work. It is very necessary that she should remain undisturbed by sex desire. A married woman should altogether avoid the company of her husband, and rest is very necessary for her, but it is not only not improper for her to read good books or to study but, on the contrary, I believe that it is desirable and necessary that she should do so. We can think of a number of household chores which such a woman can do with comfort and with little exertion.

Navajivan, 4-7-1926 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXI, p.89



139. ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD

Sir Ganga Ram has published a valuable table giving the number of widows throughout India with subsidiary tables for each province. The tables should be in the hands of every reformer.

Not many will agree with Sir Ganga Ram about the order, in which, according to him, reform should proceed. He gives the order thus:

1st. Social Reformation.

2nd. Economic Reformation.

3rd. Swaraj or Political Emancipation.

Not so thought Sir Ganga Ram's predecessors every whit as keen social reformers as himself. Ranade, Gokhale, Chandavarkar considered swaraj to be as important as social reform. Lokamanya Tilak felt no less for social reform. But he and his predecessors recognized and realized the necessity of all branches of reform proceeding side by side. Indeed Lokamanya and Gokhale considered political reform to be of greater urgency than the others. They held that our political serfdom incapacitated us for any other work.

The fact is that political emancipation means the rise of mass consciousness. It cannot come without affecting all the branches of national activity. Every reform means an awakening. Once truly awakened the nation will not be satisfied with reform only in one department of life. All movements must therefore proceed, everyone proceeding simultaneously.

But one need not quarrel¹ with Sir Ganga Ram about his arrangement of the order of the needed reform. One cannot but acknowledge his zeal for social reform even though one may not agree with his political or economic panaceas. The figures he has given us are truly appalling. "Who will not weep", he asks, "over the figures



which show the misery caused by child marriages and enforced widowhood?" Here are the figures of Hindu widows according to the census of 1921:

Widows of ages up to 5	11,892
Widows from 5 to 10	85,037
Widows from 10 to 15	2,32,147
	3,29,076

The figures are also given for the two previous censuses. The total of 1921 is a triple higher than for the two decades. The widows of the other classes are also given. They only demonstrate still further the enormity of the wrong done to the Hindu girl widows. We cry out for cow-protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the human cow in the shape of the girl widow. We would resent² force in religion. But in the name of religion we force widowhood upon our three lacs of girl widows who could not understand the import of the marriage ceremony. To force widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly. If our conscience was truly awakened there would be no marriage before 15, let alone widowhood, and we would declare that these three lacs of girls were never religiously married. There is no warrant in any Shastra for such widowhood. Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion.

And does not this Hindu widowhood stink in one's nostrils when one thinks of old and diseased men over 50 taking or rather purchasing girl wives sometimes one on the top of another? So long as we have thousands of widows in our midst we are



sitting on a mine which may explode at any moment. If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood. The reform must begin by those who have girl widows taking courage in both their hands and seeing that the child widows in their charge are duly and well married—not re-married. They were never really married.

Young India, 5-8-1926

CWMG, Vol. XXXI, pp.262-264

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1. The original had 'one did not quarrel', an error; *vide* "Corrections", 12-8-1926, *CWMG*, Vol. XXXI, pp.285-286.
 2. The source had 'we would resort', an error; *vide* "Corrections", 12-8-1926, *CWMG*, Vol. XXXI, pp.285-286.



140. SUPPRESSED HUMANITY

The untouchable is not the only portion of suppressed humanity. The young widow in Hindu society is no less so. A correspondent from Bengal writes:

There is no restriction among Muslims about widow remarriage, but there is provision for a man to marry up to four wives and as a matter of fact many Muslims have more than one wife. So none of the Muslim male population remains unmarried. Is it not therefore true that where there is no restriction against widow remarriage the number of females is much in excess of males? In other words is it not true that in the communities in which widow remarriage is allowed, polygamy should also be allowed?

If widow remarriage is made common among Hindus, will not young widows induce young men to marry them and make it difficult, rather impossible, to find out bridegrooms for unmarried girls?

Will not unmarried girls then commit all the *sins* which are committed or are presumed to be committed by widows, if there be no provision to keep more than one wife by a Hindu?

I refrain from reminding you of the love (*prem*), the saintly *grahastha*¹ life, the *pativrata* dharma² and such other things which should be taken into consideration in recommending widow remarriage.

In his zeal to prevent widows from remarrying, the correspondent has ignored many things. Mussalmans have, indeed, the right to take more than one wife but the vast majority of them have only one wife. The correspondent does not seem to know that, unfortunately, there is no prohibition against polygamy in Hinduism. Hindus in highest circles have been known to marry more than one wife. Many princes marry an unlimited number. The correspondent further forgets the fact that it is only among the so-called higher classes that widow remarriage is prohibited. Among the vast majority belonging to the fourth division, widows freely remarry, but no untoward



consequences have taken place. Though free to take more wives than one, they are as a rule satisfied with one companion at a time.

The suggestion that young widows will take up all young men and leave none for unmarried girls betrays a woeful want of sense of proportion. The excessive anxiety for the chastity of young girls betrays an unhealthy mind. The limited number of widows remarrying can never leave a large number of young girls unmarried. And in any event, if ever such a problem arose it would be found to be due to the early marriages that take place today. The remedy in anticipation is to prevent early marriages.

Of the love, the sanctity of *grahastha* life, etc., where there is a widow of tender age, the less said the better.

But the correspondent has missed the whole of my point. I have never advocated widow remarriage on a wholesale scale. The statistics collected by Sir Ganga Ram and summarized in these pages deal with widows up to 15 years only. These poor, wretched beings know nothing of *pativrata* dharma. They are strangers to love. The truer statement would be to say that these girls were never married at all. If marriage is, as it ought to be, a sacrament, an entrance into a new life, the girls to be married should be fully developed, should have some hand in the choice of companions for life, and should know the consequences of their acts. It is a crime against God and man to call the union of the children a married state and then to decree widowhood for a girl whose so-called husband is dead.

I do believe that a real Hindu widow is a treasure. She is one of the gifts of Hinduism to humanity. Ramabai Ranade was such a gift. But the existence of girl widows is a blot upon Hinduism for which the existence of a Ramabai is no atonement.

Young India, 19-8-1926



CWMG, Vol. XXXI, pp.313-14

1. Household.
2. Loyalty to one's husband.



141. CURSE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins has sent me notes of a tragic case that appears to have just occurred in Madras and has arisen out of a child marriage, the girl being 13 years and the 'husband' 26. Hardly had the pair lived together for 13 days when the girl died of burning. The jury have found that she committed suicide owing to the unbearable and inhuman solicitations of the so-called husband. The dying deposition of the girl would go to show that the 'husband' had set fire to her clothes. Passion knows no prudence, no pity.

But how the girl died is beside the point. The indisputable facts are:

- (1) that the girl was married when she was only 13;
- (2) that she had no sexual desire inasmuch as she resisted the advances of the 'husband';
- (3) that the 'husband' did make cruel advances;
- (4) and that she is now no more.

It is irreligion, not religion, to give religious sanction, to a brutal custom. The *smritis* bristle with contradictions. The only reasonable deduction to be drawn from the contradictions is that the texts that may be contrary to known and accepted morality, more especially, to the moral precepts enjoined in the *smritis* themselves, must be rejected as interpolations. Inspiring verses on self-restraint could not be written at the same time and by the same pen that wrote the verses encouraging the brute in man. Only a man innocent of self-restraint and steeped in vice could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly periods. It should be held sinful to marry a girl for several years after the periods begin. There cannot be even the thought of marriage before the periods begin. A girl is no more fit to bear children



on beginning the periods than a lad is to procreate as soon as he grows the first hair on his upper lip.

This custom of child marriage is a moral as well as a physical evil. For it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs we recede from God as well as swaraj. A man who has no thought of the tender age of a girl has none of God. And undergrown men have no capacity for fighting battles of freedom or, having gained it, of retaining it. Fight for swaraj means not mere political awakening but an all-round awakening—social, educational, moral, economic and political.

Legislation is being promoted to raise the age of consent. It may be good for bringing a minority to book. But it is not legislation that will cure a popular evil, it is enlightened public opinion that can do it. I am not opposed to legislation in such matters but I do lay greater stress on cultivation of public opinion. The Madras case would have been impossible if there had been a living public opinion against child marriages. The young man in question is not an illiterate labourer but an intelligent educated typist. It would have been impossible for him to marry or touch the girl if public opinion had been against the marriage or the consummation of the marriage of girls of tender age. Ordinarily, a girl under 18 years should never be given in marriage.

Young India, 26-8-1926

CWVG, Vol. XXXI, pp.329-30



142. WIDOW REMARRIAGE

A correspondent pertinently asks whether Sir Ganga Ram's statistics regarding Hindu widows refer to all Hindu widows or only to those whom custom prohibits from marrying. On referring the inquiry to Sir Ganga Ram, I learn that his "statistics are *not* confined to classes in which widow remarriage is prohibited, they contain Hindu widows of all classes". Sir Ganga Ram adds:

Moreover, it was no good to give figures of such classes only. We all know that Mussalmans and Christians can remarry, yet there are widows amongst them who will remarry sooner or later. It is the ban on Hindu widows which I wish to remove. I don't want to force every widow to remarry.

This is no doubt good. But the ban in Hinduism is confined only to the classes which come within the prohibited zone. Outside the zone Hindu widows marry almost as freely as Mussalman and Christian widows, though to be fair to the latter, it must be mentioned that all Mussalman and Christian widows do not remarry 'sooner or later'. There are many who do not from choice. There is no doubt, however, that a tendency exists even outside the prohibited zone to slavishly copy the so-called higher classes and to keep young widows unmarried. But so long as we have not fuller statistics, it is not possible accurately to gauge the magnitude of the evil wrought by the custom of prohibiting widows from remarrying. It is to be hoped that Sir Ganga Ram's and other associations that have specialized in this matter will collect and publish the required statistics. It should be possible to know the number of Hindu widows, say under twenty years, among the prohibited classes.

Let not my correspondent whose question was prompted probably by a desire to justify the ban and those who think with him disregard the evil of young widows being prohibited from marrying. If there be even one child widow, the wrong demands redress.



Young India, 2-9-1926

CWMG, Vol. XXXI, p.349



143. DEFENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

A reader of *Young India* writes:

I am very much pained to read the following sentence in your article, “Curse of Child Marriage”, published in the *Young India* of the 26th August 1926: “Only a man innocent of self-restraint and steeped in vice could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly periods.”

I fail to understand why you could not take a charitable view of those whose opinion differs from you. One can certainly say that the Hindu law-giver was entirely wrong in prescribing child marriage. But I think it improper to say that those who insist on child marriage are “steeped in vice”. It seems to go beyond the limits of politeness in controversy. In fact this is the first time that I heard such an argument against child marriage. Neither the Hindu social reformers nor the Christian missionaries ever said so, so far as I am aware. Imagine therefore the shock which I received when I found this argument in the writing of Mahatma Gandhi whom I believed to be perfection itself, so far at least as charity towards opponents is concerned.

You have condemned not one or two but probably everyone of the Hindu law-givers. For, so far as I know, every *smritikara* enjoins early marriage of girls. It is impossible to hold as you have suggested that the passages enjoining early marriage are interpolations. The practice of early marriage is not confined to any province or class of society, but is practically a universal custom in India. It is also a very old practice dating from the time of the *Ramayana*.

I shall try to give briefly what I consider might have been the reasons why the Hindu law-givers insisted upon early marriage of girls. They considered it very desirable that every girl should have a husband as a rule. This is necessary no less for the peace of mind and happiness of the girls themselves than for the welfare of society in general. If every girl has to be provided with a husband, the choice of husband should be made by the parents of the girl and not by the girls themselves. If the choice is left to the girls themselves, it will result in many girls not being married at all, not because they do not like marriage, but because it is very difficult for all girls to find out suitable husbands. It is also dangerous, for it might lead to flirtation and might cause looseness of morals. Youths who appear to be good might ruin the virtue of simple girls. Again, if the choice is to be made by parents, the girls must be married young. When they are grown up, they may fall in love and may not like to marry the bridegroom selected by the parents. When a girl is married young, she becomes



one with her husband and his family. The union is more natural and more perfect. It is sometimes difficult for grown-up girls with fixed ideas and habits to adapt themselves in a new home.

The chief objection to early marriage is that it weakens the health of the girl and her children. But this objection is not very convincing for the following reasons. The age of marriage is now rising among the Hindus, but the race is becoming weaker. Fifty or a hundred years ago the men and women were generally stronger, healthier and more long-lived than now. But early marriage was then more in vogue. The physique of educated girls who are married late is not generally better than the girls who receive less education and are married early. From these facts it appears probable that early marriage does not cause as much physical deterioration as some people believe.

You have good knowledge of both European society and Indian society. You will be able to say whether on the whole Indian wives are more devoted to their husbands than European wives; whether among the poor people the Indian husbands treat their wives more kindly than European husbands; whether there are fewer cases of unhappy marriages among Indians than among Europeans; whether sexual morality is higher in Indian society than in European society. If in these respects Indian marriages are more successful: than European marriages, then early marriage which is an essential feature should not be condemned.

I cannot believe that the Hindu law-givers were actuated by any consideration except the true welfare of society in general (including both men and women) in laying down the injunction of early marriage of girls. I believe that early marriage of girl is one of the features of Hindu society which have maintained its purity and prevented its disruption in spite of very hostile environments. You may not believe all this. But may we not expect that you should discard your idea that all the great Hindu law-givers who have insisted on early marriage of girls were innocent of self-restraint and were “steeped in vice”?

The Madras case reported by you seems to be very peculiar. The jury held that the girl committed suicide. But the girl said that her husband set fire to her clothes. In these conflicting circumstances, it is very difficult to hold that the facts which you consider to be indisputable are really so. There have been millions of cases of girl-wives below 13. Not one case of suicide due to cruel advances of the husband has been heard before. Probably there were peculiar features in the Madras case and early marriage was not the principal cause of the death.

Well does the poet say: “It costs very little to fashion a suitable philosophy in order to mitigate the rudeness of facts that secretly hurt one’s conscience.” This



reader of *Young India* has gone a step further. He has not only fashioned a suitable philosophy but ignored facts and erected his argument on unsupported statements.

The charge of want of charity I must pass by, if only because I have not accused the law-givers, but I have ventured to impute vice to those who could insist on marriage at an age too tender for bearing the burden of motherhood. Want of charity comes into being only when you accuse a live person—not an imaginary being, and that too without cause—of impure motives. But is there any warrant for the writer saying that the original authors of the several *smritis* who preached self-restraint wrote the verses enjoining marriage of little girls? Is it not more charitable to assume that the *rishis* could not be guilty of impurity or gross ignorance of cardinal facts concerning the growth of the human body?

But even if the texts ordering child, as opposed to early (for early marriage means marriage well before 25), marriage be found to be authoritative, we must reject them in the light of positive experience and scientific knowledge. I question the accuracy of the statement that child marriage is universal in Hindu society. I should be sorry to find that ‘millions of girls’ are married, i.e., live as wives whilst they are yet children. The Hindus would have died as a race long ago, if ‘millions of girls’ had their marriages consummated at, say, the age of eleven.

Nor does it follow that, if the parents are to continue to make the choice of husbands for their daughters, the marriage must be contracted and consummated early. It is still-less true to maintain that if girls have to make their choice, there must be courtship and flirtation. After all, courtship is not universal in Europe and thousands of Hindu girls are married after fifteen and yet have their husbands selected by their parents. Mussalman parents invariably select husbands for their grown-up daughters. Whether the choice is to be made by girls or their parents is a separate question and is regulated by custom.



The correspondent has tendered no proof to support the statement that children of grown-up wives are weaker than those of child wives. In spite of my experience of both Indian and European society, I must refuse to enter into a comparison of their morals. Granting, however, for the sake of argument that morals of European society are lower than those of Hindu society, will it naturally follow that the lowness is due to the marriages taking place after full maturity?

Lastly, the Madras case does not help the correspondent, but his use of it betrays his hasty judgment based upon a total disregard of facts. If he will refer to the article again he will discover that I have drawn my conclusion from proved facts. My conclusion is unaffected by the cause of death. It was proved (1) that the girl was of tender age; (2) that she had no sexual desire; (3) that the 'husband' made cruel advances; (4) that she is no more. It was bad enough if the girl committed suicide, it was worse if the husband murdered her because she could not yield to his inhuman lust. The girl was fit only to learn and play, not to play the wife and carry on her tiny shoulders the weight of household cares or the yoke of a lord and master.

My correspondent is a man occupying a high position in society. The nation expects better things from those of her sons and daughters who have received a liberal education and who are expected to think and act in her behalf. We have many abuses in our midst—moral, social, economic and political. They require patient study, diligent research, delicate handling, accuracy of statement and clear thinking on them, and sober, impartial judgment. We may then differ, if necessary, as poles asunder. But we shall surely harm the country, our respective religions and the national cause, if we do not toil to discover the truth and adhere to it, cost what it may.

Young India, 9-9-1926

CWMG, Vol. XXXI, pp.377-81



144. NOTES TO B, AGRA

I fix no arbitrary limit nor do I restrict myself to hard and fast conditions. The widows should have the same freedom that men have. If widowhood is to remain pure, men will have to attain greater purity. After all widows can remarry only when there are men ready to marry them. It may, however, be laid down as a general rule that where a widow cannot restrain herself, she should have the freedom to remarry without incurring any odium. Is it not better that she marries openly than that she should sin secretly? In the case of child-widows there can be no question of opinion. They should be remarried by the parents. If the wives and widows in the fourth division are no better than beasts, which I totally deny and I claim to know something of them, the fault lies at the door of the so-called higher classes. You seem to forget the law that if one limb suffers, the whole body suffers. If one Sudra does evil, it harms the whole society, even as it harms himself and his special class or caste.

Young India, 23-9-1926

CWVG, Vol. XXXI, p.443



145. SORROWS OF GIRL-WIVES

“A Hindu lady from Bengal” writes:¹

Whether the picture drawn here is true to life or overdrawn, the substance is surely true. I do not need to search for evidence in support. I know a medical man enjoying a large practice having married and taken to himself, an elderly widower, a girl who was young enough to be his daughter. They were living together as “husband and wife”. Another, a sixty-year-old educationist a widower, married a girl of nine years. Though everybody knew of the scandal and recognized it as such, he remained inspector outwardly, respected both by the Government and the public. It is possible for me to recall more such instances from my memory and that of friends.

The fair correspondent is correct in saying that “there is no power of resistance left” in the women of India “to fight against any evil whatever”. No doubt man is primarily responsible for this state of things. But may women always throw the blame on women and salve their consciences? Do the enlightened among them not owe it to their sex, as also to men whose mothers they are, to take up the burden of reform? What is all the education worth that they are receiving if, on marriage, they are to become mere dolls for their husbands and prematurely engaged in the task of rearing would-be manikins? They may fight, if they like, for votes for women. It costs neither time nor trouble. It provides them with innocent recreation. But where are the brave women who work among the girl-wives and girl-widows, and who would take no rest and leave none for men, till girl marriages become an impossibility, and till every girl feels in herself strength enough to refuse to be married except when she is of full age and to the person about whom she is given the final choice?

Young India, 7-10-1926

CWVG, Vol. XXXI, p.480



1. Not reproduced here. The correspondent had thanked Gandhiji for “speaking on behalf of the poor girl-wives of our Hindu society” and cited cases of 10-year-old girl-wives being either killed or cruelly maltreated by brutal and pleasure-craving husbands.



146. A CATECHISM

I gladly publish this catechism¹. But I must not enter into a long reply even though I should fail to satisfy the able catechist.

1. What I have pleaded for is that parents who commit the sin of “marrying” their daughters of tender age should expiate for the sin by remarrying these daughters, should they become widowed while they are yet in their teens.² If the girls become widowed at a ripe age, it is their concern whether they would remarry or remain widowed. If I were called upon to state what the rule should be, I should say the same rule should apply to women as to men. If a fifty-year-old widower may remarry with impunity, it should be open to the widow of that age to do likewise. That in my opinion both will be sinning by remarriage is quite another matter. I should any day subscribe to a reform in the Hindu law making sinful the remarriage of a widow or a widower who voluntarily married after maturity.

Young India, 14-10-1926

CWMG, Vol. XXXI, p.493

1. Not reproduced here. This was a long letter by an “Assistant Executive Engineer” raising four basic issues.

2. The correspondent, referring to Gandhiji’s article “Suppressed Humanity”, 19-8-1926, *CWMG*, Vol. XXXI, pp.313-314, had asked what his prescription would be for widows of 15 years of age or above.



147. PROSTITUTION OF IDEALS

I extract the following from a letter on the remarriage of child widows:

In your reply to B., Agra, in the *Young India* of September 23,¹ you say that child widows should be remarried by their parents. How can this be done by those parents who perform *kanyadan*, i.e., who give their daughters in marriage according to Shastric injunctions? Surely, it is impossible for parents who have most solemnly and by religious rites renounced all claims on their daughter in favour of their son-in-law to give her in marriage after his death to another person. She may of her own accord remarry if she will, but since she was given by her parents as a gift or donation (*dan*) to her husband, no one in the world after the death of her husband has any right to give her in marriage. And for the same reason she herself does not possess any right to remarry. She would, therefore, be faithless and a traitress to her dead husband if she remarried without his express consent given at the time of his death. From a logical point of view, it is thus impossible for a widow—be she child, young or old—who was married according to *kanyadan* system, which is prevalent amongst most *sanatanis*, to remarry unless her husband had given her permission to do so. A true *sanatani* husband cannot, however, brook the idea of giving such permission. He will rather fain agree to his wife's becoming *sati*, if she can or, at any rate, will like her to spend the rest of her life in devotion to his memory or, which is the same thing, in devotion to God. In this he will solely be actuated by the desire or sense of duty to help the preservation of the high ideals of Hindu marriage and widowhood, which are complementary to and not independent of each other.

I regard this kind of argument as prostitution of a high ideal. No doubt the correspondent means well, but his over-anxiety about purity of woman makes him lose sight of elementary justice. What is *kanyadan* in the case of little children? Has a father any rights of property over his children? He is their protector, not owner. And he forfeits the privilege of protection when he abuses it by seeking to barter away the liberty of his ward. Again, how can a donation be made to a child who is incapable of receiving a gift? There is no gift where the capacity to receive is lacking. Surely *kanyadan* is a mystic, religious rite with a spiritual significance. To use such terms in



their literal sense is an abuse of language and religion. One may as well take literally the mystic language of the *Puranas* and believe in the earth being a flat dish sustained on the hood of a thousand-headed snake and Divinity lying in soft ease on an ocean of milk for his bed.

The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly out of his teens, can do is to purge himself of his sin by remarrying the daughter when she becomes widowed. As I have said in a previous note², such marriages should be declared null and void from the beginning.

Young India, 11-11-1926

CWVG, Vol. XXXII, pp.21-22

1. *Vide CWVG*, Vol. XXXI, p.443.

2. *Vide CWVG*, Vol. XXXI, pp.377-81.



148. TALKS TO ASHRAM WOMEN¹

[1926]

My ideal is this: A man should remain man and yet should become woman; similarly a woman should remain woman and yet become man. This means that man should cultivate the gentleness and the discrimination of woman; and woman should cast off her timidity and become brave and courageous. It is said that women are jealous, but this does not mean that men are free from this failing or that all women are jealous. Women have to stay indoors for all the twenty-four hours and therefore their jealousy becomes more conspicuous. That is all.

* * *

My patience in teaching you will be endless. It will end only when your readiness to learn ends.

* * *

Both man and woman can become fearless. Man thinks that he can be fearless, but it is not always true; similarly woman thinks she is weak and allows herself to be called so; this too is not right. Women have no need at all for fear. I will tell you what I heard about Mirabai the day before yesterday. Mirabai went to Vrindavan and knocked at the door of a sadhu. The sadhu replied from inside that he never looked at a woman. Mirabai asked him, "Who are you? I know only one man, and that is Krishna." On hearing this, the sadhu opened the door, fell at the feet of Mirabai and said, "You have opened my eyes today. I have been saved from an abyss."

* * *

Man and woman are characterized by fear as long as both are subject to passions.

Draupadi showed as great a strength as Yudhishtira did.



Draupadi had five husbands at one time and yet has been called 'chaste'. This is because in that age, just as a man could marry several wives, a woman (in certain regions) could marry several husbands. The code of marriage changes with time and place.

But from another point of view, Draupadi is a symbol of the mind. And the five Pandavas are the five senses brought under its control. And it is indeed desirable that they are so controlled. Since all the five senses were under the control of the mind and had become refined, the mind (Draupadi) can be said to have wedded the five senses (Pandavas).

The strength which Draupadi showed was immense. Even Bhima and the Dharmaraja Yudhishtira were afraid of her.

While in jail, as I read the prayer of Draupadi to Krishna at this time, as given in the Mahabharata, I wept bitterly.

To my mind, this prayer of Draupadi has extraordinary strength in it. Countless men in North India recite these verses.

The power of words too increases or decreases in proportion to the penance underlying them. What is there in the word 'ॐ'? It is simply made up of three syllables अ, उ and म्. And yet its value lies in the penance associated with it. When there is greater penance behind the word, its value becomes greater. The same is the case with Draupadi. She may even be regarded as an imaginary character created by Vyasa. Such a woman may or may not have existed. But the great strength of Vyasa's penance and the recitation by crores of people of the prayers put into Draupadi's mouth by him have raised the value of that prayer.

'Govinda' means the master of the senses; by Gopis are meant the thousands of sense-organs. *Gopijanapriya* means one who is the beloved of the masses or, say,



of the weak. Draupadi was surrounded by the Kauravas. The Kauravas are our evil desires. Draupadi cries, “O Keshava, how is it that you do not know me?” It is the cry of the distressed, the voice of the aggrieved. Do not we all have evil desires? When are we free from passions? Draupadi says that she has been surrounded by Kauravas. Here ‘Kauravas’ may also mean wicked persons. But we are overpowered even more by our evil desires than by wicked persons. So it is better to interpret ‘Kauravas’ to mean evil desires.

Draupadi is a servant of God and as such she has the right even to quarrel with Him. She cries, “Oh Master, Oh Lord, Oh Ramanath, i.e., Lakshmiapati, i.e., Lord of the World, He who gives salvation, He who brings about self-realization, Vrajnath, i.e., Lord of the universe, Artinashana, i.e., Dispeller of grief, I am drowning in a sea of Kauravas, i.e., I am sinking in a multitude of desires; I am full of wicked passions. Save me.”

Draupadi repeats the call “Krishna, Krishna”. When a person is either in great joy or in great misery, he calls out to God twice. Draupadi says, “I come to you for refuge; save me; I am beset with evil passions, and have become weak; my limbs are giving way. Save me.”

In Bombay there is a woman named Janakibai. In 1915 when I was staying with Revashankarbhai she came to see me. She boasted a great deal about herself. At that time I did not believe her. Then when I went to Dwarka, she also was there. I made particular inquiries in regard to her and found that she moved quite freely among the most wicked of men. Her idea was that she should be able to preserve her chastity even while living in the midst of the worst men. It so happens that no one even in anger addresses her with a disrespectful ‘thou’. She moves amongst them like a lioness.

* * *



We are helpless like Draupadi, because we are all full of impurities and evil desires. Our fear of serpents and such like is a proof of our weakness. I am regarded as the highest in the Ashram; even then I, too, feel afraid. It means that I also am more helpless than Draupadi.

Dwarka means the whole world, or we ourselves, not the dirty little town near Porbandar in Kathiawar.

* * *

What can women have done that even men like Tulsidas have used insulting epithets for them? Whether it was the fault of Tulsidas or of the times, the blemish is nevertheless there.

The ancient laws were made by seers who were men. The women's experience, therefore, is not represented in them. Strictly speaking, as between man and woman, neither should be regarded as superior or inferior. The place and functions of both are different, and God has defined both.

* * *

Only the self can raise the self; the self is the help of the self. Only women can raise women. This requires *tapascharya* and hard work. It is true that women are more capable of it than men; but the *tapascharya* must be intelligent. Today women merely toil on in a helpless condition like drudges.

It may be agreed that no one can save woman except herself. But it may be asked, 'Can she be self-supporting?' My heart says that she can. If she learns satyagraha, she can be perfectly independent and self-supporting. She will not have to feel dependent upon anyone. This does not mean that she shall not take any help from others. She will certainly. But if such help be not forthcoming she will not feel destitute. If we are detached, even while we use the articles which we receive, we are self-



dependent. In such a state, even though receiving help from all the world we in fact never become dependent on anyone. And if help were refused, we would say, it was good that it was not given, and would not get angry, nor blame anyone. This is called satyagraha. It is not enough merely to be convinced that we should be fearless. We should become fearless at heart. Casting off fear does not mean that we should not care for the world's opinion.

One should give up the idea that one is helpless. God is the help of all. It is possible to throw the blame for the present sorry condition of women on their husbands. But women should think how best they can themselves cast off their own weakness.

* * *

Bapuna Patro—Ashramni Behnone, pp. 77-97 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXXII, pp.485-88

1. Notes taken by Manibehn Patel at Gandhiji's morning prayer meetings for women during 1926.



149. TALKS TO ASHRAM WOMEN

How can the pot call the kettle black when both are of practically the same colour? In the same way what can man say to woman or how can he criticize her? If numerous suspicions, doubts, passions and fears characterize women, they exist also in men. Some pundits say that woman cannot attain salvation. But as I see it, that is not so. The *Vaishnavas* believe that there has not been a greater devotee than Mirabai. My view is that if Mirabai cannot get salvation, no man can ever get it.

Bapuna Patro—Ashramni Behnone, pp. 77-97 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXII, pp.491



150. TALKS TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Man has to move about out of doors. His work is outside the house. So he does not quickly become despondent. But woman has to stay all the time inside the house. So she is lonely and falls an easy prey to despondency. If she finds another woman to talk to, she becomes so talkative that she fails to discriminate between what she should say and what she should not. Being always in the house she develops such defects. Of course, in a sense such loneliness is desirable. It saves her from many temptations. But it is fruitful only if we learn to turn our eyes inward, search our hearts, and become introspective.

* * *

Suppose there is a woman who is entirely illiterate yet remains devoted to her duties. She does not touch even a blade of grass that does not belong to her. She does not steal even in her dreams. If you ask her what the *Bhagavata* is, she stares you in the face. But she loves every human being as though she were the mother of all mankind.

Suppose there is another woman, who knows everything, has all the Upanishads by heart, whose pronunciation is excellent, but who steals, lies, is clever in making others work for her and is adept in almost everything. There is not the slightest doubt that the former is superior to the latter. Of course if she learns reading and writing, she would be better still.

Bapuna Patro—Ashramni Behnone, pp. 77-97 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXII, pp.492-93



151. TALKS TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Passion is common both to man and woman. The mind of a passionate person always wanders about seeking objects of pleasure. We must understand that our life is not for enjoying or giving such pleasures, but for self-realization.

The marriage of Siva and Parvati is regarded as an ideal marriage. One who wants to wed like Parvati should think of a man like Siva who is free from all passions. It is not Parvati alone that was destined to get such a husband. Every woman holds that fate in her own hands.

In choosing a husband, one must not go by the kind of clothes he puts on, or the turban he wears. One must see how educated he is, and how good he is in character. Once you have decided to marry, marry one who has good character, and whose mind is compatible with yours. If you find such a person, well and good; otherwise resolve to remain unmarried. One should not think of marrying anyone that comes along. Parvati had resolved that she would marry only one who was free from all passions like Siva, otherwise she would remain unmarried. Every girl should cherish the ideal of Parvati.

Bapuna Patro—Ashramni Behnone, pp. 77-97 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXII, pp.494



152. SPEECH AT MEETING OF WOMEN, BANARAS¹

January 9, 1927

Sisters, I have just come from one meeting and am on my way to another, a bigger one. Please listen peacefully to the few words I have to say to you. The first thing is that if you want swaraj or *Ramarajya* in India you have to become pure as Sita. Sita was pure in body and mind. When she was put through the ordeal on her return from Lanka, the flames did not even touch her. Why? Because she was pure not only in body but also in mind. No cloth was imported from England at the time, English cloth was not worn. All women plied the charkha and wore khadi. Foreign cloth does not add to your beauty. Real beauty consists in making body and mind pure. Only a woman who keeps body and mind pure can be worthy of our reverence. Therefore, sisters, wear khadi, ply the charkha and become pure. Make your sons and daughters pure by having them wear khadi. If you wish to give me something make some donation for khadi.

The other thing I wish to talk to you about is the death of Swami Shraddhanand. Swamiji is not dead: he lives in our hearts. He was brave; he had a noble soul. We have taken a bath in the Ganga and we have paid tribute to Swamiji. May God impart to us some of his qualities so that we can carry on his work.

Aaj, 12-1-1927 [From Hindi]

CWVG, Vol. XXXII, p.538

1. The meeting was held in the Kashi Naresh Hall of the Hindu School.



153. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, SONEPUR¹

January 16, 1927

Think of Sita. Do you imagine she went about with Rama in his 14 years' forest wanderings with heavy ornaments like you? Do you think they add to your beauty? Sita cared for the beauty of her heart and covered her body with pure khaddar. The heavy ornaments you wear are not only ugly but harmful inasmuch as they are the permanent receptacles of dirt. Free yourselves of these shackles and relieve the poverty of people who have no clothes, much less ornaments, to wear.

Young India, 27-1-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXII, p.570

1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Weekly Letter".



154. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Pausa Sud 14 [January 17, 1927]

In a women's meeting yesterday I started educating them on a new subject. The women here wear heavy silver ornaments; they keep their children dirty and do not comb their hair. I, therefore, criticized their habit of wearing ornaments. The result was that some of them gave away their anklets, necklaces and so on to me, and promised that they would neither buy nor wear others in future. While doing this, I thought of all of you. Ba is giving me great help in this work, but that is because she agrees with me in this. You can do work of this kind better than I. But that requires self-sacrifice, enthusiasm, and opportunities. All this you can have there. Do we not sing *atmavatsarva bhuteshu*¹? We should regard all as ourselves. Then, on finding somebody's children dirty, we would feel as if our own children were dirty and so would feel ashamed; on finding someone else suffer would ourselves suffer and seek a remedy for the suffering.

But I have exceeded my limit. Much as I like to exceed, I feel nervous when I look at the pile of correspondence lying before me.

Find out from a map where Patna, Sonapur, and Chhapra are situated. This is the land where King Janaka lived.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3635

CWMMG, Vol. XXXII, p.577

1. (He sees rightly who) in all things sees himself.



155. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

BETTIAH,

Posh Vad 6, 1983 [January 24, 1927]

SISTERS,

I see that your class has been growing. I agree entirely with Kaka Saheb¹. If the Ashram does not train women workers devoted to service, where else can they be trained? You yourselves have to answer this question. We may not have enough health, ability or learning for doing such work. But if we have pure devotion all else will follow. Devotion means faith—faith in God and faith in oneself. Such faith leads one to make all sacrifices. Sacrifice for its own sake is hard to practise, but if it is undertaken for service, it becomes easy. No mother would sleep on damp ground deliberately. But she would gladly do so if she could thus enable her child to sleep on a dry patch.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3636

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.6

1. D. B. Kalelkar.



156. TEAR DOWN THE PURDAH

Whenever I have gone to Bengal, Bihar or the United Provinces, I have observed the purdah system more strictly followed than in the other Provinces. But when I addressed a meeting at Darbhanga late at night and amid calm surroundings free from noise and bustle and unmanageable crowds, I found in front of me men, but behind me and behind the screen were women of whose presence I knew nothing till my attention was drawn to it. The function was in connection with the laying of the foundation-stone of an orphanage, but I was called upon to address the ladies behind the *purdah*. The sight of the screen behind which my audience whose numbers I did not know was seated made me sad. It pained and humiliated me deeply. I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced, had now become totally useless and was doing incalculable harm to the country. All the education that we have been receiving for the past 100 years seems to have produced but little impression upon us, for I note that the purdah is being retained even in educated households not because the educated men believe in it themselves but because they will not manfully resist the brutal custom and sweep it away at a stroke. I have the privilege of addressing hundreds of meetings of women, attended by thousands. The din and the noise created at these meetings make it impossible to speak with any effect to the women who attend them. Nothing better is to be expected so long as they are caged and confined in their houses and little courtyards. When therefore they find themselves congregated in a big room and are expected all of a sudden to listen to someone, they do not know what to do with themselves or with the speaker. And when silence is restored it becomes difficult to interest them in many everyday topics, for they know nothing of them having been never allowed to breathe the fresh air of freedom. I know that this is a somewhat exaggerated picture. I am quite aware of the very high culture of these thousands of sisters whom I get the privilege of addressing.



I know that they are capable of rising to the same height that men are capable of, and I know too that they do have occasions to go out. But this is not to be put down to the credit of the educated classes. The question is, why have they not gone further? Why do not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?

Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the *purdah*. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their womenfolk, even as the latter are compelled to trust them. Let us not live with one limb completely or partially paralysed. Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent even as he was himself. But for robust independence Draupadi is perhaps a better example. Sita was gentleness incarnate. She was a delicate flower. Draupadi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhima himself to her imperious will. Bhima was terrible to everyone, but he was a lamb before Draupadi. She stood in no need of protection from anyone of the Pandavas. By seeking today to interfere with the free growth of the womanhood of India we are interfering with the growth of free and independent-spirited men. What we are doing to our women and what we are doing to the untouchables recoils upon our heads with a force thousand times multiplied. It partly accounts for our¹ weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us then tear down the *purdah* with one mighty effort.

Young India, 3-2-1927

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIII, pp.44-45

1. The Source has "own".



157. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

MALVAN,

Maha Vad 11 [February 28, 1927]

SISTERS,

In my tours I always address women's meetings. Consequently I keep learning new things about women. I realize that women hold the key to swaraj. But who will awaken them? Many women have little to do. Who will make them industrious? Mothers spoil their children from birth. Who will prevent them? They load their children with ornaments and clothes of all kinds. They get their girls married quite young. They give them in marriage to old men. When I look at the jewels on women, I feel very annoyed. Who will explain to them that real beauty lies in the heart and not in these ornaments? I can write on many such matters. But how can all this be set right? It can be done only when a brilliant and dynamic Draupadi rises from amongst women. You have to try and get the necessary qualifications. Make up your mind about it and then have patience. One can achieve nothing by being in too great a hurry.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3641

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.128



158. UNTOUCHABILITY, WOMEN AND SWARAJ

I gladly publish Suhasini Devi's letter¹ which the reader will find in another column. Whilst the versatile President² of the Congress is well able to defend himself, I am inclined to think that my fair correspondent has over-generalized from her own very brief experience. No statistics are needed to demonstrate the vast strides that the movement for the removal of untouchability has made. The barrier is breaking down everywhere. The higher classes are to be met with in every province ministering to the wants of the suppressed classes in the shape of conducting schools and boarding-houses for their children. It was this phenomenon that the President evidently had in mind when he made the reference in his address. There is however infinitely more yet to be done than has been already accomplished.

The question of breaking down the feminine prejudice is most difficult. It is in reality a question of female education. And in this it is a question not merely of education of girls but it is one of the education of married women. I have therefore repeatedly suggested that every patriotic husband should become the wife's own teacher and prepare her for work among her less fortunate sisters. I have also drawn attention to the implications of the suggestion. One of them is for husbands to cease to treat their wives as objects of their enjoyment but to regard them as co-partners in their work of nation-building. We cannot have Rama without Sita. And Sita got her real schooling under the gentle care of her partner during those terrible years of exile and probation. Well, we are all exiles in our own land and need to imitate Rama and Sita to the best of our abilities and opportunity. And in this connection, I cannot help drawing Suhasini Devi's attention to the fact that Sjt. Iyengar has not only broken down the barrier of untouchability for himself but has carried his wife and family too with him in the reform which perhaps he himself would have thought impossible only ten years ago.



The question of inter-dining must be kept distinct from that of untouchability. Exclusion in culinary matters permeates the whole of Hindu society. To confuse it with untouchability is to retard the progress of the latter movement which is aimed at removing the ban on the social service to which the so-called untouchable has as much right as any other human being and on the same terms as the others receive it.

There is, too, confusion regarding swaraj. The term swaraj has many meanings. When Sjt. Iyengar says that removal of untouchability has nothing to do with swaraj, I presume he means that its existence can be no hindrance to constitutional advance. It can surely have nothing to do with diarchy or greater and effective powers being given to the legislatures. Removal of untouchability is a social question to be handled by Hindus. Why should it prevent the Mussalman and the Parsi in common with the Hindu from having the power to regulate the military expenditure, to determine the ratio or to achieve total prohibition or to impose a prohibitive tariff on foreign cloth and protecting the indigenous industries? Real organic swaraj is a different question. That freedom which is associated with the term swaraj in the popular mind is no doubt unattainable without not only the removal of untouchability and the promotion of heart unity between the different sections but also without removing many other social evils that can be easily named. That inward growth which must never stop we have come to understand by the comprehensive term swaraj. And that swaraj cannot be had so long as walls of prejudice, passion and superstition continue to stifle the growth of that stately oak.

Young India, 10-3-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, pp.148-49

1. In this she had complained that concrete action regarding removal of untouchability was not being taken to the extent it was demanded in the Congress resolutions.

2. S. Srinivasa Iyengar.



159. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day [March 22, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

Parting this time was particularly painful as I was anxious to talk to you about things and to have your views on many more. But who after all is free? We are in God's hands and we dance as He makes us to. If we acted according to our own desires we would come to grief. And so I do not worry although my wish was not fulfilled. We shall meet again when He wills. Till then we shall communicate by means of letters.

This is what I would like you to do just now:

1. Acquire a methodical and sound knowledge of ginning, carding and spinning—so good that you may be able to teach others.

2. Look after the common kitchen and make it an ideal place. For the present I do not want anyone of you to give all your time to that work, but since this duty is yours by birth and training, I entrust to you the responsibility of seeing that the cooking is well done and that the kitchen is clean.

These two tasks are just the right ones for you. Are they not?

Mirabai will leave today for Rewari Ashram,² where Jamnalalji's daughter is staying.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3642

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.179

1. From the reference to Mirabehn who left for Rewari Ashram on March 21; *vide* CWMMG, Vol. XXXIII, p. 180.

2. For further Hindustani studies.



160. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Chaitra Vad 2 [April 19, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

I am sending this letter to your secretary in the absence of Gangabehn. In Gangabehn's absence you should appoint an acting president. Your work should now be so perfectly regulated that it goes on automatically as in other institutions. In order that this may happen, a leader is absolutely necessary. A leader should have fewer powers but greater responsibilities; she should always be thinking of the good of the institution, and try to increase its capacity for service.

It appears that your observance of the National Week was quite successful. It was good that you cleaned the latrines. As time passes you should take up more and more responsibilities, provided always that you have the strength.

Maintain your contact with women who do outside work. You must also be in touch with Rajibehn and Champavatibehn. Write to me, if you know, how Rajibehn is getting on with her work.

My health appears to have improved. To this end I am making a simple experiment. If it proves successful, it will have many uses. But I do not want to take your time now by telling you more about it. I will perhaps tell you about it next week.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3645

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.242

1. The year is determined from the reference to Gangabehn being the president of Ashram women's Mandal.



161. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Vaishakha Sud 2 [May 3, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

I have now received plenty of hand-made paper. Even though the size of the paper is a little smaller than what you ask for, I believe you will prefer hand-made paper. Our chief duty today, of course, lies in regard to cloth; because from it our starving masses obtain their bread. There are not many who make this paper. Yet as long as we find something that is made in our country, and it is good, we must procure and use it.

It is very good that you have set apart some money for postage. It does not matter if the amount is small; but keep regular accounts so that those of you who can, may learn thereby how to keep accounts.

I find your progress in another direction also praiseworthy. Last week I raised the problem of protecting yourselves against thieves.² Do not lightly brush it aside. I wish you to falsify the epithets 'weak', 'timid' and so on that are specially used about women. They do not apply to all women of course. Who would say the women of *Raniparaj* are 'timid'? How can you call them weak? The women of the West, of course, take part these days in everything. I do not mean to say that they should be imitated; but at least they have been falsifying many of the assumptions of men. The Negro women of Africa are not at all 'timid'. Perhaps there is no such epithet in their language to be applied to them. In Burma, it is the men who appear timid and as it were the weaker sex. Women themselves carry on business of all kinds.

I raised the problem of thieves, not to frighten you, but to make you think calmly about it. In the Ashram we all wish to realize that we have a 'soul', Now the soul is neither male nor female; neither young nor old. The scriptures as well as our own



experience tell us that these are the attributes only of the body. The same soul pervades you and me. How then can I protect you? Is it not by learning the art of how to protect oneself? Only then can I teach you.

There is enough for you to think over here. If I feel inclined, I will take up the subject once again.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3647

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, pp.284-85

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1. Year is determined from the reference to the menace of thieves at the Ashram.
 2. *Vide* "Letter to Ashram Women", 26-4-1927, *CWMG*, Vol. XXXIII, p.255.



162. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

NANDI DURG,

*Silence Day, Vaishakha Sud 9 [May 10, 1927]*¹

SISTERS,

What you say about thieves is correct. For the present, it is enough if you try to forget that you are “weak”. You should on no account make the mistake of taking me to mean that men should give up their duty of protecting [women]. Because woman tries to come into her own, man should not think that she has already become capable of protecting herself; a man, who by thinking so, fails to protect women, is nothing but a shameless coward. He may be regarded as less than a man. Man has kept woman in subordination and in a state of dependence; so it is his duty to protect her. We are trying in the Ashram to make both men and women vigilant and self-reliant. But our goal is still far off. Till then my trying to awaken and put courage into your heart is one thing and men’s duty towards you is another thing. So as long as there is one man alive in the Ashram, you should regard yourselves as fully protected.

There is no news of Surajbehn in your letter.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3648

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.304

1. Year is fixed from the reference to thieves.



163. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Vaishakha Sud Purnima [May 16, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

I am very glad to know that you are not afraid. A person who knows that God is the Protector of all, why need he fear? By saying that God is the Protector of all, I do not mean that none would be able to rob or harm us. If this happens, it is not a reflection on the capacity of God to protect us; it is an indication of our lack of faith in Him. The river is ever ready to give water to all. But if one does not approach it with a pot in which to fetch water, or avoids it thinking its water poisonous, how can that be the fault of the river? Fear is a sign of lack of faith. But faith cannot be developed by means of reasoning. It comes gradually through reflection, meditation and practice. To develop such faith, we pray to God, recite *bhajans*, read good books, seek the company of the good and take to sacrificial spinning at the wheel. He who has no faith will not even touch the spinning-wheel.

I am getting better.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3649

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIII, p.333

1. Year is fixed from the reference to the scare from robbers at the Ashram.



164. AN APPEAL TO INDIAN HUMANITY

In another place will be found a substance of the observations made in the columns of Navajivan by Sjt. Kishorelal Mashruwala. He is a worker of long standing and was up to recently Registrar of the Gujarat Vidyapith, and it was only due to illness that he was obliged to relinquish the post. He is one of the most thoughtful among the silent workers we have in India. He weighs every word he writes or utters. I mention these qualifications of his; for I am anxious that his reflections should not be dismissed out of consideration as so many writings nowadays have to be.

The story of the abuse of the helpless women of the *Raniparaj* community is a blot upon the nation. Sjt. Kishorelal Mashruwala has made his appeal to the Parsis, and from his standpoint, rightly too. For it is the Parsis who will be better able, if anyone is, to influence the Parsi men who are said to be corrupting innocent womanhood. But I am painfully aware of the fact that it is not the Parsis alone who hold so cheap the honour of poor sisters. Indians belonging to the other faiths, placed in similar circumstances, have been known to behave exactly as the Parsi canteen-keepers are reported to be doing. But that is no justification whatsoever for the inhuman crimes of the latter. The lust for money, which drives these adventurers to a trade which they know saps the manhood of the otherwise fine forest-dwellers miscalled *Kaliparaj*, i.e., black people, tempts them to the worse crime of defilement.

The British Government or rather the Government of India and the Baroda State must be held primarily responsible for the tragedy described by Sjt. Mashruwala; for it is they, who for their wretched revenue allow liquor shops to be opened or to exist in the midst of these simple people. These people have never asked for these shops, and even if they had, it would be still criminal to open liquor shops for them, even as it would be to allow a little child to play with fire because he desires it. But a reformer does not *stop* before commencing action to philosophize or to distribute blame



through golden scales. He begins his reform wherever the opportunity offers itself. And now that the corruption has been brought to light, it behoves Parsi reformers to go to the delinquents and appeal to their sense of honour and try to wean them from the crime of violating the womanhood of the simple, innocent and guileless *Raniparaj*, even if they cannot also be weaned from trafficking in liquor.

Unfortunately, there is much truth in the taunt levelled at us as a nation, that we have not sufficient regard for the honour of our women. It is no use false patriotism seeking cover under *tu quoque* argument; nor must we mix up sexual immorality, in which depraved men and women of equal status indulge of their own free but unbridled will, with the instances of crime quoted by Sjt. Kishorelal Mashruwala.

Immoralities of the first kind are bad enough and do incredible harm to mankind; but the crimes like those of the Parsi canteenkeepers are infinitely worse and have not yet, thank God, received the tacit endorsement of fashionable society. In the instances quoted by Sjt. Kishorelal Mashruwala, the canteen-keepers are in the position of trustees, and it is insufferable that they should induce ignorant women in whose midst they are living to become instruments of their criminal lust. It is this kind of indifference to the honour of ignorant sisters who come under the influence or protection of the so-called better class men, which has been justifiably criticized, and which we must, if we want to become a self-respecting and independent nation, outgrow at any cost. The honour of the least among our sisters must be as dear to us as that of our blood-sisters.

Young India, 26-5-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXIII, pp.370-71



165. LETTER TO SHARADABEHN KOTAK

June 4, 1927

What you write about the problem of thieves is quite right. My putting the question to you did not mean that I expected you to be able to find the solution immediately. It was intended to make all the women think. Men must do their duty of protecting women. But after all men's bodies are, like those of women, as brittle as glass bangles, though perhaps the male bangles are harder and can bear stronger blows. What women should do when those bangles are broken, is a question which they themselves should consider. There is the same *atman* in woman as in man. It is not affected by differences of caste, sex or country. The wide-awake *atman* in a heroic woman can be a thousand times more powerful than the slumbering *atman* in a wicked man. Hence, in the competition for displaying spiritual consciousness and strength of soul, all people—the maimed and the crippled, the strong and the weak, men and women, the old and the young and children—can participate on equal terms if they wish. Even a dense dark night obstructs only our natural eyes, but if we have developed divine eyes, what can a dense dark night or a long-handled sickle or a large baton do to us? And if, on such a dark night a giant of a man carrying a terrible weapon comes and stands before one of us—the others having either gone to sleep or been killed or run away—if at that time we do not remember the name of Rama, then our having chanted it morning and evening will have been in vain. It is in the hope that it may come to us at such a dreadful time and help us that we unfailingly repeat Ramanama morning and evening even though we may feel lazy, or be tired or sleepy. It is possible that after long practice, that name will come to our lips spontaneously every time we need it, will even be engraved in our hearts.

The women of the Raniparaj community are certainly more fearless than we. They will go anywhere during night time. They do not depend on being protected by men. It is, however, true that they have other fears, but my statement is only about



fear of thieves and the like. It is not true to say that the Raniparaj women do not care about their chastity. It is not proper either, to believe that only those who care for their *chastity* are afraid. The fear which afflicts us in the Ashram has nothing to do with outrage of modesty. If we take count of cases of rape in the world, we shall discover that such incidents are very rare. A woman's virtue is violated through both the man and the woman acting voluntarily, and if a woman is self-controlled and pure in mind, violation of her virtue is impossible. This is true in two senses. One is that the Shastras proclaim, and it must be believed, that the body of one whose mind is pure in every way is protected by the mind itself, just as Sita's mind protected her body. As you know, Ravana could not outrage Sita's modesty, and the reason was not that he did not possess brute strength, but that he knew that if he tried to assault her his body would be burnt to ashes that very moment; and so he tried to win her consent through all manner of means, deceptions and threats, but they were of no avail in the face of Sita's strength of mind. And the second meaning is that, if a woman's mind is pure, her virtue is not violated and she is not stained by sin, even though she may have been raped. Neither will the world reproach her, nor will there be anything against her from the point of view of dharma. A pure woman, therefore, should never be afraid of her modesty being violated. On the contrary, she may remain confident that, if her mind is steadfast, her body will always remain inviolate. Forest-dwellers everywhere are less often overcome by evil desires than city-dwellers. They have not even the time to fall a prey to such thoughts. I do not mean to say that they all remain pure through their own voluntary effort. It is easy for them to live pure lives as it is easy for us to be vegetarians. Wherever there is immorality in the forests, both the man and the woman fall through their own free will.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary: Courtesy: Narayan Desai [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXIII, pp.434-35



166. LETTER TO GOPALDAS

BANGALORE,

June 11, 1927

BHAI GOPALDASJI,

I have your letter. To me restricted widow-marriage is a question of compassion. Corruption is to be found even where widows remarry—as amongst us—but this is an irrelevant point. The point to be considered is this: Is it right to impose upon woman a restriction which man would not accept for himself? A girl who does not understand the meaning of marriage is married off and later loses her so-called husband. Can such a girl be called a widow? All such questions relating to the plight of widows are a matter of dharma, of compassion and while solving them we should not call up and confront the conditions obtaining in some other countries, but consider only what our dharma points to. Looking at it from this angle, I think that it is the duty of the Hindu society to get all child-widows married.

Yours,

From a photostat of the Hindi: S.N. 12821

CWVG, Vol. XXXIII, p.470



167. LETTER TO MANILAL AND SUSHILA GANDHI

BANGALORE,

Jeth Vad 5 [June 20, 1927]

... It is also good news she has started type-composing. She can become capable of managing a press. A girl of 17 or 18 can train herself in no time. . . .

... A woman is not born merely to cook meals. Since cooking must be done, both [husband and wife] should take a hand in it. If they do and work in a spirit of service, they can easily discover many ways of saving time.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 4721

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.32-33



168. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Ashadh Sud 5¹ (July 4, 1927]

SISTERS,

I thought of you yesterday. Exhibitions and such other activities are really more the work of women than of men. ...

... Indeed all of you should learn to read the Gita in the proper way and understand its meaning. Just as a woman is not accomplished unless she is a good cook, so also a woman who does not know the Gita cannot be said to be accomplished.

Blessings from

Bapu

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3656

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.108-9

1 The source has Ashadh Sud 6, which is evidently a slip. The letter was written on the day following the opening of the Exhibition.



169. TWO SCALES

Writing about a girl, who had been married by her thoughtless parents while she was still a child and had never come to know her husband, and who had later become “a widow”, I had expressed the view that I would not regard her as married at all, and that, apart from the question whether she should be regarded as married or not, it was the duty of her parents to get her married again.

Reading about this view in newspapers, a gentleman has written a long letter to me in Hindi to the following effect:

The reasons which you advance to justify the remarriage of child-widows will also apply to other widows. Would you, then, encourage all widows to remarry? I would urge that we should prohibit even widowers from remarrying and should not in any case permit widows to remarry.

Men have committed through the ages a great many sins with the help of arguments such as these. I have come across meat-eaters who argue that, since man is obliged to eat meat in the region of the North Pole where the land is snow-bound all through the year, it is not sinful to eat meat in this country too, despite the heat here.

We easily find arguments to justify sinful practices. Widowers will not refrain from remarrying, but under cover of the argument that they should, we are urged to withhold justice from widows. Those who have made us unfit for swaraj now tell us: “You will get swaraj when you are fit for it.” We who have suppressed and degraded the untouchables say: “Let them reform themselves and then mix with us.”

Like a dishonest Vania, men keep two scales, one for buying and another for selling things with. They feel their own weaknesses, huge as hills, to be as small as



mustard seed and regard the weaknesses of others, small like grains, to be as big as hills.

If men use reason, they will see that they have no right to suppress widows. Enforced widowhood is not virtue but sin. It covers up a disease which breaks out with the opportunity for contact with a man. If a grown-up woman who has become a widow does not even feel the desire to remarry, she deserves to be revered by the whole world, she is a pillar of dharma. But one who wishes to remarry and refrains from doing so out of fear of society or is restrained by law, has already remarried in thought. She deserves not reverence but compassion and should be free to remarry. In former times she was free. Following custom slavishly, so-called high-caste Hindus turned this voluntary dharma into a law and introduced coercion in dharma.

Justice required that, so long as widowers have the right to remarry, widows too should have it. Certain restrictions are necessary for the protection of society, but they should be the same for both men and women and should command the willing consent of all thinking women as of all thinking men.

We should not forget the difference between child-widows and other widows. It is the duty of parents and of society to get the former married again, but they have no such duty towards other widows. In their case, all that is necessary is to remove the present restraint enforced by custom or law. In other words, if such widows wish to remarry they should be free to do so.

The only restraint over the remarriage of grown-up widowers and widows can be that exercised by public opinion. That public opinion is now flowing in the opposite direction. Where, however, respect for dharma, discipline and self-control is widespread, very few men and women will violate them. As things are, people who respect them are exceptions rather than the rule. A rich old man of sixty feels no shame in marrying a girl of ten or twelve, the marriage being the third in his life, and



society tolerates this. When on the other hand, a helpless widow of twenty wishes to remarry because she cannot observe self-control, despite her efforts, she is despised by society. This is not dharma but *adharm*¹.

It is useless and irrelevant to point to immorality and like evils prevailing in other countries as an argument against the removal of this coercion, this *adharm*. Even if all widows, from child widows to widows of sixty, were as pure as the immaculate Sita, I would say that if any of them wanted to remarry nobody had the right to stop them from doing so. Society may plead with them with love, but it has no right to restrain them by force.

If we apply to others the yardstick which we use for ourselves, the world would be freed of the threefold suffering and dharma would prevail once again.

Navajivan, 10-7-1927 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.141-43

1. The opposite of dharma.



170. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Ashadh Sud 13 (July 12, 1927)]¹

SISTERS,

Received your letter.

Manibehn will tell you how many women took part in the Exhibition, and what they did. Here it is enough to say that one of them was expert in keeping accounts while some others were equally expert in selling khaddar. They have received silver and gold medals. A blind woman spun exceedingly well at the Exhibition. She was the centre of attraction for all. One of the women was first in spinning fine, strong yarn and won a gold medal. Manibehn upheld the good name of the Ashram. Her carding drew the attention of all.

There was a Hindi Sammelan here. Here also one of the women was first. Some of the women here are making very good efforts to learn Hindi.

All this awakening is proceeding beautifully in this State. I have already written to you how some of the women here sing sweet *bhajans* at evening prayers too. On Saturday one of them played the vina for me. She herself composes the *bhajans*. They say she is very skilful in playing the vina.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3657

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.153

1. The year is inferred from the reference to the Khadi Exhibition and the Hindi Sammelan held at Bangalore.



171. SPEECH AT MAHILA SAMAJ, BANGALORE¹

July 13, 1927

Daridranarayana is insatiable and there is room enough in his belly for all the money and the ornaments you can give. The ornaments are your *streedhan* and you have a right to dispose it of as you like. Your real ornaments are your virtues, and you will be doing real service to the poorest of the land by disposing of part of your jewellery.

Young India, 21-7-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.163

1. From Mahadev Desai's "Weekly Letter".



172. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, Ashadh Vad 5 [July 19, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

I have to write many letters today. But how can I miss writing to you?

I wish to hit two targets at one stroke. Now this is a rendering of an English saying which literally means to kill two birds with one stone. Such sayings come into vogue where violence is common in every walk of life. My rendering too is not faultless. But indeed we could hit a target without intending to hurt anyone.

My twofold purpose is to write my usual letter to you and to include in it my reply to Chi. Vasumati. She asks, “You say that women should know how to read the *Gita* as well as they should know how to roll chapatis. How is this possible? It will take a lot of time to learn.”

It does indeed take time. But what can one not achieve with perseverance? A task can be accomplished if one devotes some time, if not a great deal, to it. It is difficult to learn cooking after you are grown up. Even then you can learn it with persistent efforts. If our women cannot pronounce Sanskrit well, the fault is not theirs. It is one’s parents’ fault, or if one is married it is the fault of one’s husband or of his people. But what is the use of putting the blame on others? Let us see how we can remove the defect now. In the Ashram we look for our own defects and then try to remedy them. Of course we should not overdo learning to pronounce Sanskrit correctly. We should carry out our other duties in the Ashram, and while doing so, try also to improve our pronunciation as much as we can. The only point I wanted you to know was that in Karnatak many women pronounce Sanskrit more correctly than even men in Gujarat.

Blessings from



BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3658

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.201-2

1. The year is inferred from the reference to Karnatak.



173. SPEECH AT CIVIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS ASSOCIATION, BANGALORE

July 24, 1927

You will have to turn your attention to the crying evils of early-marriage system. Do not call it dharma or a thing supported by Shastras that you can marry a little girl fondling on the knee, that it could be straightway married and asked to become a housewife. And yet, I have known many of my friends, learned lawyers and doctors, educated and enlightened men marry girls before they were thirteen. (Laughter) Friends, it is no laughing matter, — it is a matter for shame and tears. I tell you, there is no sadder evil in our society than this. You must think of this seriously and not with laughter. Our youth must resolve that they would not marry girls before they are fifteen. It is they who must help in this task of reform. You must all help in this cause, both young and old.

You have doubtless heard of the great name of Ganga Ram¹. This great man has done great things in the Punjab by his engineering skill, as your great man, Sir Vishveshvarayya has done here in Mysore. But greater than all these is the work he has done for the cause of widow remarriage. Like that you must also do your bit to help in this cause of the widow. But I ask who is a widow? A widow is a person held in high veneration amongst us but can you say that widowhood has come to a girl of 14 and 15 because she has lost her husband? If a parent, due to poverty or other causes, married his girl of 13 who loses her husband next year or immediately, can you say that she is a widow and that she has to suffer all the miseries of life ever after? Day after day this question has been arresting our attention very vitally and we cannot ignore it or afford to remain indifferent. Do not perpetuate suffering. When you men have got the right to marry again, why do you deny it to your ladies? You must recognize that you have got to restore this right and I ask, will you do this and serve your society most truly?



The Hindu, 25-7-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.233

1. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 213.



174. LETTER TO M. CHENGIAH CHETTY¹

July 26, 1927

With reference to my appeal² at the Mahila Samaj for ornaments and calling them *streedhan*, I do hold very strong views. Ever since I have been in India, and even in South Africa, I have not hesitated to induce sisters both Indian and European to part with their jewellery. As long ago as 1906, I remember the late Surendranath Banerjea having also appealed to the ladies at Lahore, and I remember too that ornaments were showered upon him. I do not feel that in my appeal I am doing anything out of the way. Indeed yours is the first note of dissent I have yet had. In fact, many well-to-do friends have been glad of my appeal, and some of them even took me to their homes when I was appealing on behalf of the Tilak Swaraj Fund and asked me to appeal to their womenfolk to part with their ornaments, their intention being to wean the latter from a craving for hoarding and wearing costly jewels. I have been often publicly thanked for having succeeded to some slight extent in introducing simplicity in the households of the rich people of the land. Never has any pressure been brought to bear upon the sisters. In every case where wives have parted with their jewellery, I have presumed the co-operation of their husbands. I have never accepted from little girls anything unless their parents or guardians were consenting parties. Nevertheless, I have believed that it is wrong on the part of husbands to arrogate to themselves the right of dictating what their wives shall or shall not do with their jewellery. It is the one thing which is in their exclusive possession, and I think that they should have the freest right to dispose of them how they will. But this is my own personal opinion and has nothing to do with what has actually happened in practice.

From a microfilm: S.N. 12618

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.237



1. In reply to his letter dated July 21 in which the addressee had asked “if any committee had been appointed to manage the Khadi Funds”. He had also criticized Gandhiji’s views on streedhan.
2. *Vide* “Speech at Mahila Samaj, Bangalore”, 13-7-1927, *CWMG*, Vol. XXXIV, p.163.



175. A LETTER

July 26, 1927

Your letter.

If your wife has fallen, I would hold you too responsible for it. You were separated from her. The girl would not have been keen on marrying you nor would she have consented to your separation. If she could not live without sex and went astray, why blame her? When a man errs, his wife puts up with it with suppressed anger. If the son which your wife has borne is not yours, you can sever your relationship with her. But I feel you must yourself support the woman. If she abandons you or chooses to live with the other man, you have to bear it. You are not obliged to live with your wife out of a sense of shame. If you intend to live with her, pitying her for falling because you had gone away, that too would not be regarded as immoral. But you can take this step only when the woman has repented for her action and she is going to be happy in your company. If, however, she has become absolutely depraved, it is your duty to abandon her.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.239



176. LETTER TO MIRABEHN

SHIMOGA,

August 14, 1927

What you describe of Vinoba is just like him. But my sympathy is with the orthodox resisters. This monthly untouchability is an old custom not altogether harmful, certainly not altogether superstitious. And it is difficult to draw distinctions between married and unmarried women in such matters. I have looked upon the restriction as a check upon man's lust. The confinement of the sick woman to a wretched miserable room, rags for dress, etc., is horrible, barbarous and can have no justification. But the sentiment of segregation during the monthly sickness should not be violently disturbed. I want you, therefore, to see the other side and not merely barely tolerate the attitude of people like Mogheji, but regard it with due respect as you would have them to regard your own opposite attitude. I am therefore hoping that Vinoba has been managing the thing gently and that he has not carried the orthodox inmates with him by sheer force of affection without producing a genuine conviction. And, even if they have willingly withdrawn their opposition, I would advise you to put a voluntary restraint upon yourself during the monthly sickness. You may share this letter with Vinoba if you like so that he may understand my argument. Remember that my own opinion is the same as yours. My only plea is for respectful and intelligent toleration, and remember also that when you tolerate in this manner, you do not "suppress" yourself. Self-suppression comes and is necessary where blind superstition has to be tolerated. It should not be "revolting" to you to accept such untouchability. On the contrary, you should impose it on yourself or accept it with grace and cheerfulness without thinking that the orthodox party is in any way unreasonable.

From the original: C.W. 5260. Courtesy: MirabeHN

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.342-43



177. LETTER TO N. SETHURAMAN

AS AT THE ASHRAM, SABARMATI,

August 19, 1927

DEAR FRIEND,

I have your letter. I do not think that a husband has any right to impose his own views on his wife or a parent on his grown-up children. But he is not obliged to provide things for them in which he himself does not believe. But if his wife has her own private means as she well may either from gifts given by the husband or his parents or the money she might have brought from her own parents, she has a perfect right to make what use she likes of these monies. So far as children of tender age are concerned, I am unable to say by way of general rule as to who should regulate their lives in the event of difference between husband and wife. Probably it is a matter of mutual accommodation. Finally it is the law of love that should govern relations in a family life and no hard and fast rules can really be laid down for mutual conduct. What may be perfectly justified in one case may not be wholly justifiable in every other case apparently similar.

Yours sincerely,

SJT. N. SETHURAMAN

THIRUKKANNANGUDI

KIVALUR. S. I. RLY.

From a photostat: S.N. 19803

CWVG, Vol. XXXIV, p.372



178. LETTER TO ANANDIBAI

August 22, 1927

CHI. ANANDIBAI,

Women must learn as part of elementary education at least their own mother tongue, Hindi if it is not their mother tongue, enough Sanskrit to be able to understand the drift of the *Bhagavad Gita*, elementary arithmetic, elementary composition, elementary music and child-care. Along with this, I think they should know well the processes up to the weaving from cotton. When a woman receives this education she should have an environment that will shape her character and enable her to see clearly the evils in society and to avoid them. I have not mentioned religious education separately as it is acquired by practice and would be covered by general reading. Truly speaking, it is a part of the elevating company of a teacher. This is about girls. The education of a widow or a married woman is of course a different matter.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.384



179. LETTER TO MIRABEHN

KUMARA PARK, BANGALORE,

August 26, 1927

I still feel that you have unnecessarily excited yourself over the segregation. Why do you call it compulsory? For you it would be an act of purest love on your part. You know 14 Romans. There Paul, himself not a vegetarian, says to his congregation, "If meat offend thy brother abstain from it." I am quoting from memory,¹ therefore the words may not be the same, but the substance is the same. You will segregate yourself not because you feel yourself impure in any sense of the term, but you will do so for the sake of your neighbours and for the sake of those women who believe in segregation from a right motive. I do not know that I have made my meaning sufficiently clear. The whole point is this. There are certain things not in themselves immoral which we do for the sake of others and there are certain other things which being in themselves immoral we will not and must not do for the sake of the whole world. If self-imposed segregation appears to you as immoral, you must not do it even to please me. If however there is nothing immoral in it, then you will do it for the sake of your neighbours whom you will rightly consider to be ignorant to that extent. In the theory of it I am wholly at one with you. For a virgin, there should be no segregation whatsoever. Monthly sickness is no sickness for her. And while it comes, she takes note of it and changes her occupation but not her mentality. And even for married women after the necessity for precaution is understood by them, ceremonial segregation should have no meaning. I think I told you that so far as I am concerned, I never respected the rule even with reference to Ba herself. And when I began to see things clearer, I never felt the call to have the rule observed. Radha and Rukhi certainly and all the other girls so far as I am aware do not observe it. Amina does not. Gomatibehn does and everybody respects her wishes even to the extent that when the women who



do not observe it for themselves have the monthly sickness, they do not go near Gomatibehn. If then self-segregation appears to you to be a task, you need not observe it. But if you do not, you should observe it as a pleasurable duty for the sake of others and in any case, it is not now a matter of any practical value so far as you are concerned; for, your next sickness probably does not come in Wardha at all. Or if it does, it is a question only of once whilst you are there. At Sabarmati nobody will want you to observe it. Amina does not observe it for anybody including Gomatibehn, nor is she expected to, much less will you be expected to observe it, even for Gomatibehn when she is there. So far as I know she has herself never asked anybody to observe it for her and in her presence. She is satisfied with the observance of it for herself. If the matter is still not clear you must continue to write and meanwhile to act as may seem proper to you.

From the original: C.W. 5264. Courtesy: Mirabehn

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.400-401

1. The reference is to *I Corinthians*, viii. 13: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh, while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."



180. LETTER TO BALWANTRAI MEHTA

I have not made light of suicides. I know of only two occasions when suicide becomes a duty. There are many grounds for that opinion. A man who is helpless against indulgence and cannot control himself but has sense enough to bring about his end ought to do so. That would be his dharma. Likewise, when a beast of a man attempts to criminally assault a woman, it is her duty to save herself by committing suicide.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.440



181. SPEECH AT PACHAIYAPPA'S COLLEGE, MADRAS¹

September 7, 1927²

You have mentioned there child marriage and child widows. A learned Tamilian has written to me to address students on child widows. He has said that the hardships of child widows in this presidency are far greater than those of child widows in other parts of India. I have not been able to test the truth of this statement. You should know that better than I do. But what I would like you, young men around me, to do is that you should have a touch of chivalry about you. If you have that, I have a great suggestion to offer. I hope the majority of you are unmarried, and a fair number of you are also *brahmacharis*. I have to say "a fair number" because I know students; a student who casts his lustful eyes upon his sister is not a *brahmachari*. I want you to make this sacred resolve that you are not going to marry a girl who is not a widow, you will seek out a widow girl and if you cannot get a widow girl you are not going to marry at all. Make that determination, announce it to the world, announce it to your parents if you have them or to your sisters. I call them widow girls by way of correction because I believe that a child ten or fifteen years old, who was no consenting party to the so-called marriage, who having married, having never lived with the so-called husband, is suddenly declared to be a widow, is not a widow. It is an abuse of the term, abuse of language and a sacrilege. The word 'widow' in Hinduism has a sacred odour about it. I am a worshipper of a true widow like the late Mrs. Ramabai Ranade who knew what it was to be a widow. But a child nine years old knows nothing of what a husband should be. If it is not true that there are such child widows in the presidency, then my case falls to the ground. But if there are such child widows, it becomes your sacred duty to make the determination to marry a girl widow if you want to rid ourselves of this curse. I am superstitious enough to believe that all such sins that a nation commits react upon it physically. I believe that all these sins of ours have accumulated together to reduce



us to a state of slavery. You may get the finest constitution that is conceivable dropping upon you from the House of Commons. It will be worthless if there are not men and women fit enough to work that constitution. Do you suppose that we can possibly call ourselves men worthy of ruling ourselves or others or shaping the destiny of a nation containing 30 crores so long as there is one single widow who wishes to fulfil her fundamental wants but is violently prevented from doing so? It is not religion, but irreligion. I say that, saturated as I am with the spirit of Hinduism. Do not make the mistake that it is the Western spirit in me that is speaking. I claim to be full to overflowing with the spirit of India undefiled. I have assimilated many things from the West but not this. There is no warrant for this kind of widowhood in Hinduism.

All I have said about child widows necessarily applies to child wives. You must be able surely to control your lust to this extent that you are not going to marry a girl that is under 16 years of age. If I could do so I would lay down 20 as the minimum. Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of 20 who are pure and undefiled and able to stand the storm that may rage round. Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves. Some Brahmin students tell me that they cannot follow this principle, that they cannot get Brahmin girls sixteen years old, very few Brahmins keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahmin girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then I say to the Brahmin youth, "Cease to be a Brahmin, if you cannot possibly control yourself." Choose a grown-up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a Brahmin widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of the Hindus will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your heart is not pure and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to live up to the name of the premier institution which must



produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character and what is character without elementary personal purity? Brahminism I adore. I have defended Varnashrama Dharma. But Brahminism that can tolerate untouchability, virgin widowhood, spoliation of virgins, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of Brahminism. There is no knowledge of Brahman therein. There is no true interpretation of the scriptures. It is undiluted animalism. Brahminism is made of sterner stuff. I want these few remarks of mine to go deep down into your hearts. I am watching the boys whilst I am pouring out my heart. I have not come to appeal to your intellects but to your hearts. You are the hope of the country and what I have said is of primary importance for you.

Young India, 15-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.481-83

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1. This was published under the caption, "Two Speeches".
 2. From *The Hindu*, 7-9-1927.



182. SPEECH TO WOMEN, MADRAS¹

September 9, 1927

Mahatmaji first thanked the women of Madras for the welcome they had accorded to him and for the purse. Regarding the purse, he said he was not satisfied with the same. He also doubted whether all of them who had assembled there knew for what purpose they had given the purse, for if they had realized it they would have given much more. The money was not intended to be distributed among a hundred poor people for charity but was going to be used for the relief of millions of starving people throughout India. He saw round him a large number of ladies with costly jewellery on their persons. They would not have realized that one bit of such jewellery would amount to a fortune to the starving millions. The toiling millions did not know what gold, diamonds, and silver were. Their jewellery was made of wood, stone and copper. Mahatmaji even doubted whether the women who had gathered around him had ever seen their sisters in the villages. He had a great mind to take some of them round those villages and show them the conditions in which some of their sisters lived. Then only they would realize the true significance of the movement he had set afoot, and the object of his mission. They had given a few hundreds of rupees but until they did some other things, that money would become useless. Millions of starving sisters were toiling all round the year and if more fortunate women had any affection for them they must wear khadi prepared by the poor people. Then they must show their self-sacrifice and spirit by spending at least half an hour a day and giving away the yarn. Mahatmaji said that he had been working for the relief of these poor millions and wherever he went he had received the full sympathy of all women. His work would be in vain if womenfolk of India did not co-operate with him. Referring to the welcome address, Mahatmaji said: It was a long one and he did not know whether all the women in the audience knew all subjects dealt with therein. They were all important ones and



related only to the middle class people. He did not say that they must be disregarded on that account. He had no time to discuss all the subjects mentioned therein, but would say they had his entire sympathy. He would say only this thing that women had equal rights with men. Hindu Shastras made no differentiation between the sexes and had even symbolized God as *Ardhanareeshwara*. The English saying that the wives were the better halves was quite true. India had produced many ideal women and among the seven great *satis* worshipped by Hindu woman every morning to ward off her sins Sita stood foremost. That a better place was given to women was significant in the fact that people don't call "Ram-Sita" but call "Sita-Ram". Sita was an embodiment of self-sacrifice and dharma. Her sacrifices were greater than those of Rama. If the Hindus were the true followers and worshippers of Sita and Rama they would not have allowed such disgraceful customs as were prevalent among their society. They would immediately try to purify their Hinduism. If they were determined to purify their society he would ask them first of all not to marry their daughters before they were 16 years old. The next thing they must do is to remarry young widows. It was a sin not to remarry such girls. Consent was necessary for a life contract and he believed that in early marriages there was no consent. He would then ask them to remove from their midst the custom of *Devadasis*. Such reforms as he had mentioned could effectively and easily be done by women's associations and not by male workers however capable they might be.

Continuing, Mahatmaji said that he was gratified at the fact that Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal was the Deputy President of the Legislative Council. Though he was himself a non-co-operator, he believed that Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal would do many things in the Council on behalf of the women of India. He would only request her not to completely adopt Western methods. She must instil the Indian atmosphere in the Council and never forget the interests of women. *India's progress would be sure and certain if only the women of India worked for it.*



In-conclusion, Mahatmaji said then the greatest problem in India at the present day was the relief of poverty among the millions of toiling masses scattered in thousands of villages in India. If educated and more fortunate women did not realize their duties to their less fortunate sisters and do something for their relief India would never progress. He believed that the spinning-wheel would do much in this direction. It must become the centre of their activities. *The khadi movement was a women's movement and he hoped that they would take it up and relieve him of his duties. He prayed to God Almighty that He should give them courage and energy to take up this good work.*

The Hindu, 10-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXIV, pp.496-97

1. At Singrachari Hall in Hindu High School, Triplicane.



183. SPEECH AT ST. THOMAS MOUNT, MADRAS

September 9, 1927

I have been recently drawing attention to child marriages and child widows. It is high time that parents understand their duties by their children. It cannot be a right thing to give away girls of tender years in marriage, nor can it be right to treat the child as a widow when her so-called husband dies. It is the bounden duty of every parent to give in marriage such child widows as may be in his family. We have also in the South the immoral and the inhuman institution of *Devadasis*. If we would respect our womanhood as we are expected to respect them in the name of Sita, we have to get rid of this blot upon our society.

The Hindu, 10-9-1927

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIV, p.503



184. SPEECH AT CONJEEVARAM

I received a letter today in this place asking me to dwell exclusively upon the question of child widows. Whilst it is not possible for me to deal with this great evil to the exclusion of every other, I am painfully conscious of the fact that you are not free from this evil. It is no credit to Hinduism that it has so many child virgin widows. If I had the power I would certainly insist upon every parent getting married his child widow in his home. Child widow, again, is a contradiction in terms. Only a full grown woman who has been a consenting party to her marriage and who has enjoyed the married life can become a widow.

Closely related to the question of child widows is the question of child marriages. It is an inhuman thing to give away in marriage a little girl under sixteen years. We do violence to our Shastras when we wrest from them a meaning which panders to our lust. Now, perhaps, you understand a little of what I mean by holiness. I hope that you, who are naturally and pardonably proud of this city, will bestir yourselves and take early and energetic steps to rid yourselves of the evils to which I have drawn attention. If you really feel for the poorest of the land as you claim to do in your address, you will not rest content until you have brought about total prohibition.

The Hindu, 10-9-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXIV, p.492



185. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, TRICHINOPOLY

September 20, 1927

DEAR SISTERS,

It gives me much pleasure to be able to attend this meeting. I do not want to keep you for any length of time. I just want to say that you ought to take a leading part in the national movement that is going on at the present moment in India—I mean the khadi work and the message of the spinning-wheel. It is work that is designed to deliver India from the gnawing poverty which she is suffering from. In this distress millions of our sisters are sharers. They need not be in that distress, if you and I will do our duty. They starve because they have no work in their own villages. Time was when they had no need to starve, for one hundred years ago every hut¹ in our villages had its own spinning-wheel. Whenever there was time left, our sisters living in villages used to spin yarn. Khadi that was woven out of this yarn was worn by all the people, rich and poor. One of the reasons why the spinning-wheel died out was that you and I left off wearing khadi. Now, the movement has been set afoot in order to reinstate the spinning-wheel in its original state, and the movement cannot be proceeded with, without your assistance. The assistance you can render is for all of you to discard your foreign saris and wear khadi. It is your duty and my duty to think of these poor people, but this work cannot proceed without money. You are therefore expected to contribute as much as possible, and all over India your sisters have been giving me their moneys and also their jewellery. I see that you state in your address that your jewellery is the result of your own thrift. I personally do not believe in it, for the jewellery has been given to you and not made out of your own moneys earned by your own labour, but your jewellery is undoubtedly *streedhanam*² and I want you to share it with the poorest of your sisters. If you will have India the land of holiness, then you should all become like Sita, and the beauty of Sita lay not in her personal appearance and in her jewellery but



in her heart. A woman is adorable, not for the jewellery she wears, but for the purity of her heart. I therefore urge you, if you believe that khadi will solve all the distress of India, to a certain extent, to part with the money that you have brought and your jewellery also, if you can give it to the cause. If you will go a step further, I would ask you also to spare some time to turn the spinning-wheel. It is a fine occupation for women in their leisure hours and it would be much better for you to pass your time in this useful occupation than idle talk. Now, you will give what you can to the volunteers who will go in your midst.

The Hindu, 21-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.10-11

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1. The source has "hamlet".
 2. A woman's private property over which she exercises independent control.



186. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, KARAIKUDI

September 24, 1927

DEAR SISTERS,

It is a great pleasure to me to be able to see you this morning and I thank you for the purse that you have given me for *Daridranarayana*. But I am not sure whether all of you really know why you have given me this money. I am afraid some of you think that this money is being given to some rightful Mahatma for his own treasure. But if such is the belief entertained by any single one of you, I want to disabuse you of that belief. You have given this money for the sake of your own starving sisters and I am a humble instrument for carrying this gift of yours to these poor sisters, not in the manner in which you often fling money in the faces of the poor people. This money is not to be given to those poor sisters by way of charity but the money is to be given to them for the work they do. And they are starving not because there is no food in their village but because they have got no work for which they could get money and for such money they could get food. These poor sisters of yours and mine are without work for nearly six months in the year, because of your sins and my sins. If you and I do not eat *arisi*¹ that our agriculturists grow in this part of the country, what do you think will happen to those agriculturists? If instead of eating the *arisi* that they grow we were to eat wheat that grows in Australia and is imported from Australia, what do you think will happen to those agriculturists? They will cease to grow *arisi* and starve because there is no money to be had for the produce of their labour. Now these millions of sisters of ours at one time spun yarn like this and it was woven into cloth that we used to wear and which we now call khaddar. That was the time when we wore khadi. Then came a time in the history of our unfortunate country when you and I and our ancestors went mad and sinned. They and we began to be deceived by all the foreign fineries that came from England, Paris and other parts of the world. And



so these sisters finding no market for the products of their labour threw away their spinning-wheels and there was no other work to get in their villages. And so not having any work to replace this, they began to starve. Some very few of them left their villages and sold themselves to a life of shame. And remember that these were your sisters and my sisters. Some others went to towns and accepted factory labour for wages which you will not accept. Now you have given this money by way of some penance or the sin of ours. But this money is perfectly useless if you yourselves will not wear khadi. And so what I ask you all is to consider your own dharma and henceforth make a sacred resolve that for the sake of these poor sisters you will wear nothing but khadi. But then khadi needs something more than merely wearing cloth spun and woven by the sacred hands of these villagers. If you will, through this khadi, think of these poor sisters with a true heart, then khadi will be a symbol not only of your outward change but the whole heart will be changed. If you do that you will again revive the age of Sati and Sita. And that is what I am incessantly praying God to make you like. But even God cannot make us what we should be, against our own wills. God only helps those who are willing to help themselves and He is only waiting to make everyone of you like Sita if you would only wish to become like Sita; but you don't wish it because you really consider that there are some people who are even untouchables to you; not so did Sita act. On the contrary, she regarded Guha as Nishadaraja² whom in our ignorance today we consider as untouchable. But if you will wear khadi in the khadi spirit, then you will not consider a single human being to be untouchable because he is born in particular surroundings.

Now you will even perhaps understand why I consider that you, the rich women of Chettinad, have not given for *Daridranarayana* anything like enough money. I do not hesitate to ask sisters like you not only to give me money which really they got from their parents and husbands but I ask them to part with their *streedhanam* or their jewels. And I ask them to part with it on this condition that they should not again ask



that the jewellery should be replaced. The real beauty of woman does not consist in her fine saris, in her diamonds and gold jewellery. Woman's real beauty for that matter consists in the possession of a pure heart. May God give you that heart!

The Hindu, 26-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.26-28

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1. Rice.
 2. King of the Nishadas, a tribe in the Vindhya mountains.



187. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, KARAIKUDI

September 25, 1927

And now that silence prevails in this meeting and as this is perhaps the last meeting in Chettinad that I shall address, I should like to say a few words to the sisters in front of me. I am glad to see so many of you attending this meeting. I am afraid you have no notion that this message of khadi is a message principally devoted to the betterment of the condition of your starving sisters living in thousands of villages. I do not know how much men in India will have to pay for keeping you, the women of India, in darkness about so many things of the highest importance in life, both to men and women. But thanks to God that since the advent of the movement for reviving the spinning-wheel, thousands of women have learnt to come out of their homes and listen to the music of the charkha. And I would love to think that you, the women of Chettinad, had begun to think beyond the threshold of your houses or palaces. I would like you to realize the deep and distressful poverty of millions of your sisters and I would like you independently, apart from your men, to part with your possessions, your rupees and your jewellery for the sake of these sisters and it fills me with gladness to be able to tell you that the response from the women of India has been spontaneous so far as this message is concerned and they have even given their moneys and jewelleries willingly and in many cases lavishly. But to give me money or your jewellery is by no means enough. If you will establish a living bond between yourselves and your starving sisters, it is absolutely necessary for you to discard your foreign fineries and adopt khadi permanently for your wear; because, if you do not wear the products of their labours, all the money that you give for khadi is a waste of effort.

The beauty of a virtuous woman does not consist in the fineness of her dress but in the possession of a pure heart and virtuous life. Millions of men and women all over India early in the morning invoke the blessed and immortal name of Sita in order



that her name may surround them during the whole day with her protecting power, not because Sita wore costly jewels but because she bore a heart that was of pure gold and purer diamond. Sita did not remain in her palace when Rama went into banishment but she insisted upon accompanying him through all these eventful years of exile. Sita did not consider Nishadaraja, whom in our ignorance we consider today, to be untouchable but Sita embraced Nishadaraja and accepted with a grateful heart the services he nobly rendered.

And I would like you to imitate Sita's virtues, Sita's humility, Sita's simplicity and Sita's bravery. You should realize that Sita for the protection of her virtues did not need the assistance of Rama, her Lord and master. The chronicler of the history of Sita and Rama tells us that it was the purity of Sita which was her sole shield and protection. And if you will but recognize the power that resides in your breast it is open to you by force of your purity, love and spirit of self-sacrifice to bend the haughty spirit of your men and shame them into forsaking the life of vices and debauchery. I would like you to develop the courage to insist upon accompanying your husbands wherever they go. May God give you that strength and goodwill.

I am now very nearly done and as is usual at all meetings I must follow the custom here also of asking those who have not yet contributed to this purse to do so if they believe in khadi and if they wish it. I would also urge those men and sisters here to give if they wish as much as they can and therefore if there are those who have not really given enough I would like them if they believe in the statistics I have given and in the importance of the message of khadi not to be niggardly but give generously.

The Hindu, 27-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.38-39



188. SPEECH AT SIRUVAYAL

September 27, 1927

I see some girls also in front of me who are heavily and horribly ornamented. These heavy ear-pendants look not only ugly but they interfere with the proper development of all the features of the face. I wish that you mothers will discard all these ugly superficial ornaments. Remember that your beauty consists in your character and not in your ornaments or in your dress. You have really no use for these ugly and costly ornaments of yours. Either melt them or sell them and save your moneys or give your ornaments to a man like me for the sake of *Daridranarayana*. You don't even wear khadi. You should all be like Sita with an absolutely pure heart, with simple khadi and with simple ornaments.

Note:

Complete speech is not reproduced here. Only a part of it, where Gandhiji talks about women, is reproduced.

The Hindu, 29-9-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.43-44



189. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, PAGANERI

September 27, 1927

It delights my heart to see so many sisters attending this meeting, almost the same number as men. As I said at the women's meeting at Karaikudi or elsewhere to the sisters there, the movement for which you have given these purses is essentially a movement for the freedom of the women of India. The full freedom of India will be an impossibility unless your daughters stand side by side with the sons in the battle for freedom and such an association on absolutely equal terms on the part of India's millions of daughters is not possible unless they have a definite consciousness of their own power. Immediately the spinning-wheel is reinstated in all its glory and with all its implications in the millions of cottages of India, woman, recognizes her definite power and her place in India's regeneration. For she is then able to say to men, 'you depend for your food and your clothes as much upon us as on yourselves.' 'We,' she may say, 'clean and cook your food, we spin the yarn from which khadi is prepared.' Then she is clothed with dignity which is hers by birthright and of which we, men and traitors of our womanhood, have deprived her. For in our stupidity and in our ignorance we removed from each cottage spinning-wheels and became infatuated with the foreign fineries that came to us from the West and became greedy after the sovereigns and rupees that would dangle before us, and whether by its own design or by an accident, be it however it may, we, men, conspired to keep our daughters and sisters and our wives in utter ignorance and we denied them the education to which they had a right. In our ignorance we gave away our daughters in marriage at an age when they were able only to sit on the lap and play with us as brothers and sisters. By constant usage you yourselves, sisters, who are sitting in front of me, have come to think that it is the most natural thing for you to give away your daughters early in the so-called marriage and to keep them in dismal ignorance. The message of the spinning-wheel is designed



to undo these terrible wrongs. The spinning-wheel gives the status to which a woman is entitled and it quickens the conscience both of men and women and enables man to understand his duty by the women of India. If my word has penetrated the hearts of men and women around me you will immediately understand why I consider these purses from you as not adequate for the purpose for which they are intended. I want you men and women to dismiss me from your minds altogether as a Mahatma dropped on you as a curse from heaven. But I want you to realize in all significance the fact that I come before you as a self-chosen humble servant and representative of *Daridranarayana*. I want you to understand that what you have given me is not given and not to be given to feed my vanity and my ambitions, but to clothe and feed *Daridranarayana* who is knocking every day, in season and out of season, at your doors. I have come to you to wake you up to a sense of duty by the starving millions on whom and on whose labour you and I are living. Even your money, your jewellery, your rings and your necklaces can be of no earthly use to me unless both men and women will wear khadi and nothing but that. This collecting of purses for the spinning-wheel is only a brief and intermediate interval. When every man and woman in India naturally takes to khadi as they all take to the grains that are grown on India's plains there will be as little use for these collections as there is for collection in order to carry on propaganda for cultivating rice and wheat in India. And it is open to you today to shorten that interval as much as you like by adopting khadi, every one of you; and in order to saturate our atmosphere with the spirit of the spinning-wheel, it is necessary for you, all the sisters who are sitting in front of me, to take up the spinning-wheel and if you will, it can become a symbol of your purity and your independence. And it is equally necessary for men to take up the spinning-wheel as a sacrificial rite. I cannot cheapen khadi and I cannot popularize khadi unless I have an army of expert spinners from men who and who alone can penetrate the villages and reinstate the spinning-wheel by giving necessary instruction and by doing the organizing work.



And now let me repeat what I have said in other places in Tamil Nadu about the social reforms which await fulfilment at our hands. Men's lives must become pure. Faithfulness on the part of the husband towards his wife is just as much a sacred obligation as faithfulness on the part of the wife towards her husband. It is wrong, no matter what authority may be cited from the so-called Shastras, for a man to have more than one wife. It is wrong to sell daughters in marriage. It is a sin to have a child widow in one's house and it is equally sinful to give away a child in marriage or to refuse to call all such contracts or ceremonies as an absolute nullity. And it is wrong also to keep our boys and girls without proper education and it is a heinous crime to regard a single human being as untouchable because he is born in a particular group or family. If we had a true awakening in our midst we would deal with all these social evils and deal also with the insanitation around us.

The Hindu, 29-9-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.44—46



190. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, MADURA

September 30, 1927

He asked them to remember that they had given him a purse not for his own use but for the use of millions of their starving sisters. Living in comfort as they were, he was sure they would find it difficult to imagine the distressing poverty of thousands of their sisters, with hardly one meal a day. There were others who had hardly sufficient clothing to cover up their nakedness. He had talked to some of these poor sisters who had no second clothing whatever and had therefore to go on from day to day without a thing. Needless to say they had no jewels or ornaments worth mentioning. They might not have seen or tasted ghee, oil or milk. Millions of them had no work for nearly four months in the year. Perhaps they would not be inclined to believe what all he had said, but he would tell them that many foreigners too had observed these things and written about them. It was for these poor sisters that he had accepted the purse from them. The money was not to be distributed among them as charitable doles but was proposed to be given to them as wages in return for the yarn which they would be asked to spin. They would be supplied with charkha and cotton and the yarn would be purchased from them. He therefore considered the spinning-wheel as the greatest instrument for bettering the condition of their poor sisters. The spinning-wheel would give them a ray of hope and a sense of self-respect. It would be a means of binding together all the many millions of people in India. They should not rest content merely making a donation which would be of no use if they did not wear khaddar. If really they had sympathy with their poor sisters they should wear only khadi, spun and woven by them. It might appear at first sight that it is difficult to discard all foreign cloth but if they tried they would find it very easy of accomplishment. If they would like to be Sita he would advise them to give up rich garments and jewels and take to khadi. But before they parted with any of their jewels



he would impose on them one condition, namely, that they should not ask their parents or their husbands to replace them. He said that three or four years ago he was presented by a lady with fifteen thousand rupees worth of jewels. He wanted them not only not to wear too many jewels but to be careful not to place their children in danger. For, he had come to know of an incident which took place some few days ago at Madura in which a respectable gentleman's daughter had been robbed of her jewels by some robbers. He also wanted them to remember that a woman's beauty did not consist in the jewels that she wore but in the possession of a pure heart. They should also teach this truth to their children and train them to build up their character by giving them proper education.

Again he would tell them that it is sinful to regard any single human being as an untouchable simply because he was born in particular surroundings. If they would copy Sita they would find that she did not regard even the king of the Nishadas as untouchable but gladly and gratefully accepted the services rendered by him. He had therefore no hesitation in saying that the evil custom of untouchability must disappear.

Yet another important matter about which he liked to talk to them was early marriages. They must realize that it was a barbarous system to marry girls at nine, twelve and even thirteen years. He considered such a thing to be immoral too, and urged that no girl should be married or induced to think of marriage before she had attained her sixteenth year. He would even ask them not to heed the Hindu Shastras if they said that girls should be married before puberty. Taking the case of some of the girls under his control he said that though some of them were aged from seventeen to twenty years, the girls had never thought of marriage till then. On the contrary, some of them were having good education and at the present moment some of them were working for the relief of the distressed in the flood-stricken areas in Gujarat. He



was also resolved not to think of their marriage until they themselves told him that they wanted to marry. But he would tell them that all these evil customs would disappear if they took to khadi. For the khadi spirit would make them pure and noble. They should not think that any small quantity of yarn spun by them would be a trifle but should remember that every bit of it augmented the country's wealth. In that light he would ask all of them to take to khadi and spin yarn for the sake of *Daridranarayana*.

The Hindu, 3-10-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.61-63



191. SPEECH AT TIRUMANGALAM

September 30, 1927

I would like the sisters who are sitting here to understand that the spinning movement is essentially a woman's movement. To me the spinning-wheel is a symbol of the liberation of Indian womanhood and I would like you therefore to co-operate with me in this effort not merely by giving your money or ornaments but also by wearing khadi. If you do not need spinning for your household work you can do it as a sacrifice. If you do it, it will add to the wealth of the country and the price of khadi also will become low.

The Hindu, 3-10-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.64



192. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, RAJAPALAYAM

October 4, 1927

Mahatmaji addressed the gathering in Hindi which was translated into Telugu. After thanking them for the address and the purses he said they had given the money for *Daridranarayana*. But while receiving the money he had mingled feelings of joy and sorrow—joy that they had given money for the Khadi Fund and sorrow in seeing that in spite of strenuous work for the last six or seven years for the spread of khadi among them so few of them wore khadi. Mahatmaji could not see any reason why they, Andhra Kshatriya ladies, should adopt *purdah*. If they remained at home, never came out into the public, they would not be able to know what was going on in the world. He wanted them to throw off foreign cloth and wear only khadi. He saw that they were rich people but he would tell them that there were thousands of poor sisters who were suffering from want of even one meal per day. To them the charkha could give a livelihood. But then if they, the rich people, did not wear khadi, their poor sisters could not earn anything. He asked them to remember that every man, woman and child of this land had a dharma to fulfil, and that was to wear khadi. They should do their dharma even as Sita Devi did and if all of them tried to act like Sita, he would tell them *Ramarajya* would come into existence. If they could not entertain feelings of sympathy and love for their poor brothers and sisters, of what use was their life to them? Rajapalayam khadi was very fine and an effort was being made to spread khadi work by giving away a hundred charkhas free of cost. He would therefore ask them to wear cloth spun and woven by them. The money they had given would be spent for the production of khadi and also in supplying charkhas to those who wanted them. In conclusion Mahatmaji asked them to give money and jewels for the Khadi Fund, and in doing so he told them it was not ornaments but a pure heart which lent beauty to a woman. He advised them not to load their children with jewels but give them good



education and training. He also asked them not to marry their girls before 16 or 17 years of age.

The Hindu, 6-10-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.76-77



193. 'AN INDIGNANT PROTEST'

The head master of a Bengali school writes:¹

Your advice and utterances to students at Madras², asking them to marry widowed girls only, have horrified us. ...

This kind of advice will tend to destroy the tendency of the widows to observe lifelong *brahmacharya*... Your theory of marriage will overturn the Hindu theory of transmigration, rebirth and even *mukti*³, and will bring down Hindu society on the same level with other societies which we do not like. . Examples of Ahalyabai, Rani Bhavani, Behula, Sita, Savitri, Damayanti will guide the Hindu society and we must direct it according to their ideals. ...

This indignant protest leaves me unconverted and unrepentant. My advice will not wean from her purpose a single widow who has a will of her own and who knows *brahmacharya* and is bent upon observing it. But if the advice is followed, it will certainly bring great relief to those girls of tender age who know not the meaning of marriage when they were put through the ceremony. The use of the term 'widow' in their connection is a violent abuse of a name with sacred associations. It is precisely for the very object that my correspondent has in view that I advise the youth of the country to marry these so-called widows or not at all. The sacredness of the institution can be preserved only when it is purged of the curse of child widowhood.

The statement that the widows attain *moksha* if they observe *brahmacharya* has no foundation whatsoever in experience. More things are necessary than mere *brahmacharya* for the attainment of the final bliss. And *brahmacharya* that is superimposed carries no merit with it, and often gives rise to secret vice that saps the morals of the society in which that vice exists. Let the correspondent know that I am writing from personal observation.

I should be glad indeed if my advice results in elementary justice being done to the maiden widows, and if for that reason the other maidens instead of being



prematurely sold to man's lust are given an opportunity of waiting for maturity in age and wisdom.

I have no theory of marriage that is inconsistent with a belief in transmigration, rebirth or *mukti*. The reader should know that millions of Hindus whom we arrogantly describe as belonging to the lower order have no ban on widow remarriage. And I do not see how if remarriage of old widowers does not interfere with that belief, real marriage of girls wrongly described as widows can interfere with that grand belief. I may mention for the edification of the correspondent that transmigration and rebirth are not mere theories with me but facts as patent as the daily rise of the sun. *Mukti* is a fact to realize which I am striving with all my might. And it is the contemplation of *mukti* which has given me a vivid consciousness of the wrong that is being done to these maiden widows. Let us not in our emasculation mention in the same breath as these modern injured maiden widows the immortal names of Sita and others referred to by the correspondent.

Lastly, whilst there is, and very properly, glorification of real widowhood in Hinduism, there is, so far as I am aware, no warrant for the belief that in the Vedic times there was any absolute ban upon remarriage of widows. But my crusade is not against real widowhood. It is against its atrocious caricature. The better way is not to regard as widows at all the girls I have in view and whom every Hindu who has a spark of chivalry in him is bound to relieve from their intolerable yoke. I therefore humbly but emphatically repeat the advice to every young Hindu to refuse to marry any but these maidens miscalled widows.

Young India, 6-10-1927

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.85-86

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1. Only extracts are reproduced.
 2. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XXXIV, pp.479-84.
 3. Deliverance from phenomenal existence.



194. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, COIMBATORE

October 16, 1927

SISTERS,

If you don't stop that noise I can't talk to you. I thank you for the purse you have given me. There are only one or two things I want to talk to you. We all want *Ramarajya* in India. You can't get *Ramarajya* in India if you can't live like Sita. Sita was pure in heart and pure in body. I think and it is my opinion, that most of you, the vast majority of you, defile your body with foreign cloth. Not so did Sita Devi. Don't suppose for one moment that Sita Devi went in for or sent for foreign finery to decorate her body. On the contrary, we know that in Sita Devi's time, Sita Devi and all the women of India sat spinning and wore cloth woven by the men of India. And that was beautiful. There is enough in our ancient books to show that women without exception spun in those times with their own hands and that we made all the cloth we needed. The books tell us that in those days India's millions in villages and towns ate well and clothed themselves sufficiently. But you deck your bodies with foreign saris, while millions of our women are starving in our villages. I know that men, no less than women, are guilty of this. I know that Indian men initiated this habit of wearing foreign cloth. The fruit of this has been that men and women in the villages are daily becoming poorer and daily descending into deepening distress. Like Sita Devi, think day by day of the poor brothers and sisters of India. When you think of them I am sure that you will think it your duty to wear the khadi woven by their sacred hands. I will tell you another thing that Sita Devi did. She did not consider a single human being as untouchable. She and the great Rama willingly and gratefully accepted the services of Nishadaraja, who according to our false notions of today would be considered untouchable. Bharata, the great brother of Rama, embraced Nishadaraja warmly when Bharata observed that he had served Rama with devotion. You know Bharata, the king of *rishis* and sannyasis.



Today we consider those who serve us, till our fields and clean our closets, as not fit to be touched by us. I tell you that it is not religion, but irreligion. And I wish that you should get rid of this stain of untouchability.

The third thing I want to talk to you about is *Devadasis*. Friends, I understand there are some of these sisters here. I consider the occupation of *Devadasis* to be immoral. They ought not to be found in that occupation. I see you have got your women's club or association. It is your first duty to look after these unfortunate sisters. If you band yourselves together and carry on an agitation in this matter, you can compel the men and women of Coimbatore into doing their duty in this regard.

You must take into your hands reforms of this character. You have heard the name of Dr. Muthulakshmi of Madras. She is your representative in the Madras Legislative Council. She is even its Deputy President. I had a long chat with her. Her view is, and others also think, that it is now high time to combat this serious evil of Hindu society. You here should do likewise.

There is another evil I should like to speak to you about. You give away your daughters in marriage before they can know what marriage can be. Do not get them married before they reach a ripe age, at least before they attain the age of 16. I tell you that it is a sin to do so.

I have with me in Ahmedabad girls more than 16 years old and unmarried. They are as innocent as flowers in your home. They spend their time in doing many acts of service for society. They receive proper education there. They are not going to be married, unless they themselves desire it. Do not for one moment consider that this is not your work, but men's work. This is especially your work for the women. Wake up and work for the happiness of the girls. The men cannot do it and won't do it.



To realize the truth I have told you, you need not go to colleges or read a single line. You can easily understand all this. This is what I call human education, what all women can achieve without knowing a single letter of the alphabet.

Now I must tell you, I am not satisfied with your purse. I can tell you what your sisters, the ladies of other districts, did for the movement. Malabar girls do not wear much jewellery like yourselves. Heavy jewellery I see only in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Desha. Malabar ladies parted with even the single bracelets, rings, etc., they wore for the khadi movement. And it is my standing request to them not to molest their husbands or disturb their parents for fresh jewellery to replace the jewels donated. If you feel for your poor sisters and if you like to, I would ask you to surrender your jewels for their sake. Gifts must be absolutely voluntary and willingly given.

Remember that the beauty of a woman does not consist in the beauty of her clothes and jewellery but in the purity of her heart. Whether you give me your jewellery or not, is a minor matter. But I do want you to bear the truths that I have just told you, in mind. And I tell you from my experience that the desire for wearing much jewellery does no good. Husbands often ask me to advise you to revise your notions of jewellery and finery. I am free to tell you that there are husbands who have assured me that the wives who came to be influenced by my teachings, themselves rejoiced for such influence.

May God, through you, bless our land.

The Hindu, 19-10-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.148-50



195. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, COIMBATORE

October 16, 1927

Last but not the least to be mentioned are our own unfortunate sisters, the *Devadasis*. I understand that they are to be found even in your midst. Some of them were present at the women's meeting this afternoon. It reflects no credit upon our religion or on our country. A Bill is pending before the Legislative Council sponsored by Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal. It has been framed, so far as I can see, on the Mysore model. That enlightened State dealt with this question so long ago as 1909. I suggest two things before this is done. Let these young men or old men who are making unlawful use of these dear sisters refrain from making them the object of their lust. Secondly, let everyone join in the crusade against the existence of this system, whether it is by legislation or by creating an active enlightened public opinion against this evil.

The Hindu, 18-10-1927

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, p.154



196. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Sud 6 [October 31, 1927]¹

SISTERS,

I tried to write in ink; but the train is moving so fast and is shaking so much that I cannot. And yet, how can I miss writing to you my Monday letter?

Never give up your efforts at unity. Success lies in the effort itself. God has promised that effort for good never goes waste and all of us have had some experience of this. You cannot now give up the store work. You should not, out of diffidence, give up work once undertaken. There is no reason either to feel diffident or to fear defeat. If a few of you gain experience and become expert in the work, there should be no hitch whatsoever; if you give up the store work out of a sense of defeatism, you will never be, able to undertake any other work without any misgiving. Even if there are differences of opinion and petty jealousies, whatever work has to be done must be done. We should certainly not do less than what others do.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3673

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.207

1. Year and month inferred from the reference to the Ashram women's efforts towards unity and Gandhiji's hope to see them "within three or four days".



197. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Monday, November 21 [1927]¹

SISTERS,

I have as yet received no letter from you. I have to wander about so much in Ceylon that it is difficult to get my mail direct from Colombo.

When I look at the Ceylonese women, I think of our Ashram women. I wrote to you upon the simplicity of the dress of ordinary women. On the other hand, women of higher social standing have grown so fashionable that they put on nothing but silk and brocades. In my eyes, it does not suit them at all. I always ask myself, "Whom do these women want to please by putting on such clothes?" There is no *purdah* system here. Why women adorn themselves, you can tell better than I. But seeing all this, I felt that it was good that we had established the tradition in the Ashram of wearing the fewest possible ornaments. I cannot of course say that in the Ashram we put on no ornaments at all. Write and tell me if you don't agree.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3677

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.286-87

1. From the reference to the Ceylon tour.



198. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, COLOMBO¹

November 22, 1927

I am used to ladies' meetings where thousands of sisters came in their naturalness and there the hearts meet. I do not think I can say that about this stiff meeting.

He gave them a picture of the starving millions, and said:

When Mahendra came to Ceylon the children of the motherland were not starving either materially or spiritually, our star was in the ascendant and you partook of the glory. The children are starving today and it is on their behalf that I have come with the begging bowl, and if you do not disown kinship with them, but take some pride in it, then you must give me not only your money but your jewellery as sisters in so many other places have done. My hungry eyes rest upon the ornaments of sisters, whenever I see them heavily bedecked. There is an ulterior motive too in asking ornaments, viz., to wean the ladies from the craze for ornaments and jewellery. And if I may take the liberty that I do with other sisters, may I ask you what it is that makes woman deck herself more than man? I am told by feminine friends that she does so for pleasing man. Well, I tell you if you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourselves for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything. I have mentally become a woman in order to steal into her heart. I could not steal into my wife's heart until I decided to treat her differently than I used to do, and so I restored to her all her rights by dispossessing myself of all my so-called rights as her husband. And you see her today as simple as myself. You find no necklaces, no fineries on her. I want you to be like that. Refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies, and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourselves, don't go in for scents and lavender waters; if you want to give out the proper scent, it must come out



of your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birthright. Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again.

And he cited for them the example of Sita defiant in her purity, and Miss Schlesin who with her defiant purity and innate fearlessness commanded in South Africa the adoration of thousands including amongst them fierce Pathans, robbers and questionable characters, and rounded off by telling them wherein true honour lies.

Do you know the hideous condition of your sisters on plantations? Treat them as your sisters, go amongst them and serve them with your better knowledge of sanitation and your talents. Let your honour lie in their service. And is there not service nearer home? There are men who are rascals; drunken people who are a menace to society. Wean them from their rascality by going amongst them as fearlessly as some of those Salvation Army girls who go into the dens of thieves and gamblers and drunkards, fall on their necks and at their feet, and bring them round. The service will deck you more than the fineries that you are wearing. I will then be a trustee for the money that you will save and distribute it amongst the poor.

I pray that the rambling message that I have given you may find a lodgment in your hearts.

With Gandhiji in Ceylon, pp. 16-21

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.288-89

1. Published under the title "The Haunting Memory"; Mahadev Desai says of this meeting: "Gandhiji had looked forward to a meeting like one of those women's meetings in South India attended by thousands. But instead there was a meeting of little more than a dozen ladies in the drawing room of a stately palace. It was a misnomer to call it a public meeting. ... For a moment it looked as though he would say nothing and go to the next function on his programme. But he saw that the ladies were not to blame... So he gave them a talk."



199. WHOLE TIME WORKERS ESSENTIAL¹

November 22, 1927

As you, sir, said in your remarks that you represent all races and religions, I congratulate you upon that, and if you are really capable of vindicating that claim, all honour to you, and not only the Congress but you then deserve to be copied by us. We, an older institution, are not able to vindicate that claim. We are striving; we are groping in the dark; we are trying to suppress provincialism; we are trying to suppress racialism; we are trying to suppress religionism, if I may coin a word; we are trying to express nationalism in its fullest form, but I am ashamed to confess to you that we are still far from it. But it is given to you to outstrip us and set us an example. It is easy for you, much easier for you than for us, but a condition indispensable for that is that some of you at least will have to give your whole time to this and not only your whole time but your whole selves and you will have to suppress yourselves.

As Gokhale said, politics had degenerated into a sort of game for leisure hours, whereas he desired that, for some at least, politics should be a whole-time occupation, it should engross the attention of some of the ablest men of the country. It is only when truth, fearlessness and non-violence are dominant factors that a person can devote himself unselfishly to the service of the nation.

I hope that in your Congress you have such a body of men and women, because woman must play her part side by side with man. As I said, in India our one limb is paralysed. Women have got to come up to the level of man. As I said to the ladies at a meeting today, they may not copy man in all the wildness of his nature, but they must come to the level of man in all that is best in him. Then in this island you will have a beautiful blend, then you will be worthy of what Nature has so profusely showered on you.

Young India, 1-12-1927



CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.296-97

1. The Ceylon National Congress received Gandhiji at the Public Hall on November 22nd. Gandhiji in reply to the president's welcome delivered a speech from which these passages are reproduced.



200. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, JAFFNA¹

November 26, 1927

I know that our women are the greatest offenders in this respect, and I individually appeal to them to moderate their taste for fine and silken saris and be satisfied with what their famishing sisters can produce for them. Then and then only will they be somewhat representative of Sita whose sacred feet hallowed this land as the legend has it. I give them my assurance that they will not look any the less handsome, because of their khadi sari. I would like to give them a warning too that I expect a lot of jewellery from them before I have left these shores.

I must not forget one thing. You have overloaded me with heavy things. I thought that you who claim close kinship and intimacy with me knew that if you gave me heavily framed addresses, they would be returned to you and you would be made to pay for them. You have not only spent upon heavy frames, but you have had your addresses illuminated. Unless you had all these things done with a mental reservation that you will be called upon to pay high price for these addresses, you have deprived the famishing sisters of so many rupees.

With Gandhiji in Ceylon, pp.121-28

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.324-25

1. The whole speech is not reproduced here, only the part of it, where he talks about women.



201. SPEECH AT INDIANS' MEETING, JAFFNA

November 27, 1927

It is in order to remove the sting of this growing, grinding pauperism that I have been ceaselessly wandering from place to place, exciting the sympathy of moneyed people on behalf of these men and women who do not know what a full meal can be. And it has been a matter of the greatest consolation, indeed, a sense that sustains me in spite of darkness surrounding us on all sides, that wherever I go I receive a ready response from our countrymen.

It causes me, therefore, no surprise that you have brought me here to meet you and given me your tangible sympathy. But you do not need to be told by me that the sympathy that you have given me in the shape of money is by no means enough. I can only take it as a token of your desire to render still more help, and therefore I must repeat for the thousandth time what I have been saying to every audience, that you will not have done your elementary duty by these famishing brothers and sisters of ours unless you follow up your donations by a fixed determination never more to make your cloth purchases in anything but khadi.

And the sisters who are also to be found in this hall must really help and respond to the dumb appeal of the famishing millions. Neither they nor the men may contemptuously tell me that khadi is too dear, that khadi is not fine enough, that it does not satisfy their taste. I have not yet heard a single mother to complain of the want of beauty of her children nor have I ever heard a mother complain that her children were a burden upon her purse. If you really feel for these famishing millions, if you really believe that they are famishing and that they are your own blood-brothers and blood-sisters, how can you complain of the price or quality of khadi? What right have you to think of fashion or of prices when you find that there are millions of people



hungry for food and can be fed by you if only you will wear khadi which is manufactured by their sacred but shaking hands?

Will you not take a leaf out of the book of Englishmen and Germans who taxed themselves, suffered untold privations and suffered all kinds of difficulties, including death, under circumstances too terrible to relate, and all for what they believed to be the honour of their country? How much more then should you deprive yourselves of your manufactured tastes and notions about fashionable dress and pay a little higher price for khadi when it is not merely the honour of your sisters which is at stake but when it is their very existence which is in danger.

With Gandhiji in Ceylon, pp. 134-36

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.333



202. LETTER TO K. S. KARANTH¹

AS AT THE ASHRAM,

SABARMATI,

December 19, 1927

I see no inconsistency between advocating *brahmacharya* and widow remarriage at the same time so long as I do not do so in connection with the same persons. Whilst I would like all young men to be and remain *brahmacharis*, I did not hesitate to advocate, countenance and even officiate at marriages of those who find it impossible to practise self-restraint. Of course when I advocate the marriage of child widows, I presume that they want the pleasure which all animals seek and some human beings only can restrain themselves from seeking. *Brahmacharya* is not a thing that can be superimposed, and it is sinful to *compel* child widows to remain unmarried.

If the fallen sisters to whom you refer will not mind marrying a person belonging to any caste, there should be no difficulty and they ought not to object to any caste. My asking them to observe celibacy, if they cannot secure a proper match, has a meaning. That is to say, if they will restrict themselves to a caste or a province, and yet lead a pure life, naturally they must observe celibacy or they must accept any person of any character.

From a microfilm: S.N. 12652

CWMMG, Vol. XXXV, p.394

1. Complete letter is not reproduced here.



203. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BERHAMPUR¹

December 4, 1927

SISTERS,

You have presented two purses for the khadi work. I acknowledge your present with gratitude. You must not think that I consider some of you as Oriyas and some as Telugus. You should feel that all are Indians. Some say that they belong to Andhra and some say that they belong to Orissa. Let all of you belong to India. Let all of you share each other's misery and happiness. Only thus can you become like Sita. Sita did not consider herself a citizen of Ayodhya. She always considered herself as belonging to the whole of India. I am really glad that you have written this welcome address in the national language, that is, Hindi. Let all of you give up foreign saris. Let all of you use only khadi. There is no necessity for a woman to wear beautiful saris and ornaments. The only thing a woman needs is purity. Let all of you wear khadi. Let all of you be pure and truthful. You should not consider anyone as untouchable. In India, that is, Bharatavarsha, it is a great sin to consider anyone as an untouchable. For heaven's sake do not commit that sin. Love those who are poor, diseased and hungry. Let all of you prove that you love them by spinning yarn on the charkha for at least half an hour every day. I appeal to those who have not contributed anything towards this Khadi Fund to contribute money or ornaments.

The Samaj, 10-12-1927 [From Oriya]

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.359-60

1. In Orissa.



204. LETTER TO ADA ROSENGREEN

AS AT THE ASHRAM,

SABARMATI,

December 11, 1927

DEAR FRIEND,

I have your letter¹ for which I thank you. You may translate the book *Self-restraint v. Self-indulgence*. As to the terms, I leave them to you. Whatever is given will be devoted to public use.

What you say about the women of the West is only partly true and true also perhaps to an extent for the women of India. But these are society women and very few. So far as the vast majority of women are concerned, they are too engrossed in their own occupations even to think of animal passions. It is reserved for man to become aggressive when animal passion forces him. What you say about passivity is unfortunately too true all the world over, and I do not know that the majority of women will ever be able to overcome that passivity. Perhaps the very construction of their bodies prevents the development of active resistance except under certain well-defined circumstances which are created by special culture. And it is because woman is passive that I have contended that it is man who is the more to blame than woman. And even the society woman of the West does not go beyond subtle attraction and blandishments. I have not known many cases of violence done by women to men. She has a remarkable capacity for controlling herself and pining away rather than be aggressive even under raging passion within her breast.

Yours sincerely,

M. ADA ROSENGREEN



LIDINGO, SWEDEN

From a photostat: S.N. 12541

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, p.373

1. Dated 28-9-1927, in which the addressee sought Gandhiji's permission to translate his book into Swedish.



205. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

CUTTACK,

*Silence Day [December 19, 1927]*¹

SISTERS,

God willing, there will be only one more Monday for me to write to you.

I have received Manibehn's letter. You suggest that I should discuss the question of dress in greater detail. I shall not do so now, but you may reopen the point when we meet. As long as we retain an attraction for fineries in the deepest recesses of our heart, it is useless to give up wearing them or adopt any other change just to imitate others who have given them up. But if our infatuation for fineries passes off, and still the mind is drawn towards them, then we should make the necessary outward changes, whether through a sense of shame or by way of imitation of others, and ultimately root out this craving. Infatuation and things like that are our enemies; they harass us so much that we should protect ourselves against them with help secured from every possible quarter. I am writing all this for those who are honest and sincere. The Gita says somewhere that those who deny themselves pleasures and crave for them in their hearts, are foolish and deceitful. This refers to the hypocrite. To those who are really honest and sincere, the *Gita* says that they should constantly control the passions that agitate them.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3674

CWMMG, Vol. XXXV, p.396

1. From the discussion about dress and finery; also from Gandhiji's being in Cuttack on this date.



206. WHAT SHOULD A HINDU WIDOW DO?

A gentleman from Ajmer writes in Hindi to say:

I wish you to answer the following questions of mine, in *Navajivan*:

How should Hindu widows not wishing to remarry spend the rest of their lives?

Maharshi Dayanand has written to say that they should practise celibacy, educate themselves and also educate young girls.

Do you agree with this view? If so, keeping in mind the present plight of our country, what would you like to add to this?

Maharshi Dayanand did not hold that all widows should spend their time in learning and teaching; this could only be by way of an example. In this case teaching means imparting a knowledge of letters. This knowledge is necessary to some extent; in my opinion, however, the more important teaching is how to stave off starvation. And every day, I am more firmly convinced that this lies in the spinning-wheel. If we of the middle class who are educated, and who look upon ourselves as belonging to the higher castes give a thought to the condition of the poorer classes, nothing else but the spinning-wheel will occur to us. The spinning-wheel will be plied mainly by women as it is primarily they who have time to spare. Hence I have been crying from the rooftops at various places, day and night, that it is through them that we would prevent crores of rupees from being drained out of the country and secure true swaraj—*Ramarajya*¹.

It is women who can readily approach others of their sex. Here in the Province of Orissa where I happen to write this, and where even the poorer women observe *purdah*, who can set aside *purdah* and approach them? I sent Mirabehn who has accompanied me to the women of a certain village. About fifty women surrounded her and became crazy with joy; they started asking her about many things and the



spinning-wheel came up for discussion. These women were absolutely naive, simple and ignorant. It is innumerable women of this type who should really be educated. Widows with pure character can readily impart such education, serve their own interest and, at the same time, help India solve its problems. Widows who are benevolently inclined can easily learn this work and do justice to it. However, an important prior condition for this is that they should be keen on going to villages and, while living there, should not get impatient. A widow who takes the vow of celibacy is not a helpless, crippled individual. If she is fit for self-realization, she is a strong independent woman capable of protecting herself. Compared with this, the education given to girls today is, I think, of little consequence. If however a widow refuses to go to the villages, idles away her time or, year after year, 'runs' from one place of supposed pilgrimage to another, mistaking this for dharma, it is obviously better if she stayed even in the city and engaged herself in teaching children. She has before her the vast field of nursing the sick. Very few Hindu women take up the profession of nursing. Widows in Maharashtra are found undergoing this training. Outside Maharashtra, very few widows are prepared to undergo this training. However, the jobs that I have suggested should also be regarded only as examples. Every sensible widow who wishes to practise celibacy should seek out some useful activity for herself and devote her whole life to it.

Navajivan, 25-12-1927 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XXXV, pp.419-20

1. Traditionally regarded as the ideal political order; literally, Rama's rule.



207. A SISTER'S DIFFICULTY¹

[January 29, 1928]

A sister writes:

A year ago I heard you speaking on the supreme necessity of every one of us wearing khadi and thereupon decided to adopt it. But we are poor people. My husband says that khadi is costly. Belonging as I do to Maharashtra, I wear a sari nine yards long. Now if I reduced the length of my sari to six yards, there would be a great saving, but the elders will not hear of any such reduction. I reason with them that wearing khadi is the more important thing and that the style and length of the sari is absolutely immaterial, but in vain. They say that it is my youth that puts all these new-fangled notions into my head. But I expect that they will agree to the proposed reduction in length if you are good enough to write to me, saying that khadi ought to be used, even at the cost of the style of clothing.

I have sent the desired reply² to the sister. But I take note of her difficulty here, as I know that the same difficulty is encountered by many other sisters as well.

The letter in question bears witness to the strong patriotic feeling of the writer, for there are not many sisters who, like her, are ready to give up old styles or old customs on their own initiative. The number of such sisters and brothers is legion as would gladly have swaraj if it could be attained without suffering any discomfort or incurring any expenditure and in spite of their sticking to old customs, regardless of their propriety or the reverse. But swaraj is not such a cheap commodity. To attain swaraj implies the cultivation of a spirit of self-sacrifice, including the sacrifice of provincialism.

Provincialism is a bar not only to the realization of national swaraj, but also the achievement of provincial autonomy. Women perhaps are more responsible than men for keeping up this narrow spirit. Variety is worth cherishing up to a certain limit, but if the limit is exceeded, amenities and customs masquerading under the name of



variety are subversive of nationalism. The Deccani sari is a thing of beauty, but the beauty must be let go if it can be secured only by sacrificing the nation. We should consider the Kachchhi style of short sari or the Punjabi *odhani* to be really artistic if the wearing of khadi can be cheapened and facilitated by their means. The Deccani, Gujarati, Kachchhi and Bengali styles of wearing sari are all of them various national styles, and each of them is as national as the rest. Such being the case, preference should be accorded to that style which requires the smallest amount of cloth consistently with the demands of decency. Such is the Kachchhi style, which takes up only 3 yards of cloth, that is, about half the length of the Gujarati sari, not to mention the saving of trouble in having to carry a smaller weight. If the *pachhedo* and the petticoat are of the same colour one cannot at once make out whether it is only a *pachhedo* or full sari. The mutual exchange and imitation of such national styles is eminently desirable.

Well-to-do people might well keep in their wardrobes all possible provincial styles of clothing. It would be very courteous and patriotic on the part of a Gujarati host and hostess to put on the Bengali style of dress when they entertain Bengali guests, and *vice versa*. But such procedure is open only to the patriotic rich. Patriotic people of the middle and poorer classes should take pride in adopting that particular provincial style which cheapens as well as facilitates the wearing of khadi. And even there they should fix their eye upon the clothing style of the poorest of the poor.

Swadeshi does not mean drowning oneself in one's own little puddle but making it tributary to the ocean that is the nation. And it can claim to contribute to the ocean only if it is and keeps itself pure. It is therefore clear that only such local or provincial customs should have a nation-wide vogue as are not impure or immoral. And when once this truth is grasped, nationalism is transmuted into the enthusiasm of humanity.



What is true of clothing is equally true of language, food, etc. As we might imitate the dress of other provinces on a suitable occasion, so might we utilize the language and other things. But at present all our energy is wasted in the useless, impossible and fatal attempt to give English the pride of place to the neglect, conscious or unconscious, of our mother tongue and all the more so, of the languages of other provinces.

Young India, 2-2-1928

CWMG, Vol. XXXV, pp.504-505

1. Translated by V. G. Desai from the Gujarati original published in *Navajivan*, 29-1-1928.

2. This letter is not available.



208. LETTER TO GIRWARDHAR¹

SWARAJ ASHRAM, BARDOLI,

August 4, 1928

DEAR FRIEND,

I thank you for your booklet². I do not know whether I shall ever get the time to read it.

1. There are no courtyards specially reserved for women in these parts as in Bihar.
2. Though there is no special courtyard or room reserved, males do not have free access to the females.
3. Women at public meetings have special enclosures reserved for them, as a rule.
4. Many educated women do dislike manual labour.

Yours sincerely,

From a microfilm: S.N. 13902

CWMMG, Vol. XXXVII, p.126

1. A *vakil* of Samastipur (Bihar) who in his letter (S.N. 18872) dated June 30, 1928, had asked Gandhiji the following questions: "(1) Has every Hindu house there a courtyard with rooms reserved for females as in our Province? (2) Has any friend and acquaintance of the males free access to the Zanana Compartment there? (3) In public meetings do the females sit together or promiscuously with males? (4) Have the educated females there a dislike for household manual labour like cooking, etc., or they continue to do the work themselves? (5) Do the females jointly sit with males in the outer apartments amongst their friends, acquaintances and clients, etc., or do they come out on rare occasions when necessity requires it?" It appears that Gandhiji did not answer the fifth question.

2. In Hindi entitled Gram Sudhar for being reviewed in *Young India* and *Navajivan*.



209. SPEECH ON RESOLUTION ON NEHRU REPORT, CALCUTTA CONGRESS-I¹

December 26, 1928

... Measures shall be taken to remove disabilities of women and they will be invited and encouraged to take their due share in national upbuilding.² ...

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 27-12-1928

CWMMG, Vol. XXXVIII, p.269

1. At the Subjects Committee Meeting; as a result of the All Parties Conference's resolution, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to draft the principles of a constitution before 1-7-1928. The report of this committee was known as the Nehru Report.

2. A point from the text of the resolution read by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.



210. THE FUNCTION OF WOMEN¹

The function of women is not to allow themselves to be prostituted by men in exchange for their support, but to be the queens of the household,—“running a home efficiently, caring for and educating children properly, steadily seeking to conceive and transmit new, proper, and higher ideals before they come under the influence of others of the opposite sex—all these things represent work of the highest, most important and most difficult kind that can be performed in this world”.

And not only married women. “any girl, with the proper guidance, can transmute her sex appeal, much or little into a powerful inspirational force for good or evil, with the results limited only by the height of her ideals, the character of her personality, the degree of her beauty, and her ability to make contact with the proper type of men”. “The greatest example in history of the possibilities latent in this force, and a convincing argument for the vital necessity of chastity in unmarried girls is that furnished by Joan of Arc, whom the records do not show as having been more than ordinary in appearance, but whose ideals and chastity had so powerful an effect upon the minds of the men of her time that they transformed a thoroughly beaten army into an irresistible fighting machine and earned for her the title of “Deliverer of France”. The author goes on to describe the romance of this peasant girl appearing in France at a critical moment of her history when she had been beaten by England in every battle for several years, when she had nothing but an incapacitated and dissolute soldiery, when women had lost all virtue and honour and when poverty stalked the land. “what!” said the people “a sixteen year old girl virgin in France? Wonderful—if true.” She successfully passed the test of a commission appointed to establish her claim of virginity and was placed clothed in a suit of silver armour at the head of the army which with her magic touch of virgin purity ‘promptly came to life as if it had received an electric shock’. “Playing her part so marvellously well as almost to



warrant the popular belief in divine assistance, by sheer inspirational force, made potent by the belief of men in her chastity, and sustained by her own high ideals she caused the thoroughly beaten army to turn against its enemy, and in a campaign of less than one hundred days they together broke the power of the English in France". No legend this, but 'one of the most accurately authenticated historic records in existence.'

Instances of such sublimated passion, of one unearthly passion subduing an earthly one, are not wanting in our own country. Among women of rank were Mirabai who turned her passion to God, Ahalyabai Holkar and Lakshmibai of Jhansi who were ideal administrators, and Avvai and Andal, both holy virgins like St. Joan, who are remembered as ideals for all time by the women of South India.

Young India, 18-10-1928. Vol. X, No.42, p.350

1. This is written by Mahadev Desai.



211. SPEECH AT D. J. S. COLLEGE HALL, KARACHI

February 5, 1929

I am told that as soon as marriage is proposed to a Sindhi young man he wants to be sent to England at the expense of his prospective father-in-law and that even after marriage misses no opportunity of exacting money from the bride's father. You think yourselves very clever. You get a good lot of money and try to become barristers or I.C.S. Now what is the meaning of all this? You thereby tyrannize over your own women, over your wives. Wife in our language has been described as *ardhangini* or the better half of man. But you have reduced her to the position of mere chattel to be bought and sold. There is a word in Hindi—*ardhangavayu*. Can anybody tell me a proper English word for *ardhangavayu*?

A VOICE FROM THE GALLERY: Paralysis.

Yes, paralysis is the exact word for it. This shows that you know Hindi very well and a vote of censure should be passed for Mr. Lulla's having presented to me the address in English. Well, I was going to say that it is the suppression of the better half of society by you menfolk that is responsible for the state of paralysis in which we find our society today. You read your Milton, your Browning, and your Whittier, all right. Is this what you have learnt from them to reduce your wives who should be the queens of your hearts and your homes into *londis*¹? Shame, shame on you! Tell me that you will starve but you will never make your women your slaves. Promise me that *deti-leti*² shall be wiped off. Swear that you will cherish the freedom of your women, as much as your own, that you will die to restore to them their full status and dignity. Otherwise, remember the whole world will shower its contempt on you. The other day Prof. Narayandas Malkani wired to me that he got his daughter married with only a sari for dowry. He wanted me to send my blessings to the couple. But I hesitated as a Sindhi friend to whom I mentioned the thing told me that it was impossible for a man



to get his daughter married in Sind with that much dowry. That shows what sort of reputation you have established for yourselves. Promise me that you will die rather than be party to the humiliation of your womenfolk by allowing the custom of *deti-leti* to prevail. Then I will understand that you are ready for the freedom of your country. If I had a girl under my charge, I would rather keep her a maiden all her life than give her in marriage to one who demanded even a pie as a condition for marrying her. Remember these four things then: use your mother tongue, wear only homespun cloth, free your womenfolk from social disabilities, and do something to help our poor. ...

From a copy: S.N. 16105

CWMMG, Vol. XXXIX, pp.415-16

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1. Slave girls or maid servants.
 2. Dowry system.



212. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, SUKKUR

February 10, 1929

If you want to establish swaraj in India, which for you and me can only mean *Ramarajya*, you must become pure in mind and body like Sita, for then alone you will become the mothers of heroes. And as a first step towards attaining bodily purity you must wear pure, homespun khadi just as Sita did in days of old. And lastly you must emancipate yourselves and your daughters from the thralldom of the various social abuses and tyrannies that are prevalent in your midst at present.

Young India, 21-2-1929

CWMG, Vol. XXXIX, p.447



213. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, PADIDAN¹

February 13, 1929

Our Shastras say that God is incarnate in the person of a pure woman—a sati. You should legitimately occupy the position of queens in your homes. But that will only be when you have rescued your men-folk from the drink habit.

The curse of drink had resulted in the total destruction of the great Yadava dynasty to which Lord Krishna himself belonged. And history recorded the fact that the drink habit had a share in bringing about the downfall of the Roman Empire. In short wherever it succeeded in obtaining a footing it brought misery and degradation in its train. But the women had at their disposal the great and powerful weapon of satyagraha, If Kaikeyi could obtain all that she wanted from Dasharatha by dint of *duragraha* what could they not achieve with the help of satyagraha? Their cause was just and they had an unlimited capacity for self-sacrifice and self-suffering. Victory would assuredly be theirs if they tried and persevered to the end.

Young India, 28-2-1929

CWVG, Vol. XXXIX, pp.458-59

1. Extracted from Pyarelal's "Weekly Letter".



214. PROHIBITION IN AMERICA

One reads conflicting reports in newspapers about the great experiment in prohibition that America is making. I question about it the many American tourists who visit me and the majority have assured me that the experiment is working well. Among these visitors recently there was an American authoress Madame Sara M. Algeo. She claimed to have worked in the cause of prohibition and was an ardent reformer. I therefore asked her to put down in writing as briefly as she could her impressions of the experiment which she very kindly did.¹

The Women Did It. It was the quiet little homebody of the South who contrary to all political expectations deserted her party, the Democratic, that of Mr. Smith, and voted for Mr. Hoover. Not only did they vote for Mr. Hoover but they formed clubs and shamed many of their menfolk into supporting him. It was indeed a victory for prohibition, a victory for woman suffrage, but especially a great triumph of good over evil.

Young India, 14-2-1929

CWVG, Vol. XXXIX, p.460-61

1. Only one point about women is reproduce here.



215. LETTER TO HORACE G. ALEXANDER

AS AT THE ASHRAM, SABARMATI,

March 7, 1929

DEAR FRIEND,

I have your letter as also Dr. Vaughan's book. I have gone through the booklet. There is no comparison between Miss Mayo's production and Dr. Vaughan's essay. It is a very serious contribution to a thorny subject. I propose to make use of it in the pages of *Young India*.

I do not know whether I have already written to you telling you that the Quaker books you referred to were duly received by me some months after receipt of your letter. I was grateful for the gift.

You have now learnt why I had to give up the idea of going to Europe.

I have not seen the reference about my wife.¹ But I can tell you that the relations between us are of the happiest kind. It is quite true if the writings gave you the impression that I do not carry my wife with me through her intellect. Her loyalty is amazing and she has followed me through all the transformations that my life has undergone. My own conviction is that most probably the reverence felt by the Indian men towards India's women is quite equal to that felt in the West; but it is of a different type.² The Western form of reverence yielding the first place to women and many such other things, seems to me to be highly artificial and sometimes even hypocritical. All the same, there is much to criticize in our treatment of women. Some laws are bad, some husbands are monsters, some parents are heartless towards their daughters. In these matters toleration is, in my opinion, the key to a mutual understanding. Every social institution, however admirable it may be, has its own shortcomings. I know you are too generous to take this paragraph for special pleading in our treatment of



women where it falls short of the standard that justice demands. I have simply told you as I have felt.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

From a photostat: G.N. 1406

CWMG, Vol. XL, pp.98-99

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1. In his letter dated February 5, the addressee had written that from some books he had read he got the impression that Gandhiji and Kasturba were “not always of one mind”.
 2. The correspondent had, among other things, written: “...the biggest stumbling-block to appreciation of the East comes from the belief that Eastern peoples have not learnt the same reverence for women as we have now begun to learn in the West” (S.N. 15329).



216. WOMEN AND WAR

An effective movement against war is making steady headway in the West and the women of the West are playing a most important, if not the leading, part in the movement. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom issued at its Conference at Frankfurt-on-Main held on January 4th the following telling appeal:¹

We are too poor to give any material support. Moreover we are not a nation to take part in any war. Till we come to our own, we shall have to be victims of the war that may come upon the world, but it is possible to render more than moral and material support to the movement, that is, by regaining our freedom not by warlike means but by non-violent means. I suggest to the friends of peace for the world that the Congress in 1920 took a tremendous step towards peace when it declared that it would attain her own, namely, swaraj by non-violent and truthful means. And I am positive that if we unflinchingly adhere to these means in the prosecution of our goal, we shall have made the largest contribution to the world peace.

Young India, 21-3-1929

CWMMG, Vol. XL, p.167

1. The appeal, not reproduced here, sought moral support and material help for the campaign for disarmament.



217. TO GUJARATIS RESIDENT IN BURMA

The people of Burma appeared to me unsophisticated, simple and trusting. The freedom which their women enjoy is enjoyed by women nowhere else in the world. I did not feel that, because of that freedom, they were bad in any way. There is modesty in their eyes. We might not like some of their ways; if the Burmese system of marriage strikes us as somewhat slack the women are not to blame; they see in it no impurity at all.

My feeling is that the Indians have been taking advantage of the innocence of these simple women. The educated people of Burma do not approve of the conduct of the Indians with regard to their women. It would not pain them if Indians married Burmese girls with proper ceremony, but I could see they intensely dislike those who merely indulge in their sexual urge. Indians ought to keep their conduct in this matter above board. I know that *Navajivan* may not reach the hands of those who are guilty; if it does, they may not read this and if by chance they do, they may angrily or without thinking throw it away. But I have sounded this warning out of a hope that those who read this article and have the above experience or know those who have illicit contacts will admonish them.

Navajivan, 31-3-1929 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XL, p.193



218. HELPLESS CONDITION OF WOMEN

I

Here is a summary¹ of what a young man writes:

There must be many such pitiable cases in Hindu society. There can be no instant remedy. There are some conditions which have to be put up with. What strikes me in such a case is this: if any relative of the girl wishes to help her, he should do so resolutely. If the husband, though a boy, has sense he should make use of his connection with the girl, which was brought about without his consent, in educating her, should treat her as a sister and find a husband for her. I know one can scarcely expect so much wisdom in a boy of fifteen. But in writing this I have in view a number of young men of that age who are altruistically inclined. A third way, that of educating public opinion, of bringing to light such ill-assorted unions, is of course there. If we do this, even if the unhappy girl cannot be saved, there will at least be fewer cases of this kind.

What has been said above implies the need for truth, fearlessness, firmness and daring. Only if we accept that that is not marriage which does not answer to the definition of a marriage can we go ahead. He who is afraid of his community or of poverty, and so on, can never bring about reforms. Reformers have had to die, to suffer, to starve; they have been maligned. No true reforms have been possible in the world without this.

1. Not translated here. The correspondent had said that a boy of 15 having married a girl of 17 had developed a dislike for her and wanted to remarry. Since it was difficult for the wife to remarry, what was she to do?



II

A doctor writes:¹

This doctor is to be congratulated. As he writes, many doctors, tempted by a fee, assist in the crime at such times. But I do not write this to set down the duty of doctors. The above letter furnishes yet another picture of the helpless condition of women. The remedy is what has been suggested above. The present-day society which violates ahimsa in the name of ahimsa does not hesitate to perpetrate cruelties of such kind; it constantly slaughters the cow that is woman. Under the guise of protecting the purity of women, it places all sorts of restrictions on them and, tortured by oppression, they, like others, secretly commit crimes. No one can be kept pure by force. It is desirable that, instead of men and women committing sin in private, they should humbly acknowledge their weaknesses, remarry and thus save themselves from ignominy. But who would help a woman? Men have cleared a way for themselves. As an atonement for their crime in imposing oppressive laws on women, men as a class should help women. It is useless to expect this of elders whose ideas have already become fixed. It is possible for youths, acting within certain limits, to help women. Ultimately, it is women who will bring about the emancipation of women. There are not many such women in India yet. When the youths rush to help women in a big way, there will be awakening among them; and from their ranks will rise heroines dedicated to service.

Navajivan, 21-4-1929 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XL, pp.274-75

1. The letter is not translated here. The doctor had said that a man had approached him with the information that a widow was with child as a result of his intimacy with her, and requested him to give him some drug to induce abortion. The doctor had refused.



219. A FEW QUESTIONS

Is there no way of dealing with the problem of widows in India except remarriage which lowers the banner of chastity—a way which will safeguard their virtue and at the same time enable them to participate in work for the country? In India there are more girls than boys and more widows than widowers. How then can this problem be solved by remarriage?

To say that widow remarriage leads to loss of chastity is wrong. To forcibly prevent a widow from remarrying, when she wishes to do so, would be harming chastity and dharma as well. Only by marrying a child-widow can we safeguard dharma and chastity. We can safeguard *brahmacharya* only by respecting the widows, by providing them means of education, and by granting them full freedom to remarry. Mental and physical prostitution is widespread today and the reason for this is the coercion used against widows. It cannot be proved that there are more girls than boys or more widows than widowers. It is true of a few castes. It is however to be desired that the too many castes now existing should disappear. There can be no more castes than the four *varnas*. The Hindu Shastras do not authorize the existence of the innumerable castes found today. It may be that the multiplication of castes served some useful purpose. But today castes serve no purpose and meet no need.

Hindi Navajivan, 20-6-1929 [From Hindi]

CWMMG, Vol. XLI, pp.68-69



220. WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

Ever since I expressed my views about widow-remarriage¹ I have been receiving lots of questions. Many which I feel do not need answering, I forget. But the following questions deserve consideration:

1. Up to what age should widows be permitted to remarry?
2. If, after widow-remarriage has been socially approved, a widow past the specified age should desire to remarry and insists on doing so, how can she be stopped?
3. After widow-remarriage has been socially approved, should widows with children, or those who are no longer young be allowed to remarry if they want to?
4. An article written by Shri Ramanand Chatterjee, Editor, *Modern Review*, has appeared in *Widow' Cause*, an English paper published from Lahore. The article suggests that widows should be allowed to remarry up to the age of thirty-five. Is this right?
5. Once the custom of widow-remarriage becomes established, widows will wish to remarry and even those widows who had not so far considered remarriage out of respect for custom will start doing so.

There is no need to answer these questions separately for they are all prompted by a misunderstanding of my views. The rights or latitude allowed to widowers should also be allowed to widows. Otherwise widows become victims of coercion and coercion is violence, out of which only harm can come. The questions raised about widows are not raised about widowers. It can only be because laws applying to women have been framed by men. If law-making had been the business of women they would not have given themselves fewer rights than men enjoy. In countries where women have a hand in law-making they have had the necessary laws enacted for themselves.

Thus the answer to the above questions is that it is the duty of the father to marry off his young widowed daughter. As regards the rest no obstacles should be placed in the way of those who wish to remarry.



There is no reason to believe that when such an arrangement comes into effect all widows would remarry. In those countries where widow-remarriage is allowed all the widows do not remarry, nor do all the widowers. Only when widowhood is observed voluntarily is it worthy of praise. Enforced widowhood is to be condemned and leads to promiscuity. I know of many widows who do not wish to remarry though there are no restrictions imposed on them.

Hindi Navajivan, 11-7-1929 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. XLI, pp.179-80

1. Vide *CWMG*, Vol. XLI, pp.68-9.



221. A HUSBAND'S DUTY

A friend writes:¹

Husbands are always eager to read sermons to their wives. Wives are even told to consider themselves the husband's property. The husband feels that he has the same proprietary rights over his wife as he has over his goods and chattels and livestock. To support this position they do not hesitate to quote from the *Ramayana*:

Drums, fools, Shudras, beasts and women,

All these are fit to be beaten.

These lines are considered to sanction chastisement of wives in our society. I am quite certain that this verse is not by Tulsidas. Even if it is one may be sure that it does not express Tulsidas's personal views but merely the prevailing social attitude. It is also possible that without giving the matter much thought he simply gave support to the prevailing social disposition. The *Ramayana* is a devotional poem written from the standpoint of a *bhakta*. Tulsidas did not write it in the capacity of a reformer. That is why he has drawn a realistic picture of his age and described it so naturally. Although his description is not without blemishes, this does not lessen the importance of this superb work. Just as one cannot expect the *Ramayana* to give us correct geographical information, in the same way we cannot expect it to propound for us the modern view. But we are straying from the subject. Whatever Tulsidas's view may have been about women there is no doubt that a man who treats his wife like an animal, who considers her as his property, cuts himself from his better half².

It is the duty of the husband to consider his wife a true companion, helper and his better half. He should share her joys and sorrows. A wife is never to be considered her husband's slave, nor merely meant to be the object of his lust. She has a right to the same freedoms which the husband wants for himself.



The culture in which women are not honoured is doomed. The world cannot go on without either the men or the women, it can go on only by their mutual co-operation. If the wrath of woman should be roused she could destroy man. That's why she has been considered *Mahashakti*.

Hindu culture has always respected women. They have always been given the pride of place. For instance, we say 'Sita Ram', never 'Ram Sita'. Vishnu is known 'Lakshmi pati'. Mahadev is also worshipped as 'Parvati pati'. The creator of the *Mahabharata* gave the place of honour to Draupadi, as the *Adikavi*³ Valmiki gave to Sita. We begin our day by reciting the sacred names of chaste women. A civilization so noble cannot bring the status of women down to the level of goods and chattels.

The questions are now easily answered. It is my firm belief that a wife has full right to her husband's earnings. She has an inalienable right to his property. It is the husband's duty to protect his wife and to do what he can to provide her food and clothing.

Hindi Navajivan, 8-8-1929 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. XLI, pp.268-69

1. The letter is not translated here. The correspondent had mentioned a friend who was dissatisfied with his wife because in his opinion she was not a good housewife and wanted her to leave him. He had raised questions concerning the relative rights of husband and wife.

2. The Hindi has *ardhanga*.

3. Literally, 'the first poet'.



222. SERVICE TO WOMEN

Whenever I happen to go to Bombay, the men and women of Bombay refuse to leave me alone. A large gathering of men and women always assembles at Mani Bhuvan. However, on this occasion, on the 7th, when I passed through Bombay on my way to Bhopal, four functions were arranged. Two of these were held at Vile Parle and the other two in the heart of the city itself. The first of these was the laying of the foundation-stone of an Ashram for the benefit of women.

Shri Karsandas Chitalia has been the guiding spirit behind this. He had been dreaming of such an Ashram every day. He has always had his eyes fixed on Surajbehn and other women. Unfortunately, the former has become a widow. One way to make her forget her widowhood was to get her fully occupied in the task of serving women and make her forget her own sorrow. Shrimati Ramabai Ranade and such other distinguished women have kept this ideal alive. Shri Karsandas has a unique faith in Surajbehn. Although she has had no education, she has a very soft heart and has always been enthusiastic about serving women. However, I believe that she has yet to train herself. Shri Karsandas is of opinion that regardless of whether she has received any training or not, if once a small building is built for her, she will train herself as she is kind-hearted and will be at peace with herself if she throws herself whole-heartedly into the work. Other women too will do likewise. I see haste and impatience in this. I feel that as soon as women become ready, a building will surely be ready for them. It is necessary to prepare the temple of one's heart before preparing a structure of brick and mortar. Once the former is achieved, the rest will certainly follow. If this is not done, other things even if present, are useless, and very often difficulties crop up in the way of getting them or fraudulent practices have to be resorted to for that purpose. Today there are buildings in which only crows live. There are others which



put the name 'Ashram' to shame, where self-interest rather than the ideal of welfare, immorality rather than morality reigns.

However, I am a humble creature who is a slave of love. I am bewitched by Shri Karsandas's simple-minded devotion. Ten years ago, due to his and Shrimati Jaiji Petit's efforts I had received a purse of Rs. 25,000 on behalf of the Bhagini Samaj. Ever since then I was determined to make use of that amount for the service of women alone and in using it to seek the advice of this lady and this gentleman. Shri Karsandas had collected some funds for this Ashram, while a portion of the amount was donated by Surajbehn. That was not sufficient to start an Ashram. Hence, at the suggestion of Shri Karsandas, I decided to make use of that sum in order to make up the needed amount. Not resting satisfied with this, Shri Karsandas insisted upon my laying the foundation-stone of the building. Hence yielding to his insistence, I have performed this ceremony. Now I hope and pray that those women on whom Shri Karsandas is relying will justify his faith in them. A trust is being formed and a constitution is being drafted for the Ashram. Hence all precautions dictated by practical common sense are being and will be taken in order to safeguard its objectives.

As a matter of fact, service to women can be rendered only by other women coming forward to serve. Women ought to learn to live together, to work together, to tolerate one another's temperamental differences, to think independently and to put these thoughts into action with courage and determination and to put up with hardships. Women have a far greater capacity for renunciation than men. However, the women of India have not developed a viewpoint that enables them to look beyond the narrow limits of the family. One of the aims of this Ashram is certainly to remedy this drawback.

Navajivan, 15-9-1929 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XLI, pp.405-407



223. LOOSE THINKING

A correspondent writes:

In the course of an article you have said at one place: "Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not the union of bodies but the union of souls indissoluble even by the death of either party. Where there is a true union of souls, the remarriage of a widow or widower is unthinkable, improper and wrong."

At another place in the course of the same article you say: 'I consider remarriage of virgin widows not only desirable but the bounden duty of all parents who happen to have such widowed daughters.' How do you reconcile the two views?

I find no difficulty in reconciling the two views. In the giving away of a little girl by ignorant or heartless parents without considering the welfare of the child and without her knowledge and consent there is no marriage at all. Certainly it is not a sacrament and therefore remarriage of such a girl becomes a duty. As a matter of fact, the word 'remarriage' is a misnomer in such cases. The virgin was never married at all in the true sense, and therefore on the death of her supposed husband it would be the most natural thing, it will be a duty, for the parents to seek for her a suitable companion in life.

Young India, 26-9-1929

CWVG, Vol. XLI, pp.471-72



224. THE HINDU WIFE

This article Gandhiji wrote in connection of a long letter of a brother describing the miseries of his married sister: "... My sister is heart-broken. ... We are helpless. What would you advise her and us to do? This is one of the most shameful aspects of Hinduism, where woman is left entirely at the mercy of man and has no rights and privileges. If a man chooses to be cruel and heartless, there is no remedy left to the unfortunate woman. ..."

The correspondent has sent me his full name. ... His condemnation of Hinduism, though pardonable under intense irritation, is based on a hysterical generalization from an isolated instance. For millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in their own homes. ... The case of cruelty brought to light by the correspondent is an illustration not of the evil in Hinduism, but of the evil in human nature which has been known to express itself under all climes and among people professing different faiths of the world. The facility for divorce has proved no protection against a brutal husband for a pliant wife incapable of asserting and at times even unwilling to assert herself. It is therefore in the interest of reform for reformers to avoid hysterics and exaggerations.

Nevertheless the occurrence to which this article draws attention is not an altogether uncommon occurrence in Hindu society. Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, and has insisted on the complete merging of the wife in the husband. This has resulted in the husband sometimes usurping and exercising authority that reduces him to the level of the brute. The remedy for such excesses therefore lies not through the law but through the true education of women as distinguished from unmarried girls, and through cultivating public opinion against unmanly conduct on the part of husbands. In the case ... brother and other relatives ... should clothe her with protection, educate her



to believe that it is no part of her duty to placate a sinful husband or to seek his company. It is quite evident that the husband himself does not care for the wife. She may therefore without breaking the legal tie live apart from her husband's roof and feel as if she had never been married. Of course there are two legal remedies open even to a Hindu wife for whom a divorce is unobtainable, and that is to have the husband punished for common assault and to insist upon his supporting the wife. ... This remedy is in most cases ... useless, and it never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman and makes the question of husband's reform more difficult if not impossible which after all should be the aim of society, more so of every wife. ... [Case where girl's parents cannot support her] ..., the number of institutions that would give shelter to such ill-treated women is growing in the country. There still remains the question of the satisfaction of the sexual appetite on the part of young women.

Young India, 3-10-1929

CWMG, Vol. XLI, pp.493-94



225. LETTER TO A

GONDA,

October 10, 1929

DEAR FRIEND...¹,

I got your letter. There is nothing in it which need be kept secret. You have admitted your error, and so nothing more need be said about it.

A man has no right at all to beat any woman. Are men less guilt towards their wives? If, however, wives started beating their husbands for every misdeed, we would see very few husbands alive. If a woman has no such right, how can a man claim it? I do not write all this to point out your fault, but only to open your eyes.

So that you may feel the seriousness of your error still more and refrain from repeating it.

Moreover, you observe *brahmacharya* even in relation to your wife, so that it is all the more your duty to remain unaffected by her. You should forget the very thought that she is your wife. You should regard her as your friend and serve her as best as you can. If she stole cotton, you should have paid its price. If she steals again, you can fix a maintenance allowance for her and ask her to live separately from you.

Moreover, you had really no right to use her cushion. So long as your relations are unhappy, you should never accept a service or obligation from her, and in using her cushion you accepted, if not a service, an obligation from her.

I also place before you a rather subtle consideration. No person who wishes to observe *brahmacharya* should use any article belonging to a woman towards whom impure feelings are likely to be aroused in his heart. Especially, he should not use an article like a cushion which she must have touched every day and which the man may



have used together with her when in an impure state of mind. The vows which you have described are good. If they do not forbid milk, you may benefit by taking milk or curds. Do not take any vow which is beyond your strength. There is no harm if you cannot take a vow, but it will do you much harm if you take a vow and then are forced to give it up.

Have no fear at all if people talk ill of your relation with...² If you can say, with your soul as witness, that their evil talk has no basis in fact, you are safe. Have a frank talk with your wife. If she goes on harassing you though you commit no fault, you can be firm and tell her to go and live elsewhere. For the present, you must let her live with you as atonement for your fault in your relation to her and as a test of your capacity for tolerance. If you have anything more to ask, let me know.

Blessings from

BAPU

Bapuna Patro-7: Shri Chhaganlal Joshine, pp. 160-1 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLI, pp.545-46

1. The name has been omitted in the source.

2. The name has been omitted in the source.



226. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

MUSSOORIE,

Silence Day, October 21, 1929

SISTERS,

Mussoorie is one of those places where pleasure-seeking abounds. There is no *purdah* here. Wealthy ladies spend their time in dancing at parties, paint their lips, deck themselves in all sorts of ways and blindly imitate the West in a good many ways. Ours is a middle path. We do not wish to keep alive superstitions and *purdah* nor to encourage shamelessness and self-indulgence. This middle path is straight but difficult to follow. It is our aim to seek it and follow it steadily.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3706

CWMMG, Vol. XLII, p.27



227. LETTER TO MATHURADAS P. GANDHI

ETAH,

November 9, 1929

CHI. MATHURADAS¹,

I have the letter you wrote while on your way to Karachi. Has Jivandas's death increased your responsibilities? Has he made any provision for his widow? Or can she support herself? As I view things, it should be the duty of every husband devoted to his wife to teach her at the earliest opportunity to be self-reliant. To leave money for her is, according to me, the lowest of duties. Of course, if one keeps the wife always dependent on oneself, the only course then is to leave money for her. The logical thing is that, as a wife does not leave money for her husband and, if she does, the latter feels ashamed, a wife too, should feel so if the husband leaves money for her. About the children, too, my thinking has been on the same lines, as you must have seen from my article in *Navajivan*. In the light of this, your duty to the widowed sister lies, not in supporting her for life if she is penniless, but in teaching her to be resolute and self-reliant.

The progress of the spinning-wheel class is slow because still there are very few persons who recognize spinning as a science and are interested in it as a science. Because of these two factors we do not have a tradition of good teachers. Moreover, you will observe that we have not so far had even one single teacher who has clung to the work throughout after once taking it up. As you have understood this secret, I hope that you will stick to this work and do well in it.

I hope that both of you are keeping good health.

Blessings from

BAPU



From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3733

CWMG, Vol. XLII, p.127

1. An expert carder and khadi worker at Sabarmati Ashram.



228. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

PRAYAG,

Silence Day, November 18, 1929

SISTERS,

I write about an idea which occurred to me from Santok's operation. Indian women feel reluctant to get themselves examined by doctors. This is a wrong attitude. We have suffered much because of it. *This sense of shame has its origin not in purity but in impurity.* I should like the women in the Ashram to get rid of this superstition. If Dr. Haribhai had not been permitted to operate upon Santok, the operation would not have been performed and her life would have been in danger. No woman should hesitate to let herself be examined even by a male doctor. Since the patient would be accompanied by her relatives and friends, she need have no fear. Perhaps you do not know that I had called in a male doctor at the time of Ba's last confinement. She had an operation once and that too was done by a male doctor. Ba lost nothing by this. In such matters, all that is necessary is to change one's attitude. That is why I have put this matter before you. If you wish to ask me anything about this, do so on Tuesday the 26th.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3710

CWMG, Vol. XLII, p.184



229. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

WARDHA,

Silence Day, December 9, 1929

SISTERS,

When I was with you this time, there were so many things to keep me busy that I forgot to talk to you about two matters. One of them came to my notice so late that there was no time then to talk about it. The other went out of my mind altogether.

I shall take up the second matter first. Our women do not let themselves be examined by [male] doctors or even be operated upon. This is a false sense of shame and has its origin in an impure state of the mind. In this matter I prefer the practice in Western countries. I do know that at times it has had undesirable consequences. When an unscrupulous doctor has a simple-minded woman patient whose passion is easily aroused, evil results have followed. But this happens all over the world in any conditions. That should not deter us from pursuing good and necessary activities. We should have confidence in ourselves. I, therefore, liked it very much that Santok got herself operated upon by Dr. Haribhai and my belief in her courage was confirmed. In Phoenix we had made this a common practice. When Devdas was born, a male doctor was in attendance. Ba had a complaint of the vaginal canal and required an operation. It was performed by a male doctor. Ba is very brave but simple about such matters. She certainly requires my presence at such times, but that is a small matter. Everyone requires a trusted person by his or her side on such occasion, and that is but right. My purpose in writing about all this is to explain to you that in the Ashram we should cultivate this type of courage and abandon false shame. Hundreds and thousands of women suffer because of such shame. We have before us Vidyavati's example. She would not let her private parts be examined even by a woman doctor. We wish to cultivate the innocence of Shukadevji. We should not, of course, pretend to have it so



long as we have not succeeded in acquiring it. There are men whose passion is aroused by the mere touch of a woman, and there are, likewise, women who are aroused by the mere touch of a man. Such persons should certainly force themselves to live as untouchables, even if that means their continuing to suffer a disease. Here I have only suggested that you should give up false shame. Those who are afraid of impure feelings being aroused in them by the mere touch of a man should admit that candidly and behave with due regard to the limitations of their nature. Such a passionate nature is a kind of disease and a man or woman who suffers from it should avoid the touch of a person of the opposite sex. The disease will probably disappear in course of time.

Read this part of the letter several times and try to understand its meaning. If you do not understand it, ask me. Valjibhai, too, will explain it if you ask him. It is, of course, simple enough.

The second point arises from Umiya's wedding. Immediately after the wedding, she started wearing ornaments in her ears and nose. I did not like this at all. The giver and the receiver were both at fault. What was done was against our practice in the Ashram. Umiya could have started wearing ornaments after she had gone to live with her husband, but the poor girl could not wait till then. I mention this incident not as a complaint, but in order to draw a lesson from it. Let no other girl follow Umiya's example. Poor Umiya, after all, has not been trained in the Ashram. Jaisukhlal has not paid sufficient attention to her. Her mother is a good-natured woman who follows tradition, good or bad. Umiya's fault, therefore, is pardonable. I have drawn Umiya's and her husband's attention to this matter. From him, she has received nothing except a small *choodi*¹. I have, however, mentioned this matter so that no man or girl who knows the rules of the Ashram may act in this manner. I also wish to draw another moral from this. Lustful men have degraded woman. They have taught her ways of dressing and behaving which might please them. They have taught her to adorn



herself. Woman did not see in all this her slavery and her degradation. She, too, was attracted by lustful thoughts and, therefore, consented to get her nose and ears pierced, put on fetters on her feet and became a slave. An evil man can easily drag a woman behind him by getting hold of her nose-ring or ear-ring. It passes my understanding how any thoughtful woman can put on such things which make them helpless. Real beauty is of the heart. Let every woman in the Ashram save herself from external adornment and resist being pierced in the nose. Is it not enough that draught animals are so pierced? It is now six o'clock and so I stop here. I remembered you so early in the morning, for I expect much from you.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3711

CWMG, Vol. XLII, pp.254-56

1. Bridal bracelet.



230. WOMEN AND ORNAMENTS

I have never been able to understand our rajas' and maharajas' fondness for ornaments. Or I may say that the rajas heavily laden with jewellery have reminded me of women. I do not wish to malign women by comparing the rajas with them. Even women would not appear beautiful to me if they looked like men. Every person looks well in his or her rightful place and can make a useful contribution only by remaining there. He loses his status if he tries to go above it and we also say that he does likewise if he attempts to climb down from it. This is what is meant when it is said that better one's duty bereft of merit, than another's well performed.¹ However, after having spoken of the ornaments of the rajas, I wish to speak of those of women. The former may not even be reading *Navajivan*. Even if they do, they will not pause to ponder over such matters. And even if they wish to do so, the Emperor will not permit it. These vassals derive their lustre from the latter. They are not self-luminous; if they give up their ornaments, perhaps they may also have to give up their thrones. They themselves say that it will be regarded as an insult to the Emperor if they do not deck themselves with ornaments on State occasions, and the Emperor will be displeased with them. Whether they desire it or not, they have no alternative but to possess and wear expensive ornaments and attend such functions. Hence there is no point in raising at present the question of the rajas. The planets will automatically find their proper places once the sun finds its own. These rajas are like the planets. They do not at present have any independent powers of doing good or evil. They can react independently to what they are told only when they can escape from the Emperor's clutches or free themselves from his influence.

But what about women? The uplift of women is one of the principal aims of running *Navajivan*. During my tour of the U.P., I was very much irritated at the sight of the ornaments worn by rich and poor women alike. At that very time, I read Mr.



Brayne's book. I was largely convinced by his criticism of ornaments. He has held the menfolk too responsible for this fondness for ornaments. I believe that men are or were responsible for this; their responsibility may now have decreased, but the women's responsibility for this fondness is no less. I was unable to convince many women to give up their ornaments.

How and whence did women develop this fondness? I do not know its history, hence I have only made some conjectures. The ornaments which women wear on their hands and feet are a sign of their bondage. Some of the ornaments worn on the feet are so heavy that a woman cannot walk fast, let alone run. Some women wear such heavy ornaments on their arms that they prevent them from fully utilizing the latter. Hence I regard these ornaments as fetters on the hands and feet. I have found that by means of the ornaments which are worn by piercing the nose and ears, the men lead the women as they wish. Even a child, by firmly taking hold of a nose or ear ornament of a woman, can render the latter helpless. Hence I have looked upon these principal ornaments as mere symbols of slavery.

I have found even the designs of these ancient ornaments ugly. I have beheld no true art in them. I have seen and known them as objects which harbour dirt. A woman who is loaded with ancient ornaments on her hands, feet, ears, nose and hair cannot even keep these parts of her body clean. I have seen layers of dirt collected on those parts. Many of these ornaments are not even removable every day. When some women gave me their heavy anklets and bangles, they had to call in a goldsmith to have these removed from their hands and feet. When these were taken out, they left a good band of dirt on the hands and ankles, and the designs carved on the ornaments were full of layers of dirt. These women too felt as if they were rid of an age-old burden.



The modern woman is oblivious of this origin of ornaments and, regarding them as objects which beautify her gets delicate ones made for her. She has them made in such a way that they can be readily worn and removed and if she happens to be very wealthy, she has them made of diamonds and pearls instead of gold and silver. They may gather less dirt, it may well be the case that they are regarded artistic, but they have no utilitarian value and their capacity to beautify is also imaginary. Women of other countries would not wear the ornaments worn by our women. Their idea of adorning themselves is different. Ideas of adornment and artistic beauty vary from one country to another; hence we know that in such matters we have no absolute standards of beauty or art.

Why is it then that many reasonable, educated women still continue to be fond of ornaments? On considering the matter, it seems that as in other matters, here too tradition reigns supreme. We do not find reasons for all our actions and do not even stop to consider whether they are proper or otherwise. We do them because it is customary to do so and later we like them independently. This is called thoughtless life.

However, why should all those women who are awakened, who have started thinking for themselves, who wish to serve the country, who are taking or wish to take part in the *yajna* of swaraj, not exercise their discretion with regard to ornaments, etc.?

If the origin of ornaments is what I have imagined it to be, they are fit to be renounced, however light or beautiful they may be. Fetters, though made of gold, diamonds or pearls, are fetters only. Whether in a small dark room or in a palace, men and women imprisoned in either will be regarded as prisoners only.

Moreover, wherein lies the beauty of a woman? Does it lie in her ornaments, her mannerisms, her new clothes which she changes daily, or in her heart, thought



and action? The cobra which has a precious stone on its hood has poison in its fangs. Hence, despite the fact that it wears a crown of precious stone, it is not considered worthy of *darshan* or of being embraced. If a woman realizes that this 'artistic device' leads to the downfall of countless men, why should she garner these ornaments although they may possess any amount of artistic value? This is not a matter of individual freedom, nor is it a question of the rights of an individual; it is merely a wilful act and hence fit to be renounced, because it involves cruelty. It is the dharma of every thoughtful and compassionate man and woman to see what effect his or her actions have on others and to desist from them if they are not otherwise proved to be useful and produce a harmful effect.

Finally, in this poverty-stricken land, where the average daily income of a person is seven pice or at the most eight pice, who has the right to wear even the lightest of rings? A thoughtful woman who moreover wishes to serve her country, cannot ever touch ornaments. Looking at it from the economic standpoint, the gold and silver that we lock up in making ornaments causes threefold harm to the country. The first harm is that where there is a shortage of food, we increase it by wearing ornaments. It should be borne in mind that our average daily income is seven or eight pice. As those whose daily income is a thousand rupees are also included in these calculations, even if we leave the destitutes aside and take into account only the poorer classes, their income would amount to one or two pice. Hence the amount spent on jewellery is something that we have taken away from the poor. The second is that these ornaments do not yield any interest, hence we prevent an increase in the national wealth to that extent. The third is that a large portion of these ornaments finally wears off or, in other words, that amount of wealth is lost forever. Just as if an individual throws away some of the gold bars in his possession into the ocean, his wealth will decrease to that extent, almost the same can be said of a woman who invests her money in ornaments. I use the word "almost", as some ornaments are sold in



straitened circumstances and hence they may be regarded as having been put to some use. The loss that they have suffered through wear and tear before their sale is of course there; moreover, anyone who buys them can never recover their original value when reselling them, and the loss suffered thereby is also there. Therefore, any woman who wishes to keep aside ornaments as her own property or as property which may be useful in times of distress should put their equivalent in cash in her name; either her parents or her parents-in-law should open an account in a bank and give her the pass-book. Such times may well be far off. However, if thoughtful women, who wish to render service, give up their love of ornaments, I would regard this article as having fully served its purpose at least for the time being.

Navajivan, 22-12-1929 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XLII, pp.304-307

1. *Bhagavad Gita*, III, 35.



231. POSITION OF WOMEN

There was a women's conference yesterday at the Malabari Hall at which ... The question of the evening was the Sarda Bill... Which uphold the age of 18 for girls. Another important resolution dealt with the laws of inheritance. ... Why should women have either to beg or to fight in order to win back their birthright? It is strange-and also tragically comic-to hear man born of woman talk loftily of 'the weaker sex' and nobly promising 'to give' us our due! ... Where is the 'nobility' and 'chivalry' in restoring to people that which has been unlawfully wrested from them by those having brute power in their hands? Wherein are women less important than men? Why should their share of inheritance be less than that of men? Why should it not be equal? ... son, who carries on the name and family traditions, should have the greater share. ... "And what about the girl?" ... "the other fellow will look after her!" ... They talk as though a girl were a bale of goods to be tolerated in the parental house until 'the other fellow' comes round, and then coolly handed over to him with a sigh of relief... Really wouldn't you be wild if you were a girl?

I do not need to be a girl to be wild over man's atrocities towards woman. I count the law of inheritance among the least in the list. The Sarda Bill deals with an evil far greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. But I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. As women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.

But to remove legal inequalities will be a mere palliative. The root of the evil lies much deeper than most people realize. It lies in man's greed of power and fame and deeper still in mutual lust. Man has always desired power. Ownership of property gives this power. Man hankers also after posthumous fame based on power. This cannot be had, if property is progressively cut up in pieces as it must be if all the posterity become equal co-sharers. Hence the descent of property for the most part on the eldest male



issue. Most women are married. And they are co-sharers, in spite of the law being against them, in their husbands' power and privileges. They delight in being ladies this and what not, simply for the fact of being the wives of particular lords. Though therefore they may vote for radical reform in academic discussions over inequalities, when it comes to acting up to their vote, they will be found to be unwilling to part with the privileges.

... Therefore I would always advocate the repeal of all legal disqualifications, I should have the enlightened women of India to deal with the root cause. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent to public life should therefore result in purifying it, in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property. Let them know that millions of men have no property to transmit to posterity. Let us learn from them that it is better for the few to have no ancestral property at all. The real property that a parent can transmit to all equally is his or her character and educational facilities. Parents should seek to make their sons and daughters self-reliant, well able to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of the brow...

That mutual lust too has played an important part in bringing about the disqualifications of the fair sex hardly needs any demonstration. Woman has circumvented man in a variety of ways in her unconsciously subtle ways, as man has vainly and equally unconsciously struggled to thwart woman in gaining ascendancy over him. ...

Young India, 17-10-1929

CWMG, Vol. XLII, pp.4-6



232. SPEECH IN OLPAD TALUK¹

[On or before March 30, 1930]²

I feel that in this struggle for freedom, the contribution of women will exceed that of men. Even today, women are making a far greater contribution to the Charkha Sangh. It is the women who operate the one lakh or one lakh and a half spinning-wheels that are plying in fifteen hundred villages. It is on account of the skill of women that we can get the fine khadi made in Andhra. I tell you that it is absolutely true to say that swaraj is tied to a strand of yarn. These are the words of Brahma. Hence, whether we wish to boycott foreign cloth through the means of khadi or through mill-made cloth, it is women who are the spinners. Therefore, it is women who will play a larger part in the non-violent struggle for swaraj and children of the future will say that it was their mothers and sisters who had played the more significant role. You are capable of doing this. However, you should not touch a spinning-wheel if you do not know what compassion is.

Even in the cause of prohibition, if young girls come forward in the same manner as Mithubehn, you can make Olpad a dry area. If men approach drunkards, the latter will resort to obscene language; however, if young girls approach them and question them as to why they drink, ask them what indeed they are up to, whether it befits them under the influence of drink to fail to recognize a mother or a daughter, then on hearing such words steeped in affection, even the worst of drunkards will hang his Head in shame and he will possibly burst into tears, and will take a vow in the name of Rama to give up liquor. But do Indian women have this moral fervour, this courage and this benevolence? However, I can provide this courage. Who will cast an evil eye on you if you walk straight on with the name of God on your lips? Be convinced at heart that purity itself is a shield.

Navajivan, 6-4-1930 [From Gujarati]



CWVG, Vol. XLIII, pp.154-55

1. Extracted from "Swaraj Gita".
2. Gandhiji entered Olpad Taluk on March 28 and left it on March 31, 1930, but the 31st was Silence Day for him.



233. THE TRUE SPIRIT

Shrimati Khurshedbai Naoroji came the other day to Sandhier, a halting station during the march. She was accompanied by Mridulabehn, the daughter of Sjt. Ambalal Sarabhai, Madalasa, the little daughter of Jamnalalji, Shrimati Vasumatibehn and Radhabehn from the Ashram. They had to await a lift for Sandhier. They wanted to turn to national account the time at their disposal. They saw that the surroundings of the place were not overclean. They therefore decided to clean up the rubbish and so asked for brooms from the surprised villagers. As soon as the villagers realized what had happened, they also joined these national scavengers, some of whom were drawn from aristocratic families and the village of Sayan perhaps never looked as clean as when these sisters utilized their spare time for scavenging. I commend this true service, this mute speech of the sisters to the army of young men who are pining to serve and free the country. Freedom will come only when we deliver a simultaneous attack on all the weak points. Let it be known that all these sisters have enlisted as civil resisters and are eagerly, even impatiently, awaiting marching orders. In this campaign of swaraj by self-purification, it will be nothing surprising if the women outdo the men.

Young India, 3-4-1930

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.169-70



234. SPEECH AT NAVSARI

April 3, 1930

Take the case of Dadabhai's grand-daughters. These sisters are just crazy and impatient to join the struggle. What more then need I say about the assistance from Parsis? However, I want something special.

Mithubehn saw people given to drink. It moved her and leaving her mother, her home and her belongings she has plunged into the cause of prohibition. However, the sacrifice by one Parsi lady is not sufficient to complete this task. The heart of every Parsi must be touched for the sake of this cause. And, where it seems necessary, persons like me may even have to offer satyagraha. ...

I ask the ladies in particular to help in this. They should visit the homes of those who drink and plead with them. I have seen women of the Salvation Army do this. Why should not the women of India do the same? Are they—the Hindu, Muslim and Parsi women—less capable of doing good? Are not those who are caught in the vice their own brothers? If I go and reason with them, they will quarrel with me as they will with other men. They will not, however, be disrespectful or insulting to any woman. They are not such beasts that they will not understand you. As soon as they come in contact with you they will be awakened, they will step back and, seeing the love and affection pouring from your eyes, they will conclude that it is some *sati* or *yogini* confronting them and ashamed of themselves they will give up liquor.

When you sisters come to know the wives and daughters of drunkards, when you make friends with their ignorant, straying children, when you see that they continue to drink although they own nothing but the sky above them and the earth below, you cannot but feel inspired to take up this sacred cause.



I leave this message for the sisters in case the Government whisks me away to prison. Gujarati women are trained in such matters. Women in no other part of India have received as much training as they have. Hence all you sisters must plunge into the field which has already been prepared by Mithubehn.

In this non-violent struggle, women can play an even greater part than men because they are the very embodiment of renunciation and compassion, i.e., of non-violence. A man understands the dharma of non-violence through his intellect whereas a woman has imbibed it even before her birth. A man escapes with very little responsibility, but women have to serve their husbands, their children and other members of the family.

Navajivan, 13-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.173-76



235. TO THE WOMEN¹

As I am fully aware of the fact that countless women in India are illiterate, the principles of education which I have formulated are concerned with how they can attain their due status in spite of their lack of education; and it is from these that the means for securing swaraj have been derived. I can make the claim that this struggle has been so organized that the women of India, if they so desire, can make a bigger contribution than the men. The entire khadi movement depends on the women. This movement would collapse today if the women were to refuse to extend their co-operation to it. At least five times as many women as men are lending support to the cause of khadi. As a matter of fact, their number should be regarded ten times as large since there will be ten women working on a loom which runs for eight hours. Everyone knows that the contribution of men towards providing yarn for looms is very small, but even in other aspects of khadi work a good number of women are contributing their share. There are of course a large number of women working the loom. Hence, with regard to khadi it has already been established that this activity depends solely on women and it is because of this that women in India have made such progress which is unprecedented in Indian history and beyond what anyone had imagined to be possible. I saw this in the course of my three tours around India and today, walking through Gujarat, I see the same thing and that in a measure which can be calculated by the rule of three. That is to say, the awakening among women in a particular area has been in proportion to the number of spinning-wheels working there.

Considering this and keeping in mind the impatience of women to take part in civil disobedience, I felt that if women truly wished to take risks, if they wished to leave a stamp not only on the history of India but on the history of the world, if they wished to see a resurgence of the civilization of India, they should find an exclusive field for themselves. Let us consider this. If women wish to participate in civil disobedience,



they can do so in a very few days. But, after having found something, I am not interested in inviting them to offer civil disobedience against the salt law. Even if women participate in this, they will be lost amongst the men. For I expect that at every place large numbers of men will come forward. I do not believe that women will come forward in such numbers. And even if they do, neither the women nor the men will have anything to do and the salt tax will be repealed. The more I think the more I feel that we shall not have much difficulty in getting the salt tax abolished.²

I feel that it is, or it can become, the special field of women to bring about a change of heart in these people [the drink addicts]. History testifies that man cannot conquer hearts as speedily as woman can. If women wished they could take up the work of prohibition today. The following is my idea of it:

1. Trained women should start satyagraha units at various places, go in deputations to the owners of liquor booths and request them to give up this trade.
2. They should go to the homes of drink addicts and also start picketing liquor booths, singing devotional songs and preventing those entering them from being caught in the vice.³

If liquor booths and opium dens were closed down, it would mean a saving of 25 crores of rupees of the people's money. It is possible to collect 25 crores of rupees of revenue in some other way. Only one result would follow from this; there would be a heavy reduction in the expense on the army and the administration—so heavy a reduction indeed that the very nature of the administration would be changed. The present policy is based on distrust of the people. Tomorrow's policy will be based on trust of the people. In a policy so based there would be neither a large police department nor a large army.



But why should I involve women in this tangle? At this juncture I merely offer to women the field of prohibition without entering into discussion of any other field of activity. I believe that Gujarat is the best place for carrying on this activity. The physically delicate Parsi lady Mithubehn Petit is the person who has prepared the ground for this work. And it was her remarkable effort that suggested this field of work to me. Hence, all that remains to be done is that Mithubehn's work should be multiplied a hundredfold. Not that only a hundred women should prepare themselves for the work, but, rather, that countless women should prepare themselves and the activity should increase a hundredfold. The manner in which the work is at present being carried on should be slightly modified. All men should step aside. They should only do such work as is allotted to them by women. But the principal work of picketing, of persuading people, of pleading with them and of taking deputations to the liquor-booth owners should be done by women alone.⁴

I have only given an outline of the scheme as I visualize it. Details may be filled in. It is my desire that women should become pioneers in this task and should give this activity such momentum that it will shake up the people as well as the Government.

Navajivan, 6-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.189-91

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1. The first three paragraphs of this article are not translated here. They are covered by the first three paragraphs of "To the Women of India", *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, pp.219-20.
 2. One paragraph following this is not translated here. It is covered by paragraph 4 of "To the Women of India", *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, p.220.
 3. One paragraph following this is not translated here. It is covered by paragraph 5 of "To the Women of India", *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, p.220.
 4. Two paragraphs following this are not translated here. They are covered by the last two paragraphs of "To the Women of India", *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, p.221.



236. SPEECH AT VASANA¹

March 14, 1930

For women, spinning used to be a *yajna*. There were five such *yajnas*. The first was the kitchen fire. Performing that *yajna*, my mother set apart a *go-grasa*, a morsel for the cow. The second was the quern, the third was the broom, the fourth the spinning-wheel and the fifth was fetching water. Now all these *yajnas* are on the wane, because selfishness has crept in among us. If you wish to follow the path of dharma, start again the spinning-wheel sacrifice and follow the good sense that God has bestowed on you.

Prajabandhu, 16-3-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.77

1. The meeting was held at 3 p.m.



237. INTERVIEW TO FREE PRESS OF INDIA¹

DANDI,

April 6, 1930

... I am preparing a message for the women of India who, I am becoming more and more convinced, can make a larger contribution than the men towards the attainment of independence. I feel they will be worthier interpreters of non-violence than men, not because they are weak, as men in their arrogance believe them to be, but because they have greater courage or the right type and immeasurably greater spirit of self-sacrifice.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7-4-1930

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.199

1. Gandhiji gave the interview after he had broken the salt law by picking up a lump of salt mixed with mud.



238. STATEMENT TO THE PRESS

April 7, 1930

I am preparing a message to the women of India. I am becoming increasingly certain that in the struggle for securing swaraj, the women of this country could contribute a greater share than the men. I feel that women will be able to explain the meaning of non-violence to the country more effectively than men. Not because men, out of vanity, regard them as weak but because they possess real courage in a greater proportion and an immeasurable sense of dedication.

Prajabandhu, 13-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.206



239. LETTER TO MAHADEV DESAI

April 9, 1930

CHI. MAHADEV,

I also have written to Saraladevi, but that was only about the drink evil. Yesterday I sent a letter addressed to Kaka on this subject. I think you must have read it. You will have seen from it that I, at any rate, wish to start the movement against the drink evil and foreign cloth along with the salt agitation on the 13th. Even if that should not be possible, I should like the fight against the drink evil to start from Monday if you, Kaka and other men and the Ashram women and other women visitors feel the necessary self-confidence. I wrote to Saraladevi suggesting that she might throw herself into this very work. If, however, my plan itself does not appeal to all of you, you may leave it. I do not at all believe that the salt tax will go in seven days. But I think it very necessary to utilize this golden opportunity and combine these three aims of our movement. Personally, I am convinced that if we should succeed in these three things, swaraj would soon be an accomplished fact, the women would realize their power in no time and, without any effort on our part, the whole world would see for itself how ours was indeed a holy war. Many women can contribute their share in this movement even while attending to their domestic duties. ...

Blessings from

BAPU

[PS.]

I have talked at length on these matters with Mithubehn. She has made up her mind. The Anavil Ashram will be handed over to her for the use of women workers. Those women who are willing to give all their time to the work will be admitted to it. Of course there will be other conditions for admission. The present idea is to make an



intensive effort in the Surat district where some work of this kind has been done, and to extend the area of activity as the women's self-confidence increases. Such of the Ashram women as are ready for this, like Mithubehn, should start coming here. Mithubehn herself has already had experience of this work and, therefore, the women who come here will have the benefit of that experience. As the women coming from the Ashram are trained in discipline, Mithubehn will find it easier to take work from them. I have already discussed the matter with Shardabehn. She and Dr. Sumant liked the idea very much. Shardabehn said that she would certainly go there.

From a photostat of the Gujarati: S.N. 16785

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.216-217



240. TO THE WOMEN OF INDIA

The impatience of some sisters to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. It has led to the discovery that however attractive the campaign against the salt tax may be, for them to confine themselves to it would be to change a pound for a penny. They will be lost in the crowd, there will be in it no suffering for which they are thirsting.

In this non-violent warfare, their contribution should be much greater than men's. To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman.

I have nursed this thought now for years. When the women of the Ashram insisted on being taken along with men something within me told me that they were destined to do greater work in this struggle than merely breaking salt laws.

I feel that I have now found that work. The picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops by men, though it succeeded beyond expectations up to a point for a time in 1921, failed because violence crept in. If a real impression is to be created, picketing must be resumed. If it remains peaceful to the end, it will be the quickest way of educating the people concerned. It must never be a matter of coercion but conversion, moral suasion. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?

Prohibition of intoxicating liquors and drugs and boycott of foreign cloth have ultimately to be by law. But the law will not come till pressure from below is felt in no uncertain manner.



That both are vitally necessary for the nation, nobody will dispute. Drink and drugs sap the moral well-being of those who are given to the habit. Foreign cloth undermines the economic foundations of the nation and throws millions out of employment. The distress in each case is felt in the home and therefore by the women. Only those women who have drunkards as their husbands know what havoc the drink devil works in homes that once were orderly and peace-giving. Millions of women in our hamlets know what unemployment means. Today the Charkha Sangh covers over one hundred thousand women against less than 10,000 men.

Let the women of India take up these two activities, specialize in them; they would contribute more than man to national freedom. They would have an access of power and self-confidence to which they have hitherto been strangers.

Their appeal to the merchants and buyers of foreign cloth and to the liquor dealers and addicts to the habit-cannot but melt their hearts. At any rate the women can never be suspected of doing or intending violence to these four classes. Nor can Government long remain supine to an agitation so peaceful and so resistless.

The charm will lie in the agitation being initiated and controlled exclusively by women. They may take and should get as much assistance as they need from men, but the men should be in strict subordination to them.

In this agitation thousands of women, literate and illiterate, can take part.

Highly educated women have in this appeal of mine an opportunity of actively identifying themselves with the masses and helping them both morally and materially.

They will find when they study the subject of foreign-cloth boycott that it is impossible save through khadi. Mill-owners will themselves admit that mills cannot manufacture in the near future enough cloth for Indian requirements. Given a proper atmosphere, khadi can be manufactured in our villages, in our countless homes. Let it



be the privilege of the women of India to produce this atmosphere by devoting every available minute to the spinning of yarn. The question of production of khadi is surely a question of spinning enough yarn. During the past ten days of the march under pressure of circumstances I have discovered the potency of the *takli* which I had not realized before. It is truly a wonder worker. In mere playfulness my companions have without interrupting any other activity spun enough yarn to weave 4 square yards per day of khadi of 12 counts. Khadi as a war measure is not to be beaten. The moral results of the two reforms are obviously great. The political result will be no less great. Prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs means the loss of twenty-five crores of revenue. Boycott of foreign cloth means the saving by India's millions of at least sixty crores. Both these achievements would monetarily be superior to the repeal of the salt tax. It is impossible to evaluate the moral results of the two reforms.

'But there is no excitement and no adventure in the liquor and foreign-cloth picketing', some sisters may retort. Well, if they will put their whole heart into this agitation they will find more than enough excitement and adventure. Before they have done with the agitation, they might even find themselves in prison. It is not improbable that they may be insulted and even injured bodily. To stiffer such insult and injury would be their pride. Such suffering if it comes to them will hasten the end.

If the women of India will listen and respond to my appeal, they must act quickly. If the all-India work cannot be undertaken at once, let those provinces which can organize themselves do so. Their example will be quickly followed by the other provinces.

Young India, 10-4-1930

CWVG, Vol. XLIII, pp.219-21



241. MESSAGE TO B.P.C.C., BOMBAY

April 10, 1930

I congratulate the Bombay Congress Committee and the people of Bombay on the recent arrest of Abidali and Meherali. It is the duty of every citizen of Bombay to fill the places of those who have been arrested. The arrest of the leaders should not make us falter. The unprecedented enthusiasm which was witnessed during the national week shows that, following the arrest of the leaders, people's enthusiasm in the whole of India has increased. I hope the recent arrests in Bombay will create similar enthusiasm. We should make salt and use only that salt. We should boycott foreign cloth and eradicate the evil of drinking. I have entrusted the two latter activities to the women of India. If we wish to succeed in the boycott of foreign cloth and exercise control over mills which are purely Indian it is women who can do it. We should carry on propaganda for khadi and this will not be possible until every one of us takes up the *takli*.

Gujarati, 13-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XLIII, p.229



242. TO THE WOMEN

Last week, writing about prohibition, I had mentioned that there was another activity also which women could and ought to take up. This activity is the boycott of foreign cloth through khadi. This is, or should be, the special field of women. For foreign cloth has ruined millions of homes and taken away from millions of women an employment which sustained them. Foreign cloth has ruined seven lakh villages in India. While on the one hand women have lost employment, on the other they have to pay for cloth which they could have produced in their own villages. People have developed a great liking for foreign cloth and they will not give it up without great effort and great penance. It is the women who embody that penance. Man can never make an impression upon people such as women can.

Besides, amongst those who wear foreign cloth the number of women exceeds that of men. And, in the final analysis, women will create a greater impact upon other women.

Hence it is for women to start picketing in front of shops selling foreign cloth. Men have failed in this task. But there is no reason why women should fail. Moreover, in 1920-21 we did not have the same climate that there is now. It is women alone who can take advantage of this climate.

But there is also another aspect of this work. Supposing everyone was to burn their foreign clothes today, what then would they wear? Indian mills would not be able to produce all the cloth within a short period and perhaps even if they did we would not achieve the purpose that we wish to.

That purpose would be served through khadi alone. Khadi implies the *takli* or the spinning-wheel. In the latter lies the prosperity of India. It is *Annapurna*¹. If people in every home work on the spinning-wheel, we can produce today as much khadi as we want. Producing khadi means spinning yarn. Men may well spin, but for



generations the profession of spinning has been practised by women and men's hands do not possess the same skill in this that women's do. Women alone can bring about this solidarity among their own sex. I would, therefore, advise women to make this their special field of work.²

In this non-violent campaign, although our weapons are small they are very powerful since they have in them the power of God.

Therefore, all those sisters who have faith in the spinning-wheel and the *takli* and who wish to devote themselves to saving sixty crores of rupees every year, should take up this work of boycott and the task of propagating spinning.

It should be remembered that those sisters who wish to take up this work have to be prepared to go to the villages.

Sisters who have faith not in both but in only one of these activities should take up only that. I have suggested the two activities through which millions of women can develop themselves and contribute their full share in the *yajna* of swaraj.

Navajivan, 13-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.248-49

1. Giver of plenty.

2. Two paragraphs following this are not translated here. They are covered by paragraphs 11 and 12 of "To the Women of India", *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, p.221.



243. LETTER TO RAIHANA TYABJI

DANDI,

April 11, 1930

MY DEAR RAIHANA,

I have your letter.

I would like you, Mother and others to attend here on Sunday. I am holding a conference of Gujarat women for the purpose of discussing the propriety and possibility of their tackling the problem of drink and foreign cloth.

BAPU

From a photostat: S.N. 9616

CWMMG, Vol. XLIII, p.238



244. LETTER TO NARANDAS GANDHI

DANDI,

April 11, 1930

CHI. NARANDAS,

I intend to hold a small conference of women in Dandi on the 13th. Send those from among the women there who wish to come and who can be spared to attend it. Meet the expenditure from the Satyagraha Fund. Those who have money with them should come at their own expense. If Khurshedbehn volunteers to come, offer her the fare. Probably she will refuse to accept it. Try if you can press her courteously to accept it. In the conference we are going to think only about propaganda against the drink evil and boycott of foreign cloth. These activities do not seem to have appealed to Khurshedbehn, that is, she does not wish to take them up as specially women's work. Hence she may not wish to come.

How is Purushottam? How is Kanu? How does he spend his time?

Blessings from

BAPU

From Gujarati: C.W. 8098. Courtesy: Narandas Gandhi

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.239-40



245. SPEECH AT GUJARATI WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, DANDI

April 13, 1930

There are certain activities which are meant only for women. Prohibition and boycott of foreign cloth are such activities; which if you do not take up, will never be accomplished. In 1921 I compelled men to take up these tasks and they did so out of fear, but how long could it last? In the end I had to accept defeat and suspend the activities. I would not have had to do so had I entrusted the work to women. But when I was utterly confused and had been defeated on all sides, God, like in that *bhajan* of the tortoise couple, made me entrust the work to women. It is no doubt very difficult to picket shops but women had been taking great risks in the past. It is for that reason that the world is still going on. Moreover both these activities required persuasion and change of heart. Women alone can enter the hearts of men and transform them. Moreover those women who have come here must be aware of the plight of the families where husbands drink. It is your duty to help your sisters' families from breaking up. Foreign cloth has taken away from fifteen crores of your sisters the noble profession of plying the spinning-wheel and have rendered crores of villagers unemployed. Khadi activity of ten insignificant years have brought ten lakhs of rupees to the women's homes. I want you to expand the activity so that crores of rupees are brought in. Once you take up this work, you have to discard foreign clothes—you should burn them. You may say you will wear out whatever you have or that you will preserve them. Even a drunkard might say that he would consume whatever liquor he had or keep it. How can we keep a thing which we consider to be a poison even for a day? We should throw it away lest our children by mistake take the poison. You may think that you have thrown that much money into water.

A woman picketer of Vejalpore had asked what the women should do if they were attacked while they were picketing. Gandhiji replied:



There is no danger of such attack. However if that happens or if the police try to disperse you with the help of horses then put up with it quietly. A woman has a remarkable capacity for suffering. Take it from me that the liquor shops will be closed down the day there is such an attack on women. You may be certain he will give *up drinking forever from that day.*

Prajabandhu, 20-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.251-52



246. SPEECH AT DANDI¹

April 13, 1930

I am happy that you have on your own come here in such large numbers on this the last day of the self-purification week, but you will not be happy if I do not say something to you on this occasion.

I have just concluded the women's conference. You will like to know your place in what I have told the women to do. The women have resolved to picket shops selling foreign cloth as also those who use it, and those who sell liquor as also those who drink it. We men may not interfere in this work. Let us treat this as the special field of women.

The success of this work depends entirely on the self-control of men. The assumption behind this is that men cannot easily control their anger, cannot easily practise non-violence, while women can do so. Renunciation and non-violence come naturally to women. Having been inspired by this idea I have tried to explain it to women. If my assumption is false, my conclusion will also be false to the same degree.

It is the duty of men to make the atmosphere congenial for women to do their work. We men should go to the dealers in liquor and foreign cloth and try to convince them that now that the women of India have come out they should give up trade in these two things.

Confronted by the large groups of women even liquor-booth owners and owners of shops selling foreign cloth will be startled and give up their trade. I know it is not easy to give up one's trade. But, at a time when the atmosphere is filled with national pride and patriotism, the people's capacity for renunciation automatically increases. During this week alone this capacity has increased a hundredfold, but it should increase a thousandfold.



Dealers in foreign cloth still seem to be calculating whether to give up their trade. They take a vow for three months or a year. Behind this act there is a lurking belief that they will be able to buy foreign cloth after a year. They do not make the effort that is needed to secure swaraj. This is because they lack the faith. But as this movement makes progress, trading in liquor and foreign cloth cannot but come to an end.

When hundreds of thousands of our countrymen have sacrificed their all, even these sceptical traders are bound to develop the strength to make sacrifices.

If women lack funds to continue the work after once starting it, I shall stretch out my hand to you, though at present, by the blessing of God, I am able to get more funds than I need. Only today, about a thousand rupees were collected at the women's meeting and a lady belonging to the Galiara family of Kathor gave four gold bangles without even being asked.

If we men are not indifferent and begin the work on our own, if, for instance, for want of enough khadi it becomes necessary to wear only a loin-cloth and we start doing so, to that extent we shall have lightened the burden of our womenfolk.

Miss Mayo has accused us saying that many of our men have no consideration for women, that we make them work as drudges, as if they were born to be slaves. The world will be convinced that what Miss Mayo said was not true when women wake up and accomplish the tasks of boycotting foreign cloth and of prohibition.

The stocks of khadi in the country are dwindling and I am therefore asking everyone to spin and wear khadi and I am demonstrating this before you every day by spinning on the takli. Just as we grind and cook cereals which are available in every home we ought to spin the large quantities of cotton which grows in India into some kind of yarn, make cloth from it and then wear that cloth. When spinning becomes a



universal activity in the country, you can rest assured that the trade in foreign cloth will come to an end.

Mills can never entirely meet the cloth needs of India and as most mills in India are either wholly or partly foreign, cloth made by only a few of them can be used if the need arises.

Women from good families have come out to take up these activities. Divan Shri Manubhai's daughter Shrimati Hansa Mehta and some other ladies have only recently issued a circular and begun the work of prohibition in Bombay. If Gujarati women continue to work in this spirit and if the men lend them support this activity will become widespread in India. All these three things are easy. When we have accomplished these three things we shall have saved six crores from the salt-tax, twenty-five crores from prohibition and sixty crores from the boycott of foreign cloth—ninety-one crores in all. We shall have become purer and added to our strength, and then it will not take long for us to secure swaraj.

Navajivan, 20-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.252-55

1. Extracts from the speech were also published in *Young India*, 17-4-1930, under the heading "Men's Part".



247. SPEECH AT UMBER

April 15, 1930

Mr. Gandhi asked the village women gathered there if they knew Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

They said, "How can we know?" Gandhiji remarked:

It is not your fault but of us men who have hitherto been satisfied with your being and remaining as house-keepers, cooks, scavengers and drawers of water but now you will no longer remain in that position. If this movement is to succeed, yours will have to be as big a share as men's, if not much bigger.

Referring to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhiji said:

He was to all India what Sardar Vallabhbhai was to us in Gujarat. He was wearing himself out in the nation's service and has been punished because he was the greatest among us all.

Hitherto I have asked you to resist snatching of salt by the police from your closed fists and suffer mutely and meekly whatever injuries the police might inflict upon you. If you have got strength of suffering, and faith in your mission I want to go many steps further.

I would like you henceforth to regard yourselves as trustees or guardians not merely of the precious national wealth locked up in your fists but of the whole treasure now being prepared in salt pans. Defend that treasure with your life if that be the price you have to pay for it. When the police come and raid these pans, surround them and do not let the police touch them till they have overpowered you by sheer brute force.

Even if you are beaten you must not lose your temper. I hope that Gujarat has now become courageous to that extent. I am getting my strength from the strength of



Gujarat. You must be prepared to endure suffering and keep the peace at any cost. Let them destroy pans but only after they have either arrested you or beaten you. This is altogether a new experiment and I leave it to you to make more pans wherever possible.¹

From your sufferings will rise into being not only Purna Swaraj but a non-violent army for its defence. Women ought not to take part alongside of men in defence of salt pans. I still give credit to the Government that it will not make war upon our women. It will be wrong on our part to provoke them into so doing. This is men's fight so long as the Government will confine their attention to men. There will be time enough for women to court assaults when the Government has crossed the limit. Let it not be said of us that men sought shelter behind women, well knowing they would be safe if they took women with them in what may be called, for want of a better name, aggressive non-violence. Women have in the programme I ventured to place before them enough work and to spare and all adventure and risk they may be capable of undertaking. The Labour Association of Ahmedabad has undertaken to picket liquor shops. Selling of contraband salt which was going on in Ahmedabad is now stopped. It will be done in villages by sending batches of volunteers.

He said that they must either make their own arrangements for food or must take whatever is cooked for them. They could not maintain kitchens for different tastes. This was a fight for self-purification and therefore they must leave off all bad habits. They must have perfect discipline and strength to suffer hardships. He asked all those who cannot submit themselves to discipline to resign in the beginning. But let them not cheat the community and nation. Even if there were only a few true volunteers the fight would go on. The fight has been well begun, and Gujarat has earned credit for it. Let it not be said that Gujarat lost the fight because of mistakes and lapses.²



The Hindu, 16-4-1930

CWVG, Vol. XLIII, pp.262-63

1. This paragraph is taken from a report in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 16-4-1930.
2. This paragraph is taken from *The Bombay Chronicle* report.



248. SPECIAL TASK BEFORE WOMEN

The conference of women on Sunday last at Dandi became a Congress as I had wanted it to be. Thanks to the Government prohibition against the Baroda territory cars plying between Navsari and Dandi, many had walked the full 12 miles to Dandi. The following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

I

This conference of the women of Gujarat assembled at Dandi on 13th April, 1930 having heard Gandhiji, resolves that the women assembled will picket liquor and toddy shops of Gujarat and appeal to the shop-keepers and the shop-goers [to desist] from plying their trade or drinking intoxicating liquors as the case may be, and will similarly picket foreign-cloth shops and appeal to the dealers and the buyers to desist from the practice of dealing in or buying foreign cloth as the case may be.

II

This conference is of opinion that boycott of foreign cloth is possible only through khadi and therefore the women assembled resolve henceforth to use khadi only and will so far as possible spin regularly and will learn all the previous processes and preach the message of khadi among their neighbours, teach them the processes up to spinning and encourage them to spin regularly.

III

This conference appoints the following Executive Committee with power to draw up a constitution and to amend it from time to time and add to their number:¹

1. Mrs. Tyabji (President)
2. Shrimati Mithubehn Petit (Secretary)



Members

3. Shrimati Manibehn Patel
4. Shrimati Rohini Desai
5. Shrimati Chandubehn

This conference hopes that Gujarati women will welcome this activity and participate in it.

This conference hopes that women all over Gujarat and the other provinces will take up the movement initiated at this conference.²

The same resolutions were passed also in Vejalpur; only the first resolution was divided into sections. Two distinct sections dealt with prohibition and the boycott of foreign cloth through khadi, so that women who believed in only one of these causes could vote for that one alone. At the second conference three more names were added:

Shrimati Shardabehn Sumant Mehta

Shrimati Savitabehn Trivedi

Shrimati Surajbehn Manilal

This vote need not be considered as having much value. It is valuable to the extent that not a single resolution was opposed at the meeting, for it shows that even if the women present may not be prepared to put the resolution into practice, nevertheless they approved of its substance. At both these conferences women from villages were present in greater numbers. The struggle this time is of the villages especially. The awakening in the villages is astonishing which is a good sign. Salt, the boycott of foreign cloth and prohibition—all these three are specially meant for villages and the women would benefit especially.



Even if a few women are ready to lay down their lives for the sake of this resolution, they will come forward. If this does not happen the conference will not be deemed to have completed its work. If the number of women present at the conference is any indication, the women would seem to be prepared for work.

The soul of any organization is its executive committee. Hence the success of the work depends upon the enthusiasm, the *tapascharya* and the skill of the ladies who have given their names for the committee.

Mithubehn Petit has started the work with great alacrity. According to her accounts habitual drunkards are enthusiastically breaking earthen jars containing toddy. Thousands of persons in Surat who are given to drinking, have started having resolutions passed by their castes prohibiting drinking.

Once women become self-confident and gain faith, they will find from experience that the fear which they entertain has no basis. Rama and Ravana dwell in every human being. If women would act through the Rama who is in them, the Ravana who dwells in man would be powerless. Rama awakens less readily in men than in women. Who can harm one who is protected by Rama? Who can protect one with whom Rama is displeased?

In the work of prohibition, once the initial fear is shed, things become easy. For all it involves is picketing. Those who drink are not wicked. They are simple folk. Their self-interest is not involved in drinking. Once they are convinced, they will give up liquor. The liquor-booth owners do have their self-interest involved but they realize that this is an immoral trade.

I regard this extension of the swaraj movement as of the highest importance. I need not reiterate the argument already advanced in these pages. Mithubehn has already commenced operations. She is not the woman to let the grass grow under her



feet. The idea is for twenty to twenty-five women to go in one batch and plant themselves near each liquor shop and come in personal contact with every visitor to the liquor or toddy shops and wean him from the habit. They will also appeal to the shop-keepers to give up the immoral traffic and earn their livelihood through better means.³

Foreign-cloth shops are to be treated in the same way as liquor shops as soon as there are enough trained women volunteers. Though the same committee will carry on the two boycotts it will necessarily have two branches. It will be open to any woman to offer her services for only one branch of work, nor is it necessary that every worker should belong to the Congress. Only this must be clearly understood, that the work is part of the Congress programme and has tremendous political results if it has also equally great moral and economic consequences.

Those who will belong to the foreign-cloth boycott branch should realize that without the constructive work of khadi production the mere boycott will be a mischievous activity. Its very success without the production of khadi will prove the ruin of the national movement of independence. For the millions will take it up in simple faith. But they will curse us if they discover that they have no cloth to wear or the cloth they can get is too dear for their purse. The formula therefore is: discard foreign cloth and make your own khadi and wear it. Already there is a dearth of khadi.

The boycott of foreign cloth is, however, a difficult matter. It has two aspects; boycott and khadi production. The boycott does not require much effort. Only a few women would suffice for the work. For the production of khadi thousands and even hundreds of thousands would have to be regularly active. Hence it would require organization and planning. However, it is a work needing patience, as it requires intelligence and faith. In the course of it you have to come in contact—directly or indirectly—with crores of women. It requires a pure co-ordination between towns and



villages. And, through it all the khadi India needs can be produced in a short time. We have before us all the means to produce it. We have the necessary skill too. All that we lack is workers. It is the sisters who must create these workers. They can do so only when they themselves learn to card and spin and disseminate the art among others. Most of the khadi workers are in the salt campaign. Therefore the production has suffered a temporary check.⁴

But there need never be any dearth of cloth the moment the country gets disabused of the superstition that it must buy cloth to cover its nakedness. It would be on a par with someone saying that we must starve if we cannot get Manchester or Delhi biscuits. Even as we cook our food and eat it so can we, if we but will it, make our own cloth and wear it. We did it only a hundred years ago and we can relearn the trick now. All the vital processes are almost too simple to learn. At this supreme crisis, this turning-point in the nation's history, we must not hesitate and nurse idleness. I do not need to restate the argument about our mills. Even if every mill were genuinely swadeshi and even if all became patriotic, they could not supply all our wants. Whichever way we look at it, whether we like it or not, we cannot escape khadi if we are to achieve independence through non-violent means and if we are to achieve the boycott of foreign cloth on which we began concentration in 1920.

Of men's part in the boycott I have said enough in my speech which I unexpectedly delivered to the men who had come to Dandi. Relevant parts of this speech are reproduced elsewhere.⁵ Suffice it here to say that men will damage the movement if they will meddle with women's picketing wherever it is undertaken by them.

By passing the above two resolutions Gujarati women have taken up the responsibility and Begum Amina Tyabji and their committee have shouldered the responsibility on their behalf.



May God grant them strength!

Navajivan, 20-4-1930 and *Young India*, 17-4-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.271-75

1. These four paragraphs have been taken from "Women in Conference", *Young India*, 17-4-1930.
2. This paragraph has been taken from *Young India*.
3. This and the following two paragraphs have been taken from *Young India*, 17-4-1930.
4. The last two sentences and the following two paragraphs have been taken from *Young India*, 17-4-1930.
5. Vide *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII, pp.252-5.



249. HOW TO DO THE PICKETING

1. At least ten women are required for picketing a liquor or foreign-cloth shop. They must choose a leader from among themselves.
2. They should all first go in a deputation to the dealer and appeal to him to desist from carrying on the traffic and present him with leaflets setting forth facts and figures regarding drink or foreign cloth as the case may be. Needless to say the leaflets should be in the language understood by the dealer.
3. If the dealer refuses to suspend traffic, the volunteers should guard the shop leaving the passage free and make a personal appeal to the would-be purchasers.
4. The volunteers should carry banners or light boards bearing warnings in bold letters against buying foreign cloth or indulging in intoxicating drinks, as the case may be.
5. Volunteers should be as far as possible in uniforms.
6. Volunteers should at frequent intervals sing suitable *bhajans* bearing on the subject.
7. Volunteers should prevent compulsion or interference by men.
8. On no account should vulgarity, abuse, threat or unbecoming language be used.
9. The appeal must always be to the head and the heart, never to fear of force.
10. Men should on no account congregate near the place of picketing nor block the traffic. But they should carry on propaganda generally through the area against foreign cloth and drink. They should help and organize processions of women to parade through the area carrying the message of temperance and khadi and the necessity of boycott of drink and foreign cloth.



11. There should be at the back of these picketing units a network of organization for spreading the message of the *takli* and the charkha and thinking out new leaflets and new lines of propaganda.
12. There should be an absolutely accurate and systematic account of all receipts and expenditure. This should be periodically audited. This again should be done by men under the supervision of women. The whole scheme presupposes on the part of men a genuine respect for women and sincere desire for their rise.

Young India, 24-4-1930

CWVG, Vol. XLIII, pp.312-13



250. MESSAGE TO AMERICA

[*Before April 27, 1930*]¹

That this is a movement of self-purification is abundantly proved by the fact that women have come into it in large numbers and are organizing the picketing of liquor shops. Thousands have taken vows to abstain from intoxicating liquor. In Ahmedabad, a strong labour centre, receipts of canteens have dropped to 19 per cent and are still dropping. A similar manifestation is taking place in the district of Surat. Women have also taken up the question of boycott of foreign cloth. It is spreading all over India. People are making bonfires of foreign cloth in their possession. Khadi, i.e., hand-spun cloth, is so much in demand that the existing stock is well-nigh exhausted. The spinning-wheel is much in demand and people are beginning to realize more and more the necessity of reviving hand-spinning in the cottages of 700,000 villages of India. In my humble opinion, a struggle so free from violence has a message far beyond the borders of India. I have no manner of doubt that after all the sacrifice that has already been made since April 6, the spirit of the people will be sustained throughout till India has become independent and free to make her contribution to the progress of humanity.

M. K. GANDHI

The Modern Review, June 1930

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.334-36

1. This appeared in *The Sunday Times*, 27-4-1930.



251. DRAFT LETTER TO VICEROY¹

[On or before April 27, 1930]²

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

We, the undersigned women of Gujarat, have come to the conclusion that we may not keep ourselves aloof from the great national upheaval that is taking place. We are in full sympathy with the civil disobedience campaign in respect of the salt tax. Our sisters in the villages have already begun the manufacture of contraband salt.

But we feel that we must, as women, find an additional and special field for our activity. We feel the force of Gandhiji's argument that women are better fitted for dealing with the question of the prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs and boycott of foreign cloth. Drink has desolated many a home, and foreign cloth has deprived millions of India's women of their employment during leisure hours, which amount in the aggregate to no less than four months in the year.

These two are therefore questions that concern the women more than men. And in so far as they can be dealt with through picketing, i.e., an appeal to the hearts of those who traffic in these things and those who are lured to the drink and the drug or the foreign-cloth shops, we feel that we can make a more successful effort than men. And women doing the work must automatically ensure its peaceful nature.

As we embark upon the campaign we should respectfully point out that it is essentially the duty of the State to prohibit traffic in intoxicating drinks and drugs because they ruin both mind and body and homes of those who indulge in them and to prohibit the entry of foreign cloth inasmuch as it has brought about the economic ruin of the villages of this unhappy land.

As to the importation of foreign cloth it might be urged that the argument that applies to foreign cloth applies also partially to the cloth manufactured in Indian mills.



Only the output of Indian mills is so far short of the requirements that khadi can have nothing to fear from them.

We wish that we had time enough to canvass the opinion of our sisters in the other provinces. But we know what their opinion is likely to be. After all we are not dealing with new problems. These have already been before the nation through its national organization, the Congress. What we are seeking to do is to dedicate ourselves more to these questions than to the others which along with these are being dealt with in terms of the independence movement.

We are,

Yours faithfully,

SHARDA MEHTA

INDUMATI C. DIVAN

MANORAMA CHINUBHAI

PARVATIBEHN GIRDHARLAL AMRITLAL

VIJAYAGAURI DURGAPRASAD

LASHKARI

MAHALAKSHMI MANSUKHRAM

CHATURLAKSHMI JIVANLAL DIVAN

VIJAYAGAURI BALVANTRAO KANUGA

AMINA KURESHI

LAKSHMIBAI KHARE

MITHUBEHN PETIT



AMINA TYABJI

RAIHANA TYABJI

KANCHANGAURI MANGALDAS

GIRDHARDAS

SULOCHNA CHINUBHAT

TANUMATI CHINUBHAI M.

RANCHHODLAL

SARLADEVI AMBALAL SARABHAI

VASANTGAURI NARSIDAS

MRS. CHIMANLAL NAGINDAS

ANASUYA SARABHAI

MOTIBAI RANCHHODLAL.

LILAVATI HARILAL DESAI

NIRMALA BAKUBHAI MANSUKHBHAI

SANTOK M. GANDHI

DURGA MAHADEV DESAI

GANGABEHN, RANCHHODAS BHATIA

SAVITA TRIVEDI

MRS. JAYANTILAL AMRITLAL

Young India, 1-5-1930

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.336-37



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1. This was drafted by Gandhiji.
 2. The draft was ready for signatures on April 27, 1930; *vide* "Letter to Amina Tyabji", *CWMMG*, Vol. XLIII, p.347.



252. DRAFT OF APPEAL TO WOMEN OF GUJARAT

[About April 27, 1930]¹

SISTERS,

Here is a letter to the Viceroy. Please sign it if you feel you can do so. The original letter is in English. This is a translation of it. You will understand the contents carefully and sign it only if you wish to join the movement. If you sign it, please give full particulars: such as your name, address, age, etc. The names will be published in the papers and your signing the letter will mean that you will be ready to join in picketing liquor booths and foreign-cloth shops and to work under the instructions of the self-appointed committee formed by the signatories below.

However, there is also another way in which you may function. Instead of working under this Committee, you may form your own committee and determine your own area of activity. That is, you may picket only those liquor booths or foreign-cloth shops which you may choose. Even if you do so, we shall ultimately come together and work in co-operation with one another. If you wish to join in this sacred work, you should intimate while sending your signatures whether you would form a separate committee or work under this one.

We remain,

INDIA'S WOMEN VOLUNTEERS

From a photostat of the Gujarati: S.N. 16845

CWVG, Vol. XLIII, p.338

1. It is likely this was drafted about the same time as the preceding item.



253. RASHTRIYA STREE SABHA

This body has now formed a sub-association whose sole object is to do the work of the two boycotts—liquor and foreign cloth. It has made a public appeal for funds. I have no doubt that it will receive greater public support than hitherto. The public should know that the ceaseless workers in this association are the G.O.M.'s grand-daughters. His spirit is watching over their devotion and India's work with pride and satisfaction.

Young India, 1-5-1930

CWMMG, Vol. XLIII, p.365



254. WOMEN'S APPEAL TO THE VICEROY

The appeal of the women of Gujarat made to the Viceroy, printed elsewhere, I deserves world-wide attention. The appeal has been promoted by the Gujarati women only. For an all-India appeal much time would have been required. But it is to be hoped that the action of the Gujarati sisters will be copied by all the other provinces with such changes as may be necessary. The organization has to grow naturally. Therefore a variety may be invited. It would not matter, so long as the central facts are allowed to remain intact. They are (1) no mixed picketing, (2) Boycott of foreign cloth, not merely British cloth, and this through khaddar.

Young India, 1-5-1930

CWVG, Vol. XLIII, p.366



255. EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH AT OLPAD

May 1, 1930

I have been told that in Surat when some of our sisters were on their round, the owners of toddy booths behaved badly. Some even threw clods of earth at them. I was ashamed to hear this. A man should die before he insults such women or swears at them or lifts a stone against them. What though the person behaving thus be a drunkard? Haven't drunkards their mothers and sisters? These women do not go and abuse them. They only humbly entreat them. Is it a crime to do so? Every man in this country should have the spirit in him not to tolerate women being insulted. This does not mean that one should lose one's temper with the person who abuses them. But how can any man have the audacity to abuse a woman or lift a stone against her? He ought rather to pray: O God, may my hand come unstuck before I commit such a crime.

Against whom can you raise your hand? Perhaps against a man who attacks you, though even that is at present forbid den. To raise one's hand against a woman is cowardly. It is unthinkable. I hope no Indian is behind these incidents. I hope the clod of earth fell accidentally on some sister. I had believed that though there might be wicked Indians, even they would observe some decorum. However, even if a few women have their heads smashed as some men have had theirs, we will not give up what we have undertaken in the name of God. If it is the fate of our sisters to be beaten they will be beaten. But let those who drink as well as those who sell liquor note that drinking will soon be a matter of the past.

The way of the Raghus it has been ever.

Life may fail but a pledge never.

We all brothers and sisters have now learnt to recite this quatrain and we are no actors in a play who only sing and do not act. Just as we know that the salt law is as good as abolished, let us also have the faith that the drink evil, too, will be gone.



Remember my humble prayer. I also want you to carry my message—the message of an old man—to all concerned and to the liquor-booth owners of Surat.

Navajivan, 11-5-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.372



256. PICKETING

The proprietor of a liquor booth in Ahmedabad thrashed innocent labourers who had committed no crime. In Surat, foul abuses were hurled at women and clods of earth thrown at them. In Jalalpur, they have started using filthy language towards women. The women who endured all this deserve to be complimented. But what about men? When women are abused, it is not necessary for any man to come forward to fight on their behalf. One should not fall into a panic when abused by a drunkard or the proprietor of a liquor booth. All the same, men cannot remain idle in such circumstances. They should go and meet the proprietor, plead with him courteously, collect people's signatures on statements condemning such conduct and publish them. The proprietors of liquor booths should also realize that they ought not to insult women. I am convinced that, if every case of such misconduct is brought to people's notice in courteous language and public feeling in this regard is explained to the proprietors, the latter will certainly desist from such misconduct. They should wisely give up on their own a business which is becoming less and less paying.

Navajivan, 4-5-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.384-58



257. GIFT FROM A PARSİ GIRL

I reproduce below, without any change, the letter which a Parsi girl has written to me:¹

In just the same manner, Parsi children in Vapi gave Rs. 300 and one little girl among them asked whether she might join the struggle. When such innocent children show a desire for service, who can help believing that they are prompted by God? I see no insincerity in these girls.

Navajivan, 4-5-1930 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, p.385

1. The letter is not translated here. The girl, aged 7, had said she was sending Rs. 10 as her contribution to the cause.



258. SPEECH AT SURAT

May 4, 1930

It is not by means of the power of intellect that people are able to observe vows they take.¹ There must be a thorough change of heart and faith in God, which alone could give them the necessary strength. I have been defeated in prohibition campaign as a man and therefore I have asked women to help the movement. If anybody could melt the heart of drunkards it is woman. I have often asked Ministers in charge of Excise Department to put a stop to drink traffic. They have replied that I must find out for them new sources of revenue. I have told them to stop giving education to boys but they would not adopt the suggestion. If in swaraj we have liquor traffic, our President will have to face a similar problem afterwards. We are also not as adventurous as Americans, who are successfully making America dry. We have become emasculated and therefore I appeal to you to tackle this question first.

The present time is the most opportune and auspicious. I appeal to you with all earnestness to observe the vows you have taken. Do not deceive me; if you are unable to give up drinking, say so openly; I will congratulate you even then. My own son confesses honestly that he is not able to give up the drinking habit, and I congratulate him on his truthfulness. Even so you must be truthful so that I may not miscalculate. God alone will help him, my son, and you, who are unable to give up drink. If you deceive me, you deceive your community and the whole country.

Referring to the insult offered to some women picketers at some places Gandhiji said that if they had not considered women as low creatures working for men and as objects of their lust then nobody could have dared to raise a finger against them.

But even if they will stone them, they will continue picketing. "Pussyfoot" lost his eye in anti-drink propaganda to make America dry, but did not give up his campaign. India will have to answer for every insult offered to women. This is my last



throw; and I am out to lose my all. But all this I do for the liberation of India. If one district is ready, we will surely have swaraj. You must purify yourself, you must be industrious; there is no other way for achieving swaraj.

The Bombay Chronicle, 6-5-1930

CWMG, Vol. XLIII, pp.396-97

1. Panchayats of Surat city had passed resolutions asking members of their respective communities not to drink liquor.



259. LETTER TO GANGABEHN VAIDYA

November 14, 1930

CHI. GANGABEHN,

Your letter to Kakasaheb was received late. I understood the situation better from it. People certainly give you credit. But exercise the utmost patience. You have taken upon yourself a great responsibility. But you should meditate over those three verses which we have recently included in the prayers. Those who work for God with His name ever on their lips, He makes them His special concern and ensures the success of their undertakings, and it is He who guides them; why, then, should we worry?

Man has ill-treated woman and is still doing so. But the remedy for this ultimately lies in woman's own hand. If she stops thinking that she is weak, she can be free this very day. The really strong are not those who are strong in body. Ravana, who was a demon, that is, had physical strength, was helpless before the seemingly weak Sita. I am sure you remember the story. Sita was under the protection of a boon to the effect that anyone who cast an evil glance at her would be instantly burnt to ashes. Ravana knew this and that is why, though he carried her away, he could not touch her person with impure thoughts. He had to entreat Sita to let him embrace her. He threatened her time and again in the hope that she might yield; but unless she yielded of her own free will he was, in spite of his strength, as helpless as a goat. Though physically Sita was utterly helpless, in spirit she was a lioness.

We know the meaning of a boon. It is only a symbol. Every woman who has inviolable purity of character enjoys the same boon as Sita did. Any man who casts an evil glance at such a woman would be instantly burnt to ashes. If man has ill-treated woman, the reason is that she, too, has yielded to lust. Being enslaved by passion, both forgot their higher nature, forgot that they were souls and remained mere bodies. So



far as the body is concerned, man is undoubtedly the stronger of the two. Hence woman was enslaved by man and the impression came to prevail that she was helpless before man, that she was weak and always needed man's protection.

As souls man and woman are equal. If a man does not recognize his spiritual nature but a woman does, the latter is the stronger of the two, as Sita was stronger than Ravana, and the other remains weaker, as was Ravana. Don't believe, moreover, that this was possible only in the time of Rama. Even today there are countless Sitas in the world who require no man's help and are yet safe against all danger. One such is Janakimaiya. You must have seen her. Whenever I went to Bombay, she came and saw me. She had not much intellectual capacity to speak of, but had boundless strength of spirit. She must have been good-looking in her youth. She embraced a hard path of service in the prime of her youth. I have known other Indian women like her, and also Englishwomen. They are examples of but a small measure of spiritual strength. A woman who has fully grown in soul deserves to be revered as the world's mother.

For those who wish to cultivate such strength, *satyayuga* exists today. Your task, therefore, is to make women strong. That is the right method of securing justice from men. A man like me may guide you and awaken, other men to a consciousness of their duty. But my capacity for serving women is limited.

Women alone can serve women perfectly. It is my ambition, through the Ashram, to prepare not one such worker but many. An opportunity to do so has presented itself to us just now.

If you have not followed this, ask me to explain again.

Blessings from

BAPU

Bapuna Patro-6: G.S. Gangabehnne, pp. 45-7; also C.W. 8764. [From Gujarati]



Courtesy: Gangabehn Vaidya

CWMG, Vol. XLIV, pp.308-09



260. LETTER TO KASHINATH TRIVEDI

YERAVDA MANDIR,

November 22, 1930

CHI. KASHINATH,

If Mother lives near the Ashram, you will feel easy in mind and will also be able to go on with the work of service.

It is not obligatory on anyone to marry a particular person and nobody else. If, however, a Hindu woman wishes to marry a Muslim for good and sufficient reasons, we should not believe that she would be committing a sin if she did so. How, then, can we object to a woman marrying a so-called untouchable? Such a person is not a non-Hindu. There is no necessary connection between marriage and the varna system. We should remember that marriage is a universally accepted religious institution intended to put a restraint on gratification of lust, and limit the field of choice for individuals. I think I have fully answered your question.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 5261

CWMG, Vol. XLIV, pp.328-29



261. INTERVIEW TO THE PRESS

BOMBAY,

January 27, 1931

In the first instance, I am not at all satisfied that a common term has been used to mean the same thing. Secondly, the Congress has pursued nothing that the situation did not render absolutely necessary. In my opinion when the history of the last decade comes to be written the palm will be given to the women of India. They have brought swaraj nearer. They have added several inches to their own height and that of the nation.

The Times of India, 28-1-1931

CWMMG, Vol. XLV, p.129



262. LETTER TO VICEROY

ANAND BHAWAN, ALLAHABAD,

February 1, 1931

H.E. THE VICEROY, DELHI

DEAR FRIEND,

You have made a public appeal¹ to me for co-operation in connection with the further work of the recently held Conference in London and ascribed to me a belief in the sincerity of British promises and declarations. I wish that I could endorse your ascription. I told you on the 23rd December 1929, that subject to honourable exceptions I had found to my great sorrow that British declarations and promises were insincere. Had I not found them so, the active voluntary co-operation that I had tendered to British officials in India and outside would never have been withdrawn.

But I assure you that I am simply waiting for a sign in order to enable me to respond to your appeal. I confess, however, that some of the signs are highly ominous. In Borsad, in the district of Kaira, on the 21st January, a cruel, uncalled for and unchivalrous lathi-charge was made upon wholly innocent women and girls who were forming a procession which was marching to a women's meeting that was to be held in order to protest against the brutal treatment of a girl² 17 years old by a police official. Neither the procession nor the meeting was prohibited. The injuries were severe in several cases. Some of those who were assaulted belong to the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati. One of them, an old widow³, a member of the Managing Board of the Ashram, was drenched in blood. To give you some idea of the nature of the police barbarity, I give you a free translation of her letter⁴ to me. The facts stated in that letter are capable of easy proof. The Collector himself was in Borsad on this date. At the time of writing this, I cannot recall anything in modern history to parallel this



official inhumanity against wholly defenceless and innocent women. I may complete the outline of this picture by stating that there were no men in this meeting or procession except a few volunteer guides.

I remain

Your faithful friend,

Enclosure: Translation of a letter

Bombay Secret Abstracts 750(14)0 Pt-A, pp.159-63

The Hindu, 2-2-1931

CWMMG, Vol. XLV, pp.136-38

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1. *Vide* Appendix II, CWMMG, Vol. XLV.
 2. Lilavati.
 3. Gangabehn Vaidya.
 4. *Vide* Appendix III. CWMMG, Vol. XLV.



263. SPEECH AT PUBLIC MEETING, ALLAHABAD

February 1, 1931

Speaking in Hindi while seated on the dais, Mahatma Gandhi said that it afforded him great pleasure in seeing an assembly of such a large crowd as had gathered at the meeting and he offered his thanks to God and congratulations to the people for the great deeds of bravery and sacrifices done by the people during the period of eight months. He said that whenever he thought of those brave deeds and sacrifices he was at once reminded of his sisters. *The whole world was surprised, said Mahatma Gandhi, at the considerable sacrifices made by people in the national struggle, especially at the share taken by the women of India.*

The women who were considered absolutely ignorant and always lived in *purdah* gave up their *purdah* forthwith at the nation's call, they sacrificed their children, offered for the struggle even their little girls and did not put any obstacles in the way of their husbands participating in the fight. And, he said, the women's sacrifices were not confined to that alone but they themselves discarded the *purdah* and went out to participate in the fight.

Proceeding, Mahatma Gandhi said that any number of families would be found in the country, which would have given everyone of its members for the national struggle. In a fight with guns, old men, women, boys and girls were exempted, but India's fight for freedom was such that everybody could participate in it.

Resuming the speech, which Mr. Shiva Prasad Gupta repeated¹, Mahatma Gandhi, while busy at his *takli*, said that the women of the country had been lifted high on account of their sacrifices, by three or four inches and consequently the height of the whole country was also raised by three or four inches which naturally provided an occasion for the Indians to feel proud.



The Leader, 4-2-1931

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 3401

CWMMG, Vol. XLV, p.139

1. As the loud-speakers failed.



264. LETTER TO VASUMATI PANDIT

February 2, 1931

CHI. VASUMATI,

How fortunate you are. You got beaten and were also awarded a jail sentence. All of you have upheld the honour of the Ashram and brought glory to your sex. All people do not yet see the full significance of this incident¹. Its real value will be appreciated after some time. I hope you did not even feel angry with the person who beat you. All of them are like our brothers. If we do not feel angry, they are bound to change some day.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: S.N. 9320

CWVG, Vol. XLV, p.142

1. At Borsad; *vide* "Letter to Viceroy", CWVG, Vol. XLV, pp.136-8.



265. LETTER TO CHHAGANLAL JOSHI

February 2, 1931

CHI. CHHAGANLAL,

I got all your letters. But I have had no rest after leaving the rest-house. Today is my silence day and so I have got some time, though the stream of visitors continues.

I simply cannot forget the Borsad incident. The people have not yet realized its significance. I am taking up the matter.

The Ashram women have immortalized themselves and the Ashram. Our prayers and the vows of self-discipline have borne fruit. Other women also have shown such courage. There were some in this procession too. But I have formed the impression that the special merit of the sacrifice made by the Ashram women lies in the religious spirit which inspired it.

My future movements are uncertain. Probably I shall reach Bombay on the 4th. Panditji's ship is in mid-ocean, so that even for his sake I may have to stay on here. I keep good health. About other developments, you will read in the papers. I am trying for the release of the other prisoners, but only within limits proper for us. Those who are released by the Government on the expiry of their sentences should try to return to the jails immediately. Write to me wherever I am. For the ensuing official year of the Congress, Sardar has been elected President. This increases the responsibility of Gujarat. It may have been necessary for women from outside Kaira District to go there. Who took the lead in showing this discourtesy?

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 5500

CWMG, Vol. XLV, pp.142-43



266. LETTER TO RAMABEHN JOSHI

PRAYAG,

February 10, 1931

CHI. RAMA,

I have your letter. You should not get tired so soon. If we are imprisoned, we should welcome that. If they beat us, we should suffer the beating with Ramanama on our lips. A person who is out to serve, what choice can he or she have? How do we know that we shall escape with beating? We may even have to face bullets. We should show patience and be ready to pass through any test God may ordain for us.

If, while doing service, we go to bed late and get up late, we need not feel unhappy about that. However, there should be no self-deception in this matter.

Write to Vimu and ask her how, after hearing that in Borsad women were dragged by their hair, she still wants to have long hair. After this incident, the right course for all women engaged in service is to get their hair cut short. But how can I convince women about this?

I am here up to the 15th. Where I shall be after that, God alone knows. But it seems to me that we shall meet now.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 5330

CWMG, Vol. XLV, p.171



267. SPEECH AT DELHI

February 20, 1931

Resuming his speech, Mahatmaji said:

Here as elsewhere the part played by women is indescribable. When the history of this movement comes to be written, the sacrifices made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place and just as with women so also with children. Their wonderful awakening has fortified me in my faith that God is with us in this struggle. These young folk had never been organized for such work, never been trained for it. How they came to achieve all this I have not been able to divine nor has anyone else whom I have consulted been able to enlighten [me] as to who guided them; only God could have done so. But remember that, in the sacred battle, whatever sacrifices you have made are trifling. Let them not puff you up with pride, what we want for India is *purna swaraj*. And who can calculate what further sacrifices India will have to make to achieve that goal? I assure you that I am doing as much as is humanly possible to bring about peace so that the people may not have to go through further suffering and sacrifices but everything is in God's hands and if it be not His will that any understanding be arrived at, then I will have to tell the people that they must be ready for much further suffering.

The Hindustan Times, 22-2-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLV, p.209



268. A TWENTIETH CENTURY SATI(?)¹

I hope that the incident as reported in the Press is not true and that the lady in question died through illness or through accident, not by suicide. A sati has been described by our ancients, and the description holds good today, as one who ever fixed in her love and devotion to her husband signalizes herself by her selfless service during her husband's lifetime as well as after, and remains absolutely chaste in thought, word and deed. Self-immolation at the death of the husband is not a sign of enlightenment but of gross ignorance as to the nature of the soul. The soul is immortal, unchangeable and immanent. It does not perish with the physical body but journeys on from one mortal frame to another till it completely emancipates itself from earthly bondage. The truth of it has been attested to by the experience of countless sages and seers and can be realized by anyone who may wish to even today. How can suicide be then justified in the light of these facts?

Again true-marriage means not merely union of bodies. It connotes the union of the souls too. If marriage meant no more than a physical relationship the bereaved wife should be satisfied with a portrait or a waxen image of her husband. But self-destruction is worse than futile. It cannot help to restore the dead to life, on the contrary it only takes away one more from the world of the living.

The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping-stone to the divine or universal love. That is why immortal Mira sang: "God alone is my husband—none else."

It follows from this that a sati would regard marriage not as a means of satisfying the animal appetite but as a means of realizing the ideal of selfless and self-effacing service by completely merging her individuality in her husband's. She would prove her satihood not by mounting the funeral pyre at her husband's death but she would prove



it with every breath that she breathes from the moment that she plighted her troth to him at the *saptapadi*² ceremony, by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would shun creature comforts and delights of the senses. She would refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family, but would utilize every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating renunciation and self-discipline, and by completely identifying herself with her husband, learn to indentify herself with the whole world.

Such a sati would refuse to give way to wild grief at the death of her husband but would ever strive to make her late husband's ideals and virtues live again in her actions and thereby win for him the crown [of] immortality. Knowing that the soul of him whom she married is not dead but still lives she will never think of remarrying.

The reader will here be perhaps tempted to ask, "The sati that you have pictured is a being untouched by passion or animal appetite. She can have no desire for offspring. Why should she marry at all?" The reply is that in our present-day Hindu society, marriage, in a vast majority of cases, is not a matter of choice. Again, there are some who believe that in our ramshackle age marriage is necessary as a shield to virtue and as an aid to self-restraint. And as a matter of fact, I personally know several instances of persons who, though at the time of the marriage, were not free from animal passion later on became imbued with the ideal of absolute chastity and found in their married life a powerful means for realizing their ideal. I have cited these instances to show that the ideal of sati that I have depicted is not merely a counsel of perfection that has no place outside the world of theory but something that has to be lived up to and realized in this very matter of fact world of ours.

But I readily concede that the average wife who strives to attain the ideal of sati will be a mother too. She must therefore add to her various other qualities mentioned



above a knowledge of rearing and bringing up children so that they might live to be true servants of their country.

All that I have said about the wife applies equally to the husband. If the wife has to prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband so has the husband to prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife. You cannot have one set of weights and measures for the one and a different one for the other. Yet we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife. It may therefore be taken for granted that the practice of the widow immolating herself at the death of her husband had its origin in superstitious ignorance and the blind egotism of man. Even if it could be proved that at one time the practice had a meaning, it can only be regarded as barbarous in the present age. The wife is not the slave of the husband but his comrade, otherwise known as his better half, his colleague and friend. She is a co-sharer with him of equal rights and of equal duties. Their obligations towards each other and towards the world must, therefore, be the same and reciprocal.

I therefore regard the alleged self-immolation of this sister as vain. It certainly cannot be set up as an example to be copied. Don't I appreciate at least her courage to die?—I may perhaps be asked. My reply is 'no' in all conscience. Have we not seen even evil-doers display this sort of courage? Yet no one has ever thought of complimenting them on it. Why should I take upon me the sin of even unconsciously leading astray some ignorant sister by my injudicious praise of suicide? Satihood is the acme of purity. This purity cannot be attained or realized by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day.

Young India, 21-5-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVI, pp.73-75



1. The Gujarati original of this appeared in *Navajivan* 3-5-1931. This is a translation by Pyarelal, with the following introductory note: "A lady correspondent from Ghatkopar having invited Gandhiji to express his opinion on an alleged case of sati that was recently reported in a Bombay vernacular paper Gandhiji has delivered himself on the subject in an article in the *Navajivan* as follows." *Vide* also "Opinion Unchanged", 17-5-1931.

2. Seven steps.



269. OPINION UNCHANGED

Commenting on the article entitled “A Twentieth-Century Sati(?)”, Shri Mathuradas Devram writes as follows:¹

I have published this letter for the sake of fairness. My opinion remains unaltered even after having known all these facts. The facts as they were published have been corroborated and so my grief is all the greater and my opinion has been strengthened. This is an example not of love but of strong emotion. What does man not do when overcome by emotion? If that very woman had survived, she could have perpetuated her husband’s memory by her dedicated life. Having died, she did not accompany her husband. It is an error to believe that the relationship ends as soon as the body perishes. But even if that were at all true, she could not preserve that relationship. Just as her husband’s body was reduced to ashes, hers too was reduced to ashes; hence along with the departure of the one, the other too followed suit. In this pathetic incident, I find nothing at all praiseworthy. I hope that even this woman’s relatives do not consider this suicide as the act of a sati. Rather than teach women to love their husbands blindly, we should liberate them and show them through our conduct that the soul in a woman has equal rights with the soul in a man.

Now about Shri Mathuradas’s last question. In the sentence “A woman who is a sati will participate in the function of procreation within limits,” the phrase ‘a woman who is a sati’ has been used to denote a woman of good character whose husband is alive. My ideal is to make husbands and wives practise total celibacy. If that is not possible, my purpose was to say that both should, within limits, participate in the function of procreation. That is to say, sexual union between the two should be permitted only for the sake of this function and that too for the limited number of children that both desire. This, in my opinion, is limited self-restraint.

Navajivan, 17-5-1931 [From Gujarati]



CWMMG, Vol. XLVI, p.159

1. The letter is not translated here. It had described and justified the action of the woman who had burnt herself on the pyre of her husband.



270. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK

NAINITAL,

May 18, 1931

CHI. PREMA,

I liked your letter very much indeed. I see that during the journey you had observed things intelligently. I should like Kisan also to send me a description of her experiences. She may write either in English or Marathi.

Take great care of Lakshmi. My idea is to marry her to a non-*Antyaja*. ... She should know cooking, and also how to run a home. She should know how to keep accounts. It would be excellent if she knew a little Sanskrit. Even if she does not know Sanskrit she should be able to recite the prayer verses and verses from the *Gita* with correct pronunciation.

All girls should know this. We ought not to neglect their education. Write to me in detail. Let me know your experience regarding Lakshmi.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10254. Also C.W. 6702.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantak

CWMG, Vol. XLVI, p.171



271. A WOMAN'S SACRIFICE

During the great awakening that took place last year amongst women there were heroines whose mute work the nation will never know. Now and then however one gets information of such village work. Here is one such sample sent by a friend:¹

When our Congress camp was declared illegal and locked up by the police we shifted to the hut of a poor Mahishya woman—Habu's mother of Baradongal. We have read of Gorki's mother. We saw her incarnate in Habu's mother. Night and day she used to cook for us workers. She nursed the sick amongst us. She consoled those that were troubled in heart and thus became real mother to us who would otherwise have felt motherless. We had graduates and M.A.s amongst us proud of their educational gifts but all of us were compelled to call Habu's mother our own. Her sacrifice and great devotion to duty commanded that homage from us.

Young India, 21-5-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVI, pp.189-90

1. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XLVI, p.162.



272. A MARTYR

In Bombay, there was a public meeting in Dongri at which there was an uproar and at which a youth 'Pannalal' was fatally stabbed. Next day Pannalal died. He was born of wealthy parents. He left a young widow behind him, to whom he was married only eighteen months ago. His parents were under the influence of the national movement and due to that they had simplified the life of the family. In this connection Gandhiji wrote about the young widow of Pannalal.

As for the widow let me hope that their love for their son will prompt the parents to give her the education the girl widow may desire or be fitted for and that they will give her every encouragement to remarry when she grows to maturity. Let them, if they have drunk in the spirit of the age, shed the superstition that a widow is the property of the husband's family to remain as their slave. A widow must have the same right as a widower and must be taught to know that she has the same free choice as men.

Young India, 25-6-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVII, p.58



273. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BOMBAY

June 26, 1931

Mahatma Gandhi first congratulated the women of India and particularly the women of Bombay for the great and heroic part they had taken in the last fight. They had shown unparalleled courage and their capacity to suffer and make supreme sacrifices in the cause of the country was fully tested. When Gandhiji started on his pilgrimage to Dandi¹ he had entrusted to the women of India a twofold mission. Firstly the women of India must help the nation to exterminate all foreign cloth and secondly they must help to enforce total prohibition. Gandhiji entrusted this task to the women, having full faith that it would be carried out. What the women had achieved by selfless work and during such a short time was far beyond his most sanguine hopes.

The women of India, proceeded Gandhiji, had enhanced the prestige of the whole nation. They were the cynosure of all eyes. The whole world looked up to them with admiration for their patriotism. But that was not enough. The praise that was showered on them by the world must encourage them to look forward to their future work with greater faith and zeal.

They should with more vigour carry out the work entrusted to them during the fight. They should persuade dealers in foreign cloth as well as consumers to shun foreign cloth. They should beg of those who are addicted to drink to give up the vice and they should induce the dealers in liquor to stop the evil traffic. During the last fight men and women volunteered their services for this work but now this task had become more onerous and difficult. There was both laxity in work and lack of workers.

The need for a regular and disciplined army of workers was therefore all the greater. They should not be disappointed by the results of their efforts. If they had complete faith in their mission and believed that they were going to succeed, it would not only be possible to exterminate foreign cloth from India but also root out the drink



evil in a short time. But this kind of work required discipline and united efforts. He noticed among the audience a few women wearing the orange colour saris but a majority of them did not wear this emblem. This colour was symbolic of the dedication of their services in the cause of the country. It also indicated that they were members of the local organization of women which carried out the mission of boycott and prohibition.

My appeal to you women, therefore, is to come out and adopt this symbol of the orange colour sari and join the band of those brave and selfless women whose services are pledged to the country.

He then sounded a note of warning to such of the women who took to khaddar during the last struggle but were now tempted to go in for foreign fineries. It had been brought to his notice that a few Khoja² women who had taken part in the movement and had become converts to the gospel of khaddar were now showing an inclination to buy foreign cloth. This was not the case with Khoja women alone but Hindu women also. If they had the slightest regard and pity for the millions of their countrymen who were facing starvation and worse they should cease patronizing foreign cloth.

They should prefer either khaddar or India-made cloth to the exclusion of all foreign cloth. But he would point out that Indian mill-cloth was meant for those to whom the message of the starving millions had not reached and for such persons who were not of Congress persuasion. But every Congressman and woman and everyone who believed in the Congress creed must adopt khaddar and khaddar alone even to the exclusion of mill-cloth.

Mahatmaji thought that the best education for girls and women was not the kind of university education that they were getting in schools but that they should be taught thoroughly to master the art of spinning and carding. The message of the charkha must be popularized throughout the length and breadth of the country and



women were best fitted for the propagation of this message. If every woman learnt to spin and cultivated the habit of wearing only self-made khaddar clothes they would go a long way in winning their freedom.

The Bombay Chronicle, 27-6-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVII, pp.64-66

1. On March 12, 1930; vide *CWMG*, Vol. XLIII.

2. A Muslim community.



274. LETTER TO LILAVATI SAVARDEKAR¹

AHMEDABAD,

August 16, 1931

DEAR SISTER,

This is my message:

Whilst it is true that man must shed his vice for the sake of his fallen sisters I am quite certain that the evil will be eradicated only when some sister from amongst them rises in revolt against the evil and with the fire of her own purity burns the evil in the others.

Yours sincerely,

SM. LILAVATI SAVARDEKAR

From a photostat: S.N. 17482: also *Bombay Chronicle*, 29-8-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVII, p.302

1. *Vide* also "Letter to Lilavati Savardekar", *CWMG*, Vol. XLVII, p.278.



275. INTERVIEW TO “JOHN BULL”

LONDON,

[*On or before September 25, 1931*]

What would be the position of the women in India under swaraj? They would be our co-workers and colleagues, enjoy the same rights and privileges as the men.

John Bull, 26-9-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.64-65



276. MYSELF, MY SPINNING-WHEEL AND WOMEN¹

Yes, I believe in complete equality for women and, in the India I seek to build, they would have it. The reason I have so many women co-workers is, I believe, due to my adoption of celibacy and my instinctive sympathy for women.

You have probably heard that in my country women occupy a subordinate position. This is only so outwardly. Actually, their influence has ever been of the strongest. For centuries women have worked on an equal footing with men. If they ceased work, then many of the men would starve.

PLAYTHINGS

In the cultivation of the crops our men and women toil together. Their life is a strenuous one. It is in the leisured classes that the difference is more marked. Wealth has enabled women to forget and set aside the virtue of usefulness. Thus there is a tendency for wealthy women to become mere ornaments-playthings.

What I want to see is the opening of all offices, professions and employments to women; otherwise there can be no real equality. But I most sincerely hope that woman will retain and exercise her ancient prerogative as queen of the household.

From this position she must never be dethroned. It would indeed be a dreary home of which a woman was not the centre. I cannot, for instance, imagine a really happy home in which the wife is a typist and scarcely ever in it. Who would look after the children? What, after all, is a home without children, the brightest jewels in the poorest household?

FAMILY FIRST

Cases might be cited in which a clever woman might, by going out into the world to earn her living, make more money and do more for the children, paying someone



to look after them. Exceptional women make necessarily exceptional cases. There are exceptions in every phase of life, but we cannot generalize from exceptions.

Generally, it is the father who should be the bread-winner. He will work all the better, knowing that he has a happy home. And it is a serious injustice to deprive a child of the tender care which only a mother can give.

It is a woman's work to bring up her little ones and mould their character. A precious work, too. Equality in status with men, I desire for women, but if the mother fails in her sacred trust towards her children, then nothing can atone for the loss.

Whatever the race, family life is the first and greatest thing. Its sanctity must remain. Upon it rests the welfare of the nation. For good or for ill home influence persists. Of that there can be no possible doubt, and no State can survive unless the sacred security of its home life is preserved. Individuals there may be who in pursuit of some great principle or ideal, forgo, like myself, the solace of family life, choosing instead one of self-sacrifice and celibacy; but for the mass of the people the preservation of home life is essential.

The Daily Herald, 28-9-1931

CWMMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.79-81

1. The title supplied by *The Daily Herald* for which Gandhiji wrote this exclusive article.



277. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S RECEPTION¹

LONDON,

October 2, 1931

Mr. Gandhi, who arrived three-quarters of an hour late, explained that he had been attending the informal minorities conciliation committee. He said:

I have undertaken work of very considerable responsibility and I could not tear myself away from a meeting that I was attending in connection with the very mission that has brought me from India.

Mr. Gandhi said there were 700,000 villages in India where the people lived under ill-nourished conditions. One of the best constructive activities of the Congress was that of bringing work to the workless women of the villages, irrespective of race, caste or creed. Probably at the present moment some 50,000 women were being given the work of spinning in their own homes. No constructive work in India was more important than that of banishing pauperism by giving the men and women not doles or charity but work. The great mass of villagers were without work for six months in the year. When they thought of this chronic unemployment, the unemployment in England dwindled into insignificance. He did not wish to underrate the difficulties arising in this country from unemployment, such as he had seen in Lancashire, but he did say that the unemployment in India deserved the sympathy and assistance of the whole world. He did not mean material sympathy: if they in India could give work to their people, there would be no need of money, for labour was another form of money. Mr. Gandhi paid a tribute to the "noble part the women of India took during the last struggle for the freedom of India".²

The manifestation of energy, devotion and sacrifice which thousands of women made during the last satyagraha in India was nothing short of a miracle. Though I had



great faith in their ability to discharge their duty to the utmost, I was not prepared for the phenomenal awakening which occurred. This probably took the country several years in advance. If India today stands taller than she did eighteen months ago, I know Indian women had the largest share in it. It does not surprise me that the vast body of women in India does not want to scramble for special protection and special privileges. The women have set a noble example to men by abstaining from claiming special privileges.

I would like to have their blessings in order that I may not fail to represent the cause that has been entrusted to my hands.

The Times, 3-10-1931 and, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4-10-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.111-12

1. The reception, to mark Gandhiji's birthday, was arranged by the Women's Indian Association and Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association in King George's Hall at the Central Y.M.C.A. in the afternoon. Mrs. Brijlal Nehru was in the chair. A purse of £165 was presented to Gandhiji on the occasion.

2. What follows is from *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.



278. SPEECH AT CHATHAM HOUSE MEETING¹

LONDON,

October 20, 1931

The Indians were not as armed as the British; they did not know the science of fighting; they were called a gentle race, and he was glad to belong to a gentle race. But weakness of body did not matter when they had stout hearts. Indian women had stout hearts, and had received lathi blows with breasts forward, not turning their backs as if they were escaping-villagers who had received no education from English schools, and the greatest heroine among them was a woman who could hardly read a letter in her own mother tongue. They acted like this in order that they might gain liberty for their country. The masses in India were awakening, and it was too late to persuade them that good alien rule was better than bad indigenous rule.

International Affairs, November 1931

CWMMG, Vol. XLVIII, p.204

1. Held under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the meeting was attended by influential Englishmen and Englishwomen drawn from all parts of England. Lord Lothian presided.



279. SPEECH AT MEETING OF WOMEN'S INDIAN COUNCIL¹

LONDON,²

[November 18, 1931]

Gandhiji took the opportunity of correcting various fantastic notions about the women of India and presented a vivid picture of the heroic part they had played during the last struggle. He said:

They are perhaps in many ways superior to you. You had to go through untold suffering to win your suffrage. In India women got it for the asking. No hindrances have been placed in the way of their entering public life and the Congress had not only women for its Presidents, but had Mrs. Naidu as a member of its Cabinet. For several years, and during the last struggle when our organizations were declared illegal and those in charge of them put into prison, it was the women who came to the forefront, took the place of "dictators" and filled the jails. That, however, does not mean that they have not suffered at the hands of men. They have had their bitter cups to drink, but I have no hesitation in telling you that what you have read in Miss Mayo's book about India is 99 per cent untrue. I have read the book from cover to cover and as I finished it I exclaimed that it was verily a drain inspector's report³. Some of the things she has said are true, but her generalizations are absolutely false, and several statements in the book are pure figments of her imagination.

He then went on to describe how last year they came out of their homes in one mass and showed an awakening which was miraculous. They took part in processions, defied the law, and bore the lathi, without raising a little finger, without swearing at the police, and used their power of persuasion to wean the drunkard from drink and the sellers and purchasers of foreign cloth from it. It was not a learned woman like Sarojini Naidu but an unlettered woman⁴ who had borne lathi blows on her head which bled profusely whilst she stood unflinching, ordering her companions not to move



from their posts, and converted the little town of Borsad into a Thermopylae. It was to these women that the last year's victory was mainly due.

Young India, 3-12-1931

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.311-12

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1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "London Letter". The meeting was organized by Agatha Harrison and took place at Morley College.
 2. According to a report in *The Hindustan Times*, 21-11-1931, the meeting took place on this date.
 3. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XXXIV, pp.539-47.
 4. Gangabehn Vaidya; *vide CWMG*, Vol. XLV, p.136.



280. SPEECH AT MEETING

PARIS

December, 5, 1931

In the beginning of last year, during the salt march, women came forward to participate in the movement, not only women who had received a European education but women from the villages, who could not even sign their names. At the very beginning we had made it clear that neither sex nor age would be any bar to one's participation in the movement. Women and the aged participated in the movement as much as children.

Regeneration Numero Special Consacre a Gandhi et a l'Inde, Janvier 1932 [From French]

CWMMG, Residuary Vol. II, Item no. 463



281. SPEECH AT MEETING IN LAUSANNE¹

December 8, 1931

Q. What is your message to the women of Europe?

A. I do not know if I have the courage to give the message without incurring their wrath. I would direct their steps to the women of India who rose in one mass last year and I really believe, if India would drink in the nectar of non-violence, Europe would do it through women. Woman I hold is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today women do not realize what a tremendous advantage they hold over men. As Tolstoy would say, they are labouring under the hypnotic influence of man. If they would realize the nobility of non-violence, they would not consent to be called the weaker sex.

Tolstoy and Ruskin renewed my faith in things which I had only darkly felt.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.406-407

1. The source does not specify which meeting this was. But Mahadev Desai in his "Letter from Europe", published in *Young India*, 31-12-1931, says this was the Conscientious Objectors' meeting organized by Pierre Ceresole and his friends and was held in a church. The speech and the answers to questions that followed were translated by Edmond Privat and Prof. Bovet.



282. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, ROME¹

[December 13, 1931]²

The beauty of non-violent war is that women can play the same part in it as men. In a violent war the women have no such part in it as men. In a violent war the women have no such privilege, and the Indian women played a more effective part in our last non-violent war than men. The reason is simple. Non-violent war calls into play suffering to the largest extent, and who can suffer more purely and nobly than women? The women in India tore down the purdah and came forward to work for the nation. They saw that the country demanded something more than their looking after their homes. They manufactured contraband salt, they picketed foreign-cloth shops and liquor shops, and tried to wean both the seller and the customer from both. At late hours in the night, they pursued the drunkards to their dens with courage and charity in their hearts. They marched to jails and they sustained lathi blows as few men did. If the women of the West will try to vie with men in becoming brutes, they have no lesson to learn from the women of India. They will have to cease to take delight in sending their husbands and sons to kill people and congratulate them on their valour.

Young India, 14-1-1932

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, p.424

1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Letter from Europe".

2. From a reference in "Diary, 1931".



283. WOMEN AS THE STRONGER SEX

Q. Is not non-resistance submission?

A. Passive resistance is regarded as the weapon of the weak but the resistance for which I had to coin a new name altogether ... is ... a weapon of the strongest. But its matchless beauty is that it can be wielded by the weak in body, [by the] oldest and even by children if they have strong hearts and, since resistance through satyagraha is offered through self-suffering, it is a weapon open pre-eminently to women. And we found in actual experience in India last year that women in many instances surpassed men in suffering. And children also-thousands-played a noble part in this campaign. For the idea of self-suffering became contagious and they embarked upon amazing acts of self-denial. Supposing that women of Europe and children of Europe became fired with love of humanity ... they would take them by storm and reduce militarism to nothingness in an incredibly short time. And the underlying idea is that children, women and others have the same identical soul, same potentiality. The question is of drawing out the limitless power of Truth.

From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai

Young India, 14-1-1932

CWMG, Vol. XLVIII, pp.407-408



284. WOMEN AND MILITARISM

At various meetings the question was pointedly asked as to how women may help in fighting militarism. In Italy at a private meeting Gandhiji was asked to tell the women of Italy something they could learn from the women of India.

He said in Paris.

“If only women will forget that they belong to the weaker sex, I have no doubt that they can do infinitely more than men against war. Answer for yourselves what your great soldiers and generals would do if their wives and daughters and mothers, refused to countenance their participation in any shape or form in militarism.”

He said at Lausanne.

“I do not know if I have the courage to give message for the women of Europe that you asked for. If I am to do so without incurring their wrath, I would direct their steps to the women of India who rose in one mass last year, and I really believe that if Europe will drink in the lesson of non-violence it will do so through its women. Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realise what a tremendous advantage she has over man. As Tolstoy used to say they are labouring under the hypnotic influences of man. If they would realise the strength of non-violence they would not consent to be called the weaker sex.”

Speaking to a group of women in Italy he said: “The beauty of non-violent war is that women can play the same part in it as men. In a violent war the women have no such privilege, and the Indian women played a more effective part in our last non-violent war than men. The reason is simple. Non-violent war calls into play suffering to the largest extent, and who can suffer more purely and nobly than women? The women in India tore down the *purdah* and came forward to work for the nation. They saw that the country demanded something more than their looking after their homes.



They manufactured contraband salt, they picketed foreign cloth shops and liquor shops and tried to wean both the seller and the customer from both. At late hours in the night they pursued the drunkards to their dens with courage and charity in their hearts. They marched to jails and they sustained lathi blows as few men did. If the women of the West will try to vie with men in becoming brutes, they have no lesson to learn from the women of India. They will have to cease to take delight in sending their husbands and sons to kill people and congratulate them on their valour”

Young India, 14-1-1932



285. LETTER TO LILAVATI ASAR

January 23, 1932

CHI. LILAVATI,

I have your letter. We at least could see each other, but what about the other women who could not even see me? However, I should have realized your eagerness and sent a special slip for you. Have it now. I should advise you not to exert yourself beyond your capacity. However, God will look after you all. Remember the first verse¹ of the women's prayer. It has universal application. You should not think that it is a prayer which was offered by someone thousands of years ago.

All of us are helpless, as Draupadi was. Before God such distinctions as man and woman lose all meaning. The same *atman* dwells in the man's and in the woman's body. In our infatuated state, we are deluded by the different bodily forms and are even overcome by passion. If we know the soul living within and, realizing that all individual selves are essentially one and the same, devote ourselves to the service of all, no disturbing thoughts would attack us and harass us.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 9322. Also C.W. 6597.

Courtesy: Lilavati Asar

CWVG, Vol. XLIX. p.25

1. गोविन्द, द्वारिकावासिन, कृष्ण, गोपीजनप्रिय ।

कौरवैः परिभुतांमां किं न जानासि केशव ॥



286. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Silence Day, January 25, 1932

DEAR SISTERS,

I hope you will understand that it is not possible for me to write to each of you separately. Of course, whenever it is necessary, and I get time, I write to some of you individually. But this time, too, I intend to write a joint letter to the women as I used to do formerly.

During these days, when all of us are passing through a testing time, I hope that all of you will derive great consolation from Draupadi's prayer. Really speaking, all of us are now in the same plight as she was. No human being can save our honour, God alone can do that. It is true that He often sends His help through men. But such a man is only God's tool or instrument. This much in regard to the difficult time through which we are passing.

Now a little from my experiences in England. I may say that in England, too, I received from women almost the same love that I have always received from Indian women. Just as you have kept no secret from me, there in England also I came across women who opened their hearts to me. They came from long distances to accompany me in my early morning walks and to talk to me. The moral which I drew from this is that non-violence is a very wide thing. It includes absolute freedom from impure thoughts.

I also saw that Indian women were in no way inferior to European women. Much of their strength lies suppressed and some of it has had no opportunity to reveal itself. Whenever I observed the European women's superiority, I could also see the causes of it. If the same causes begin to operate in our country, the women here also would become like them. However, we should certainly reflect over the superiority which we observe in European women. We should not feel elated thinking that that strength lies



concealed in us; nor should we be complacent on that account. They possess the power of organization and can unite and work very well like the men. They don't think themselves helpless, but fearlessly move about wherever they like. In England, if a woman goes out alone either during day or at night, it is not thought necessary for anybody to accompany her. Nursing in hospitals has become an exclusive province of women, and they do the work very well indeed. The sacrifices made by some women are beyond praise. Muriel Lester who came to stay with us at the Ashram is a daughter of rich parents. Like Mirabehn, she has given away, as a trust to the Ashram founded by her, all her share of the parental wealth. She and her sister Doris have dedicated their all to public service. Doris runs a school for children. She is helped by about ten women teachers who work for a very small pay. Muriel runs the Ashram where I was staying. Day and night the two sisters think only of service. Both have remained unmarried and now they have reached an age when even the thought of marriage would not occur to them. We can see their purity marked on their faces. In Muriel's Ashram no distinction would ever be made between high and low or between whites and non-whites. One may suppose that she could expect some publicity by acting as my hostess. But what shall one say about her having let Tilakam stay at the place? You may ask Tilakam himself how he was looked after there. He went to it as a pauper. I had agreed to pay the expenses on his account. However, Tilakam gave to the Ashram his full services like the others, so that I did not have to pay a single penny on his behalf. Negroes too she admits into her institution, and treats them with the same respect and love. I have many such happy memories of my stay. But I hope that for the present you will be satisfied with what I have given.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a microfilm of the Gujarati: M.M.U./II

CWMG, Vol. XLIX, pp.33-34



287. LETTER TO SHARDA C. SHAH

March 20, 1932

CHI. SHARDA,

The stars and the constellations which we see in the heavens are so many images of God.

Indian women's dress has appealed to me as the best. Mahavir, Buddha, Jesus, Mahomed and other teachers have sung praises of one and the same God.

Most of the education for women should be the same as for men. There may be some difference bearing on the special functions and duties of women.

From the Gujarati original: C.W. 9907. Courtesy: Shardabehn G. Chokhawala

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.212



288. LETTER TO VIDYA R. PATEL

March 24, 1932

CHI. VIDYA,

This time your handwriting seems to have deteriorated. You should see that it is always good. Ordinarily it is not necessary to make any difference between men's and women's work. There is a difference in some respects, but it will come about naturally.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: C.W. 9423. Courtesy: Ravindra R. Patel

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.235



289. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK

March 28, 1932

CHI. PREMA,

I have never written to you about the grown up women. I feel inclined to do so this time. They do not seem to come together for any common purpose. That is, their Association has broken up. I have written to Lakshmibehn and Durga on this matter, but I seem to have produced no effect on them. The women should get the strength to assume responsibility for joint work. If you have sufficient courage and confidence in yourself, take up this task. If you do so, however, you must resolve not to be defeated. We have, in fact, achieved nothing if we are able to do something when all the circumstances are favourable. A carpenter gives shape to any piece of wood and a sculptor makes an image from any stone; we are, likewise, worth our salt only if we know how to live with all types of people and get work from them. I think this is the main thing we have to learn in this life. For that, our heart should be as large as the sea. If we observe the defects of a person the very moment we see him or her and are deterred by them, our work would suffer. Everyone has defects. We have them and so have others. If we are determined to mix with them despite the defects, only then can we succeed in our work. ... I know that this is a difficult task. I have been engaged in this one task all these years and yet I cannot say that I have succeeded in it. I do seem, though, to have succeeded in some measure. That is why I muster courage or have the presumption to guide others.

You may now do what you think proper. You can, if you wish, put this letter before the women.

Blessings from

BAPU



From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10278. Also C.W. 6726.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantak

CWMG, Vol. XLIX, pp.246-47



290. LETTER TO ASHRAM WOMEN

Sunday, April 3, [1932]¹

DEAR SISTERS,

Since I cannot write with the left hand as fast as I can with the right, I dictate this letter instead of writing it.

‘Whatever women do, how can you, being their elder, employ satyagraha against them?’ There is a big flaw in this argument and it is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of satyagraha. In that question, you equate satyagraha with *duragraha*². Satyagraha makes no distinction between the young and the old, the prince and the pauper. God also employs satyagraha against us. His satyagraha is unceasing. In essence, satyagraha means simply this—scrupulous regard for truth. If God did not adhere to truth, the whole world would perish in an instant. The point is that offering satyagraha is as much a duty as it is a privilege. But I shall now take your own instance. If you do not discuss my letters among yourselves and reply to them, I really need not write to you every week. Even if I write, my letters will have no effect. A lover of truth never writes or speaks merely for the sake of writing or speaking. There must be some definite purpose in his writing or speaking. Ordinarily he should observe complete silence. Really speaking, there can be nothing for me to tell you or anybody else, particularly while I am in prison. Though I am imprisoned, the Government permits me to maintain limited contact with the outside world, and I avail myself of that freedom. But I should do so only for writing letters with a definite aim. A person like me should teach what he wishes to teach only through his own conduct. Those who do not learn from my actions, how can they learn from my words? This is the general rule. But there are persons in the Ashram as also outside it who regard my manner of life as worth following and, for that very reason, want me to explain my ideas more clearly. It is my duty to write to them. You are included among these



persons, but only if you ask me some questions. That is why I told you that, if you do not reply to me, ask me no question or discuss nothing with me, why should I write to you?

I know that you feel shy. I also know your nature. You do what service you can and say nothing. That is perfectly right, and it befits you. But even though we should learn to live in that manner, after all we have to mix with one another. Living in the Ashram means that we should live as a small community, that is, live together, have our meals together, work and spend our free time together and think together. This is the meaning of the *mantra* which we recite before commencing every meal. Animals also have some capacity for living and moving together. But man has it in unlimited measure, and it must be so because it is his dharma to realize his oneness with all living creatures. He cannot do this if he cannot live in a community. You must, therefore, strive your best and cultivate this capacity. Hence even if you do not meet regularly just now as members of an association, you should do so at least to qualify yourselves to get weekly letters from me and to reply to them. In this manner you can make some progress [towards collective living]. When any of you write to me individually, I do reply to her. But since I started the practice of writing a common letter to the women I have realized that I must write regularly something meant for all the women. The women should discuss it and I should discuss the questions which they raise. I think that I have now made quite clear what I wished to tell you and what I wished to tell you and what I want from you.

This was only a preface to the letter. Trivenibehn has asked me one question which concerns all women. Today, therefore, I will discuss that. She asks why women, not only the women in the Ashram but all women with whom she has come in contact, look as if they were dead and have no spirit in them at all. There is some truth in her description, though of course it will not apply to all women. The reasons which I have



been able to discover are these: (1) lack of order in women's life; (2) excessive worries; (3) wrong upbringing; (4) adoption of unscientific measures at the time of child-birth and during confinement; (5) lack of exercise; (6) eating food which is harmful to health; (7) the habit of remaining within the four walls of the home; (8) the habit of eating things which they ought not to eat; (9) in many cases, harmful thoughts which they do not try to regulate wisely, but repress.

These are the reasons which I can think of. I do not mean that all of them apply in every case. Every woman should think and find out which reason applies in her own case. I have observed one great defect in our women, namely, that they hide their thoughts from the world. As a result, their behaviour becomes hypocritical. This can happen only to those who are habitually hypocritical. I do not know anything in the world so poisonous as hypocrisy, and especially when the evil affects our middle class women who are suppressed throughout their lives it eats them up like a canker. At every step they do things which they dislike in their hearts, and believe that they must do them. If they only think a little, they will realize that they need not let themselves be suppressed by anybody in the world. If they learn this first lesson and cultivate the courage to stand before the world just as they are, they will be able to eliminate the other causes which I have mentioned.

According to me, this is a very important letter. Think over it again and again and ask me about anything in it which you do not understand. If you read the letter twice or thrice, you will be able to understand it very clearly.

From a microfilm of the Gujarati: M.M.U./II

CWMMG, Vol. XLIX, pp.263-65

1. A part of this letter is given in *Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. I, p.72, under the date April 4, 1932.

2. Opposite of satyagraha.



291. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK

April 8, 1932

CHI. PREMA,

Since Dhurandhar is here, I shall probably see him some time. Instead of wishing to kill many birds with one stone, why not wish to bring down many berries with one hit? You should never wish to kill a bird.

It was fortunate that you escaped being hurt by the tile.¹ We should conclude from this that you are destined to do much more.

You need not at all feel confused about the problem concerning the women. You may give your services if they want them and if you have confidence in yourself. Otherwise you should forget the suggestion as if it had never been made. You should have confidence in yourself not about your ability to teach the women, but about your humility, about your ability not to let any misunderstanding occur and to manage any difficult situation that may arise. We often hesitate to undertake a responsibility out of fear of humiliation, misunderstanding, etc. If you can overcome such hesitation, you may take up the responsibility. You do believe that all the women are good by nature. They require the help of someone who can express their thoughts in words and maintain records for them. An illiterate mother may have more sense and practical wisdom than her educated daughter, but, being illiterate, she may not be able to use them. A daughter can supply this deficiency. I should like you to do that. I certainly don't believe that the Association was doing very good work when Gangabehn was there. But on one pretext or another, she could bring all of them together. It was her ambition to do this work and she sowed the seed. She is doing similar work here too. I should like to see that seed grown into a tree. The women certainly do social work, but as individuals. I should like them to assume responsibility as a body, for some social service. This will create in them capacity for organization. When such capacity has



been created, individuals may come and go but the organization will remain. God has given such capacity only to human beings. In our country, women have not cultivated it so far. The blame for this lies with the men. But that is a question with which we need not concern ourselves just now. If we believe that women must acquire this capacity for organization, we should try to cultivate it in them. It does not matter if we commence only with my writing a letter to their Association and their replying to me. Slowly (no matter, if very slowly) we may take up other activities. If you have fully understood what I have suggested and if the suggestion has appealed to you, if the other women also approve of it and if they are ready to take interest in carrying it out, you may take up this work. If, however, you see difficulties in carrying it out or see no meaning in it, you may drop the idea.

Don't pay attention just now to my request² to you to send me a list of books. I don't want you, for the present, to send anything besides the books of Upton Sinclair which I have asked you to send.

I don't at all like the practice of converting a person from one religion to another. I don't believe that marriage between a man and a woman professing different faiths is impossible or always undesirable.

I think the distinguishing features of Hinduism are cow-protection and varnashrama. Any nation that wants to rise should follow the path of truth and non-violence.

I think I have answered all your questions.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10280. Also C.W. 6728.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantik



CWMG, Vol. XLIX, pp.282-83

1. The addressee was sleeping in a courtyard and a gust of wind sent a tile from the roof hurtling on her bed.
2. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. XLIX, pp.282-83



292. A LETTER

April 18, 1932

CHI.,

Woman's special virtues are non-violence, patience, forbearance, capacity for endurance and purity of heart. Dreams are signs of poor sleep. They may be caused by indigestion or too much of thinking. We can prevent them by discovering their cause.

Blessings from

BAPU

From Gujarati: C.W. 9029. Courtesy: Narandas Gandhi

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.319



293. LETTER TO DUDHIBEHN V. DESAI

April 24, 1932

CHI. DUDHIBEHN,

It is less trouble to me to reply to a letter immediately I get it, if I have the time to do so. Writing will stop automatically when I can no longer use my hand. A wife can go where her husband does, but sometimes dharma indicates a different course. What is essential is to have patience. We should cheerfully do—learn to do—the duty which has come to us unsought. Why should a woman believe herself weak? Husband and wife are friends and equals of each other. A weak wife makes the husband also weak. Hence she should be strong even for his sake.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: C.W. 7428. Courtesy: Valji G. Desai

CWMG, Vol. XLIX, p.358



294. LETTER TO PUSHPA S. PATEL¹

April 24, 1932

CHI.,

Mother India should possess the virtues of patience, capacity for endurance, forbearance, courage, non-violence, fearlessness, etc. One can cultivate them in the Ashram.

Do we remember every event in our present life?² If we did, we would become mad. After we have learnt the proper lesson from anything which we would like to remember, what harm is there if we forget it? On the contrary, it would be for our good.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a copy of the Gujarati: C.W. 9053. Courtesy: Narandas Gandhi.

Also *Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. 1, p.119

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.358

1. The name of the addressee is not given in the sources; but in "Letter to Pushpa S. Patel", *CWVG*, Vol. XLIX, p.266, Gandhiji refers to her having played the role of Mother India in a dramatic piece.

2. The addressee had also asked why we cannot remember the events of former births.



295. LETTER TO ASHRAM GIRLS

April 24, 1932

CHI.,

If you get your hair cropped, you would save the time you have to give in taking proper care of it, save expense over oil, comb, etc., and get rid of the false notion that there is beauty in hair. Without hair, the head remains clean. For a woman, absence of hair is a sign that she is observing *brahmacharya*. If girls and grown-up women get their hair cropped, the practice would cease to be regarded as sign of widowhood. If we think about the matter we may discover some other benefits also. But are not those I have mentioned enough just now?

From Gujarati: C.W. 9058. Courtesy: Narandas Gandhi.

Also *Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. I, p.120

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.363



296. A LETTER¹

May 30, 1932

I believe, and doctors also hold the same view, that no woman can be absolutely and simply raped. Not being prepared to die, a woman yields to the wrongdoer. But a woman who has overcome all fear of death would die before submitting to the outrage. It is easy to say this, but difficult to act in this manner. Hence when a woman yields to the wrongdoer unwillingly, it is but right that we should regard her as having been raped. If such a woman becomes pregnant, she should not resort to abortion. A woman who has been the victim of a rape does not deserve any censure. On the contrary, people should have compassion for her. If, however, a woman wishes to conceal the very fact of her having been raped, who is to say what right she has, whether or not she has a right to resort to abortion? In her fright she would believe that she had such a right and do as she wished. After the outrage, a woman has no right at all to commit suicide, nor need she do it.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. I, pp. 188-9 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XLIX, p.504

1. *The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, gives only the initial letter "S" of the addressee's name.



297. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK¹*June 23, 1932*

Your questions about men and women are good.

We should explain to a child any matter about which it shows curiosity, if we know the answer. Otherwise, we should admit our ignorance. If we think the child's question should not be answered, we should restrain it and also tell it not to ask others. In any case, we should never give an evasive reply. Children know more about these things than we think they do. If we refuse to tell them what they do not know, they learn to satisfy their curiosity in improper ways. We should, however, take that risk and not tell them what we think they ought not to be told. There are, of course, very few such things. If they want to know about the obscene act, we should certainly not satisfy their curiosity. Don't mind if they learn the facts in a clandestine manner despite our forbidding it.

If children see birds engaged in the sex-act and want to understand what it means, I would certainly satisfy their curiosity and use the opportunity to teach them the lesson of *brahmacharya*. I would teach them the distinction between man on the one hand and birds and beasts on the other. All the men and women who act in the same manner are, despite their human form, like birds and beasts in that particular respect. There is no condemnation of anyone in this; it is only a statement of fact. We have been granted the human form and our intelligence so that we may rise above our animal nature.

All the facts about menstruation should be explained to a girl who has reached puberty; if a younger girl comes to know about the phenomenon and asks you about it, you may explain to her, too, as many facts as she can understand.



Despite all our precautions, children will not always remain ignorant about these facts. Hence, it would be better to impart that knowledge to them at the proper time. If *brahmacharya* is so frail a thing that a person who knows the facts about sex cannot observe it, we have no use for such *brahmacharya*. The knowledge of these facts should strengthen one's *brahmacharya*. That is what happened in my case.

The motives for seeking or imparting this knowledge differ from person to person. One person may seek it in order to gratify his lust. Another may learn the facts without his showing any curiosity about the subject. A third person may seek the knowledge in order to calm his passions and to help others.

One should impart this knowledge to others only if one is fit for the job. You should have that ability, and also the confidence that by imparting it to the girls you will not awaken sex-thoughts in them. You should remember all the time that you impart this knowledge to the girls in order that they may not be disturbed by such thoughts. If you yourself are not free from them you should take care that they do not disturb you while you are imparting this knowledge to the girls.

The primary aim behind the partnership in life of man and woman as husband and wife is physical enjoyment. Hinduism has tried to teach in its place the practice of self-control, or say, rather, that all religions have done so.

If the husband is Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar, so is the wife. A wife is not a servant; she is a friend with equal rights, a partner in dharma. Each is the guru of the other.

A daughter's share should be equal to a son's.

A husband and a wife have equal rights in what either earns. The husband earns with the wife's help, even if she does no more than cook for the family. She is not a servant, but is an equal partner.



A wife has the right to live separately from her husband if he ill-treats her.

The two have equal rights over the children. After the children have grown up, neither of them has any. If the wife is unfit to exercise her right, she loses it. And so does the husband.

In sum, I do not admit any differences between men and women except those created by Nature which all of us can see. I don't think now that I have left any of your questions on this subject unanswered.

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10291. Also C.W. 6739.

Courtesy: Premabehn Katak

CWVG, Vol. L, pp.88-92

1. The letter is not reproduced here completely. Only that part where he talks about women is reproduced.



298. LETTER TO SHARDA C. SHAH

June 24, 1932

CHI. SHARDA,

You must know that what is true about the peacock is also true about us.¹ Even men and women who have been beautiful are not a pleasant sight after death, and we cremate them without delay. Hence, we should not be attached to bodies.

There is no hatred in complaining about anyone's lapses in discharging the duties laid down by one's superior. But the person at fault should be tenderly warned.

The expression *sahadharmacharini*² basically does mean what you say. But in ordinary language it is used only for a wife. When a sister gets married, she does not stay with her brother. The expression *charini* has the implication of life-long adherence. And when a particular meaning comes to be attached to a word, it becomes difficult to change it. Nor is it necessary. You are comfortable remaining alone. Look after your health.

BAPU

From the Gujarati original: C.W. 9950.

Courtesy: Shardabehn G. Chokhawala

CWMMG, Vol. L, pp.94-95

1. The addressee had stated in her letter that a peacock which had died in the Ashram looked as ugly in death as it had been beautiful in life.

2. Literally, 'partner in dharma'; the addressee had asked why the expression could not be applied to a sister also, if she joined her brother in the practice of dharma.



299. LETTER TO SUMANGAL PRAKASH

June 29, 1932

DEAR SUMANGAL,

Your letter to hand. Your argument with regard to rape seems convincing. In circumstances similar to those in which you believe it right for a woman to take her life, it may be right for a trustee to take his life when somebody tries to rob the property under his care. But the woman and the trustee themselves should think that it is their dharma to do so. You or I have no right to accuse a woman of failing in her dharma if she does not kill herself to prevent herself from being raped. If, unlike her, the trustee dies while defending the property under his care, we cannot assume, either, that he has done the right thing. We can judge in either case only if we know the mental condition of the person concerned at the time. Though I say this from the point of view of justice, personally I believe that a woman, if she has courage, would be ready to die to save her honour. In discussing this matter with women, I would, therefore, certainly advise them to kill themselves in such circumstances and explain to them that it was easy to take one's life if one wished to do so. I would do this because many women believe that, if there is no man present to protect them or if they have not learnt to use a dagger or a gun, they have no choice but to submit to the evil-doer. I would certainly tell a woman who believes so, that she need not depend upon anybody's weapons to protect her and that her own virtue will protect her. Even if that does not happen, instead of using a dagger or any other weapon she can kill herself. She need not consider herself weak or helpless.

Blessings from

BAPU



Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. 1, pp.268-70, and Bombay Secret Abstracts, Home Department, Special Branch, File No. 800(40)(3), Pt.11, pp.75-9 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. L, pp.110-11



300. BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY

Some people think that it is not a breach of *brahmacharya* to cast a lascivious look at one's own or another's wife or to touch her in the same manner; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Such behaviour constitutes a direct breach of *brahmacharya* in the grosser sense of the term. Men and women who indulge in it deceive themselves and the world, and growing weaker day by day, make themselves easily susceptible to disease. If they stop short of a full satisfaction of desire, the credit for it is due to circumstances and not to themselves. They are bound to fall at the very first opportunity.

In *brahmacharya* as conceived by the Ashram those who are married behave as if they were not married. Married people do well to renounce gratification outside the marital bond; theirs is a limited *brahmacharya*. But to look upon them as *brahmacharis* is to do violence to that glorious term.

Such is the complete Ashram definition of *brahmacharya*. However there are men as well as women in the Ashram who enjoy considerable freedom in meeting one another. The ideal is that one Ashramite should have the same freedom in meeting another as is enjoyed by a son in meeting his mother or by a brother in meeting his sister. That is to say, the restrictions that are generally imposed for the protection of *brahmacharya* are lifted in the Satyagraha Ashram, where we believe that *brahmacharya* which ever stands in need of such adventitious support is no *brahmacharya* at all. The restrictions may be necessary at first but must wither away in time. Their disappearance does not mean that a *brahmachari* goes about seeking the company of women, but it does mean that if there is an occasion for him to minister to a woman, he may not refuse such ministry under the impression that it is forbidden to him.

Woman for a *brahmachari* is not the 'doorkeeper of hell' but is an incarnation of our Mother who is in Heaven. He is no *brahmachari* at all whose mind is disturbed



if he happens to see a woman or if he has to touch her in order to render service. A *brahmachari's* reaction to a living image and to a bronze statue is one and the same. But a man who is perturbed at the very mention of woman and who is desirous of observing *brahmacharya*, must fly even from a figurine made of metal.

An ashram, where men and women thus live and work together, serve one another and try to observe *brahmacharya*, is exposed to many perils. Its arrangements involve to a certain extent a deliberate imitation of life in the West. I have grave doubts about my competence to undertake such an experiment. But this applies to all my experiments. It is on account of these doubts that I do not look upon anyone else as my disciple. Those who have joined the Ashram after due deliberation have joined me as co-workers, fully conscious of all the risks involved therein. As for the young boys and girls, I look upon them as my own children, and as such they are automatically drawn within the pale of my experiments. These experiments are undertaken in the name of the God of Truth. He is the Master Potter while we are mere clay in His all-powerful hands.

My experience of the Ashram so far has taught me that there is no ground for disappointment as regards the results of this pursuit of *brahmacharya* under difficulties. Men as well as women have on the whole derived benefit from it, but the greatest benefit has in my opinion accrued to women. Some of us have fallen, some have risen after sustaining fall. The possibility of stumbling is implicit in all such experimentation. Where there is cent per cent success, it is not an experiment but a characteristic of omniscience.

Ashram Observances in Action;

also from the Gujarati in *Satyagrahashramno Itihas*

CWVG, Vol. L, pp.210-11



301. EDUCATION

As for women's education I am not sure whether it should be different from men's and when it should begin. But I am strongly of opinion that women should have the same facilities as men and even special facilities where necessary.

There should be night schools for illiterate adults. But I do not think that they must be taught the three R's; they must be helped to acquire general knowledge through lectures, etc., and if they wish, we should arrange to teach them the three R's also.

Experiments in the Ashram have convinced us of one thing, viz., that industry in general and spinning in particular should have pride of place in education, which must be largely self-supporting as well as related to and tending to the betterment of rural life.

In these experiments we have achieved the largest measure of success with the women, who have imbibed the spirit of freedom and self-confidence as no other class of women have done to my knowledge. This success is due to the Ashram atmosphere. Women in the Ashram are not subject to any restraint which is not imposed on the men as well. They are placed on a footing of absolute equality with the men in all activities. Not a single Ashram task is assigned to the women to the exclusion of the men. Cooking is attended to by both. Women are of course exempted from work which is beyond their strength; otherwise men and women work together everywhere. There is no such thing as *purdah* or *laj*¹ in the Ashram. No matter from where she has come, a woman, as soon as she enters the Ashram, breathes the air of freedom and casts out all fear from her mind. And I believe that the Ashram observance of *brahmacharya* has made a big contribution to this state of things. Adult girls live in the Ashram as virgins. We are aware that this experiment is fraught with risk but we feel that no awakening among women is possible without incurring it.



Women cannot make any progress so long as there are child marriages. All girls are supposed to be in duty bound to marry and that too before menstruation commences, and widow remarriage is not permitted. Women, therefore, when they join the Ashram, are told that these social customs are wrong and irreligious. But they are not shocked as they find the Ashram practising what it preaches.

Not much of what is usually called education will be observed in the Ashram. Still we find that the old as well as the young, women as well as men are eager to acquire knowledge and complain that they have no time for it. This is a good sign. Many who join the Ashram are not educated or even interested in education. Some of them can hardly read or write. They had no desire for progress so long as they had not joined the Ashram. But when they have lived in the Ashram for a little while, they conceive a desire for increasing their knowledge. This is a great thing, as to create a desire for knowledge is very often the first step to be taken. But I do not regret it very much that there are insufficient facilities in the Ashram calculated to satisfy this desire. The observances kept in the Ashram will perhaps prevent a sufficient number of qualified teachers from joining it. We must therefore rest satisfied with such Ashramites as can be trained to teach. The numerous activities of the Ashram may come in the way of their acquiring the requisite qualifications at all or at an early date. But it does not matter much, as the desire for knowledge can be satisfied later as well as sooner, being independent of a time-limit. Real education begins after a child has left school. One who has appreciated the value of studies is a student all his life. His knowledge must increase from day to day while he is discharging his duty in a conscientious manner. And this is well understood in the Ashram.

The superstition that no education is possible without a teacher is an obstacle in the path of educational progress. A man's real teacher is himself. And nowadays there are numerous aids available for self-education. A diligent person can easily



acquire knowledge about many things by himself and obtain the assistance of a teacher when it is needed. Experience is the biggest of all schools. Quite a number of crafts cannot be learnt at school but only in the workshop. Knowledge of these acquired at school is often only parrot-like. Other subjects can be learnt with the help of books. Therefore what adults need is not so much a school as a thirst for knowledge, diligence and self-confidence.

The education of children is primarily a duty to be discharged by the parents. Therefore the creation of a vital educational atmosphere is more important than the foundation of numerous schools. When once this atmosphere has been established on a firm footing the schools will come in due course.

This is the Ashram ideal of education which has been realized to some extent, as every department of Ashram activity is a veritable school.

Ashram Observances in Action; also from the Gujarati in *Satyagrahashramno Itihas*

CWMMG, Vol. L, pp.234-36

1. Veil.



302. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK

August 26, 1932

CHI. PREMA,

I got your letter. I hope you do not exhibit different virtues from time to time in order to win from me the praise which they deserve. If you do that my praise will lose all its value.¹

You will not see anywhere else the fierce hatreds which you see in Kathiawar. I am not, therefore, surprised that you saw an exhibition of them too. Such exhibitions take place there without any preparation. A person like . . . is likely to get frozen by an exhibition of such hatreds, but it is strange that though ... lives in Rajkot she could not remove ...'s depression. I am sure she must have tied on his wrist the customary *raksha* on the Balev Day. But were they satisfied with a *raksha* of hand-spun yarn? It ought not to be beyond ...'s strength to discover the cause of ...'s unhappiness and remove it. ... used to adore his wife, ... My belief is that, though married, they observed *brahmacharya*....'s passing away was a great shock to.... Perhaps deep down in his heart ... wishes to marry. He cannot understand his own condition. But... should have as wife a girl with the same ideals as his own. Failing to get such a wife, if he gets a sister with strong idealism in her character,... may perhaps blossom out. I have supposed ... to be a perfect *brahmacharini*. She cherishes friendship for..., and has idealism in her character. Since you wrote about... 's depression, I have been tempted to write this. If you think that I have understood... 's character correctly and that what I have suggested is not beyond her strength, you may safely send this letter to her. If you feel that this is beyond her strength or that it is not her work, you may ignore this part of the letter.... craves for pure love. But ... is full of likes and dislikes. He can love very few persons and so remains discontented within himself all the time. Such a person feels little need for a wife. But [,if married,] he can remain absorbed in his wife.



He must get the sisterly love of a woman who is free from passion. If... gets such a sister, his life will take a new turn.

Women in our society do not try to cultivate this virtue. They know how to be good wives, but do not know how to be good sisters. In order to be a good sister, one requires great capacity for renunciation. It seems self-evident to me that a wife can never be a perfect sister. A woman can be a true sister to the whole world. A wife can surrender herself only to one person. The capacity to be a good wife is a useful virtue, but it does not have to be cultivated, for a wife's relation to her husband permits the satisfaction of physical desire. It is extremely difficult to cultivate the virtue required in one who would be a sister to the whole world. Only a woman for whom *brahmacharya* is a natural state and in whom the spirit of service has become the strongest impulse of her life can become that.... has not given me the impression that she has risen so far, but I certainly believe that she has the capacity to rise so high. Maybe you have been instrumental in creating this impression in me. I have now said everything which I felt about this matter, I have indeed been striving to make you such a sister. It is a difficult task. Let the result be as God wills it.

You have given a good description of the exhibition. Your descriptions are always interesting to read and make one think.

You did right in returning to the Ashram for the Janmashtami festival. See that you overcome your anger. Do you know that Dhiru was simply not ready to go with you? Don't get angry with him at any time. He is a child; you are not. If you win over Dhiru, it will be your victory; if you fail to do so, it will be your defeat.

Is there any test by which to judge whether a father and a mother are cultured? Who can say what the parents' state of mind was at the time of conception? I think, therefore, that it is best to cling to the rule that what is good bears good fruit. If we



cannot prove the truth of this rule in every individual case, the reason may be our ignorance and not the inadequacy of the rule.

Even if I did² believe in Fate, its decrees could not be altered. Fate means the effect of past karma.

For saving the prostitutes from their profession, it is necessary that men should cease to be beasts. As long as we have beast-like men in the world, so long shall we have prostitutes. If any prostitutes give up their profession and turn a new leaf in their lives, the so-called “respectable” men will certainly come forward to marry them. It is not true that once a prostitute, always a prostitute.

The belief that in every country girls are abducted for the army seems exaggerated to me. In a well-governed country this cannot happen.

It is not correct to believe that residents of the Malabar coast can digest coconut even after they have left the air of that place. By mixing coconut with *tandalja*, you weakened the effect of *tandalja*. I have often included coconut in my diet. It didn't agree with me. But it is highly probable that it is essential with other articles of food in regions where it grows.

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10300. Also C.W. 5747.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantik

CWMMG, Vol. L, pp.422-24

1. The names in the following two paragraphs have been omitted.

2. The addressee explains in *Bapuna Patro-5: Ku. Premabehn Kantikne* that she had asked Gandhiji whether he believed in Fate, and thinks that the reply should read: “Even if I did not believe in Fate...’.



303. A LETTER

September 2, 1932

However wicked the man you have to face you should have faith that God will give you the strength to resist him. You should not have the slightest fear. If such a thing happens, use all your strength. Such resistance is not violence. A rat can never do violence to a cat. If, however, the rat is determined, the cat cannot eat it alive. Thus, a rat which saves itself from the mouth of a cat does no violence to the cat. Do you understand this? Remember that an immoral man is always a coward. He cannot withstand the power of a pure woman. He trembles when she roars at him.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. I, pp. 391-2 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LI, p.8



304. WHAT WOMEN SHOULD DO IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION

[September 4, 1932]¹

Touching upon non-violence, if some maniac should try to assault a woman, and if another man should happen to be present, should he not protect her honour with the use of a weapon? Should not women train themselves in the use of weapons and learn to protect themselves? I have given my opinion. Use of weapons would certainly imply violence but I have never permitted anyone to draw from this the inference that a man or woman who happens to be present should not run to the rescue of the woman and should tolerate an outrage on her modesty. On the contrary, I have said that the man who allows the modesty of a woman to be thus outraged will be regarded as a coward. He will be a partner in violence because violence is implicit in cowardice. It is my firm opinion that heroic violence is less sinful than cowardly violence. A heroic man or woman can learn the lesson of non-violence, it is pretty nearly impossible for a coward to learn it. I have not begun this article in order to repeat all this. One will find these ideas in many other places in my writings.

But there is one thing which I think I have not remarked upon anywhere else which I wish to put down. I have dissuaded the Ashram women from learning the tricks of *jamaiya*², etc. The woman who depends on a *jamaiya* or a *gothi*³ to guard her honour may some day fail to do so. When someone snatches away the *jamaiya* or the *gothi* from her, she will become defenceless, so that there is a possibility of her falling into the hands of a maniac....⁴ Sita had no weapons. But she had soul-force. Hence her consent was necessary before Ravana could so much as touch her. Our sisters should have self-confidence of this kind. Hence we have introduced Draupadi's prayer specially for women. But we were discussing an ideal. When a woman is faced by a maniac, what is she to do? If she truly has courage in her and also compassion, instead of becoming panicky she will melt him with the radiance of her compassion. But if that



emotion has not arisen in her, she will certainly become enraged. In her rage she will slap him and raise such a row that he will run away from the scene. Or he will fall at her feet then and there. That is to say, the woman will use all her physical strength. Will that not constitute violence? If that is to be so, why not carry a weapon? My opinion is that there is violence in carrying and learning to use a weapon. But in a situation like the above, slapping or scratching, if the occasion demands it, does not constitute violence. If there is violence in a mouse biting a cat, the conduct of a woman in such a situation would also constitute violence. The trust of a woman who slaps is not in the slap, her trust is in God. Only compassion has not awakened her, while anyone can become enraged. Her rage will indicate her opposition. When a lecherous man approaches a woman, he does so in the belief that he will be able to subdue her, that is to say, that desire will also ultimately possess her. How is the woman to show that this cannot happen? Either by calm but immense compassion or by shouting and struggling. Slapping and so on is like the struggling of a mouse against a cat. The woman's slap certainly cannot cause any injury to the lecher. This will be evident, if we go deeper into it. Here I do not have in mind women of a giant's strength. Such a woman will be blinded by the consciousness of her strength. She may be faced by a man of greater strength and she may then surrender herself to him. Here have in mind Ashram girls or women without physical strength who repose their trust in soul-force. Their slap is not an expression of violence, only of their opposition. Their cry will render that lustful man meek, because crime itself has no strength and he who has come to commit an offence knows it. This belief of mine implies that the woman will not even till death surrender herself to the man. Her anger, her alarm, proclaims for herself as well as for the man her preparedness to die. For what I have pictured may not happen and the maniac instead of becoming meek at the woman's anger, may hit her and determine to throw her on the ground. If at that time the woman is defeated, if she does not think of God, if she loses her self-confidence, she will be trembling, so that it



will not occur to her to die. Even if it occurs to her to die, she will not know how to die. Fear, ...⁵ self-confidence become utterly weak. And enthusiasm in her....⁶ This is merely to warn women. It is quite possible for her to be in a state where she may think: 'I do not have such faith in God that I shall be able to get rid of the maniac by my purity alone. Bapu has said that one must not use a weapon; for that will be violence. One may then not use even one's hands. What, O God, am I to do! Oh! I am dying.' Such a thought is intolerable to me. This instruction of mine is not meant only for one man or woman. There is no question of my instruction rendering anyone weak. If anyone becomes so, it will be due to their own misunderstanding. The above suggestion is to clarify my thought. Women should just forget that they are the weaker sex. She who has the desire and the strength to die can never be regarded as weak. There is danger to the body, not to the soul. The soul which has attenuated its relation to the body, has made it absolutely insignificant like a blade of grass, cannot be harassed or defeated even by all the maniacs of the world. This lesson should be learnt by every boy and girl who is of an age to understand it. It is to impart this lesson that I have made the above observation. Instead of feeling helpless and scared, she should say to herself: 'I shall offer up my body and life, but shall not become a coward.' Her slap or scratching indicates this resolve. It is in itself an act of non-violence. She has no strength to cause harm. Hence her act is not violence; but it has power to move a lecherous mind and to awaken the woman who administers the slap.

From a microfilm of the Gujarati: M.M.U./II

CWVG, Vol. LI, pp.17-18

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1. From *Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. I, pp.394-5.
 2. Dagger-like weapon.
 3. Name of a weapon.
 4. Some words are illegible here.
 5. & 6. Illegible in the source.



305. DISCUSSION WITH MAHADEV DESAI¹

September 4, 1932

It then seems you have not understood my article.² I have actually pointed out that a slap rouses oneself, makes oneself fearless and above all, gives oneself the strength to die. A wicked person is not prepared for such, in his eyes senseless, resistance. In all probability, therefore, he would run away. But I attach less importance to that. The strength which is aroused in that woman enables her to end her life. By the time that the maniac has overpowered her, the woman has already sought protection in death; for she struggles prepared for death and has no thought of hitting the man. All that she has to do is to go on repeating Ramanama. I suggest this remedy for all circumstances, and only for those women who are pure and who want to defend themselves against attack non-violently. This article is based on my own experience. When I held on to that bar,³ I was mentally prepared for death. I could not have inflicted any serious injury on my assailant. If, however, I had lost hold of the bar, I would have struggled on, would perhaps have slapped or bitten the man and would have resisted till death. I would not have committed violence by fighting in this manner. For, I could not have inflicted any injury upon him, nor was it my intention. I only wished to die and to avoid the necessity of sitting at the opponent's feet. This is the real test of non-violence. One's aim should not be to inflict pain nor should pain be the result.

M. D. I understand, but the purest of girls cannot subdue a hooligan with one slap and is helpless if she has to face a number of them.

GANDHIJI: Not only I but medical jurisprudence holds it impossible for a woman to be outraged so long as she does not relax. A woman who is not ready to die relaxes, may be reluctantly, and submits to the hooligan. A desperate animal breaks its bonds or else breaks itself, and every animal is capable of exerting so much strength. The fact



is that love of life is too strong for one to hold fast till death. A woman who puts forth the utmost strength will have herself torn to bits and her ribs broken in fighting the assailant.

M. D. To a woman of such purity it is not necessary to suggest slapping or anything of that kind. She will herself think out some plan or other.

GANDHIJI: I may explain it all only after I break the silence.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. I, pp.394-5 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LI. pp.24-25

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1. Since it was Gandhiji's Silence Day, he expressed his views in writing.
 2. *Vide CWMG, Vol. LI pp.17-9.*
 3. When Gandhiji was attacked at Pardekoph; *vide CWMG, Vol. XXXIX, pp.95-6.*



306. A LETTER

September 5, 1932

You are either cunning or foolish. Do you really not know what '*vikar*' means? The *vikar* resulting from eating pulses and that resulting from physical touch, are both signs of something wrong in us. Both disturb the equilibrium. The first kind of *vikar* results from swallowing some external substance; the second is a change of mental state resulting from the sight of some external object. A *vikar* that can shake one's whole being may prove harmful. If a woman feels *vikar* towards a man, society does not always hold her guilty; that is, when it springs from a desire to marry that person and such marriage is not forbidden, the matter is not kept secret from one's people and one is free to marry. According to me, you are not yet fit to marry, for you are studying and are still a minor. Your having such relations with...¹ is improper, as he was your teacher and was, moreover, like a brother to you. Call your feeling what you like, whether *vikar* or desire for marriage, you kept it secret and, therefore, it is blameworthy.

You do not understand the meaning of independence also. When you show the letters to your elders of your own free will, you do not lose your independence but seek your safety. If somebody posts himself at our door-step, he is like a Government bailiff depriving us of our freedom; but if we station a watchman at the gate, we do not lose our freedom but protect it. In the same way, if you in your adolescent state regard your elders as guardians of your interests, open your heart to them and show your letters to them. You do not lose your independence but seek protection for it. I earnestly wish that you should become independent. It was for protecting your independence that I advised you to show your letters, etc., to your parents. If, however, you cannot reconcile yourself to this and feel it an irksome restraint, you may keep your letters private. I do not want to put pressure on you in any way, as that



would crush your individuality. I only wish that you should become a brave girl and a spirited servant of the people. And I shall be extremely pained if you stop writing to me.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. II, pp.6-7 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. LI, pp.26-27

1. The name is omitted in the source.



307. LETTER TO KASTURBA GANDHI

September 13, 1932

I have your letter. You have probably heard about my fast. Do not get frightened in the slightest degree by the news and also do not let the other women get frightened. Indeed, you should rejoice that God has granted me an opportunity to go through such an ordeal for the sake of dharma. I also hope that you have understood the meaning of this fast. I shall not have to start the fast if my demands regarding the *Antyajas* are accepted, and even if I have started it I can end it. If, however, I have to carry it on till the end, you should indeed thank God. Only one in millions meets death for which he has prayed. What a good fortune it would be if I met such a death! And if I do not die, it is clear as daylight that it would then be my moral duty to purify myself still further and to devote myself more to service. I think that after having lived with me for fifty years you will be able clearly to understand this simple thing and willingly follow me.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. II, pp.22-3 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LI, p.52



308. LETTER TO MAHALAKSHMI M. THAKKAR*October 14, 1932*

CHI. MAHALAKSHMI,

The purpose behind bangles, the vermilion mark, and the coloured sari might be adornment or conformity to custom, just as one might eat for pleasure or only to give the body its hire. One ought to give up eating for the sake of pleasure, but may give the body anything it needs, even if it be something which one enjoys eating. Milk and curds taken with dates give us no little pleasure. But you eat them, since you have not adopted that diet for the pleasure of the palate. In the same way, you should give up bangles, the vermilion mark and coloured sari despite opposition from society, if they arouse passion in you, but it is not blameworthy to retain them if you do so merely in obedience to custom or to respect the wishes of the elders. In other words, there is no absolute duty not to retain them, as there is the absolute duty of not telling a lie. It was for such a reason that I said in my letter that the error was in taking a vow not to wear bangles. It is not proper to take a sudden vow for something which is not an absolute duty. There is no great self-sacrifice in such a step. It would have been right for you to take that vow if you had been pining for bangles, travelling all over the world to get bangles of your choice, or were in the habit of stealing them. I know women who want to have bangles of various styles, fight with their husbands to get them or steal them. It would be good for such women to take a vow not to wear bangles, but they would fight with me if I so much as made such a suggestion. A woman who thinks that all her beauty lies in her hair would get red with anger at the mere suggestion that she should cut off her hair. She might get it cut off, but it is not wrong, for a woman, who dislikes long hair and thinks it to be a burden, to keep her hair long to please her parents or to avoid being cut off from society. Do you now understand this shastra of bangle-wearing?

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 6823

CWMMG, Vol. LI, pp.239-40



309. LETTER TO JANAKIDEVI BAJAJ

September 19, 1932

CHI. JANAKIMAIYA,

It is because women like you fear that they would starve to death if they had to live on the diet of 'C' class prisoners, that I have decided to embrace the way of living without eating. You will see from tomorrow how I do that. Everybody in the world eats and still dies. Let us see how long you live eating the food of 'A' class prisoners. Is it not a great art to survive an indefinite fast? There is one condition, of course, for this to be made possible. All women will have to come out of their homes as dedicated workers and eradicate the practice of untouchability, and so prove their claim to be incarnations of God's powers. Do that, and go on eating the food of 'A' class prisoners all your life. If, however, you do not get 'A' class food on some occasion, you should be satisfied with 'C' class food.

Suppose, however, that the efforts of the women workers bear no fruit. In that case, let this earthly frame perish right now. Even then, I shall live forever. As long as even one woman carries on my mission, can anybody say that I am dead? We may leave aside the *Gita's* philosophy about the immortality of the *atman*. But the immortality which I have explained can be witnessed with our ordinary eyes. You must not, therefore, fall into panic. Act in a manner which will do honour to yourself and to the cause. Surrender yourself and all that you possess to God, and be happy and ever remain so. I have no time today to write to the mischievous Om and the wise Madalasa.

Treat this letter as meant for all of you.

May you enjoy the blessed state of wifehood to the end of your life.

Blessings from

BAPU



From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 2901

CWMG, Vol. LI, pp.87-88



310. LETTER TO SHARDA C. SHAH

October 3, 1932

CHI. SHARDA,

I must write a long reply to your letter, but I do not have that much time or energy. You should take hip-bath in cold water.

But it should be taken before menstruation, not during it. Then there is friction-bath, about which Premabehn will probably know. Santok is likely to know about it too. You must take complete rest during the period. It is bad to have white discharge. This too can be cured by hip-bath and friction-bath. If you are after it and take the treatment I am suggesting, you are sure to get well.

There are natural differences between males and females. Hence, their functions too are somewhat different. This being the case, if a man tries to perform the functions of a woman or a woman that of a man, there is bound to be trouble. But they can overcome most of the difficulties. Such a situation can be reached only when an atmosphere of physical and psychological purity is created. You may find this point difficult to grasp. Read the letter twice or thrice. If you still do not catch the point, consult Chimanlal¹ or Narandas or Premabehn and then let me know what you have understood.

From the Gujarati original: C.W. 9957. Courtesy: Shardabehn G. Chokhawala

CWVG, Vol. LI, pp.184-85

1. Addressee's father.



311. LETTER TO JAISHANKAR P. TRIVEDI

October 10, 1932

After the tragic death of Taragouri, would not all of you do this by way of *shraddha* to her? You should either banish the primus stove from your home or, if that is not possible, the women members should take a vow never to light it themselves. They should always ask a man to light it for them. The dress of our women is not designed to enable them to light a primus stove.¹

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. II, p.127 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LI, p.224

1. *Vide* also *CWMMG*, Vol. LI, p. 190.



312. LETTER TO WOMEN PRISONERS

October 14, 1932

Tell Durgabai Joag that the women can get rid of the fear which they feel in going about their work through firmness of mind. They should go freely wherever necessary for work or service with a firm conviction that God is there to protect them. Whom do they fear? Why should they fear any men? Why think that all men are only waiting for an opportunity to harass women? After all, men are born of women and the latter ought to have the faith that no man would ordinarily attack a woman who is like a mother to him. Every woman should regard herself as a mother and fear a man only if she would fear her own son. If, nevertheless, a woman meets a man who is blinded by lust, she should remain firm in her conviction that the armour of her purity will protect her.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. II, pp.135-6 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LI, p.241



313. LETTER TO SITALA SAHAY

October 25, 1932

We must not look upon young men and women with suspicion. We must not deliberately tempt them. Here there is no such thing...¹ is careful. He is not a young boy any more; he is about thirty-two. ...² too is a sensible girl and ...³ has a commendable habit. He hides nothing from me; if he is a prey to passion he confesses it to me. Their relationship, therefore, causes me no anxiety. I am to some extent acquainted with the Roman Catholic injunctions. Our experiment is unique, it is open to many risks. It is also not in conformity with the prevalent atmosphere in India. But the service we want to render to the women of India and the freedom that we want for them, are not possible without incurring risks. We must proceed fearlessly, cautiously, and with faith in God. And this is why we must be very careful in choosing the Ashram manager. In my judgment we cannot find a purer, more patient, disciplined and balanced person than Narandas. As long as he is there, I need not worry. Still, if you have any misgivings, if anything reaches your ears, do write to me.

Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. II, pp. 177-8 [From Hindi]

CWMMG, Vol. LI, p.297

1. 2. & 3. These names are omitted in the source.



314. LETTER TO VASUMATI PANDIT

October 27, 1932

The phrase, 'one's duty however defective' should not be interpreted to mean a duty which violates morality. 'Defective' here means what seems to be inferior. According to the *Gita*, all duties have equal value, for Mother *Gita* attaches importance only to people's hearts and, therefore, her standards are bound to be faultless. For example, if a grain-dealer who feels that his occupation is inferior to a clerk's, gives up his trade and tries to become a clerk, wouldn't he be a loser both ways? In the same way, if Titus, who looks after the dairy, leaves the cows in order to serve *Antyajjas* because *Antyajja* service has become fashionable just now, he will be said to have given up his duty and acted contrary to the teaching of the *Gita*. Similarly, if you women who have bound yourselves by vows to do certain work, leave it and take up some other work of service, you will be guilty of forsaking your duty. Is this quite clear?

From a photostat of the Gujarati: S.N. 9335. Also C.W. 581.

Courtesy: Vasumati Pandit

CWMMG, Vol. LI, pp.305-306



315. INTERVIEW TO WOMEN¹

November 23, 1932

The Zamorin is a good man, not even obstinate, but he must take his co-trustees with him. Only the certainty of the sincerity of public opinion will accomplish that. Women have good powers of persuasion. Let them convince the *bonafide* temple-goers that true religion will open the hearts of the people and the gates of the temple to every human being and will brand no one as an outcaste.

Go to Malabar and enlist Nambudri and Nair women there to procure signed statements from the *bonafide* attenders at the temple within a radius of 10 miles that they would be willing to admit the depressed classes into the temple. This work is specially suited to the women and the Women's Indian Association branch at Malabar should take a leading part.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 30-11-1932

CWMMG, Vol. LII, p.48

1. According to The Bombay Chronicle, 25-11-1932, Mrs. Cousins, Mrs. Urmila Devi, Mrs. Ambalal Sarabhai and others of Women's Indian Association met Gandhiji in the afternoon.



316. LETTER TO MANIBEHN PATEL

(CHIKHALDA,)

November 19, 1933

Your own generosity fills me with admiration. But mind you, it is not peculiar to you. I have seen such generosity in countless women. They are always ready to forget the wrongs done to them. It is this virtue which is their special honour. But men have taken undue advantage of it. ...

Blessings from

BAPU

Bapuna Patro-4: Manibehn Patelne, pp.115-6 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LVI, p.257



317. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, PALGHAT¹

January 10, 1934

Do you know why I have come here? I have come here to ask you to do penance. I have come here to ask you to forget that there can be a single human being who can be called 'untouchable'. You, the women of Malabar, are freer than any women in any other part of India. And if you choose to, you can save Hinduism from peril. Even if millions of people came and said that untouchability was a divine institution, I will repeat it is an institution of the devil. I have just now come from a little settlement where I saw Nayadi brethren and some sisters. It is your shame and my shame that they have got to live on a little rice thrown at them from a distance. I have nothing more to say to you. And if you want to commence by doing penance, then you will commence by discarding your ornaments and silver to contribute funds to help these helpless human beings.

The Hindu, 12-1-1934

CWMMG, Vol. LVI, pp.461-62

1. The meeting, held at Gowder Picture Palace, was attended by about 1,000 women.



318. INTERVIEW TO MEMBERS OF GANDHI SEVA SENA

BOMBAY,

June 14, 1934

The next appointment was with the sisters led by Shrimati Gosibehn Captain. They had a great deal of silent service to their credit. But Gosibehn would not detain Gandhiji with a recital of those services. She wanted him to speak to the lukewarm, of whom she said they had their fair share. That gave Gandhiji the opportunity of speaking to them on the necessity of dealing with the root evil. What were the weak of body to do? Gandhiji said it was easy enough for such to do one thing. They could keep a Harijan boy or girl to serve them. Given the change of heart and willingness to serve, there was limitless scope for all to serve. What were the women to do where the elders were opposed to the reform? For them no doubt the difficulty was great. But so was the opportunity for work. They had to commence with the conversion of their elders, and this they could do by gentleness and firmness. They must be prepared to suffer for their convictions. Character played a great part in every movement of reform. Only the pure of heart could touch the hearts of their neighbours.¹

Mahatma Gandhi in the course of his address advised women to take an increasing interest in the work for the uplift of Harijans and spread knowledge about health, hygiene and cleanliness among the Harijan womenfolk.

Harijan, 29-6-1934; also *The Bombay Chronicle*, 15-6-1934

CWMMG, Vol. LVIII, pp.78-79

1. What follows is reproduced from *The Bombay Chronicle*.



319. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, BOMBAY

June 15, 1934

In the course of his address to them, Gandhiji said that he was glad he was speaking to women before he would speak to the men, for women were superior to men in faith and love, and his battle would be more than half won if he could enlist their whole-hearted support. He hoped that the women of Bombay would rise to the occasion. Women held the key position in society and it would be a tragedy if they blocked the path of reform.

Untouchability had its origin not in religion, but in mere pride of race and the tendency of the strong to keep down the weak. It had persisted so long because Harijans were cut off from all contact and consigned to the worst places. If, however, they were allowed freely to mix with all classes of society and to practise all professions on a footing of equality, we would in a few years be surprised that they should ever have been looked down upon.

The reformer's was an uphill task, as we had imported religion into untouchability. Sacrifice was essential; but service was impossible without sacrifice, and no sacrifice could be too great to be offered in order to wipe out the deep and long-standing stain of untouchability.¹

Appealing for funds, Gandhiji hastened to clear any impression in their minds that he was collecting money always. He was there to ask for the support of the women of Bombay for the cause of Harijans, which was dearer to him than anything else. Before they paid the money, they should realize that they were paying for what they had done or allowed to be done in the past.

Harijan, 29-6-1934; also *The Bombay Chronicle*, 16-6-1934

CWMMG, Vol. LVIII, pp.81-82

1. What follows is reproduced from *The Bombay Chronicle*.



320. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, AHMEDABAD¹

June 27, 1934

It is an auspicious thing for me that my public work in Ahmedabad in the Harijan cause begins with a women's meeting. At many women's meetings and some men's meetings I have said, whenever I thought necessary, that not only in India but all over the world, religion has been and will be safeguarded by women. It was not, and is not, my intention to say that women have safeguarded religion by writing big treatises or delivering lectures. They have rather safeguarded religion by their actions. No religion has been propagated through lectures or books. We regard certain books as religious books; but they are a propagation of the thoughts and deeds of virtuous men and women. A work that is not backed by virtuous conduct, however beautiful the thoughts may be, cannot make a religious treatise. Nor can it bring us the peace that the scriptures do. When a confirmed liar says, 'Speak the truth', he fails to make any impression, although no one may have known that he ever uttered a lie. But the act of a person who is persistent in his virtuous ways is bound to bear fruit even if he is completely silent about it. If a live seed is sown in fertile soil, it is bound to sprout. The same is true about the words in religious books. I have said after due thought that women have done most to safeguard religion. Women's capacity for sacrifice, suffering and patience cannot be found in man. This can be attributed to many causes. It is unnecessary to go into them here. But the world believes what I have said. That is why I am happy that my work here has begun with this function.

If you are convinced that untouchability is a social sin, you must strive hard to free yourself from that sin. It is not enough that someone like me should go round and collect funds. Behind my effort is the hope that I should be able to appeal to the hearts of women. It is only when this happens that I would be able to complete my work. The work would be partly done if I can appeal to the hearts of men. I went to give my



condolences to Lady Lakshmibai in Bombay. What condolences could I give to her? I stressed only one point. I told her: 'Give up your mourning and come out of the house. Mourning will bring no credit, but Harijan work will bring credit to your widowhood.'

Lakshmibai has worked for the eradication of untouchability. So, she told me: "You men may say anything. But can you do anything if we are obstinate?" I had to plead guilty. "I know it by experience"—she added: "What would you do if a woman does not obey you—a husband or father? We women know only to say no. And, are you men going to be in the house for all the twenty-four hours? You may instruct us to do something and go out; but how would you know later if we did not carry it out?" What she said was absolutely true. That is why I say that my work can be carried out only if I appeal to the hearts of women. Men tell me: "We do wish to give up untouchability. But do you wish to create domestic quarrels? We are willing to have Harijans in our houses. But what can we do if those who are in the house for all the twenty-four hours would not allow them?" So, if women realize that untouchability is a sin and has to be wiped out, men would not be able to hold fast to it. It is beyond the powers of men. This is the experience of most men.

That is why I want to firmly impress upon you women, that let any number of Brahmins and astrologers talk to you, you should firmly bear in mind that if you are good mothers, you would not discriminate between one child and another. On the contrary, you would shower more affection on a dull, stupid and crippled child. I have never known a mother who would cast off a stupid child and lavish her affection on an intelligent child. Such a mother, if there is one, should be scorned. At least I would do that. A mother is bound to show more affection for her handicapped child. If we men and women who are images of clay have such sense of justice regarding our children and pay more attention to the crippled, how would God, who has created us, who is our Father, who is Father of all fathers, who is the Father of the universe, the Creator



of the entire living world, have a different sense of justice? My reason does not accept that it is God's will that the Harijans should be boycotted, that they should not be allowed to take water from wells and tanks, that they should not be allowed to enter temples, and that temples would be defiled if they entered them, and any fruit or bread, if touched by them, should be thrown away. This is sheer superstition. We do not find such a thing in Islam or Christianity. Only Hinduism has specialized in regarding these people as worse than animals.

Harijanbandhu, 15-7-1934 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LVIII, pp.113-15

1. Held in the Krishna Cinema under the auspices of seven women's associations.



321. SPEECH TO JYOTI SANGH¹ MEMBERS, AHMEDABAD

June 29, 1934

Asked for advice as to what the little girls in front of him should do, Gandhiji said that they must see the labourers' chawl in the Gujarat Cotton Mills and understand the life of labourers. They must enter into the Harijans' lives and reject sweets and finery for themselves, at least until the latter had sufficient food and decent clothing. Let the girls go into that dark world as light-bearers.

He would suggest that they must put on khadi, which was the only real swadeshi cloth. They must use things manufactured by millions and not by half a dozen people. And they must take to spinning, for, if millions of girls did it only for half an hour every day, they would add considerably to the wealth of the nation. They need not wait for others to do this service, but must make a beginning themselves, in the faith that their numbers would swell later into thousands and millions.

Harijans constituted the lowest strata or the foundation of society, and if they were neglected, society would topple down like a house of cards. On the other hand, if the foundation was well attended to, they need not worry much about the superstructure.

He was glad to note that the association was mainly run by women, typifying their desire not to accept any inferior or slavish position for women. He hoped they had no intention of importing into India the movement for making women absolutely independent of men, which was out of keeping with Indian culture and was bound to do us untold harm. Socially men and women were inseparable members, one of another, supplying one another's deficiencies. Women were dubbed the 'weaker vessel', being physically weaker than men, but spiritually they were superior to men. Men were proud of their brute force, but women need not mind their inferiority in that respect. A muscular body and a great soul went ill together. They must not



confound real health with crude physical development, Women's inferiority complex only prevented them from going out alone fearlessly even at midnight, which they could do if they had the same fire of purity burning in their hearts as Sita had. If they realized this, they would concentrate on exercising their souls more than bodies and cultivate soul-force and courage rather than learn to use the dagger or the revolver, which would only furnish their enemy with a weapon. No one on earth could suppress anyone else. Oneself was one's best friend or worst enemy. He would certainly like them to take physical exercise, but his point was that it was useless in the absence of moral courage.

Harijan, 13-7-1934

CWMG, Vol. LVIII, pp.122-23

1. An association of women started by Mridula Sarabhai and run mainly by women with a view to creating interest in public life among women and giving them training in home industries and crafts so as to increase their earning capacity. The speech is extracted from "Weekly Letter".



322. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, AJMER

July 5, 1934

Gandhiji reached Ajmer at night on the 4th, and on the 5th he addressed a women's meeting the first thing in the morning. He said he would not make any elaborate argument before them. Everyone would agree that we are subject to the law of love. As Tulsidas put it, mercy is the root of religion. Untouchability must be abolished if only because it was opposed to the law of love and to the spirit of mercy. How could they swear by love and at the same time consign a large class of their fellowmen to insanitary surroundings, prevent them from drawing water at wells, compel them to drink water spoilt by cattle and assault them if they tried to assert their common right over public wells? So also, if quite a number of dirty *savarna* children could attend the public schools with impunity, was it right to exclude Harijans even when they were clean? To consider others as lower than ourselves was a species of pride, which Tulsidas called the root of sin, and pride goes before destruction.

Harijan, 20-7-1934

CWMMG, Vol. LVIII, p.143



323. WOMEN AND VARNA¹

An esteemed friend writes:²

From your recent writing³ on varna in *Harijan* it seems that the principle of varna adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women? What would determine a woman's varna? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her varna from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband and, in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children? ... It is... the commonest thing nowadays to find a woman serving as a schoolmistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what varna would the woman under these circumstances belong? ... To what varna between these would their children belong? ...

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing today. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion of the varnas, today there are in reality no varnas, the varna principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four-varnas today exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of varna, there is only one varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all Shudras.

In the resuscitated varnadharma, as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage belong to the varna of her father, just like her brother. Inter-marriages between different varnas will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her varna unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different varna, then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his varna and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of varna be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities since the institution of varna in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four varnas.



I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of the children and upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that "For woman there can be no freedom" is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangana*, "the better half", and *sahadharmini*, "the help-mate". The husband addressing the wife as *devi* or "goddess" does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a status of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her varna. For, varna does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the role of the woman in society is accepted, the question of the varna of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the varnas of the husband and the wife.

Harijan, 12-10-1934

CWMG, Vol. LIX, pp.146-47



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1. The Gujarati original appeared in *Harijanbandhu*, 7-10-1934.
 2. Only extracts are reproduced here.
 3. *Vide* "Introduction to *Varnavyavastha*", *CWVG*, Vol. LIX, pp.61-7.



324. LETTER TO BHAGWANJI P. PANDYA

BORSAD,

May 26, 1935

CHI. BHAGWANJI,

Your letter was put into my hands at 3.30 a.m., and after reading it I have immediately sat down to reply to it. Shedding tears will not help us to remove the hardships of Savli's women. It can be proved that the condition of the Harijan women of Savli is not as bad as you believe it to be. Your imagination can carry you too far. That faculty needs to be kept under control. This world is a sea of misery. If we keep thinking of it only we would get drowned in it. We should remember that God, who created this world and who rules it is just and, therefore, the sufferings that we imagine do not exist and that, on the balance, happiness reigns, that is, truth alone triumphs. Knowing this, we should keep our minds light. That will also help us in removing the sufferings. If, on the contrary, we magnify the sufferings, we would sink into *moha*¹ and become incapable of relieving them.

I will certainly inquire regarding Savli. But I will say one thing. It is surely a matter of satisfaction that whereas before the women earned nothing, through spinning they earn something now, however little it may be. They do have other income. A woman is but one member of a family. There are others, too, who earn. There are countless women in this country much poorer than they. Instead of shedding tears over their poverty, we should steel our hearts while thinking about it and devise measures to eradicate it.

Blessings from

BAPU

From the Gujarati original: C.W. 388. Courtesy: Bhagwanji P. Pandya
CWMG, Vol. LXI, p.102

1. Ignorant attachment.



325. ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS¹

May 31, 1935

What should be the attitude of a woman towards her family? To what extent can she maintain her individuality in the family?

There is not the slightest doubt that wives have all the rights which husbands enjoy. Their duties are different but their rights are the same. If a woman sets out in shirt and trousers with a gun in her hand, a man has no right to stop her. In such matters men and women enjoy equal rights. A husband cannot compel his wife to go to a cinema against her wishes or if she wishes to go out by herself, he cannot prevent her. In other words, in things which have to be done jointly—the greater the amount of co-operation and unanimity the better it is.

This co-operation is not a one-sided affair. It cannot be measured. The husband saying, 'I am your master, you are my property, you should do as I tell you' is the kind of thing that has no place in my ideology. Satyagraha is the final weapon against such attitude in husbands. A woman too can resort to it. It is both a single-edged and a double-edged sword. It can be used anywhere with success. The husband has no alternative but to give in before this strength of love. Although I am pointing out this path of love—of satyagraha—to the woman who wishes to assert her own personality before her husband, it is as the poet Pritam has said "the flame of the fire". She will have to walk in it and that too bare-footed, not with shoes on.

With reference to removing the economic dependence of women, Gandhiji said:

I can point out many ways of removing the economic dependence of women. The easiest way to this is for every woman to take up some form of work. It is not as if the educated women of today were independent. They are equally dependent. But



this is a problem that concerns only the city women and high-caste women. I have travelled in villages and have seen numerous women enjoying economic independence. These women do more work than men. But women get less wages. Truly speaking, both men and women should get equal wages. That is women's right. It is only fair. If Jyoti Sangh could achieve this, one could say it had brought forth a new principle in the world.

Now we have to find out what our work should be. Of the crores of women, how many of you are going to become B.A.s and M.A.s? But let me inform you that crores of women in India enjoy economic freedom. I have to find out how many in Ahmedabad do so. It is difficult for the Jyoti Sangh to remove their financial dependence. For peasant women it is not so. We do not enjoy the right which they enjoy. It is the Brahmins and Banias who have to fight for the right of divorce. Other communities have long been enjoying this right. Hence, I ask you not to pity them unnecessarily. Only you city-dwellers are dependent.

All of us have to work in the way bricks are put together one upon another. You should work within the scope set for your work and bring credit to it. You can invite those who wish to take an active part in national and social activities. I bless you that you may succeed in your endeavours. But for this many women will have to become martyrs to this cause and become ascetics, This is no play and if it is that at all, it is like that of the tight-rope-walker who is able to keep himself straight like a stick only when he concentrates fully, keeps his eyes fixed on a particular point and is fully attuned to the tunes of the *shehnai* and the drum. You shall be able to achieve something only if you work with such concentration.

With reference to the duties of women, Gandhiji said:

The duty of a woman is to look after what in English is called the hearth and home. Man has never performed this task. He has been content to build forts and



ramparts for protection. Will he come forward to protect the home? And even if he does so, what sort of protection will he offer? Even in a home he will build fortresses and walls. He will make holes within these to fire bullets from and put glass and nails on walls. In the end, the children of the house will meet their death by climbing upon these. But we have to bring credit to the home. Hence it is my confirmed opinion that women should get a distinct kind of education. The two have separate spheres of activity and their training, therefore, should also be different. This does not imply that the work of the one is inferior while that of the other is superior; the spheres of the two are complementary.

Gujarati, 16-6-1935 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXI, pp.123-25

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1. The questions were asked by members of Jyoti Sangh, an institution for women's welfare.



326. HELPLESS WIDOWS

A bereaved friend sends a pathetic letter describing the plight of a 17-year-old girl, who has lost in Quetta her husband, two months old child, father-in-law and her husband's younger brother, that is to say everybody in her father-in-law's house. My correspondent adds that she escaped unhurt and returned with only her clothes on. She is his uncle's daughter and he does not know how to console her or what to do with her. She herself is not undamaged. Her leg has been injured, though fortunately the bone remains intact. The correspondent concluded by saying:

I have left her with her mother in Lahore. I gently mentioned to her and other relatives whether the girl might not be remarried. Some listened to me sympathetically and some resented the proposal. I have no doubt that many a girl must have suffered the same fate as this cousin of mine. Will you say a word of encouragement to these unfortunate widows?

I do not know what my pen or voice can do in matters in which age-long prejudices are concerned. I have repeatedly said that every widow has as much right to remarry as every widower. Voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon in Hinduism; enforced widowhood is a curse. And I very much feel that many young widows if they were absolutely free, not so much from the fear of physical restraint as from the opprobrium of Hindu public opinion, would remarry without the slightest hesitation. All the young widows, therefore, who are in the unfortunate position of this bereaved sister from Quetta should have every inducement given to them to remarry, and should be sure that no blame would be attached to them if they chose to remarry, and every effort should be made to select for them suitable matches. This is not work that can be done by any institution. This work has got to be done by individual reformers whose relatives have become widows, and they have to carry on a vigorous, dignified and restrained propaganda in their own circles, and whenever they succeed they should give the widest publicity to the event. Thus, and only thus, there is likely to be tangible relief provided for the girls who might have become widows during the



earthquake. It is possible that the public sympathy can be easily mobilized whilst the memory of the tragedy is fresh in mind, and if once the reform takes place on a large scale, the girls who may have become widows in the natural course will also find it easy to get married if they are willing to do so.

Harijan, 22-6-1935

CWMG, Vol. LXI, pp.188-89



327. LETTER TO MOOLCHAND AGRAWAL

July 21, 1935

BHAI MOOLCHAND,

The wife has an equal right to the husband's earnings. But it does not mean that she can utilize the money just as she pleases. Your decision to maintain an account is quite correct.¹

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Hindi: G.N. 838

CWMG, Vol. LXI, p.273

1. The addressee had in his letter mentioned about the differences between him and his wife over items of expenditure; *vide* also *CWMG*, Vol. LXI, p. 230.



328. FOR WOMEN REFORMERS

From a serious discussion I had with a sister¹ I fear that my position on the use of contraceptives has not yet been sufficiently understood. My opposition is not due to their having come to us from the West. I thankfully use some Western things when I know that they benefit us as they benefit those in the West. My opposition to contraceptives is based on merits.

I take it that the wisest among the protagonists of contraceptives restrict their use to married women who desire to satisfy their and their husbands' sexual appetite without wanting children. I hold this desire as unnatural in the human species and its satisfaction detrimental to the spiritual progress of the human family. As against this is often cited the following testimony among others of Lord Dawson of Penn:²

Sex love is one of the clamant, dominating forces of the world. ... You may guide it into healthy channels but an outlet it will have, and if that outlet is inadequate or unduly obstructed, irregular channels will be forced. Self-control has a breaking point, and if in any community marriage is difficult or late of attainment, an increase of irregular unions will inevitably result. ...

Sex love has, apart from parenthood, a purport of its own. It is an essential part of health and happiness in marriage. ... The attainment of mutual and reciprocal joy in their relations constitutes a firm bond between two people and makes for durability of their marriage tie. ...

I will pass on to consider the all-important question of birth-control... The reasons which lead parents to limit their offspring are sometimes selfish, but more often honourable and cogent. The desire to marry and to rear children well-equipped for life's struggle, limited incomes, the cost of living, burdensome taxation, are forcible motives. ... Absence of birth-control means late marriages, and these carry with them irregular unions and all the baneful consequences. ... But say many, 'Birth-control may be necessary, but the only birth-control which is justifiable is voluntary abstention.' Such abstention would be either ineffective or, if effective, impracticable and harmful to health and happiness. To limit the size of a family to, say, four children, would be to impose on a married couple an amount of abstention which



for long periods would almost be equivalent to celibacy, and when one remembers that owing to economic reasons the abstention would have to be most strict during the earlier years of married life when desires are strongest, I maintain a demand is being made which, for the mass of people it is impossible to meet; that the endeavours to meet it would impose a strain hostile to health and happiness and carry with them grave dangers to morals. ...

Lord Dawson's eminence is not to be denied. But with all due respect to his greatness as a physician, I am tempted to question the value of his evidence, specially when it is pitted against the experience of men and women who have lived a life of continence without suffering any moral or physical harm. Physicians generally come across those who have so defied laws of health that they have contracted some illness. They, therefore, often successfully prescribe what sufferers should do to become well, but they cannot always know what healthy men and women can do in any particular direction. Lord Dawson's evidence, therefore, about the effect of continence on married people has to be taken with the greatest caution. No doubt the tendency among married people is to regard sexual satisfaction for itself as legitimate. But in the modern age in which nothing is taken for granted and everything is rightly scrutinized, it is surely wrong to take it for granted that because we have hitherto indulged in the sexual appetite in married life, the practice is either legitimate or healthy. Many old practices have been discontinued with good results. Why should this particular practice be exempt from examination especially in the light of the experience of those who even as married men and women are living a life of restraint with mutual benefit both physical and moral?

But I object to contraceptives also on special grounds in India. Young men in India do not know what sexual restraint is. It is not their fault. They are married early. It is the custom. Nobody tells them to exercise restraint in married life. Parents are impatient to see grandchildren. The poor girl-wives are expected by their surroundings to bear children as fast as they can. In such surroundings, the use of contraceptives can only further aggravate the mischief. The poor girls who are expected to submit to



their husbands' desires are now to be taught that it is a good thing to desire sexual satisfaction without the desire to have children. And in order to fulfil the double purpose they are to have recourse to contraceptives!!!

I regard this to be most pernicious education for married women. I do not believe that woman is prey to sexual desire to the same extent as man. It is easier for her than for man to exercise self-restraint. I hold that the right education in this country is to teach woman the art of saying no even to her husband, to teach her that it is no part of her duty to become a mere tool or a doll in her husband's hands. She has rights as well as duties. Those who see in Sita a willing slave under Rama do not realize the loftiness of either her independence or Rama's consideration for her in everything. Sita was no helpless weak woman incapable of protecting herself or her honour. To ask India's women to take to contraceptives is, to say the least, putting the cart before the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her the sacredness of her body and to teach her the dignity of national service and the service of humanity. It is not fair to assume that India's women are beyond redemption and that they have therefore to be simply taught the use of contraceptives for the sake of preventing births and preserving such health as they may be in possession of.

Let not the sisters who are rightly indignant over the miseries of women who are called upon to bear children whether they will or no, be impatient. Not even the propaganda in favour of contraceptives is going to promote the desired end overnight. Every method is a matter of education. My plea is for the right type.

Harijan, 2-5-1936

CWMG, Vol. LXII, pp.361-63

1. Mrs. Margaret Sanger; *vide CWMG*, Vol. LXII pp.156-60.

2. Only extracts from the quotation are reproduced here.



329. LETTER TO AMRITLAL V. THAKKAR

May [18, 1936]¹

Now the fourth thing, which is a new one. Hardly could we persuade Surajbehn² to quit when a demand for the building has come on behalf of the Women's Servants of India. For my part, I think that these women's idea is quite different. It smells of Western polish. These women do not wish to go along the lines that I have all along followed in the course of my work among women. There may well be need for their work, but I think we should not use this income for such a purpose. You should however give your opinion with a free mind, and explain to me if I am making any mistake.

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 1157

CWMMG, Vol. LXII, p.417

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1. From the contents and the G.N. Register.
 2. A worker of the Bhagini Samaj, Bombay.



330. INFANTICIDE OF GIRLS

It is difficult to believe that even today a cruel inhuman custom like infanticide of girls is prevalent in this unfortunate country. But, the letter that lies before me forces me to believe it. In the village Amarpur, in Bhagalpur District, Bihar, an association to oppose such infanticide among Rajputs has been formed. The secretary of this body has written a very sad letter in this regard. A few excerpts¹ from it are given below.

Dharma teaches us that all souls are one. Plurality, being momentary, is only an illusion. Nationalism, too, teaches us this same lesson. We do not think of ourselves as Rajputs, or Biharis, Punjabis and so on. We consider ourselves Indians and we believe ourselves to be one nation and persuade others to believe so. Therefore whether from the point of view of religion or of patriotism we are one; the responsibility of the misconduct of any one falls on all of us. For this reason we are all responsible for the infanticide of girls among Rajputs, whether we are Rajputs or from any other community. Had we not been indifferent to one another's faults and troubles, infanticide of girls could not have continued to this day. There is no religious excuse and no need for this. There might have been a time when the life of a Rajput was insecure and therefore the birth of girls was considered calamitous. Today this excuse does not exist. It cannot be said that the lives of Rajputs are less safe than those of the others. War no longer threatens the Rajputs. Today a Rajput does not have to sleep with his sword by his side. There is still a Rajput community, no doubt, but there is nothing like the special dharma of the Rajputs. Why then this infanticide of girls? Why should girls be a burden? The burden certainly is on those who buy husbands for their daughters and have to pay such exorbitant prices that they are all but ruined. It is God's mercy that they have not reached the stage of killing their daughters. I am not aware



if any excuse is put forward for the infanticide of Rajput girls. If there is any such excuse, it is the duty of this new association to throw light on the subject.

But even if there is a cause, it is our duty to remove it. No excuse can be accepted for the continuance of this barbarous custom. Public opinion must be mobilized to abolish this custom soon. The burden of mobilizing public opinion must fall on the Rajput Kanya Vadha Virodhini Sabha. This endeavour will not bear fruit by long speeches nor by passing resolutions. A little of both these will be needed. But the most important thing is a complete picture of the facts. You should prepare a chart which should tell at one glance where the infanticide of girls takes place and the number of girls killed in the previous year. It may be difficult to obtain the number of girls killed, it may even be impossible. The point is that all available information must be gathered and the Sabha's message conveyed to every home where there is a possibility of such an incident. Mere publishing of the resolutions in newspapers will have no effect on the parents who resort to this practice. It is important for the workers of the Sabha to remember that they should not exaggerate facts in any way. By ceaseless, sincere and peaceful efforts success in this cause can be attained soon. This is what I think and believe.

Harijan Sevak, 4-7-1936 [From Hindi]

CWMMG, Vol. LXIII, pp.117-18

1. These are not translated here.



331. WOMAN IN THE SMRITIS

A correspondent sends me an issue of *Indian Swarajya* published at Bezwada. It contains an article on the place of woman in the *Smritis*. From it I copy the following few extracts without any alteration:

The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities. (*Manu* 5.154)

Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty. (*Yajnavalkya* 1.18)

A woman has no separate sacrifice, ritual or fasting. She gains a high place in heaven by serving the husband. (*Manu* 5.145)

She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the husband. She goes to hell. A woman who is after the sacred waters should wash the feet or the whole body of the husband and drink the water; and she attains the highest place. (*Atri* 136-137)

There is no higher world for the woman than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displease the husband. (*Vasistha* 21-14)

That woman who prides in her father's family and disobeys the husband should be made by the king a prey to the dogs in the presence of a big assembly of people. (*Manu* 8.371)

None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is to be known as a sensualist. (*Angiras* 69)

If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then, for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away. (*Manu* 10.78)

It is sad to think that the *Smritis* contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race; sadder still to think that a newspaper published on behalf of



orthodoxy should publish such texts as if they were part of religion. Of course there are in the *Smritis* texts which give woman her due place and regard her with deep veneration. The question arises as to what to do with the *Smritis* that contain texts that are in conflict with other texts in the same *Smritis* and that are repugnant to the moral sense. I have already suggested often enough in these columns that all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word. But everyone can't decide what is good and authentic and what is bad and interpolated. There should therefore be some authoritative body that would revise all that passes under the name of scriptures, expurgate all the texts that have no moral value or are contrary to the fundamentals of religion and morality, and present such an edition for the guidance of Hindus. The certainty that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority need not interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance.

Harijan, 28-11-1936

CWMG, Vol. LXIV, pp.84-85



332. SPEECH AT THE CONCLUDING SESSION OF THE TWELFTH GUJARATI SAHITYA PARISHAD, AHMEDABAD¹

November 2, 1936

I shall say something here which I said yesterday in the Subjects Committee. I received a letter from Shrimati Lilavati Desai on behalf of the Jyoti Sangh. Although I approve of the substance of the letter I did not like its language. Its substance was that what was written about women was painful to them. The description of women which was found in current literature was a distorted one. These women in exasperation asked whether God had created them in order that men could describe their bodies? When they were dead would they embalm their bodies? There was no reason to believe that they were created to cook and clean utensils. Someone had picked out some striking quotations from *Manusmriti* and sent these to her. He had picked out from *Manusmriti* whatever disparaging things could be said against women. Some women, poor souls, themselves admitted that they were helpless, uncouth and like cattle—but for this reason, could that description apply to all women? Why could not someone else have interpolated such ugly verses in *Manusmriti*?

Now these women ask the question why they are not described as they really are. They are neither Rambhas, celestial maidens, nor slave girls. They too are independent human beings like men. Why should the latter describe them as if they were dolls? Why do not men think of their mothers when they talk of women? There was a time when a large number of women stayed with me. In South Africa I had become a father or brother of women belonging to about sixty families. There were pretty women as well as plain ones amongst them. Although these women were illiterate, I brought out the courage in them and they went to jail as bravely as men.

I ask you to change your point of view. I am told that current literature is full of apotheosis of women. I do not want such wrong apotheosis, such descriptions of their



eyes, nose, ears and other features. Do you ever describe your mother's features? I suggest that before you put your pens to paper keep your mother before your eyes. If you do that the literature which will flow from your pen will be like the rain which nurtures the thirsty mother earth. But today, instead of giving peace and encouragement to her, you enrage her. She poor soul feels that she is not as she is described, how can she become so? Are such descriptions an essential part of literature? Do we find anything vulgar in the Upanishads, the Koran or the Bible? Do we find any such thing in Tulsidas? Are these great epics not literature? Is the Bible not literature? It is said that the English language consists of three parts Bible and one part Shakespeare. Where would the English language be without the Bible or, for that matter, Arabic without the Koran, or Hindi without Tulsi? Why do you not produce such literature? Reflect upon what I have said here, give it a thought and, if you find it meaningless, reject it.

Harijanbandhu, 20-12-1936 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXIII, pp.420-21

1. A summary of the speech by Mahadev Desai was also published in *Harijan*, 21-11-1936.



333. MESSAGE TO THE ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE¹

[Before December 23, 1936]

I have grown old but will give a message still, if you need one from me. I can only say that until women establish their womanhood, the progress of India in all directions is impossible. When woman whom we call *abala*² becomes *sabala*³, all those who are helpless will become powerful.

The Hindu, 24-12-1936

CWMMG, Vol. LXIV, p.165

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1. The conference commenced on December 23 and was presided over by Margaret Cousins.
 2. Weak.
 3. Strong.



334. ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD

Pyarelal has unearthed the following instructive extract on the suttee and widowhood from the treatise on universal history by Diodorus the Sicilian who lived in the age of Julius Cesar.

Now it was an ancient law among the Indians that when young men and maidens were minded to wed they did not marry according to the judgment of the parents, but by mutual consent. But when espousals were made between persons of immature age, mistakes of judgment were of frequent occurrence, and when both sides repented their union, many of the women became depraved, and through incontinence fell in love with other men, and when at last they wished to leave the husbands they had first chosen, but could not in decency do so openly, they got rid of them by poison, a means of destroying life which they could readily procure in their country which produces in great quantity and variety drugs of fatal potency, some of which cause death if merely introduced as powder into food and drink. But when this nefarious practice had become quite prevalent, and many lives had been sacrificed, and when it was found that the punishment of the guilty had no effect in deterring other wives from their career of iniquity, they passed a law ordaining that a wife, unless she was pregnant or had already borne children, should be burned along with the deceased husband, and that if she did not choose to obey the law she should remain a widow to the end of her life, and be forever excommunicated from the sacrifices and other solemnities as being an impious person.

If these extracts give a faithful account of the origin of the two inhuman customs, we have reason to thank Heavens for the suppression of the suttee by law imposed upon us. No outside imposition can cure Hindu society of the enforced widowhood of girls who don't even know what marriage is. The reform can come first by the force of enlightened public opinion among Hindus, secondly by parents recognizing the duty of marrying their girl widows. This they can do, where the girls' consent is lacking, by educating their minds to the correctness of their marrying. Naturally this refers to girls under age. Where the so-called widows have grown to



maturity and they do not desire to marry, nothing is necessary save to tell them that they are free to marry precisely as if they were maidens unmarried. It is difficult to break the chains of prisoners who hug them, mistaking them as ornaments, as girls and even grown-up women do regard their silver or golden chains and rings as ornaments.

Harijan, 20-3-1937

CWMMG, Vol. LXV, pp.9-10



335. CURSE OF DRINK

A sister writes:

On going to the village, I was more than grieved to hear of the havoc drink is working among these people. Some of the women were in tears. What can they do? There is not a woman who would not like to banish alcohol for all time from our midst. It is the cause of so much domestic misery, poverty, ruined health and physique. As usual it is the woman who has to bear the burden of this self-indulgence on the part of man. What can I advise the women to do? It is so hard to face anger and even cruelty. How I wish the leaders in this Province would concentrate on the removal of this evil rather than expend time, energy and brain on the injustice of the Communal Award. We are so apt to neglect the things that really matter for such trivialities as would settle themselves if the moral stature of our people were raised. Can't you write an appeal to the people on the question of drink? It is sad to see these people literally going to perdition because of the curse.

My appeal to those who drink will be vain. It must be. They never read *Harijan*. If they do, they do so to scoff. They can have no interest in being informed of the evil of the drink habit. They hug the very evil. But I would like to remind this sister, and through her all the women of India, that at the time of the Dandi march the women of India did listen to my advice and made the fight against drink and the plying of the wheel their speciality. Let the writer recall the fact that thousands of women fearlessly surrounded drink-shops and often successfully appealed to the addicts to give up the habit. In the prosecution of their self-imposed mission they put up with the abuses of the addicts and sometimes even assaults by them. Hundreds went to gaol for the crime of picketing drink-shops. Their zealous work produced a marvellous effect all over the country. But unfortunately with the cessation of civil disobedience, and even before the cessation, the work slackened. Into the reasons for the slackening I need not go. But the work still awaits workers. The women's pledge remains unfulfilled. It was not taken for a definite period only. It could not be fulfilled until prohibition was proclaimed throughout India. The women's was the nobler part. Theirs was to bring



about prohibition by emptying drink-shops by an appeal to the best in man. Could they have continued the work, their gentleness combined with earnestness would most assuredly have weaned the drunkard from his habit.

But nothing is lost. The women can still organize the campaign. If the wives of those of whom the writer writes are in earnest, they can surely convert their husbands. Women do not know what influence for good they can exert on their husbands. They wield it unconsciously no doubt, but that is not enough. They must have that consciousness, and the consciousness will give them the strength and show them the way to deal with their partners. The pity of it is that most wives do not interest themselves in their husbands' doings. They think they have no right to do so. It never occurs to them that it is their duty to become guardians of their husbands' character, as it is the latter's to be guardians of their wives' character. And yet what can be plainer than that husband and wife are equal sharers of each other's virtues and vices? But who but a woman can effectively awaken the wives to a sense of their power and duty? This is but a part of the women's movement against drink.

There must be enough women with proper equipment to study the statistics of drink, the causes that induce the habit and the remedies against it. They must learn the lesson from the past and realize that mere appeals to the addicts to give up drink cannot produce lasting effects. The habit has to be regarded as a disease and treated as such. In other words, some women have to become research students and carry on researches in a variety of ways. In every branch of reform constant study giving one a mastery over one's subject is necessary. Ignorance is at the root of failures, partial or complete, of all reform movements whose merits are admitted. For every project masquerading under the name of reform is not necessarily worthy of being so designated.

Harijan, 24-4-1937

CWVG, Vol. LXV, pp.143-45



336. MESSAGE TO TRAVANCORE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, QUILON

[Before August 24, 1937]¹

How I wish Travancore women will play their part in purifying religion by removing from their heart untouchability and all it means and by taking their due share in the prohibition campaign now commenced.

The Hindu, 25-8-1937

CWVG, Vol. LXVI, p.67

1. The conference concluded on August 24, expressing "its profound gratitude to the Maharaja and Maharani for issuing the Temple-entry Proclamation and resolved to form an All-Kerala Hindu Women's Conference."



337. LETTER TO AMRIT KAUR

SEGAON, WARDHA,

June 17, 1938

MY DEAR IDIOT,

I have never liked the idea of our women seeking foreign aid in their fight for freedom. Hence I do not want the League¹ to inquire into the position or condition of India's women. This kind of propaganda turns their attention from themselves. Their fight is not even against India's men. It is and must [be] among and against themselves. I have never relished the fight put up for women at the Round Table Conference. Such being my radical views you can understand my indifference to what the League does or does not do. But if I have to examine their viewpoint, I refuse to read colour prejudice where there are other cogent reasons to justify a particular course of action. I wonder if this is plain to you. You may not agree just yet, though you will in the end. For I am quite sure of my ground. The women in S. A. rose at a bound by their own action. And have [not] they, the village women, done likewise even here?

I had a long chat with Asha Lata about Parkinson's note. I think she has grasped my point.

Love.

TYRANT

From the original: C.W. 3865. Courtesy: Amrit Kaur. Also G.N. 7021

CWVG, Vol. LXVII, p.122

1. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.



338. WOMAN'S SPECIAL MISSION

The crisis over, however, what do we see? A more strenuous race than before for armaments, a more comprehensive and intensive organization than ever of all the resources available—of men, women, money, skill and talent—in the event of war! No avowed declaration that “War shall not be” from anywhere! Is this not a recognition that war—however averted today—is still hanging over our heads as the proverbial sword of Damocles?

To me, as a woman, it is painful to realize that my sex has not contributed to world peace the quota that should be ours by instinct and prerogative to contribute. It pains me to read and hear of women's auxiliary corps being organized, of women being commandeered and volunteering to take their full share in the actual field as well as behind the lines. And yet, when war comes, it is the women's hearts that are wrung in agony—it is their souls that are scarred beyond repair. It is all so inexplicable. Why is it that we have not chosen the better part through all the ages? Why have we, without murmur, bowed the knee to hideous, soulless, brute force? It is a sad commentary on our spiritual development. We have failed to understand our high calling. I am quite convinced that if women could only have a heart understanding of the power and glory of non-violence all would be well with the world.

Why cannot you inspire and organize us, women of India? Why will you not concentrate on having us as your “sword arm”? How often have I longed for you to undertake an all-India tour just for this purpose? I believe that you would have a wonderful response, for the heart of Indian womanhood is sound and no women, perhaps in the world, have finer traditions of sacrifice and self-effacement behind them as we. Perhaps if you would make something of us we may, in however humble a manner, be able to show the way of peace to a sorrowing and stricken world. Who knows?

A Woman

I publish this letter not without hesitation. The correspondent's faith in my ability to stir the woman heart flatters me. But I am humble enough to recognize my limitations. It seems to me that the days of my touring are over. Whatever I can do by writing I must continue. But my faith is increasing in the efficacy of silent prayer. It is by itself an art—perhaps the highest art requiring the most refined diligence. I do



believe that it is woman's mission to exhibit ahimsa at its highest and best. But why should it be a man to move the woman heart? If the appeal is addressed exclusively to me not as man but as the (supposed to be) best exponent of ahimsa to be practised on a mass scale, I have no urge in me to go about preaching the doctrine to the women of India. I can assure my correspondent that there is no want of will in me that deters me from responding to her appeal. My feeling is that if men of the Congress can retain their faith in ahimsa and prosecute the non-violence programme faithfully and fully, the women would be automatically converted. And it may be that there shall arise one among them who will be able to go much farther than I can ever hope to do. For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa. For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is any day superior to man as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.

BANNU, October 25, 1938

Harijan, 5-11-1938

CWMMG, Vol. LXVIII, pp.52-53



339. MESSAGE TO ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE¹

[Before December 22, 1938]²

Women alone can emancipate themselves not men. If women will, they can help in the fulfilment of ahimsa. Through the charkha, they can serve the cause of their poor sisters. By wearing khaddar, they can bring help to the homes of the poor. They can bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. They can abolish the purdah and drive away the ghost of untouchability.

Will the Women's Conference at Delhi undertake to fulfil any of these causes?

The Hindustan Times, 28-12-1938. Also from a copy: C.W. 10362.

Courtesy: All-India Women's Conference

CWMMG, Vol. LXVIII, p.230

1. The Conference opened in Delhi on December 28. Amrit Kaur presided. Gandhiji's message according to *The Bombay Chronicle*, 29-12-1938, was in Gujarati.

2. Vide CWMMG, Vol. LXVIII, Item 272.



340. STUDENTS' SHAME

There is a most pathetic letter from a college girl in the Punjab lying on my file for nearly two months. Want of time was but an excuse for shirking the answer to the girl's question. Somehow or other I was avoiding the task, though I knew the answer. Meanwhile I received another letter from a sister of great experience, and I felt that I could no longer evade the duty of dealing with the college girl's very real difficulty. Her letter is written in chaste Hindustani. I must try to do as much justice as I can to the letter, which gives me a perfect picture of her deep feeling. Here is my rendering of a portion of the letter:

To girls and grown-up women there come times, in spite of their wish to the contrary, when they have to venture out alone, whether they are going from one place to another in the same city or from one town to another. And when they are thus found alone, evil-minded people pester them. They use improper or even indecent language whilst they are passing by. And if fear does not check them, they do not hesitate to take further liberty. I should like to know what part non-violence can play on such occasions. The use of violence is of course there. If the girl or the woman has sufficient courage, she will use what resources she has and teach miscreants a lesson. They can at least kick up a row that would draw the attention of the people around, resulting in the miscreants being horse-whipped. But I know that the result of such treatment would be merely to postpone the agony, not a permanent cure. Where you know the people who misbehave, I feel sure that they will listen to reason, to the gesture of love and humility. But what about a fellow cycling by, using foul language on seeing a girl or a woman unaccompanied by a male companion? You have no opportunity of reasoning with him. There is no likelihood of your meeting him again. You may not even recognize him. You do not know his address. What is a



poor girl or a woman to do in such cases? By way of example I want to give you my own experience of last night (26th October). I was going with a girl companion of mine on a very special errand at about 7.30 p.m. It was impossible to secure a male companion at the time and the errand could not be put off. On the way a Sikh young man passed by on his cycle and continued to murmur something till we were within hearing distance. We knew that it was aimed at us. We felt hurt and uneasy. There was no crowd on the road. Before we had gone a few paces the cyclist returned. We recognized him at once whilst he was still at a respectful distance. He wheeled towards us, heaven knows whether he had intended to get down or merely pass by us. We felt that we were in danger. We had no faith in our physical prowess. I myself am weaker than the average girl. But in my hands I had a big book. Somehow or other courage came to me all of a sudden. I hurled the heavy book at the cycle and roared out, "Dare you repeat your pranks?" He could with difficulty keep his balance, put on speed and fled from us. Now, if I had not flung the book at his cycle, he might have harassed us by his filthy language to the end of our journey. This was an ordinary, perhaps insignificant, occurrence; but I wish you could come to Lahore and listen to the difficulties of us unfortunate girls. You would surely discover a proper solution. First of all, tell me how, in the circumstances mentioned above, can girls apply the principle of ahimsa and save themselves. Secondly, what is the remedy for curing youth of the abominable habit of insulting womenfolk? You would not suggest that we should wait and suffer till a new generation, taught from childhood to be polite to their womenfolk, comes into being. The Government is either unwilling or unable to deal with this social evil. The big leaders have no time for such questions. Some, when they hear of a girl bravely castigating ill-behaved youth, say, 'Well done. That is the way all girls should behave.' Sometimes a leader is found eloquently lecturing against such misbehaviour of



students. But no one applies himself continuously to the solution of this serious problem. You will be painfully surprised to know that during Diwali and such other holidays newspapers come out with notices warning women from venturing outdoors even to see the illuminations. This one fact should enable you to know to what straits we are reduced in this part of the world! Neither the writers nor the readers of such warnings have any sense of shame that they should have to be issued.

Another Punjabi girl to whom I gave the letter to read supports the narrative from her own experiences of her college days and tells me that what my correspondent has related is the common experience of most girls.

The other letter from an experienced woman relates the experiences of her girl friends in Lucknow. They are molested in cinema theatres by boys sitting in the row behind them using all kinds of language which I can only call indecent. They are stated to resort even to practical jokes which have been described by my correspondent but which I must not reproduce here.

If the immediate personal relief was all that was needed, no doubt the remedy that the girl who describes herself to be physically weak adopted, i.e., of flinging her book at the cyclist, was quite correct. It is an age-long remedy. And I have said in these columns that when a person wants to become violent, physical weakness does not come in the way of its effective use, even against a physically powerful opponent. And we know that in the present age there have been invented so many methods of using physical force that even a little girl with sufficient intelligence can deal death and destruction. The fashion nowadays is growing of training girls to defend themselves in situations such as the one described by my correspondent. But she is wise enough to know that even though she was able to make effective use for the moment of the book she had in her hand as a weapon of defence, it was no remedy for the growing evil. In



the cases of rude remarks, there need be no perturbation but there should be no indifference. All such cases should be published in the papers. Names of the offenders should be published when they, are traced. There should be no false modesty about exposing the evil. There is nothing like public opinion for castigating public misconduct. There is no doubt that, as the correspondent says, there is great public apathy about such matters. But it is not the public alone that are to blame. They must have before them examples of rudeness. Even as stealing cannot be dealt with unless cases of thieving are published and followed up, so also is it impossible to deal with cases of rude behaviour if they are suppressed. Crime and vice generally require darkness for prowling. They disappear when light plays upon them.

But I have a fear that the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. She loves adventure. My correspondent seems to represent the unusual type. The modern girl dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun but to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls. I have often remarked in these columns that definite rules govern the development of the non-violent spirit in us. It is a strenuous effort. It marks a revolution in the way of thinking and living. If my correspondent and the girls of her way of thinking will revolutionize their life in the prescribed manner, they will soon find that young men, who at all come in contact with them, will learn to respect them and to put on their best behaviour in their presence. But if perchance they find, as they may, that their very chastity is in danger of being violated, they must develop courage enough to die rather than yield to the brute in man. It has been suggested that a girl who is gagged or bound so as to make her powerless even for struggling cannot die as easily as I seem to think. I venture to assert that a girl who has the will to resist can burst all the bonds that may have been used to render her powerless. The resolute will gives her the strength to die.



But this heroism is possible only for those who have trained themselves for it. Those who have not a living faith in non-violence will learn the art of ordinary self-defence and protect themselves from indecent behaviour of unchivalrous youth.

The great question, however, is why should young men be devoid of elementary good manners so as to make decent girls be in perpetual fear of molestation from them? I should be sorry to discover that the majority of young men have lost all sense of chivalry. But they should, as a class, be jealous of their reputation and deal with every case of impropriety occurring among their mates. They must learn to hold the honour of every woman as dear as that of their own sisters and mothers. All the education they receive will be in vain if they do not learn good manners.

SEGAON, *DECEMBER 26, 1938*

Harijan, 31-12-1938

CWMG, Vol. LXVIII, pp.244-48



341. THE MODERN GIRL

I have received a letter written on behalf of eleven girls whose names and addresses have been sent to me. I give it below with changes that make it more readable without in any way altering the meaning:

Your comments on the letter of a lady student captioned 'Students' Shame' and published in *Harijan* on the 31st December, 1938 deserve special attention. The modern girl, it seems, has provoked you to the extent that you have disposed of her finally as one playing Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. This remark which betrays your idea about women in general is not very inspiring.

In these days when women are coming out of closed doors to help men and take an equal share of the burden of life, it is indeed strange that they are still blamed even when they are maltreated by men. It cannot be denied that instances can be cited where the fault is equally divided. There may be a few girls playing Juliets to half a dozen Romeos. But such cases presuppose the existence of half a dozen Romeos, moving about the streets in quest of a Juliet. And it cannot or should never be taken that modern girls are categorically all Juliets or modern youths all Romeos. You yourself have come in contact with quite a number of modern girls and may have been struck by their resolution, sacrifice and other sterling womanly virtues.

As for forming public opinion against such misdemeanours as pointed out by your correspondent, it is not for girls to do it, not so much out of false shame as from its ineffectiveness.

But a statement like this from one revered all over the world seems to hold a brief once more for that worn out and unbecoming saying 'woman is the gate of Hell.'

From the foregoing remarks, however, please do not conclude that modern girls have no respect for you. They hold you in as much respect as every young man does. To be hated or pitied is what they resent much. They are ready to mend their ways if they are really guilty. Their guilt, if any, must be conclusively proved before they are anathematized. In this respect they would neither desire to take shelter under the covering of 'ladies, please', nor would they silently stand and allow the judge to condemn them in his own way. Truth must be faced; the modern girl or 'Juliet', as you have called her, has courage enough to face it.



My correspondents do not perhaps know that I began service of India's women in South Africa more than forty years ago when perhaps none of them was born. I hold myself to be incapable of writing anything derogatory to womanhood. My regard for the fair sex is too great to permit me to think ill of them. She is, what she has been described to be in English, the better half of mankind. And my article was written to expose students' shame, not to advertise the frailties of girls. But in giving the diagnosis of the disease, I was bound, if I was to prescribe the right remedy, to mention all the factors which induced the disease.

The 'modern girl' has a special meaning. Therefore there was no question of my restricting the scope of my remark to some. But all the girls who receive English education are not modern girls. I know many who are not at all touched by the 'modern girl' spirit. But there are some who have become modern girls. My remark was meant to warn India's girl students against copying the 'modern girl' and complicating a problem that has become a serious menace. For, at the time I received the letter referred to, I received also a letter from an Andhra girl student bitterly complaining of the behaviour of Andhra students which from the description given is worse than what was described by the Lahore girl. This daughter of Andhra tells me the simple dress of her girl friends gives them no protection, but they lack the courage to expose the barbarism of the boys who are a disgrace to the institution they belong to. I commend this complaint to the authorities of the Andhra University.

The eleven girls I invite to initiate a crusade against the rude behaviour of students. God helps only those who help themselves. The girls must learn the art of protecting themselves against the ruffianly behaviour of man.

BARDOLI, JANUARY 30, 1939

Harijan, 4-2-1939

CWMMG, Vol. LXVIII, pp.348-50



342. DISCUSSION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF MUNICIPALITIES AND LOCAL BOARDS¹

Q. In our schemes for adult education, should the aim be to promote the spread of literacy or to impart 'useful knowledge'? What about the education of women?

A. The primary need of those who are come of age and are following an avocation, is to know how to read and write. Mass illiteracy is India's sin and shame and must be liquidated. Of course, the literacy campaign must not begin and end with a knowledge of the alphabet. It must go hand in hand with the spread of useful knowledge. But municipal bodies should beware of trying to ride two horses at a time, or else they are sure to come a cropper.

As for illiteracy among the women, its cause is not mere laziness and inertia as in the case of men. A more potent cause is the status of inferiority with which an immemorial tradition has unjustly branded her. Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and better half! The result is a semi-paralysis of our society. Woman has rightly been called the mother of the race. We owe it to her and to ourselves to undo the great wrong that we have done her.

Shrimati Mridulabehn Sarabhai, who is a keen social worker and founder of the Jyoti Sangh, an institution for the uplift and emancipation of women at Ahmedabad, put Gandhiji a few leading questions on the *position of women in society*: "The awakening of civil and political consciousness among Indian women has created a conflict between their traditional domestic duties and their duty towards society. If a woman engages in public work, she may have to neglect her children or her household. How is the dilemma to be solved?"



Basing his reply on a celebrated text of the *Gita*, Gandhiji remarked that it was always wrong to run after the 'distant scene' to the neglect of the more immediate duties that might have accrued to one naturally. Neglect of present duty was the way to destruction. The question was whether it is a woman's duty to devote all her time to domestic work. More often than not a woman's time is taken up not by the performance of essential domestic duties but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master and for her own vanities.

G. To me this domestic slavery of women is a symbol of our barbarism.

In my opinion the slavery of the kitchen is a remnant of barbarism mainly. It is high time that our womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of a woman's time.

MRIDULABEHN: At the elections your Congressmen expect all manner of help from us, but when we ask them to send out their wives and daughters to join us in public work, they bring forth all sorts of excuses and want to keep them close prisoners within the four domestic walls. What remedy do you suggest?

G. Send the names of all such antediluvian fossils to me for publication in *Harijan*.

SEGAON, FEBRUARY 7, 1939

Harijan, 18-2-1939

CWVG, Vol. LXVIII, pp.341-43

1. Extracted from Pyarelal's "Municipal Service and Non-violence". About 200 representatives of municipalities and local boards had met Gandhiji to discuss the various knotty problems relating to their day-to-day work.



343. SWARAJ THROUGH WOMEN

Now that the Working Committee has accepted¹ spinning as an indispensable condition of civil disobedience, the women of India have a rare opportunity of serving the country. The salt campaign brought out tens of thousands from their seclusion and showed that they could serve the country on equal terms with men. It gave the village woman a dignity which she had never enjoyed before. The restoration of spinning to its central place in India's peaceful campaign for deliverance from the imperial yoke gives her women a special status. In spinning they have a natural advantage over men.

Since the beginning of time there has been a division of labour between men and women. Adam wove and Eve span. The distinction persists to the present day. Men spinners are an exception. In the Punjab when during 1920-21 I asked men to spin, they used to tell me that men considered spinning to be beneath their dignity and that it was solely women's occupation. Men nowadays do not object on the ground of dignity. There are thousands who spin for sacrifice. It was when men took up spinning from a patriotic motive that spinning was reduced to a science and inventions as great as in any other field were made. Nevertheless experience shows that spinning will remain woman's speciality. I believe there is a good reason behind the experience. Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively silent process. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and therefore non-violence. Her occupations must therefore be, as they are, more conducive to peace than war. That she is now being dragged down for purposes of violent war is no credit to modern civilization. I have no doubt that violence so ill becomes woman that presently she will rebel against the violation of her fundamental nature. I feel that man too will repent of his folly. Equality of the sexes does not mean equality of occupations. There may be no legal bar against a woman hunting or wielding a lance. But she instinctively recoils from a function that



belongs to man. Nature has created sexes as complements of each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms.

But a proof of the different functions of the sexes is unnecessary for my purpose. The fact stands, at any rate in India, that millions of women regard spinning as their natural occupation. The Working Committee's resolution automatically shifts the burden from men to women and gives to them an opportunity of showing their mettle. I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. If the fight came, I should then approach it with much greater confidence than if men predominated. I would dread the latter's violence. Women would be my guarantee against such an outbreak.

SEGAON, *NOVEMBER 27, 1939*

Harijan, 2-12-1939

CWMMG, Vol. LXX, pp.381-82

1. *Vide CWMMG*, Vol. LXX, p.373.



344. WHAT IS WOMAN'S ROLE?

With certain omissions I quote below the following from a highly educated sister:

You have shown the world, through *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, the dignity of the soul. These two words are the only solution to the problem of how to overcome man's baser nature.

Education through crafts is not only a great idea, but the only right way of teaching, if we want our children to have self-reliance. It is you who have said it, and solved in one sentence the whole vast educational problem. The details could be worked out according to circumstances and experience.

I beg you to solve the problem of us, the women. Rajaji says that there is no women's problem. Perhaps not in the political sense, Perhaps it could be made by legislation not to matter in the professional sense, that is, all professions could be made equally open to men and women. But these things would not alter the fact that we are women and as such, of a different quality from men. We need an additional set of principles besides *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* to overcome our baser qualities. A woman's spirit like a man's strives to attain better things. But just as there is need for *ahimsa* and *brahmacharya* for a man to get rid of his aggressive spirit, lust, brutish instincts of inflicting pain etc., so there is for woman need of certain principles that would enable her to get rid of her baser qualities, which are different from men and commonly said to belong by nature to her. The natural qualities of her sex, the upbringing meted out to her because of her sex, and her environment which is created because of her Sex, all are against her. And in her work these things, namely her nature, upbringing and surroundings always get in the way and hinder her and give occasion for the hackneyed phrase, 'she is only a woman, after all'.

This is what I mean by sex hanging round one's neck. And I think that, if we only possess the correct solution, the correct method of improving ourselves, we could make our natural qualities, such as sympathy and tenderness, a help instead of a hindrance. The improvement, just as your solution in the case of men and children, must come from within us.



I said nature, upbringing and environment. I will give an example to make myself clearer.

Women by nature are intended to be soft, tender-hearted, sympathetic, to mother children. These things influence her to a great extent unconsciously. So when it comes to doing things, she become too emotional. When moving with men, she commits blunders. She is soft-hearted when she should not be so. She is temperamental, easily gets vain and generally acts in a silly way.

When I came to see you, although I had desired the meeting very much and spent the previous night sleepless thinking over it, when in your presence I was asked to sit down, I went and sat behind the broad back of Shri Desai, I could not hear and I prevented myself from seeing you! What a silly thing to do! Further. I found, I could not explain myself, could not articulate. This I attribute to my being saddled with an emotional nature which gets out of control easily. Of course suitable training would have cured that particular fault, but I dare say, I would commit some other equally silly act.

A friend of mine showed me the answers she has written to a questionnaire sent by the National Planning sub-committee for women's role. The questions, as you no doubt know, are numbered, and are something like this: To what extent, in your part of the country, is woman entitled to hold, acquire, inherit, sell or dispose of property in her own right? What provision has been made, or facilities available, for the appropriate education and training of women for the several kinds of work and employment that women of different capacities may need to engage in? She has not replied to the questions, but has written, 'We cannot say with an ounce of truth that women were not getting any education as such in the good old ancient days', and, 'in the Vedic period the wife, on her marriage, was at once given an honoured position in the house and she was mistress in her husband's home'. etc., and has quoted Manu. I asked her what necessity there was to write about ancient customs when the questionnaire was about present-day ones. She murmured something about thinking that a reply in the form of an essay would be nice, and brightened up saying Mrs. Some-one-else's reply was worse than hers. I think this mistake of my friend is due to lack of proper training, which was denied to her because she is a woman. Even a clerk would know that when one is asked a question one should not write an essay on a different matter in reply.



I do not think, I need go on quoting examples and explaining myself. You, with your vast experience of women of all kinds, would know whether I am right in saying that women lack the vital principle that would set them right.

Your advice to me was to read *Harijan*. I do so eagerly. But so far I have not come across, well, the advice for the inner spirit. Spinning and fighting for the national freedom are only some aspects of the training. They do not seem to contain the whole solution. For I have seen women who do spin and do try to work out the Congress ideals and still commit blunders which are attributed to the fact of their being women.

I do not want woman to become like man. But just as you have caught men ahimsa for their baser nature, do teach us the thing that would remove our sillier qualities. Tell us please, how to make the best use of our qualities, how to turn our disadvantages into advantages.

This, the burden of my sex, is with me always. Every time I have someone say, 'she is a woman, after all,' in a sneering way, my soul winces, if that is, a soul is capable of wincing. A man to whom I talked of these things laughed at me and said, 'Did you see that child at our friend's house? He was playing at trains, and *chugchugged* along until he came against a pillar. Instead of going round it he just tried to push it aside with his shoulders thinking, in his childish mind that he could remove it. You remind me of him. What you say is a psychological thing. You make me laugh in your attempt to understand and solve it?

I had flattered myself that my contribution to the woman's cause definitely began with the discovery of satyagraha. But the writer of the letter is of opinion that the fair sex requires treatment different from men. If it is so, I do not think any man will find the correct solution. No matter how much he tries, he must fail because nature has made him different from woman. Only the toad under the harrow knows where it pinches him. Therefore ultimately woman will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active help.



But somehow or other man has dominated woman from ages past, and so woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status.

Nevertheless there is no doubt that at some point there is bifurcation. Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread-winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care the race must become extinct.

In my opinion it is degrading both for man and woman that women should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling his companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition as there is in defending it against attack from without.

As I have watched millions of peasants in their natural surroundings and as I watch them daily in little Segaoon, the natural division of spheres of work has forced itself on my attention. There are no women blacksmiths and carpenters. But men and women work on the fields, the heaviest work being done by the males. The women keep and manage the homes. They supplement the meagre resources of the family, but man remains the main bread-winner.



The division of the spheres of work being recognized, the general qualities and culture required are practically the same for both the sexes.

My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance truth and ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex. If she is able to do this successfully, she must resolutely refuse to believe in the modern teaching that everything is determined and regulated by the sex impulse. I fear I have put the proposition rather clumsily. But I hope my meaning is clear. I do not know that the millions of men who are taking an active part in the war are obsessed by the sex spectre. Nor are the peasants working together in their fields worried or dominated by it. This is not to say or suggest that they are free from the instinct implanted in man and woman. But it most certainly does not dominate their lives as it seems to dominate the lives of those who are saturated with the modern sex literature. Neither man nor woman has time for such things when he or she is faced with the hard fact of living life in its grim reality.

I have suggested in these columns that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who again suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in



satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

My good nurse in the Sassoon Hospital, Poona, as I was lying on a sick bed years ago', told me the story of a woman who refused to take chloroform because she would not risk the life of the babe she was carrying. She had to undergo a painful operation. The only anaesthetic she had was her love for the babe, to save whom no suffering was too great. Let not women, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise their sex or deplore that they were not born men. The contemplation of that heroine often makes me envy woman the status that is hers, if she only knew. There is as much reason for man to wish that he was born a woman as for woman to do otherwise. But the wish is fruitless. Let us be happy in the state to which we are born and do the duty for which nature has destined us.

SEAGAON, *FEBRUARY 12, 1940*

Harijan, 24-2-1940

CWMG, Vol. LXXI, pp.206-209



345. ADDRESS TO BENGAL WOMEN WORKERS

MALIKANDA,

February 24, 1940

Politics means not merely to sit on the Congress Executive. Real politics is in spinning.¹

He drew their attention to the vow taken by the male workers to spin 60,000 yards yarn a year and said that women should spin more than that.

Menfolk have taken to spinning, but let me confess that the art comes more naturally to you than to them. One of the reasons is that men have many other avenues of employment. And if swaraj has to come through the charkha, your share in the fight for freedom is going to be greater. Again if swaraj has to come through non-violence, then too your place in the fight will be in the forefront, for Nature has given you a greater capacity for suffering than she has to men. In order also to wipe out the reproach of inferiority and subjection that man has imposed on woman, you will take your privileged part in the fight and prove to the world that you are better fighters for freedom than men.²

Mahatma Gandhi congratulated them on the management of the kitchen during the Seva Sangh Conference and urged them to engage all their spare time in spinning which he said would bring swaraj to India.

Harijan, 9-3-1940, and *The Bombay Chronicle*, 26-2-1940

CWMG, Vol. LXXI, p.287

1. This and the following paragraph are from *The Bombay Chronicle*.

2. What follows is from *The Bombay Chronicle*.



346. WOMEN AND THEIR WORK

Q. You say, "It is degrading both for man and woman that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end."¹ But what about the millions of female labourers in fields, factories, etc.? They are forced to forsake the hearth and become 'bread-winners. Would you abolish the industrial system and revert to the stone age? Would that not be a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end? What is the new order that you envisage where the sin of making women work will be absent?

A. If millions of women are forced to forsake their hearth and become bread-winners, it is wrong, but not so wrong as shouldering the rifle. There is nothing inherently barbarous in labour. I see no barbarity in women voluntarily working on their fields whilst they are looking after their homes. In the new order of my imagination all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women in the new order will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home. Since I do not regard the rifle as a permanent feature in the new order, its use will be progressively restricted even so far as men are concerned. It will be tolerated as a necessary evil while it lasts. But I would not deliberately contaminate women with the evil.

Harijan, 16-3-1940

CWMMG, Vol. LXXI, p.324

1. Vide "What Is Woman's Role?", Item 344, p.



347. MEN AND WOMEN

Q. I should like to know whether you would approve of men and women satyagrahis mixing promiscuously and working together, or whether they should be organized into separate units with a clear delimitation of the field of each. My experience is that the former must lead, as it has led, to a lot of indiscipline and corruption. If you agree with me, what rules would you suggest to combat the potential evil?

A. I should like to have separate units. Women have more than enough work amongst women. Our womenfolk are terribly neglected, and hundreds of intelligent women workers of sterling honesty are required to work among them. On principle too I believe in the two sexes functioning separately. But I would lay down no hard and fast rules. Good sense must govern the relations between the two. There should be no barrier erected between the two. Their mutual behaviour should be natural and spontaneous.

Harijan, 1-6-1940

CWMMG, Vol. LXXII, p.107



348. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

Q. Some people oppose a modification of laws relating to the right of a married woman to own property on the ground that economic independence of woman would lead to the spread of immorality among women and disruption of domestic life. What is your attitude on the question?

A. I would answer the question by a counter question: Has not independence of man and his holding property led to the spread of immorality among men? If you answer 'yes', then let it be so also with women. And when women have rights of ownership and the rest like men, it would be found that the enjoyment of such rights is not responsible for their vices or their virtues. Morality which depends upon the helplessness of a man or woman has not much to recommend it. Morality is rooted in the purity of our hearts.

Harijan, 8-6-1940

CWMMG, Vol. LXXII, p.137



349. A WIDOW'S DIFFICULTY

Q. I am a Bengali Brahmin widow. Since my widowhood—these 24 years—I have observed strict rules about my food. I have my separate widow's kitchen and utensils even in my own family. I believe in your ideal of truth and non-violence, I am a habitual wearer of khadi since 1930 and a regular spinner. Our Manila Samaj has established a Harijan school in a Harijan village in Dacca. I go there and mix with the Harijans. I mix freely with my Muslim sisters towards whom I have nothing but goodwill. But I cannot inter-dine with Harijans or any other non-Brahmin caste. Now can't orthodox widows like me enlist as satyagrahis, passive and active?

A. According to the Congress constitution you have a perfect right to be enlisted. You can even enforce your right. But since you ask me, I would dissuade you from being enlisted. I know the punctilious way in which Bengali widows observe the rules custom has prescribed for them. But widows who dedicate themselves to the country's cause, and that in a non-violent way, should have no scruples in dining with anybody. I do not believe that dining with people, no matter who they are, hinders spiritual progress. It is the motive which is the deciding factor. If a widow approaches every task in a spirit of service, it is well with her. A widow may observe all the dining and other rules with meticulous care and yet not be a true widow if she is not of a pure heart. You know as well as I do that outward observance of rules governing a society often covers hypocrites. I would, therefore, advise you to disregard the restriction on inter-dining and the like as a hindrance to spiritual and national progress and concentrate on cultivation of the heart. In the satyagraha *dal* I should like to have not self-satisfied persons but those who have used their reason and chosen a way of life that has commended itself to both head and heart.

SEVAGRAM, JUNE 10, 1940

Harijan, 15-6-1940

CWMMG, Vol. LXXII, p.161-62



350. INTERVIEW TO AMERICAN VISITOR¹

SEVAGRAM,

[Before June 27, 1940]

Q. I do a lot of writing and speaking, especially among women. Have you any message to give to American women?

A. Not as a message. I can throw out a suggestion and, if it appeals to you, you can develop it. Woman can play a most important part in the work of pacifism. She should refuse to be swept off her feet and to imitate man's language and refuse to allow herself and hers to be identified with anything connected with war. For she must know that she can represent peace more than war. She is made for the demonstration and exhibition of that silent force which is not less effective because it is silent, but the more effective because it is silent.

Harijan, 13-7-1940

CWMMG, Vol. LXXII, p.207

1. Extracted from Mahadev Desai's "Occasional Notes", 27-6-1940. The visitor was a pacifist and represented various women's associations.



351. LETTER TO V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

SEVAGRAM,

July 9, 1940

Dear BROTHER,

Have just read your letter. Your detachment¹ is simply wonderful. Bapa² is an authority on many things—road-making, Harijans, Bhils, Society's³ affairs, forlorn causes, etc. But I never knew that he was an authority on interpreting Tulsidas. I should still cite Sita's example for our women. My incitement has never gone beyond. But I must not weary you. Keep me always on the straight and narrow path.

Love.

M.K.G.

From a facsimile: *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. V, between pp.352 and 353; also *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p.320

CWVG, Vol. LXXII, p.261

1. T. N. Jagadisan explains: "Sastriar's letter, which is not available now, was written from Poona in the midst of an anxious crisis in the Society. This fact explains Gandhiji's reference to Sastriar's detachment."

2. AN. Thakkar.

3. Servants of India Society.



352. WOMAN'S ROLE¹

The Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference met recently at Abbottabad. This was their first venture in the Frontier Province. The members, I understand, had a very happy experience. There were no caste distinctions, no religious differences. Muslim, Sikh and Hindu women freely mixed together. The Standing Committee passed the following three resolutions:

1. The members of the Standing Committee of the All-India Women's Conference assembled at Abbottabad desire to place on record their immense grief and despair at the continuance of war in Europe and the Far East. They are in deep sympathy with all those countries which have lost their independence and are under the iron heel of Nazi and Fascist domination against which all sections of India have expressed their opinion in no uncertain terms. They appeal again to the women of the world to realize the utter futility of trying to settle disputes and grievances by means of war and to throw their whole weight into the cause of peace.
2. The Standing Committee reaffirm their belief in non-violence as the only effective means of ensuring a lasting peace in the world by the formation of a brotherhood of nations. They realize how difficult of attainment this ideal is, and therefore they appeal to Indian women to try to develop the practice of non-violence in their individual and collective lives, for they feel that with their traditional inheritance of service and sacrifice they could give a lead to the women of the world in this respect.
3. The members reiterate the opinion of the A.I.W.C. that the recognition of India's free status would be a first and logical step towards the attainment of the goal for which Britain is at War-namely, the freedom of all nations, and a world democracy.



Evidently the sisters who met at Abbottabad believe like me that in the war against war women of the world will and should lead. It is their special vocation and privilege. Therefore the Committee have reaffirmed their belief in non-violence. Let me hope that the women who are under the influence of the Conference share the Committee's belief, and that they will work to that end.

SEVAGRAM, *July 27, 1940*

Harijan, 4-8-1940

CWMG, Vol. LXXII, pp.326-27

1. The Gujarati original of this appeared in *Harijanbandhu*, 3-8-1940. The English translation has been reproduced from *Harijan*, where it was published under "Notes".



353. IMPLICATIONS OF CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME¹

Woman is described as man's better half. As long as she has not the same rights in law as man, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of woman is a denial of ahimsa. Every village worker will, therefore, regard every woman as his mother, sister or daughter as the case may be, and look upon her with respect. Only such a worker will command the confidence of the village people.

SEVAGRAM, *August 13, 1940*

Harijan, 18-8-1940

CWMG, Vol. LXXII, p.380

1. The Gujarati original of this was published in *Harijanbandhu*, 17-8-1940. This English translation is reproduced from *Harijan*.



354. LETTER TO PREMABEHN KANTAK

SEVAGRAM,

October 18, 1940

CHI. PREMA,

I have your letter. Women certainly do have a place.¹ But I do not know where this struggle will take me and the country. Everything is in God's hands.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10412. Also C.W. 6851.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantak

CWMMG, Vol. LXXIII, p.113

1. The addressee had asked whether women had a place in the individual satyagraha.



355. MESSAGE TO ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE¹

[*On or before December 27, 1940*]²

I have already pointed out the royal road to swaraj to my sisters where they can go ahead of their brothers. By traversing this road they can achieve fulfilment.

From a copy: C.W. 10363. Courtesy: All-India Women's Conference

CWMMG, Vol. LXXIII, p.259

1. & 2. The message was sent for the annual session which was held at Bangalore from December 27 to 30, 1940.



356. NOTE TO PREMABEHN KANTAK¹

[Before February 26, 1941]²

Tell Lilavatibehn³ that she has to think of women as a class and not of herself. The rule should not be broken for the sake of a Congressman; nor should a woman be made a party to such breach. It is harmful for the woman too. But when it is the turn of a Christian, a woman from that community should be given the chance, just as a Hindu woman or a Muslim woman should be chosen when it is the turn of that community.

Women satyagrahis who are weak and diseased should not go to jail again. Moreover no woman can go to jail with her child.

It is better if 'A' and 'B' class prisoners avail less and less of their special privileges. In fact our ideal is not to enjoy any additional facilities other than those enjoyed by 'C' class prisoners.

The purpose behind payment of fine is only to remove the fear of fine as we have already overcome the fear of jail. It does not mean that fine should be paid by borrowing money. But we should not lose valuable things for a negligible price.

We have to presume that the struggle will be a prolonged one. Talks of compromise only betray our weakness. Rest assured, ultimate victory is ours.

From a photostat of the Gujarati: G.N. 10417. Also C.W. 6856.

Courtesy: Premabehn Kantak

CWMG, Vol. LXIII, pp.350-51

1. & 2. The addressee was sentenced in the last week of November 1940 for three months' imprisonment. On her release, she went to Sevagram and asked Gandhiji several questions regarding women prisoners. Gandhiji



wrote down the reply so that she could carry it with her during her second term of imprisonment, and in order that the women prisoners would not doubt its authenticity. Gandhiji left Sevagram on February 26.

3. Lilavati Munshi who wanted to contest for the Mayorship of Bombay to put an end to the convention of elections by communal rotation.



357. WOMEN

I have included service of women in the constructive programme, for though satyagraha has automatically brought India's women out from their darkness as nothing else could have in such an incredibly short space of time, Congressmen have not felt the call to see that women become equal partners in the fight for swaraj. They have not realized that woman must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service. Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his. But as every right in a non-violent society proceeds from the previous performance of a duty, it follows that rules of social conduct must be framed by mutual co-operation and consultation. They can never be imposed from outside. Men have not realized this truth in its fullness in their behaviour towards women. They have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends and co-workers. It is the privilege of Congressmen to give the women of India a lifting hand. Women are in the position somewhat of the slave of old who did not know that he could or ever had to be free. And when freedom came, for the moment he felt helpless. Women have been taught to regard themselves as slaves of men. It is up to Congressmen to see that they enable them to realize their full status and play their part as equals of men.

This revolution is easy, if the mind is made up. Let Congressmen begin with their own homes. Wives should not be dolls and objects of indulgence, but should be treated as honoured comrades in common service. To this end those who have not received a liberal education should receive such instruction as is possible from their husbands. The same observation applies, with the necessary changes, to mothers and daughters.



It is hardly necessary to point out that I have given a one-sided picture of the helpless state of India's women. I am quite conscious of the fact that in the villages generally they hold their own with their menfolk and in some respects even rule them. But to the impartial outsider the legal and customary status of woman is bad enough throughout and demands radical alteration.

Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place

CWMMG, Vol. LXXV, p.155



358. MESSAGE TO ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

[*Before December 29, 1941*]¹

The most important work before the Conference is to recognize the special obligation of the women of India to enforce the constructive programme which I have put before the nation in my recent pamphlet². It should satisfy the highest ambition for service of the tallest woman in India.

The Hindu, 31-12-1941

CWMG, Vol. LXXV, p.188

1. The sixteenth session of the All-India Women's Conference commenced in Cocanada from December 29 under the Presidentship of Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

2. *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*; vide *CWMG*, pp.146-66.



359. CRIMINAL ASSAULTS¹

The whole world is on trial today. No one can escape from the war. Whilst the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are products of poets' imagination, their authors were not mere rhymesters. They were seers.² What they depicted is happening before our very eyes today. Ravana's are warring with each other. They are showing matchless strength. They throw their deadly weapons from the air.³ No deed of bravery in the battlefield is beyond their capacity or imagination.

Man would not fight in this manner, certainly not the gods. Only brutes can.⁴ Soldiers drunk with the pride of physical strength loot shops and are not even ashamed to take liberties with women. The administration is powerless in war time to prevent such happenings. The army fulfils their primary need, and they wink the eye at their misdeeds. Where a whole nation is militarized the way of military life becomes part and parcel of its civilization. Therefore a soldier's taking such liberties is not a matter for condemnation.⁵ But it would take generations for India to become so.

Hence arise questions like the following which a sister sends me:

- (1) If a soldier commits an assault on a woman, can she be said to have lost her virtue?
- (2) Is such a woman to be condemned and ostracized by society?
- (3) What should women and the public do under such circumstances?

Whilst the woman has in point of fact lost her virtue, the loss cannot in any way render her liable to be condemned or treated as an outcast. She is entitled to our sympathy for she has been cruelly injured and we should tend her wounds as we would those of any injured person.

A woman is worthy of condemnation only when she is a willing party to her dishonour.⁶ In no case are adultery and criminal assault synonymous terms. If we were



to view the matter in this light, we would not hide such instances as has thus far been our wont. Public opinion against such conduct on the part of men towards women would then be created and freely exercised.

If the Press carried on a sustained agitation, soldiers white or brown would probably cease to behave in this manner. Their officers would be compelled to prevent such misbehaviour.⁷

My advice to women is that they should leave the cities and migrate to the villages where a wide field of service awaits them. There is comparatively little risk of their being assaulted in villages. They must, however, live simple lives and make themselves one with the poor. If they will display their wealth by dressing in silks and satins and wearing jewellery, they will, in running away from one danger, expose themselves to a double. Naturally the advice cannot refer to those whom duty compels to live in cities.

The main thing, however, is for women to know how to be fearless. It is my firm conviction that a fearless woman who knows that her purity is her best shield can never be dishonoured. However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity. There are examples even in modern times of women who have thus defended themselves. I can, as I write, recall two such instances. I therefore recommend women who read this article to try to cultivate this courage. They will become wholly fearless, if they can, and cease to tremble as they do today at the mere thought of assaults. It is not, however, necessary for a woman to go through a bitter experience for the sake of passing a test of courage. These experiences mercifully do not come in the way of lakhs or even thousands. Every soldier is not a beast. It is a minority that loses all sense of decency.⁸ Only twenty per cent of snakes are poisonous, and out of these a few only bite. They do not attack unless trodden on. But this knowledge does not help those who are full of fear and tremble at the sight of a snake.



Parents and husbands should, therefore, instruct women in the art of becoming fearless. It can best be learnt from a living faith in God. Though He is invisible, He is one's unfailing Protector. He who has this faith is the most fearless of all.

But such faith or courage cannot be acquired in a day. Meantime we must try to explore other means. When a woman is assaulted she may not stop to think in terms of *himsa* or *ahimsa*. Her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that come to her mind in order to defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and, if need be, die in the effort. The man or woman who has shed all fear of death will be able not only to protect himself or herself but others also through laying down his [or her] life. In truth we fear death most, and hence we ultimately submit to superior physical force. Some will bend the knee to the invader, some will resort to bribery, some will crawl on their bellies or submit to other forms of humiliation, and some women will even give their bodies rather than die. I have not written this in a carping spirit. I am only illustrating human nature. Whether we crawl on our bellies or whether a woman yields to the lust of man is symbolic of that same love of life which makes us stoop to anything. Therefore only he who loses his life shall save it; **तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः** | Every reader should commit this matchless *shloka* to memory. But mere lip loyalty to it will be of no avail. It must penetrate deep down to the innermost recesses of his heart. To enjoy life one should give up the lure of life. That should be part of our nature.

So much for what a woman should do. But what about a man who is witness to such crimes? The answer is implied in the foregoing. He must not be a passive onlooker. He must protect the woman. He must not run for police help; he must not rest satisfied by pulling the alarm chain in the train. If he is able to practise non-violence, he will die in doing so and thus save the woman in jeopardy. If he does not believe in non-violence or cannot practise it, he must try to save her by using all the



force he may have. In either way there must be readiness on his part to lay down his life.

If old, decrepit and toothless as I am, I were to plead non-violence and be a helpless witness of assault on the honour of a sister, my so-called Mahatmaship would be ridiculed, dishonoured and lost. If I or those like me were to intervene and lay down our lives whether violently or non-violently, we would surely save the prey and at any rate we would not remain living witnesses to her dishonour.

So much about the witnesses. But if the courageous spirit pervades the entire atmosphere of our country and it is known that no Indian will stand women being assaulted, I venture to say that no soldier will dare to touch them. That such a spirit does not exist is a matter of shame for us. But it will be something, if persons ready to wipe out this blot are forthcoming.

Those who have influence with the Government will try to get authorities to take the necessary action. But self-help is best help. In the present circumstances we may rely only on our own strength and God's help.⁹

ON THE TRAIN TO WARDHA, *FEBRUARY 19, 1942*

Harijan, 1-3-1942

CWVG, Vol. LXXV, pp.336-39

1. The Gujarati original of this appeared in *Harijanbandhu*, 1-3-1942, under the date-line "Sevagram, 23-2-1942".

2. The Gujarati here adds: "Of these artists the medium was not words, but human nature. We, therefore, need not try to ascertain whether what they wrote actually happened in their times."

3. The Gujarati here has: "They had been shedding, as if it were water, their own blood and blood of those whom they regarded as enemies."



4. The Gujarati here adds: "Thus we see that the brute in man has cast off his sense of shame."
5. The Gujarati here adds: "It has almost assumed the garb of civilization."
6. The Gujarati here adds: "But the woman who suffers the injury can more aptly be described as a victim of rape rather than as one who has lost her virtue."
7. In the Gujarati the following paragraph begins with the sentence: "Today every city-dwelling woman is faced with this risk and hence the menfolk are worried on her account."
8. The Gujarati here adds: "Knowledge of a single case is enough to frighten a woman who is already a victim of fear."
9. The Gujarati here adds: "Those who use their strength to subdue others get none from the Lord. Thus they fritter away their strength. Those who merge their own strength into the Lord's become unassailable."



360. INDIRA NEHRU'S ENGAGEMENT

I have received several angry and abusive letters and some professing to reason about Indira's engagement with Feroz Gandhi. Not a single correspondent has anything against Feroz Gandhi as a man. His only crime in their estimation is that he happens to be a Parsi. I have been, and I am still, as strong an opponent of either party changing religion for the sake of marriage. Religion is not a garment to be cast off at will. In the present case there is no question of change of religion. Feroz Gandhi has been for years an inmate of the Nehru family. He nursed Kamala Nehru in her sickness. He was like a son to her. During Indira's illness in Europe he was of great help to her. A natural intimacy grew up between them. The friendship has been perfectly honourable. It has ripened into mutual attraction. But neither party would think of marrying without the consent and blessing of Jawaharlal Nehru. This was given only after he was satisfied that the attraction had a solid basis. The public know my connection with the Nehrus. I had also talks with both the parties. It would have been cruelty to refuse consent to this engagement. As time advances such unions are bound to multiply with benefit to society. At present we have not even reached the stage of mutual toleration, but as toleration grows into mutual respect for religions such unions will be welcomed. No religion which is narrow and which cannot satisfy the test of reason will survive the coming reconstruction of society in which the values will have changed and character, not possession of wealth, title or birth, will be the sole test of merit. The Hinduism of my conception is no narrow creed. It is a grand evolutionary process as ancient as time, and embraces the teachings of Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Nanak and other prophets that I could name. It is thus defined:

विद्वद्भिः सेवितः सद्भिर्नित्यमद्वेषशगिभिः ।

हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तं निबोधत ॥



Know that to be (true) religion which the wise and the good and those who are ever free from passion and hate follow and which appeals to the heart.

If it is not that, it will perish. My correspondents will pardon me for not acknowledging their letters. I invite them to shed their wrath and bless the forthcoming marriage. Their letters betray ignorance, intolerance and prejudice—a species of untouchability, dangerous because not easily to be so classified.

SEVAGRAM, MARCH [2]¹ 1942

Harijan, 8-3-1942

CWVG, Vol. LXXV, pp.375-76

1. The source has this under the date-line “1-3-1942”. However, in the letter to Jawaharlal Nehru dated March 4, 1942, Gandhiji mentions having written this on Monday which fell on March 2.



361. TALK TO MEMBERS OF MAHILA ASHRAM¹

SEVAGRAM,

[*Before March 1, 1942*]²

Members of the Mahila Ashram, in particular, owed a deep debt of gratitude to him. How were they going to repay it? There must be no idle tears. The best memorial to him was service.

The soul does not die. It is the body alone that perishes. But not everyone lives forever in the hearts of men as Jamnalalji will. The Mahila Ashram students and staff must pull their full weight in making Wardha an ideal town. Clean it, remove illiteracy, spread the gospel of khadi, remove untouchability and serve the women. Then all of you can become members of the Goseva Sangh and help in enlisting members too. The pledge is not a rigid one, and, if you love the cow, you will willingly sign it. Last but not the least there is Urdu. Each one of you should begin to study the Urdu script. Only those who know both Hindi and Urdu will be able in due course to create that beautiful mixture, the Hindustani of my dream, which shall be the national language.

Jamnalalji created the Mahila Mandal in order to create women workers. The least each one of you can do is to imbibe his spirit of service and take it as your armour when you go into the wider sea of life. Most of you will marry. It is the natural thing to do, and I used to chaff Jamnalalji and call him a registrar of marriages because he was always arranging marriages. He was no less anxious than I that many of our girls should elect to remain unmarried for the sake of serving their less fortunate sisters, but such women are rare. In any case I shall expect service from you, and when married you will be two persons and will have to give fourfold. In many ways married life—if well and truly lived, not for the sake of satisfying carnal desires—is harder than celibacy.



Jamnalalji was a rare man. He was born to serve and serve universally. Nothing that he did was done half-heartedly. His diligence was amazing. He had even begun to tend the cow that gave him milk. Such was his thoroughness. He died in harness as he would have wished. Everyone cannot follow him in everything, but, at any rate, if you really loved and admired one who did so much for you, you should learn one lesson from his life. Work hard and give yourselves utterly to the fulfilment of those high ideals of womanhood which he set before you.

Harijan, 15-3-1942

CWMG, Vol. LXXV, pp.370-71

1. & 2. Reproduced from Amrit Kaur's article "Jamnalalji and Women", dated March 1, 1940. The members of the Mahila Ashram joined the evening prayers and presented their sacrificial yarn, spun in memory of Jamnalal Bajaj.



362. DISCUSSION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF HINDUSTANI TALIMI SANGH

SEVAGRAM,

[Before October 27, 1944]¹

Basic education would forge ahead through its intrinsic merit. He knew that the reform would not come by mere argumentation. It would come by ocular demonstration. If they could carry their experiment to a successful end even in one village, the battle would be half won. He was, therefore, content to go slow. It was enough that the trustees had agreed to the money being spent for the education and welfare of women and children in the villages exclusively.

Your work is going chiefly to be among women. I have always had a passion to serve womankind. Ever since my arrival in India, the women have recognized in me their friend and servant. They have come to look upon me as one of themselves. I hold radical views about the emancipation of women from their fetters which they mistake for adornment. If God wills it, I hope one day to place some of my conclusions before the public when my researches are completed. My experience has confirmed me in the view that real advancement of women can come only by and through their own efforts. I am, therefore, anxious that as many women workers as possible should be inspired to carry out the Talimi Sangh activities under the Trust.

The Hindu, 29-10-1944

CWMG, Vol. LXXVIII, pp.235-36

1. The report, date-lined "Wardha, October 27, 1944", mentions this discussion as having taken place "recently".



363. SPEECH AT SEVAGRAM¹

February 15, 1945

Q. Today the Provincial Committees have an overwhelming majority of men. In how much time do you hope to be able to replace them by women?

A. I would, if I could, turn out all the men today and myself follow suit. But I would take women on their merit, not merely because they were women. If we could find suitable workers I would certainly wish to spend the money in our hands fairly fast. Anyway, I do hope and expect that by the time the present fund is expended, women would have become capable of managing their own affairs.

Q. If you do not find suitable women workers, why should not the Fund be used to train them up?

A. That is exactly our object and it is for that purpose that you are all here. But everything must be done in a way befitting the memory of her in whose name the Fund has been collected.

Q. What is to be done in a province like Sind where it is too unsafe for any woman to venture out and work in the villages?

A. So long as women do not come forward, it goes without saying that men have to work in their place. But I have no doubt that you should be able to find women to go to work in the villages. Muslim women at any rate should have nothing to fear in Sind. Anyway the worst that can happen to a woman is that she might lose her life. I am convinced that no one can molest a woman if she has the determination and will to resist and is not afraid of dying. I know of a young missionary girl who went all alone in the midst of Negroes in the wilds of Africa. Yet she was not afraid and no one ever cast an evil eye on her. We have such women amongst us also. One of them was with me only two days ago. She went to Dacca all alone when Hindus and Muslims had run



amok. No one dared to touch her. To enable women to shed their cowardice and to face danger undaunted should in fact be one of the results of our activity under the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund scheme.

The Hitavada, 20-2-1945

CWVG, Vol. LXXIX, p.126-27

1. Gandhiji Addressed the Secretaries of the Provincial Committees of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund.



364. SPEECH AT SEVAGRAM¹

February 15, 1945

Q. The custom of slavery of women is still prevalent in some States. Can't the Fund be used to do something for them? Anyone who tries to help these women is clapped into prison under trumped-up charges.

A. Send these women to me and I shall look after them. They can all perform an exodus from the States where their elementary rights are denied.

The Hitavada, 20-2-1945

CWVG, Vol. LXXIX, p.128

1. Gandhiji Addressed the Secretaries of the Provincial Committees of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund.



365. A NOTE

February 24, 1945

With women men should behave as they would with men. Two men would not deliberately embrace or kiss each other, or sleep together. But if there is a reason, one man would touch another, sit by his side, or sit on the same seat. We must behave with women in the same manner. We must forget the distinction of sex as far as possible. There is distinction between men and women but it should have no place in our normal dealings. The consciousness of this distinction arises either in the case of carnal desire or outside it in that of a genuine desire for progeny. Let us forget this second category. Probably one in a million may be resorting to intercourse for purposes of procreation. I have not come across any such person so far. I do not consider association with women or keeping away from them in conformity with the conventional restraints of *brahmacharya* as real *brahmacharya*.

My relationships are covered by this explanation. Whatever you may hear to the contrary must be rejected offhand. Think of this instead of being curious about my relationships.

BAPU

From a photostat of the Hindi: G.N. 5850

CWMG, Vol. LXXIX, pp.159-60



366. SPEECH AT BORIVLI CAMP¹

April 11, 1945

Another friend asked how women could go into the villages and work under the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund scheme handicapped as they were by so many restrictions. Gandhiji's reply was that he had expected that their first lesson in the camp was to learn to break all social restrictions that cramped or degraded them. He, however, warned them that this did not mean throwing off of all moral restraints. There was at present a woeful deterioration of moral standards in society among men. Even those who talked loudly about enforcing monogamy through law did not practise it themselves. The same tendency was beginning to manifest itself among women. He had known educated girls who thought nothing of marrying men having a living wife. He called this degradation of womanhood. Such views could not be defended under the pretence of banishing social superstitions or vice. Did the emancipation of women mean that they should imitate men in that respect? Certainly not. India could never win swaraj, certainly not the swaraj of his conception, by following that path.

Uttermost moral purity was the first requisite for establishing social freedom. No one who lacked moral purity was qualified to lead a crusade against evil social restrictions.

The Bombay Chronicle, 13-4-1945

CWMMG, Vol. LXXIX, pp.365-66

1. The camp was organized by Mridula Sarabhai under the auspices of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund.



367. LETTER TO SUSHILA SHARMA

SIMLA,

June 26, 1945

CHI. SUSHILA,

How can I advise you? These are my views: These days educated men take advantage of the blind faith of women. Truthful women will give up their immoral and unfaithful husbands. Even educated women do not have self-respect and do not keep away from licentiousness. A woman indulging in lechery is certainly lecherous but the one who puts up with lechery is also lecherous. If you can take anything from this you are welcome.

Blessings from

BAPU

SHRI SUSHILA SHARMA

BENARES

From a copy of the Hindi: Pyarelal Papers. Courtesy: Pyarelal

CWMG, Vol. LXXX, p.372



368. LETTER TO LALMANSINGH

SIMLA,

July 1, 1945

BHAI LALMANSINGH,

Balvantsinha has written to me about you. I would like to meet you if I make a halt at Delhi. However, it seems I shall not be stopping in Delhi. How, then, can we meet? I have already written¹ to you to persuade Hoshiari and take her with you. Hoshiari's children should be allowed to stay with her. One of our bad practices is that we suppress women while men have their freedom. What would you have done if she had been a boy? But I do not wish to try and convince you more fully through a letter. You can do this: come along with me when I leave Delhi. I will write to you when something is decided about my departure.

Blessings from

BAPU

From a copy of the Hindi: Pyarelal Papers. Courtesy: Pyarelal

CWMMG, Vol. LXXX, p.392

1. *Vide CWMMG, Vol. LXXX, pp.318-9*



369. A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY¹

September 10, 1945

Woman is not helpless. She must never regard herself as weaker than man. She should not, therefore, beg for any man's mercy, nor depend on him.

Bapuke Ashirvad: Rozke Vichar, pp.240-346 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXI, p.459

1. At the request of Anand T. Hingorani and to comfort him Gandhiji had started the practice of writing a thought daily from November 20, 1944. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. LXXVIII.



370. LETTER TO KUSUM

November 8, 1945

CHI. KUSUM,

Kusum is written in quotes: that means it is not your real name. Why are you so distressed over your widowhood? A true widow does not believe that because the body of her husband has perished, the soul has also perished. A woman is married not to a human frame but to the soul which resides in it. That is precisely the reason why widow remarriage is taboo. That is why your lamenting, thinking of committing suicide and so on are contrary to dharma and justice. Your duty is to serve, giving the first place to spinning. Learn the processes preceding and following spinning. Also study the science of the charkha so that you can understand properly the significance of spinning. You have not stated your age and your education.

Blessings from

BAPU

KUSUMBEHN

C/o SHRI RAJENDRA KUMAR AGRAWAL

PANNALAL ROAD

ALLAHABAD

From a copy of the Hindi: Pyarelal Papers. Courtesy: Pyarelal

CWMG, Vol. LXXXII, p.49



371. DISCUSSION WITH CONGRESS WORKERS¹

MAHISHADAL,

[On or after December 25, 1945]²

As an instance of the infinitely greater efficacy of the non-violent technique as compared to the technique of coercion, he mentioned the case of Bardoli. In Midnapore whilst they succeeded in capturing a few symbols of power in the initial stages, they could not retain the fruits of their success. But in Bardoli the satyagrahis were able fully to retain the gains of their struggle.

Moreover, you have seen that all your bravery could not prevent the violation of women. Now that is intolerable. No one should be able to cast an evil eye upon them. This requires inculcation of a higher form of bravery, i.e., that of non-violence which can hurl defiance at death and against which the power of the aggressor cannot prevail. This is what I am trying to do. It may take time. It takes a long time to infuse this kind of higher courage among the millions. Whether this kind of non-violence will ever come into play or not I do not know. But you who have had training in non-violence for all these years ought to realize that in your hands non-violence should show all the brilliance that is inherent in it.

Harijan, 17-2-1946

CWMG, Vol. LXXXII, p.279

1. Extracted from Pyarelal's "Non-violent Technique and Parallel Government".

2. Gandhiji was in Mahishadal from December 25 to 30.



372. TALK WITH PEOPLE¹

MAHISHADAL,

December 29, 1945

Gandhiji replied that he had been asked the same question² in 1920 and 1921 and he could only repeat the reply which he gave then. The question betrayed ignorance of non-violence and also of swaraj of his conception. He did not want swaraj at the cost of women's honour. If what passed as non-violence did not enable them to protect the honour of women or if it did not enable the women to protect their own honour, it was not non-violence.

Believe me, it is something quite different.

And he described what he had written in *Hind Swaraj*³ in 1909. Gandhiji observed that experience had added force to the argument.

After all who protected Sita from Ravana? The poet tells us that her purity was such that Ravana dared not compass his end without her consent.

He warned them in the end that if anybody came to him with the plea that they could not protect the honour of their womenfolk because they had taken the vow of non-violence, he would give them no quarter. Non-violence should never be used as a shield for cowardice. It was a weapon of the brave. He would rather they died fighting violently than became helpless witnesses to such atrocities. A truly non-violent man would never live to tell the tale of such atrocities. He would have laid down his life on the spot in non-violent resistance.

Harijan, 10-2-1946

CWVG, Vol. LXXXII, p.302



1. Extracted from Sushila Nayyar's "Non-violence and Molestation of Women". On the night of the 29th Gandhiji met about 200 men and women of Mahishadal and neighbouring villages including local workers and victims of police and military atrocities during the 1942 movement.
2. The question was whether they were expected to remain non-violent even when their womenfolk were molested.
3. *Vide CWMG, Vol. X.*



373. DISCUSSION WITH CONGRESS WORKERS

January 1, 1946

Gandhiji's advice to ladies was that they could serve the country even by doing household duties. Generally, they hankered after making their daughters fit for marriage and sons for earning. Such families could not be said to be serving the country. Married men and women could give much time for the service of the country even after looking after their children and doing household duties. Instead, they passed their days in enjoyment of life and thus ended the span of life. There were some who were so addicted to pleasure that they used contraceptives.

Asked how women whose husbands were imprisoned could serve the country, Gandhiji said that they should no doubt spin. But this might not be sufficient for their living. They should take to some means of earning money. They could still work for the country. Under no circumstances, Gandhiji emphasized, should women earn their livelihood by sacrificing their honesty and purity. Mahatmaji was faced with the problem of spending annually one crore and 25 lakhs of rupees of the Kasturba Fund. Although he was trying hard to utilize the money in the best possible way still enough women workers could not be found.

Gandhiji advised women living in towns to serve the villages. He appealed to them to search their hearts whether they were really ready and then begin work when they found response in their hearts.

Replying to the question whether girl students should have a separate organization, Gandhiji said although the life of men and women was not quite different so long a woman remained a woman there might be necessity for a separate organization for their work. In his Ashram men and women lived together and worked together, still there might be such necessity.



Discussing the constructive programme, Gandhiji said that besides the charkha there were several other items in his fifteen fold programme and women could take to any of them as they liked. Women could take a large share in the freedom movement of the country as they always had done specially in Midnapor and other places of India during the Salt Satyagraha. So he thought that it was needless to question what share the women could take in national movement.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 3-1-1946

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXII, pp.325-26



374. SPEECH AT KASTURBA MEMORIAL COMMITTEE MEETING¹

GAUHATI,

January 11, 1946

Addressing the gathering, Gandhiji explained the aims and objects of Kasturba Memorial Trust which had been started² during the period when he was in jail. Later on he lent a hand in framing the Trust of the Fund.³ The idea behind the whole scheme of Kasturba Trust had been to make women self-reliant and self-sufficient. This did not mean that men would go down, but if womenfolk improved and raised themselves up, men would automatically be raised higher. It is good that in India there were no quarrels between the menfolk and the womenfolk as existed in other countries. But that did not mean that the condition of Indian women was better than those of European countries. If the resources of Assam could be utilized, then the face of Assam could be changed. So much time was wasted in useless and idle talk. If they kept a diary of their work for the 24 hours, then they would know it. If they could utilize only a portion of the time they wasted for constructive work, there would be a wonderful improvement in their condition. In Assam *muga* industry was one through which people could change their conditions considerably and thus could do immense service to the cause of their country.

He knew that quite a number of ladies had come merely to see him. But he could tell them that if they could devote all their strength to the execution of his constructive programme they would be immensely benefited.⁴

Gandhiji emphasized that beauty lay not in ornaments or fine clothes but in doing something good and in applying oneself to doing some service to others.

Replying to certain questions, Gandhiji said that the relation between the Congress and the Kasturba Memorial Trust was nothing but at the same time



everything. If Congressmen took interest, the relation was there. If not, there was no relation.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 13-1-1946, and *The Hindu*, 13-1-1946

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXII, p.402

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1. This was held at Sarania Ashram to seek Gandhiji's advice on uplift of women.
 2. On March 18, 1944.
 3. In 1944; *vide* CWMMG, Vol. LXXVII.
 4. What follows is reproduced from *The Hindu*, 13-1-1946.



375. ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS AT CONSTRUCTIVE WORKERS' CONFERENCE, MADRAS

January 27, 1946

Mahatma Gandhi said that many women enquired of him about the nature of work they might do. He had been telling repeatedly, and he would say again that women should go to villages and work there. They must attend to the improvement of the condition of the village womenfolk. They must attend to the health and sanitation of the villages and to the education and culture of the womenfolk. All these should be done in a spirit of love and service and not as a mere formality.

Replying to a question relating to parliamentary programme, Mahatma Gandhi said that the question of entering legislatures was a small matter. Only a limited number of women could engage themselves in this work, whereas the constructive programme provided scope for all of them. Mahatma Gandhi added that he had no objection to women standing for election to legislatures; but they must enter the legislatures with the idea of serving the people, always keeping in mind the principle of truth and non-violence. But how many of them would be able to enter the legislatures in a spirit of service? They must also have a clear idea beforehand as to what they would do inside the legislatures. The parliamentary programme was like building from the top. Their aim must be to build from below so that the foundation would be strong and the structure good. If any mistake occurred while building from the bottom, it could be rectified immediately, and the harm done would not be much. On the other hand, if a mistake was committed in the other programme, the entire structure might collapse and the whole country stood to lose thereby.

In reply to another question, Mahatma Gandhi said that the wife or dependent of a Government servant could do national work, provided she was ready to do so without fear of her property being confiscated or the education of her children



suffering. If any woman thought that by doing constructive national work her children stood to lose privileges they might otherwise get from the Government, she should not undertake the work.

He said that this sphere of work was large and all were welcome. It was the constructive programme that was responsible for creating an awakening in the country. It was only through constructive programme that they would be able to retain their freedom when it was won. The important part of the constructive programme was to develop purity of body and mind and to educate their children according to the Nayee Talim or New Education. Thereby their girls and boys would grow into self-supporting and independent citizens. They wanted many workers to go out into the villages and work among the people. Educated women should make it a point to get into villages and teach the children to read and write and to lead clean lives. If these things were done, the constructive programme would have achieved its purpose.

If they had a capital of one crore of rupees, they should be able to multiply it and not allow themselves to squander away what they had. All of them were aware that he would not allow even a pie being spent unnecessarily. The constructive programme, if correctly followed, would not only pay its way but also add to the capital. Therein lay its greatness.

The Hindu, 29-1-1946

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.38-39



376. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, MADRAS¹

January 29, 1946

Addressing the gathering, Gandhiji called for silence, observing that unless they kept silent, they would not be able to hear him. As there was no appreciable reduction in the noise coming from the fringes of the vast gathering, Mahatmaji called for *bhajan*.²

He said that he had received a purse containing about Rs.10,000 from the Maharani of Vizianagaram, on behalf of the ladies of Madras, for which he was thankful. The Rani Saheba had told him that on account of the shortage of time, more could not be collected, but had promised to raise the amount to Rs. one lakh within three months. The vast gathering before him was witness to that promise. If the Maharani was not able to collect the entire balance within that period, Mahatmaji was certain she would make good the deficit from her own pocket. But that would not please him. It was his desire that his sisters residing in all the four linguistic parts of this Province should contribute and see to it that the fund reached the figure of Rs. one lakh.

Explaining what he proposed to do with the money, Gandhiji said that he was not going to devote the entire sum for work among women. He proposed to give a portion of it to the Hindi Prachar Sabha for the spread of Hindustani among women, a portion to Harijan work and the balance for important work for the uplift of women. He had seen many girls taking their degrees at the Hindustani Convocation. He was not satisfied with their number. He would like to see crores of women studying Hindustani in South India. All of them were aware what a “greedy” person he was in the matter of collecting funds for specific purposes. He was never satisfied with small purses. He wanted crores so that he could spend the money on deserving causes. The sum of Rs. one lakh was not a big thing for the women of Madras Presidency to



contribute. Women liked to decorate themselves with so many unnecessary things. They could avoid so much waste and contribute to good causes.

Gandhiji remarked that the Maharani had taken pity on him as sunlight was falling severely on him.³ Resuming his speech, Mahatma Gandhi said that he saw women wearing a number of ornaments. He would prefer to see them dressed in khaddar rather than bedecked with ornaments. After all, character was the most important thing for women. It was ignorance that led them to wear ornaments. The simplicity of Sita was an example before them. In spite of carrying her away to Lanka, Ravana dared not lay his hands on her. Why was it? It was because of the character of Sita. India was a glorious country, full of such great examples. The glory of Hindustan was in the hands of Indian womanhood. Dusshasana was unable to put Draupadi to shame, though the Pandavas were unable to come to her rescue. It was her character that made the Lord come to her rescue. Swaraj or Ramarajya was after all a small thing. It was the *tejas*⁴ of Hindustan that mattered. If the womanhood of India attained her complete *tejas*, the foreigner would not be here. Therefore he would impress upon them that their real asset and ornament was character and not dresses and jewels.

Finally Gandhiji spoke about untouchability and said that some of them could not drink even water given by a Harijan. Not only that, they would not give water to a Harijan in a pot. They would pour water only into his hand. This attitude should go. Other differences like Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi should also go. They should strive for unity and that unity could be achieved early by all of them speaking a common language, Hindustani.

Glancing at his watch, Mahatmaji said that it was time for him to leave. He would, therefore, request them to excuse him, if he could not speak more.

The Hindu, 31-1-1946



CWMMG, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.51-52

1. The report said: “Mahatma Gandhi and party arrived at the pandal at 4.35 p.m. He was conducted to the dais by the Maharani of Vizianagaram, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Mrs. Ambujammal and others. He was presented with khadi garlands by a number of children.”
2. According to the report, “two women sang *Raghupati Raghava Rajaram* and the audience joined in the chorus, marking time with hands.”
3. Here the speech was interrupted, while Gandhiji shifted his seat.
4. Literally, “brightness”; here it refers to brightness of purity of character.



377. SPEECH AT GOLDEN ROCK¹

[February 2, 1946]²

The workers, Gandhiji said, were possessed of real wealth, for wealth really was not money but the capacity to produce goods. Money alone could produce no goods, only labour could. He wanted the workers to realize their strength and work for progress on the lines of truth, ahimsa and unity. He was confident that he carried with him their good wishes and sympathy in his pilgrimage to Madura. Addressing the women in the gathering, Gandhiji said that during the days of the Salt Satyagraha Campaign, women gave proof of their patriotism and showed themselves as not a whit behind men. They should represent in themselves the essence of truth and ahimsa.³

The Hindu, 4-2-1946

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIII, p.80

1. According to the report, "some ten thousand men and women mostly of the working classes sat in absolute silence and order."

2. From *The Hindu*, 3-2-1946, which reported that Gandhiji's Special reached Trichinopoly at 1.30 p.m. on this date, "after reception at Srirangam and Golden Rock".

3. *Vide* also "Some Labour Questions", CWMG, Vol. LXXXIII pp.100-3.



378. SPEECH AT KASTURBA GANDHI NATIONAL MEMORIAL

TRUST WOMEN AGENTS' MEETING, URULI-KANCHAN¹

[On or after March 28, 1946]²

Tracing his line of thought, Gandhiji explained how it was women's work, and how he had felt he must make women shoulder the responsibility of it. In no other organization, not even in the Congress, had such a tremendous responsibility been thrown on women.

The Agent's post throws all the burden of work on her in her area. It is immense but given the industry and intelligence not only will the work grow but the Agent herself will grow in stature. She is there to serve and to give, not to possess. By this giving she will become the people's trusted servant. This is the royal road to democracy.

Gandhiji gave them a clear answer in respect to political work such as volunteering at polling booths. They were not there for that purpose. It was perfectly possible for them not to be in the Congress and yet be of it as he was himself. The work before them was to make women fit to take their place in society. If they succeeded in teaching them the correct way of life, they would have taught them all they needed. Today they were steeped in the Stygian darkness of ignorance and superstition. With the removal of that, women would make freedom worth-while.

He cited the good example of Kanu Gandhi who had said that in his camp, soon to be started, it would be his aim to teach the students how to battle against famine by tilling the ground, scavenging, cooking, bringing their own expenses with them, so that they need not be a liability on anyone. Women have to work in famine areas with this ideal. It is ours to mitigate, not to aggravate the burden.



Asked as to what work he would lay most emphasis on, so far as women were concerned, Gandhiji felt that sanitation and hygiene, owing to the lack of knowledge of which our people suffered so greatly, should take first place. Then there were evil customs which had to go, the useless expenditure on jewellery; and he made everyone laugh by his graphic description of a much bejewelled woman patient with a huge nose ring, earrings, necklace, bracelets and anklets complete who had visited him as a patient that very morning! It was hard to know what should come first. "Really all work in its own place is of equal importance." There is the very great necessity of teaching women the care and upbringing of children, discipline in their own lives in every department including eating. He placed maternity almost last in comparison with the above mentioned. But nothing could be achieved without friendship with the women. That was the first and basic desideratum.

The pay of workers had caused much discussion. For Gandhiji it was the spirit of the worker that meant everything. Inasmuch as the labourer was worthy of his hire, a decent living wage must be paid; but it was the work and not the pay that should attract.

Were the women to be given the wheel as a revolutionary weapon as, he had said it was, in the hands of a Jawaharlal? The answer was 'No'. How could it be such in the hands of an ignorant woman? But if every woman in India span, then a silent revolution would certainly be created of which a Jawaharlal could make full use. Unless steam generated was put to proper use, the engine would not run and the person generating the steam might himself be scalded by it even unto death.

Amongst the members were some staunch feminists who were anxious for women alone to run the show. To them Gandhiji said that the men who were there were serving the memory of one who was instinctively a village woman. Long before he himself had taken to village life as being the ideal life for service, Kasturba had



shown her preference for it. Her heart was in Phoenix even in the far off South African days when he himself worked in a town. The men who were honouring her memory were only serving until such time as women were ready to take their place.

I am the only one whom you may find it hard to get rid of, for I have always counted myself as a woman. I believe, I know your sex and your needs better than you do yourselves.

He said, the Kasturba Trust would have even a bigger place in national service when freedom was ours than it had today. For all would go to the winds, if women were not properly trained. He hoped that every worker in the Trust would have a great deal to give to the new government.

But we have got to generate that strength within us. We may not be frightened of making mistakes. Man is born to make mistakes, but the great thing is to see our mistakes and learn from them. We should magnify our own errors so as to be deterred from falling into them again. Those who imagine that they never make mistakes are to be feared.

He agreed with one of the members when she said that it was a great tragedy that the uplift of women had to be an item on the constructive programme. "Have we yet to find ourselves?" she asked. The reply was:

Yes, indeed, and to where better can you find yourselves than by being true to the highest traditions of Indian women by serving your unhappy sisters today?³

One worker asked that while he did not advocate their taking any part in politics, what would he advise them to do in case of violent outbreaks?

There is no question of any of you keeping aloof from the fiery furnace, should such ever come your way. I shall not shed a tear; I shall rejoice to hear, if any or all of you are found to have laid down your lives in trying to quell the disturbance. To be



killed but never to kill is the law that governs us, and women should surely excel in this field.

Harijan, 14-4-1946 and 28-4-1946

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.331-33

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1. This is extracted from Amrit Kaur's "Inspiring for Women". Amrit Kaur explains: "Uruli village... was the meeting place of all the women Agents so far appointed by the Kasturba Trust to organize and supervise work in the different Provinces. ... When Thakkar Bapa suggested to Gandhiji that an Agents' meeting would be advisable, Gandhiji welcomed the idea.... As Agents they had been asked, why Gandhiji who talked of democracy should have been party to the appointment of single persons to run the work of Province instead of the originally formed committees."
 2. *Vide* "Kasturba Smarak Trust", Item 380, p. 368.
 3. What follows is extracted from Amrit Kaur's "The Lesson of the Cross" published on April 28, 1946.



379. QUESTION BOX

Q. We find that the Congress is reluctant to select women representatives on a large scale for elective bodies. It is surely just and necessary that more women are taken into the various bodies. How would you deal with the question?

A. I am not enamoured of equality or any other proportion in such matters. Merit should be the only test. Seeing, however, that it has been the custom to decry women, the contrary custom should be to prefer women, merit being equal, to men even if the preference should result in men being entirely displaced by women. It would be a dangerous thing to insist on membership on the ground merely of sex. Women and for that matter any group should disdain patronage. They should seek justice, never favours. Therefore the proper thing is for women as indeed for men to advance the spread not of English or Western education among them, but such education on general lines through their provincial languages as will fit them for the numerous duties of citizenship. For men to take a lead in this much-needed reform would be not a matter of favour but a simple act of belated justice due to women.

URULI [-KANCHAN], MARCH 30, 1946

Harijan, 7-4-1946

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXIII, p.338



380. KASTURBA SMARAK TRUST

There were two meetings at Uruli-Kanchan: on the 28th, 29th and 30th March; one of the Agents¹ of this Trust and the other of the Executive. The meeting of the Agents was the first of its kind. The Agents had many interesting questions. Why could not the Agents be members of the legislatures? The obvious answer is that, if they are to do justice to their work, they should have no time for legislative duties. The decisive reason is that the villagers will have a wrong example set to them, if they have members of legislatures to look up to.

Whatever the sphere of work they choose, they should not be non-entities. It should be remembered that the Agents have displaced the committees that were appointed for the last year. If they cover the whole Province, they have their work cut out from them. If they cannot cope with it, they have to run model *shibirs*² in one or more places to prepare women workers for villages. These may be teachers, nurses, spinners, weavers, sanitarians, etc. Work by women among women in the villages of India is an unbeaten track. Men are hardly fit for it. But the women have so long remained without experiences of such work that it is difficult, especially in the initial stages. If the Agents attempt at intensity and confine their activity to certain centres, they will find the work to be simple and instructive.

Then they have their advisers. They are not meant to be ornamental. Their advice should always be at the disposal of the Agents. If they are well-chosen, they must prove towers of strength to the Agents in their difficult task.

The experiment of having women only as Agents is new. It can only succeed if they are wisely guided by the Centre and ably advised by the advisers. Much as it is to be wished that they too were women, the fear is that in the beginning they will be mostly men. The advisers should never aspire to be more than such and never be less. It should be their proud privilege to give the Agents their advice whenever it is sought.



The members of the defunct committees, it is hoped, will never feel that they have been displaced for any other reason save the patent and potent one of manning the organization with women from top to bottom. The secret of success in this as in any other organization lies in the spirit of service actuating its every limb and self being subordinated to the organization.

ON THE TRAIN TO DELHI, *MARCH 31, 1946*

Harijan, 7-4-1946

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.341-42

1. *Vide CWMG*, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.331-3.

2. Camps.



381. WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?¹

I am glad to read your reply² to the complaint that enough women have not been put up for elections or selected for official posts. ... Neither in the ministries and legislatures nor in local bodies is merit given first consideration in the matter of selection of candidates. Consideration of caste, community and province come into the picture and are the determining factors. The argument proffered in favour of such action is that none of these interests can be ignored. If the argument holds, what about the interests of women? ...

The above is from the letter³ of an esteemed sister. The sister's argument boils down to this, that where everything is on a wrong basis, another wrong will not matter. But, if we go on thus, the evil will grow and we shall be hopelessly caught in a vicious circle. My appeal to women, therefore, is that they should intelligently become the personification of renunciation and thereby not only adorn but also raise the status of their sex and the nation.

So long as considerations of caste and community continue to weigh with us and rule our choice, women will be well-advised to remain aloof and thereby build up their prestige. The question is as to how best this can be done. Today few women take part in politics and most of these do not do independent thinking. They are content to carry out their parents' or their husband's behests. Realizing their dependence, they cry out for women's rights. Instead of doing this, however, women workers should enrol women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them which will compel men to realize women's strength and capacity for sacrifice and give her places of honour. If they will do this, they will purify the present unclean atmosphere. So much for women.

As to men, they should consider it their duty to come out of the impure atmosphere wherever it exists. They will not be guided by considerations of caste and community, if these are banished from their own minds. The best and easiest way to



achieve this is for both men and women to stoop to conquer by becoming Harijans and that too of the last class, i.e., Bhangis or Mehtars.

Where capable women have been left out, men should make amends. It is their duty to give such encouragement to women as will enable them to outshine men. If both parties act as suggested, the atmosphere will soon become pure. Whether men do so or not, women's duty is, to my mind, clear.

NEW DELHI, APRIL 12, 1946

Harijan, 21-4-1946

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIII, pp.398-99

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1. Originally written in Gujarati, this appeared as from "*Harijanbandhu*" published simultaneously with the source.
 2. *Vide* Item 379, p.368.
 3. Of which only extracts are reproduced here.



382. SPEECH AT SEKSARIA COLLEGE OF COMMERCE¹

WARDHA,

August 9, 1946

Moreover, what they learnt through the mother tongue, they would easily be able to communicate to their mothers and sisters at home and thereby bring the latter into line with themselves. Woman had been described as man's better half. Today there was a hiatus between the thought world of men and women respectively in India, thanks to the intrusion of the foreign medium. Our womenfolk were backward and ignorant with the result that India was today like a patient with paralysis of the better side. India could not realize her full stature unless that handicap was removed.

Harijan, 18-8-1946

CWVG, Vol. LXXXV, p.144

1. Extracted from Pyarelal's "Weekly Letter". The occasion was the inauguration of the change from English to Marathi as the medium of instruction. Those attending included Ravi Shanker Shukla, Premier of C. P., and the Vice-Chancellor of the Nagpur University.



383. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING¹

NEW DELHI,

October 24, 1946

They were pained at the news of women's suffering in East Bengal, said Gandhiji. But they had so lost their heads that they had themselves failed to be considerate towards the women in the audience. They had scared them away from the prayer ground. They had occupied the place where women sat every day. It was a strange way of demonstrating their sympathy with the outraged womanhood of East Bengal. He hoped that they would see the irony and inconsistency of it. Our women were easily scared away. It was so more or less all the world over. He wanted our women to learn to be brave. His advice to them to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be dishonoured had been much misunderstood. They could keep a dagger for self-defence if they wished to. But a dagger was no use against overwhelming odds. He had advised them to take poison and end their lives rather than submit to dishonour. Their very preparedness should make them brave. No one could dishonour a woman who was fearless of death. They had two ways of selfdefence—to kill and be killed or to die without killing. He could teach them the latter, not the former. Above all he wanted them to be fearless. There was no sin like cowardice.

But there was a moral code even for those who believed in violence. He did not wish them to copy the methods said to have been adopted in East Bengal. They must have read Maulana Saheb's statement and the statement issued by the ex-President of the All India Mejlis-e-Ahrar. They had said that Islam did not permit forcible conversion or abduction and molestation of women.²

Harijan, 3-11-1946; also *The Hindustan Times*, 26-10-1946



CWMG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.26-27

1. Extracted from Pyarelal's "Weekly Letter".
2. Vide also *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p. 16.



384. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING¹

CHANDIPUR,

(January 3, 1947)²

Gandhiji said that women should depend on God and on their own strength and not on others. They should be more courageous and should have more confidence in their own strength. If they were afraid, they would fall easy victims to the onslaughts of the miscreants.

Indian women are not *abalas*. They are famous for their heroic deeds of the past, which they did not achieve with the help of the sword, but of character. Even today they can help the nation in many ways. They can do some useful work by which they can not only help themselves, but also the nation as a whole, thereby taking the country nearer her goal.

Gandhiji told them that not the men of Noakhali only were responsible for all that had happened, but women too were equally responsible. He asked them all to be fearless and have faith in God like Draupadi and Sita of the past.

Gandhiji also asked them to eschew untouchability. He said that if they still went on disowning the untouchables, more sorrow was in store for them. He asked the audience to invite a Harijan every day to dine with them. If they could not do so, they could call a Harijan before taking a meal and ask him to touch the drinking water or the food. This, Gandhiji said, would go a long way to cement the gulf created between different classes of people by artificial caste barriers. Unless they did penance for their sins in that way, more calamities and more severe ones would overtake them all.

Harijan, 26-1-1947

CWVG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.304-305



1. Extracted from "Srirampur Diary". The meeting was held at the courtyard of the house where Gandhiji was staying.

2. From *The Hindu*, 6-1-1947.



385. SPEECH TO WOMEN

PARKOTE,

January 17, 1947

What has happened in Noakhali is God's curse, not only for Bengal but for the whole of India and it is high time that our outlook was changed.

Gandhiji said that Hindu women should give up the habit of differentiating between high and low and between caste and caste. They should move with all women on a basis of equality. In particular Gandhiji advised Hindu women to mix freely with their Muslim sisters. If the women of the two communities had been on terms of friendship and if Hindu women were in close touch with their Muslim sisters, much of what happened in Noakhali could have been prevented.

Gandhiji also advised women in the villages not to waste any of their spare time but to take to spinning and other subsidiary work, such as keeping their villages clean and the water in their tanks pure.

Gandhiji also said that his advice to the Hindu women applied to the men also and they should move as friends among the Muslims. By friendly contact misunderstandings were cleared and chances of quarrels were eliminated.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20-1-1947

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.363-64



386. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING¹

PARKOTE,

January 17, 1947

Gandhiji referred to the fact that the celebration was in connection with a girls' school and recalled that Mr. Jinnah had advised the Education Minister in Sind to launch a determined drive against illiteracy. In this lay the secret of future peace and unity. Literary education by itself did not carry one far for there never had been any dearth of literary men. What was needed was education for life. Men and women, he continued, were two limbs of the social body and if one limb was atrophied then the whole body would suffer in consequence. It was, therefore, very unfortunate that our sisters should be left in darkness and ignorance.

Hindu women joined the prayer in large numbers. Why should not Muslim girls, if not women, find it possible to join the prayer? The obvious duty of the Hindu sisters, Gandhiji continued, was to go to their Muslim sisters purely in a spirit of service.

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

Harijan, 9-2-1947; and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20-1-1947

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.365-66

1. Extracted from "Srirampur Diary".



387. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING¹

BADALKOT,

January 18, 1947

Gandhiji's answer was that he did not maintain illusions and never ascribed to himself any superior powers. He had met Mr. Jinnah many times, as they knew, and their meetings had been marked by nothing but friendliness. Yet the results were negative as they all knew.

The fact was, continued Gandhiji, that a leader was made by his followers. He reflected in a clearer manner the aspirations lying dormant among the masses. This was true not only of India but of all the world. What he would therefore suggest to both Hindus and Mussalmans was that they should not look to the Muslim League or the Congress or the Hindu Mahasabha for the solution of their daily problems of life. For that they should look towards themselves; and if they did that then their desire for neighbourly peace would be reflected by the leaders. The political institutions might be left to deal with specifically political questions but how much did they know about the daily needs of individuals? If a neighbour was ailing, would they run to the Congress or the League to ask them what should be done? That was an unthinkable proposition.

On the previous evening Gandhiji had quoted Mr. Jinnah's advice that women should rapidly be rescued from illiteracy. But Gandhiji said that, that was not enough. Was the condition of the literate men any better for their literacy? Were they not, he asked, subject to the passing fashions of the political world? Germany, which had lain so long under Hitler, proved what he meant; as all knew it was in a sorry plight today. It was not literacy or learning which made a man, but education for real life. What did it matter if they knew everything but did not know how to live as brothers with their neighbours?



Gandhiji continued that if some people had committed grievous mistakes in their dealings with their neighbours, they should repent and ask God to forgive them. If He forgave them but the world did not, even then it did not matter to a man who had learnt to depend on God; such punishment nobly borne served to elevate a man. Gandhiji then said that in a book of sayings of the Prophet he had found that a man should never leave an error uncorrected. If he did, he would be hauled up on the Day of judgment and find no favour in the eyes of God.

It was not enough that they acquired the art of reading, writing, etc. It was necessary that they should learn the art of living on friendly terms with their neighbours. They should rescue the womenfolk, who formed half their numbers, from the thraldom of ignorance and superstition. Men should live in co-operation and work for the common good. For this, they should not look up to political parties for direction, but to their own souls or God.

Personally, Gandhiji said, he had addressed himself wholly to that task. He would not leave this part of the country alive if the work remained unaccomplished. If he succeeded in overcoming the distrust of his Muslim brethren, and in establishing the fact that, after all, it was the daily things of life such as he had mentioned which mattered most, then its effect would be felt not merely in this part of the country but over the whole of India: and as such might even deeply affect the future peace of the world.

Harijan, 2-2-1947

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.368-69

1. Extracted from "Srirampur Diary". The report explains: "A short while before prayer the Muslim friend at whose house Gandhiji had halted on his way to Badalkot, approached him and said that if there was a settlement between Mr. Jinnah and him, peace would be established in the country."



388. A WOMAN'S DILEMMA

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

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

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

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

A. This question requires a definite answer. I answered it in Delhi just before leaving for Noakhali. A woman should most certainly take her own life rather than surrender. In other words, surrender has no room in my plan of life. But I was asked in



what way to take one's own life. I promptly said it was not for me to prescribe the means and behind the approval of suicide under such circumstances was and is the belief that one whose mind is prepared for even suicide will have requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant will be disarmed. I could not carry the argument any further because it does not admit of further development. It requires positive proof which, I own, is lacking.

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

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

PALLA, *JANUARY 27, 1947*

Harijan, 9-2-1947

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVI, pp.397-98



389. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING¹

NABAGRAM,

January 31, 1947

An old lady asked Gandhiji what they should do in case they were threatened with conversion.

Gandhiji said that to him the answer was simple:

Religion is the breath of one's life and as no one could agree to forgo the right of breathing under any threat or compulsion, so no one should forsake his faith even if it be an alternative to death.

Be it man or woman, if one forsook one's faith at anyone's command, one had no religion. Unfortunately, Gandhiji continued, India had come to such a stage that some Indians easily abandoned their supposedly cherished faith. Religion was one's breath of life. If anyone agreed to forgo his religion under threat, he would reduce himself to a brute.²

One of them asked what a woman, whose husband had turned a recluse, should do. Gandhiji said:

Such a woman should lead a very chaste life. She should work for her livelihood. She should not hoard anything but only keep that which is absolutely necessary. It is wrong to assume that a person is a true hermit simply because he wears an ochre robe. If the desolate woman is at a loss to know what to do, she could take to spinning. I have called the spinning-wheel the *kamadhenu*. She should also chant God's name as she spins. In my opinion this type of renunciation will surpass that of her husband. She should constantly keep herself occupied in altruistic work such as sweeping the village streets, giving bath to dirty children, etc. There is a proverb saying an idle mind is the devil's workshop. There must be a similar proverb in Bengali. If we sit idle, doing



nothing, a thousand unhealthy thoughts will crowd our mind. So one should never be without some sort of work at all times. This is the best solution for the problem.

The Sunday Hindustan Standard, 2-2-1947; and *Eklo Jane Re*, p. 110

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVI, p.411

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1. The meeting was held in the afternoon in the courtyard of the house where Gandhiji was staying.
 2. What follows is translated from *Eklo Jane Re*.



390. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING¹

HAIMCHAR,

March 1, 1947

Q. You have referred to numerous social abuses prevalent among us. They are there; but then if the men are unwilling to effect the necessary social changes what can we women do about it?

A. Gandhiji said that there was no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men. It was proclaimed that woman was half of man and by parity of reasoning man was half of woman. They were not two separate entities but halves of one. The English language went further and called woman the better half of man. Therefore, he advised women to resort to civil rebellion against all undesirable and unworthy restraints. All restraints to be beneficial, must be voluntary. There was no possibility of harm resulting from civil rebellion. It presupposed purity and a reasoned resistance.

Harijan, 23-3-1947, and Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4-3-1947

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, p.33

1. Extracted from "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary".



391. NO DOWRY AND NO CHILD MARRIAGES¹

CHARSOLADI,

February 23, 1947

Q. *Namasudra* girls are usually married off at the age of 12 or 13; formerly the usual age was 8 or 9. The bridegroom has to pay a dowry of Rs. 150 for the bride. The average difference between the two is about 12 to 15 years. As a result of this the number of widows in the *Namasudra* society is rather large. Among one section of the caste widow-marriage was prevalent. But in imitation of another section which was looked upon as superior, the former are giving up that practice. What is your advice regarding child-marriage and widow-remarriage?

A. Dealing with the question Gandhiji said that his opinion was definite. In the first instance there should be no possibility of child-widows. He was averse to child-marriages. It was an evil custom which unfortunately the *Namasudras* had perhaps taken from the so-called higher castes.

Gandhiji was also against the system of dowry. It was nothing but the sale of girls. That there should be castes even amongst *Namasudras* was deplorable and he would strongly advise them to abolish all caste distinctions amongst themselves. And in this they should bear in mind the opinion the speaker had often expressed that all caste distinctions should be abolished, and there should be only one caste, namely, Bhangis, and all Hindus should take pride in being called Bhangis and nothing else. This applied to the *Namasudras* as well.

When child-marriages were abolished, naturally there would be few, if any, young widows. As a general rule he was for one man one wife for life, and one woman one husband for life. Custom had familiarized women in the so-called higher castes with enforced widowhood. Contrary was the rule with men. He called it a disgrace, but



whilst society was in that pitiable condition, he advocated widow-remarriage for all young widows. He believed in equality of the sexes and, therefore, he could only think of the same rights for women as men.

Harijan, 16-3-1947

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVII, p.11

1. Extracted from "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary". It being Gandhiji's silence day the questions and answers were read out.



392. ADVICE TO MUSLIM WOMEN¹

PATNA,

Sunday, March 16, 1947

You should have faith in God. He is the one who looks after everyone. I am only striving [to do my duty]. You mix with the Hindu women. Tell the children in your families things which promote love [among the two communities]. What you can do, men can never do. Tell your husband, son or father, or whoever is there, that he should rush to the rescue of the Hindus if they are terrorized by the Muslims anywhere in the country. Protect the Hindu women and inspire confidence in them that they are your own sisters. I have described women as the very embodiment of non-violence. God has given to woman a loving heart which man does not possess. You should put it to good use. It is as clear to me as daylight that as long as women do not acquire qualities of refinement and do not realize their duty, the country can make no progress. Women from numerous such Muslim families have come to me. So many of them are just like daughters to me. One of them is right in Noakhali. Amtussalaam is just skin and bones, but she is putting up a brave fight. She undertook a number of fasts. Raihana who comes from the family of Abbas Tyabji is just as brave. She is a devotee of Krishna. She reads the *Gita* and the Koran together. She understands the meaning of the *Gita* as much as she understands the meaning of the Koran. I believe that she has more Hindus than Muslims among her friends. There are many girls who have given up distinctions of caste and creed. My advice to you is that you should forget distinctions of caste and community if you want to be happy. It is one God who has endowed us with human life. We are all human beings, all men and women belonging to the same country. Let us justify our religion as human beings.

Biharni Komi Agman, p.64 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.97-98



1. The Muslim women came clad in *burqas*. Gandhiji asked: “Why do you observe purdah from me? Women do not observe it with me. The real purdah should be of the heart.” The women then removed their *burqas*.



393. LETTER TO NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE¹

March 17, 1947

CHI. NIRMAL BABU,

Your letter is full of inaccuracies and unwarranted assumptions. I had asked you to discuss the thing with me. You could not do it. The result is bad. I do not mind what opinion you hold, only it must be well fortified.

You should have ascertained my views from me before accepting second-hand evidence however honest it might be.

I go beyond the orthodox view as we know it. My definition does not admit of laxity. I do not call that *brahmacharya* that means not to touch a woman. What I do today is nothing new for me. So far as I know myself, I hold today the same view I held when about 45 years ago I took the vow. Without the vow in England as a student, I freely mixed with women and yet I called myself a *brahmachari* for the period of my residence there. For me, *brahmacharya* is that thought and practice which puts you in touch with the Infinite and takes you to His presence.² In that sense Dayanand Saraswati³ was not. Most certainly I am not. But I am trying to reach that state and, in accordance with my belief, I have made substantial progress in that direction.

I have not become modern at all in the same sense you seem to mean. I am as ancient as can be imagined and hope to remain so to the end of my life. If this displeases you, I cannot help it. Let me appear to you and others as naked as I can.

You have not done justice to A, B or C. You do not know them fully. Have you any right to judge them before you have taken the trouble of knowing them as fully as possible? That you may not want to or that you have no time, I would appreciate. But that very fact should prevent you from passing judgement on them.

I am amazed at your assumption that my experiment implied any assumption of woman's inferiority. She would be, if I looked upon her with lust with or without her



consent. I have believed in woman's perfect equality with man. My wife was 'inferior' when she was the instrument of my lust. She ceased to be that when she lay with me naked as my sister. If she and I were not lustfully agitated in our minds and bodies, the contact raised both of us.

Should there be difference if it is not my wife, as she once was, but some other sister? I do hope you will acquit me of having any lustful designs upon women or girls who have been naked with me. A or B's hysteria had nothing to do with my experiment, I hope. They were before the experiment what they are today, if they have not less of it.

The distinction between Manu and others is meaningless for our discussion. That she is my grand-daughter may exempt me from criticism. But I do not want that advantage.

"Experiment" or *prayog* is an ill-chosen word. I have used it. It differs from the present in the sense that the one could be stopped by me, the other being dharma could not be. Now comes the stop.

That I should take the public in my confidence before I do anything new is [not] novel to me. In the present case there is nothing new.

BAPU

My Days with Gandhi, pp.176-8

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.103-104

1. This was written on the train to Masaurhi and handed over to the addressee who was accompanying Gandhiji.

2. *Vide* also *CWMG*, p.108.

3. Founder of Arya Samaj.



394. DISCUSSION WITH WOMEN WORKERS¹

PATNA,

March 23, 1947

QUESTION: Can women take part in politics while they are working in the Kasturba Memorial Fund?

GANDHIJII: This question can be answered in two ways: they can and cannot take part in politics. If they want to serve, they should not take part in politics. There is Congress rule in the country at present (it may be socialism or communism in future). Now, supposing it is necessary to sell spinning-wheels or khadi for the sake of propaganda in the villages, women can take part in such activities. But supposing the intentions of the Congress go wrong and instead of khadi it wants to sell liquor in the villages, the *sevikas*² would certainly not take part in such an activity. Rather, they would start a satyagraha campaign against it if it became necessary. Women can take part in any activity which is in the interest of the country irrespective of the 'ism' of the ruling party.

Q. Women do not still seem to give up untouchability and purdah. What should we do?

G. If they do not give them up they must be persuaded to do so. You must carry on your work. You should not worry about the results. Those who want to serve should continue to work more and ever more, and firmly hold on to truth.

A. HARIJAN WOMAN: Nobody is willing to sit by my side. What should I do?

G. (Smiling): There are so many women sitting around you. You must forget that you are a Harijan. Things would automatically smoothen out if you do that.

Biharni Komi Agman, pp. 89-90 [From Gujarati]



CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp. 145-46

1. Of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund who met Gandhiji at 4 p.m.
2. Women workers.



395. TALK WITH AMERICAN JOURNALISTS¹

BHANGI COLONY, NEW DELHI,

April 8, 1947

Addressing the woman journalist Gandhiji said:

Similarly you should show here that woman occupies an important place in the world and she is not merely a plaything for men, that she is courageous too. Try to leave upon the women here an impress of your culture.

I would like to make a suggestion to you which I feel would appeal to you. If you like it, you may keep it in mind and try to act accordingly, otherwise forget it. I am obliged to you even for listening to me. My suggestion is that women can play a very important role in establishing peace. Instead of being carried away by science they should follow the path of non-violence because women by nature are endowed with the quality of forgiveness. Women will never succeed in aping men in everything, nor can they develop the gift nature has bestowed on them by doing so. They should neither allow their family members to have, nor should they themselves have any connection with anything relating to war. God has endowed women with hearts overflowing with love. They should utilize this gift properly. That power is all the more effective because it is mute. I hold that God has sent women as messengers of the gospel of non-violence.

Gandhiji's fair visitor was deeply moved: "If there is anyone in the world who can point the way of deliverance to womankind, it is you. ... We realize that what you have told us today is also the answer to the challenge of the atom bomb. ... Why do you not visit our country?"

BAPU: Yes, I would indeed like very much to visit your country. But at present I see no such prospect. If you want me to go there I would request you to help me by



devoting yourself to the service of my country. Try to quell the riots that are raging amongst us and help in stopping the killing of women and children. I shall certainly be free to visit your country provided you are successful in your attempt, provided a democratic government is proclaimed here and the millions of people here are as happy as you are in your country. But this is like attempting to pluck a flower from the sky.

Biharni Komi Agman, pp.169-71 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.234-35

1. Three journalists, two men and a woman, from the U.S.A. had come on a four-month visit to India.



396. TALK WITH WOMEN WORKERS¹

BHANGI NIWAS, NEW DELHI,

April 10, 1947

I would prefer women and men to work in separate fields. The work to be done among women is so much that sometimes owing to paucity of women workers men have to work in organizations meant exclusively for women. Our society has shown gross negligence towards women. We desperately need intelligent and service-minded women workers to work among them. However, I would advise you to keep it in mind that there should be no rivalry between men and women workers. Both are equally important and equally essential. There should be no secrecy between them. Their conduct towards each other should also be natural and without inhibition.

A number of workers who in the past were staunch believers in non-violence are, so to say, taking it lightly today. Even if people were to renounce and condemn non-violence, truth, constructive programme and khadi, etc., I shall continue to proclaim my faith in them till my last breath, for I see no other way for India's progress. No progress will be possible unless we make the requisite effort for implementing the constructive programme and learn to cultivate goodwill towards wrong-doers. Eminent persons have made experiments and invented armament but they fail to tempt me. With the increase in armament my conviction is becoming deeper that the power generated by non-violence is immense and incomparable. I have been a votary of this power for the last 30 years. I am not going to take this power lightly at a critical juncture as at present. Even if no one is with me I am my own companion.

India has been disarmed against her will. But if everyone in India cultivates the courage to face death bravely, India can proclaim that she can defend herself and make progress not through the atom bomb but through non-violence alone. Women alone can take the lead in this, for God has endowed them with great power.



Biharni Komi Agman, pp.180-1 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVII, p.250

1. The women workers had asked whether they should work only among women or also among men.



397. TALK WITH WOMEN WORKERS

GANDHI CAMP, PATNA,

April 17, 1947

You should have faith in yourselves and in God and thus build up your self-confidence and courage. Everyone frightens the timid. Therefore if you continue to be timid you will not be able to make any use of the strength with which God has blessed you, the strength to cultivate courage in oneself. In order to utilize your strength you have to realize the power inherent in you.

God only knows who invented the word *abala*¹ for the women of India. To call them *abala* is to condemn the inherent strength of women; in my view it is an insult to them. If we peruse the history of the Rajput, Moghul or *Mahabharata* period of our country we shall come across marvellous instances of bravery shown by women. They not only exhibited their bravery through arms, but by building up their moral courage they developed immense strength. If women resolve to bring glory to the nation, within a few months they can totally change the face of the country because the spiritual background of an Aryan woman is totally different from that of the women of other countries.

We hear reports, not only from Bihar or Noakhali, but from everywhere about goondas having molested or abducted women. I feel terribly upset hearing such sorry tales. I wonder why our women have become so timid. Their glory has been diminishing and for this you women are yourselves responsible. You should have such boundless faith in God, as Draupadi and Sita had. You should get rid of the distinctions of Hindu, Mussalman, Parsi or Jew. Follow the religion which appeals to you. Who are the persons who violate the honour of women? Are they not your brother, father or son? After all they are all our countrymen, aren't they? You should restrain your menfolk from committing such atrocities and warn them that if they violated any



Muslim woman it would be tantamount to violating your honour, because she is after all your sister. But today even women have stopped thinking on these lines. Instead, some women take pride in their son, brother, father or husband killing or molesting other women. I have seen a number of such cases. But remember that those who are dishonouring other women today will treat you in the same way tomorrow. As a result even a brother and sister might be forced to follow immoral ways. As I see it, this will be the outcome of the massacre that is going on. I do not wish to live to witness this. I would plead with you not to become an instrument in dragging India's ancient culture into the mire. You are only twelve or fifteen but you are all workers. If you can carry my voice, I would like to convey my anguish to every woman in the country.

Biharni Komi Agman, pp.214-6 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.293-94

1. Weak, helpless



398. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING¹

April 21, 1947

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Today also I wish to speak to you about khadi. Its secret lies in hand-spun yarn. Spinning used to be the occupation of women who were regarded as slaves. Who would pay the poor souls the wage that was their due? In the middle ages women were compelled to spin for a mere pittance. Except in Assam, weaving everywhere was considered to be man's occupation. Weaving has survived even today, but if hand-spinning is not revived weaving too is certain to die out in course of time.

If every man and woman does not regard spinning as his or her dharma, that is, does not do carding, or make slivers and spin himself or herself, khadi is bound to die. I shall not call it khadi if a few wear it by way of fashion. My definition of khadi is that it should replace mill-cloth throughout India. I do not have the words to describe the strength it is bound to generate.

This will remain but a dream if men do not spin by way of atonement and the injustice done to women does not cease. The wages payable to women for an hour's spinning should be the same as are paid to men. There should be no inequality in the wages paid to men and women. The times have changed when man was regarded as woman's master. That we do not admit this is a different matter. God has made man and woman one complete whole. One must not lord over the other. An endeavour is being made to establish this truth through khadi.

Time will come when a mill-owner's wife will herself become a worker and a carding woman. Then there will be no need for mill-cloth. Women should prepare themselves to hasten the advent of such a day.

Bihar Samachar, 24-4-1947 [From Hindi]



CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.325-26

1. It being Gandhiji's silence day, his written speech was read out.



399. TALK WITH MUSLIM WOMEN

GANDHI CAMP, PATNA,

April 27, 1947

Now we can hope that India is shortly going to become free. If women were to make a resolve, they could demonstrate the remarkable strength bestowed on them by God. And it is essential for it that you should pray daily. But today prayer has come to be regarded either as a pastime of old women or of those who have retired from life. And I can quote such instances where young men and women regard prayer, *bhajans* or discourses as something ridiculous and worthless. This has led to our present degeneration. But if we can understand the secret of prayer, we would realize its wonderful power. Our independence will be stable if we attain it through prayer. But spiritually inclined men and women should also understand the secret of non-violence. We should realize that if our non-violence is the non-violence of the weak, our independence will not be stable. And it will further prove that we cannot protect ourselves even with weapons, for we have neither arms nor training in their use. We have the wonderful and unrivalled weapon of truth and non-violence. Not only for winning freedom but also for preserving it there is no alternative to ahimsa. Those who regard us as their enemies, can be won over by love and non-violence alone. Women can easily accomplish this. Let me give a simple example. You marry your daughter aged fourteen, fifteen or sixteen into a strange new family and hand her over to a stranger; the girl becomes one with the new family or after a short while even becomes the mistress of that household. How does this happen? God has blessed her with a loving heart. She can win over everyone with her love, affection and non-violence. This is our every-day experience. Similarly in the larger context of society, if you learn to treat your Hindu sisters as your friends and try to emulate their good



qualities they will certainly reciprocate. Women have the remarkable capacity for sacrifice.

Under varying situations in life and in order to advance or strengthen your country you should learn to efface the self and meet death bravely with prayer in your heart, whenever the occasion demands it. In order to cultivate the courage to meet death, prayer is the first and the last *mantra* of the art of dying. Implicit faith is essential for it. Without faith, no satyagrahi can ever succeed. Rama, Rahim, God or Allah—call Him by any name you like, His Law is universal.

Think over what I have said. You have come in purdah but the real meaning of observing purdah is that you should guard against lust, anger and attachment. That is, one has to exercise restraint over oneself. This outward purdah is mere hypocrisy. Its observance is meaningless if one's heart is impure.

Biharni Komi Agman, pp.266-7 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp.370-71



400. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

NEW DELHI,

May 27, 1947

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

There have been equally gallant women. In one place when all their menfolk were killed and there was no hope of any help, instead of quietly surrendering they chose to die. This really happened. Some seventy-five women died in this manner; they first killed their children with their own hands, because they did not want their children to be ill-treated by others.

I would say that only when people have behaved like this has their religion remained alive whether they were Hindus or Muslims. I would say the same thing to the Sikhs, namely, that if each one of them is equal to one and a quarter lakh they should all concentrate on God and die with the cry of '*Sat Sri Akal*' on their lips. What greater act of bravery can there be?

I don't mind if anybody calls me a coward. God alone knows whether or not I am a coward. We should accept a lesson in bravery even if it is offered by a coward. I do not want to make a coward of anyone. I have not made anyone a coward, nor am I alone myself.

Prarthana Pravachan-I, pp.88-92 [From Hindi]

CWVG, Vol. LXXXVIII, p.22



401. A LETTER¹

June 8, 1947

Hinduism has denied to women the right to remarry. Therefore, to be fair, men too ought not to remarry, much less expect or ask for my blessings. But if they must remarry, let them select as their partner a widow who is desirous of remarrying. If widowers stopped marrying maidens they would be highly obliging the country.

Bihar Pachhi Dilhi, p.101 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, p.104

1. A widower wanting to remarry had asked for Gandhiji's blessings.



402. TALK TO A WOMAN RELATIVE¹

June 8, 1947

Women at any rate should think of God and His infinite power and know that His is the only real support. While cultivating self-confidence and courage, they should also exercise wisely their natural qualities of humility, simplicity and kindness with which God has endowed them. India's women were never weak, are not so even today and will not be so in future. If we think over the matter, we shall see that from the times of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* their courage has been unrivalled, and that courage has been the result of strength of character. Revive that strength of character. If the women do not remind themselves of the examples of Draupadi and Sita and display the same strength of virtue, they will never be able to serve the country well no matter how many of them get educated. If the atrocities one hears of are perpetrated on women, the fault does not lie with men alone. Women also are responsible. I know that today women have taken the downward path. In their craze for equality with men, they have forgotten their duty. Ba was in no way weaker than I; in fact she was stronger. If I had not had her co-operation I would have been sunk. It was that illiterate woman who helped me to observe all my vows with the utmost strictness and kept me ever vigilant. Similarly in politics also she displayed great courage and took part in all the campaigns. From the worldly point of view she may have been illiterate, but she was an ideal woman who had received what I regard as true education. She was a devout *Vaishnava*, used to worship the *tulsi*, religiously observed sacred days and continued to wear the necklace of holy beads right up to her death. I have given that necklace to this girl². But she loved the Harijan girl as much as she loved Manu or Devdas's Tara. She was a living image of the virtues of a *Vaishnava* described by Narasinha Mehta in his *bhajan*. It is because of her that I am today what I am. She never spared herself, no matter how ill she herself was, in serving



me. And often I have been in danger of my life. In the fast of 1943³ I may say I was nearly at death's door, but she never cried or lost courage but on the contrary kept up other people's courage and prayed to God. I can see her face vividly even today.

Bihar Pachhi Dilhi, p.98 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, pp.105-106

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1. She was one of a group from South Africa on a visit to India.
 2. Lakshmi.
 3. The source has '1942', a misprint.



403. TALK WITH WOMEN WORKERS¹

NEW DELHI,

June 22, 1947

Frankly speaking we are not going to make any progress till we have patriotism, sincerity and honesty. We are not even fully independent yet and I have been receiving complaints that some so-called eminent leaders of India are making money through their sons, that nepotism is on the increase as also is corruption and that I should do something about it. If it is true all one can say is that we have reached the limit of our misfortune. I am an old man. Why should I be afraid of anything? How long can this kind of administration go on? The fact is that we have raised our standard of living so much that we are compelled to resort to dishonest ways. We are human beings. Since God has granted us human form we should show at least a modicum of honesty in our conduct. We are betraying our way of life and that is why we are suffering. I have a few letters describing some of the dishonest means Congressmen are resorting to in order to further their selfish interest. This has made me unhappy. I must also confess that at present I am not in a position to say anything to anyone. For haven't I grown too old and therefore has not my mind too atrophied? However, bear in mind that all this is not going to go on for very long. I do not want to live to see all this. But if they go on deceiving us there will be such a tremendous upheaval that the golden history of our cherished freedom, won without shedding a drop of blood, will be tarnished. A mother, having brought forth a child, selflessly devotes herself to his care till he grows up and becomes independent. Even after the children are grown up her constant desire is to make herself one with them. Unless we have the same feeling and devotion for our motherland, many countries will be lying in wait to crush us down. You sisters can do much if you are disposed to. But to my grief and shame I have to say that women today have given themselves up to luxurious ways of living. They take pride in



going to the clubs, wearing foreign dresses and talking in English with their own countrymen. I can understand one's talking in English with those who do not know our language. But to say nothing of compatriots talking among themselves in English, even husbands and wives, brothers and sisters prefer to talk with each other in English rather than in their own language. Shall I call this our shame or our sorrow? But these seemingly small things are an indication of how little devotion we have for our country or rather of how much influence the British exercise on us.

Bihar Pachhi Dilhi, pp.192-3 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, pp.191-192

1. Four or five women working in refugee camps who were accompanying Gandhiji during a walk.



404. A LETTER

June 30, 1947

I am surprised and pained to hear that you are marrying again. What you say about how grieved you were at the death of your first wife and how devoted you two had been to each other does not interest me much. Dharma requires that since you worshipped her so much for her virtues you should strive earnestly to imbibe those virtues and fulfil the aspirations which she cherished. I can write more on the subject but there is this conflagration raging around and I must either let myself be consumed in it or discover Truth. So I do not have any time at all. You, who have accepted the path of service and constructive work, do you not know that women's education and uplift is one of the eighteen points I have enumerated? I therefore feel disposed to say that as long as a widow in our society does not have the right to remarry without fear, a widower also should observe the restriction. But perhaps it is too late now. Please reconsider if it is still possible. Otherwise throw this letter into the waste-paper basket.

Bihar Pachhi Dilhi, pp. 242-3 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, pp.243-44



405. MESSAGE TO CHINESE WOMEN

NEW DELHI,

July 18, 1947

If only the women of the world would come together they could display such heroic non-violence as to kick away the atom bomb like a mere ball. Women have been so gifted by God. If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up, they will dazzle the world. My experiment in non-violence would be instantly successful if I could secure women's help.

Bihar Pachhi Dilhi, p.354 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXVIII, p.366



406. SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING¹

CALCUTTA,

August 21, 1947

I have been to many women's meetings. But today the noise is too much. I am but a servant. I have come to this meeting because I was ordered to do so. I would like to leave as soon as possible. All the women who have come here should call on Muslim women. Women can do much work. My grand-daughter was with me in my Noakhali tour. I used to send her to Muslim women daily. It was amazing the way they talked with her. Those women used to test her also. Women should work for eradicating untouchability.

Calcuttano Chamatkar, p.45 [From Gujarati]

CWMMG, Vol. LXXXIX, p.70

1. The meeting was held in the University. There was so much noise that Gandhiji had to wait for about forty-five minutes before he could address the gathering.



407. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

NEW DELHI,

September 18, 1947

I have heard that many women who did not want to lose their honour chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great, because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honour. Not that their lives were not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die with courage rather than be forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies. And so those women died. They were not just a handful, but quite a few. When I hear all these things, I dance with joy that there are such brave women in India. But where is the place for those who have already fled? They must return and return with honour. Let there be justice at least on our side. Let us keep our hearts and hands clean. Then we can ask for justice before the whole world. I have already said that the Muslims who possess arms should surrender their arms. As said the day before yesterday, let everyone hand over the arms. I think this process will take some time but now that it has started, arms have got to be given up. We cannot protect ourselves with arms.

Prarthana Pravachan-I, pp.321-3 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIX, p.202



408. EXTRACT FROM SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

NEW DELHI,

September 30, 1947

If one believes that woman is weak, I would say that no woman in the world is weak. All are strong. All those who have firm faith in their religion are strong, not weak. So I would suggest that we should first teach our boys and girls that they are not weak. Children have their religion to strengthen them.

Prarthana Pravachan-I, pp. 360-5 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. LXXXIX, p.262



409. FRAGMENT OF A LETTER

November 14, 1947

...¹ In no other country are widows insulted as much as they are in our country. But I place widows in the category of spiritual *rishis*. I do not have the least hesitation in advising you and other sisters to organize yourselves and see that if widows are not allowed to be present on auspicious occasions, or if restrictions are imposed on their diet or dress, the same rules apply to widowers. It is another matter if a wife voluntarily makes a sacrifice on the death of her husband. But I have no doubt that the rigidity of social customs and conventions must be broken.

Blessings from

BAPU

Dilhiman Gandhiji-I, pp.278-9 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XC, p.31

1. Omission as in the source



410. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

November 26, 1947

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Many of our women are in Pakistan. They are being molested. Those unfortunate women are made to feel ashamed. In my view, they have no reason to feel ashamed. It would be gross injustice if any woman is considered worthless by society and abandoned by her brothers, parents, and husband because she had been abducted by the Muslims. It is my belief that any woman who has the purity of Sita cannot be touched by anyone. But where can we find women like Sita these days? And not all women can be like Sita. Should we show contempt for the woman who had been forcibly abducted and tyrannized? She is not a woman of loose character. My daughter or wife too could be abducted and raped. But I would not hate her for that reason. Many such women had approached me in Noakhali. Many Muslim women also came. We have all become goondas. I consoled those women. It is the men who commit rape that should feel ashamed, not these poor women.

Prarthana Pravachan-II, pp.123-4 [From Hindi]

CWVG, Vol. XC, p.112



411. FRAGMENT OF A LETTER

November 28, 1947

It is my misfortune that Kasturba is not alive today.¹ Had she been alive, she would have actually demonstrated the kind of bravery that is expected from women in the present circumstances. And whatever place our women have achieved today is due to Kasturba's courage, purity and steadfast faith. She might have been a totally uneducated woman, but she possessed all the virtues which a woman should have. On the strength of these virtues, India and I have risen high. I do not hesitate to say that the country or any of her citizens can hardly repay the debt.

Dilhiman Gandhiji-I, p.380 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XC, p.121

1. The addressee had written: "Unfortunately Kasturba is not alive today. Had she been alive and had she been abducted, you would have understood our feelings."



412. FRAGMENT OF A LETTER

November 30, 1947

I can understand the plight of those who have been uprooted from their homes. But we have to find a way out of this situation. It is truly a boon if one can find happiness in adversity. I have not the slightest doubt that, if those who live in groups behave properly, everyone's interest will be served. If the doctors, *vaidyas*, nurses, teachers, traders, jewellers, and people of other professions among the refugees help one another it cannot but have pleasing results. Camp life presents its own opportunities. If we could only co-operate with one another and regulate our lives properly no one would find himself in distress. We could then show the world that though we had lost our all, we were still fully prepared to face any calamity.

...¹I am sure that if only women displayed a little courage and freed themselves from narrow religious ideas they could render a unique service to the nation. I am convinced that no country where women are slaves can ever make any progress. I am amazed that while such barbarities are being perpetrated on women, men who call themselves brave merely look on. Look at the plight of the Punjab. Is that sort of thing enjoined in the Shastras? I fear that if we and our leaders do not wake up betimes it will be difficult to recover the girls that have been carried away to Pakistan.

After the girls are brought back it is necessary to resettle them properly. Girls forcibly abducted are not to be treated as defiled. And does defilement only apply to women and not to men? How long must I go on writing? What can I write? My heart is crying. What can my shedding tears avail? I have had long talks with Maulana Saheb but I have no hopes that anything will be achieved.

You all should take care of yourselves. I am well. Manu will write the rest. She is still weak, for in the midst of work she does not think of her health. I do, and therefore I keep fit.



Blessings to all from

BAPU

Dilhiman Gandhiji-I, pp.393-4 [From Gujarati]

CWMG, Vol. XC, p.138

1. Omission as in the source.



413. DISCUSSION AT KASTURBA GANDHI NATIONAL MEMORIAL TRUST MEETING

NEW DELHI,

December 7, 1947

QUESTION: Should the *sevikas*¹ of the Kasturba Trust be given instruction in first-aid and home remedies or should this be a different department? For instance, should the women engaged in Nayee Talim and khadi work receive such training too?

GANDHIJI: I do hold that any woman who wants to be an all-round village worker must have a basic training in nursing. That is to say she must know how to deal with and treat common diseases such as boils, malaria, scabies, vomiting, diarrhoea and so on. I of course believe only in nature cure. But these women must know what the disease is, what diet is to be given and how sponging, enema, etc., have to be given. All this is of course covered under Nayee Talim.

Q. If the *sevikas* who have received training start working for the Communist Party, what should one do? Should one ask them to refund the expenses incurred on their training? Again, if women from the Communist Party or the Socialist Party request for training being given to them, should they be given the training? And should we take in trainees recommended by the Government?

Q. It cannot of course be a happy situation if we train workers and are then denied the benefit of their services. But we must not be disappointed. If the Government sends us trainees and pays their expenses we must give them the training. And we must emphatically tell the trainees that courtesy demands that they observe the conditions that go with the training. We must not worry which ism a trainee follows, or which party she comes from. We must be satisfied if she signs the pledge and follows the rules. This is not a sectarian organization or a party



organization. It is an institution of service. We should not seek Government grants. We have to train women village workers for the revival of the villages.

Dilhiman Gandhiji-II, pp.43-5 [From Gujarati]

CWVG, Vol. XC, pp.190-91

1. Women workers.



414. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

NEW DELHI,

December 7, 1947

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Today I wish to talk to you about a very complicated matter, which is also rather sensitive. It has appeared in the newspapers. You will have seen that yesterday some Hindu women workers went to Lahore and met some Muslim women there.¹ They discussed the question of what ought to be done about the Hindu women abducted by Muslims in Pakistan and the Muslim women abducted by Hindus and Sikhs in East Punjab. A very large number of Muslims have already left India and it is possible some more may yet leave. We should now resolve that not a single Muslim will be compelled to leave. If they voluntarily opt for Pakistan that is a different matter. But the fact is that no one wants voluntarily to leave India. Why should anyone want to give up one's house and property? It is not as if they had houses and properties waiting for them in Pakistan. Those voluntarily opting for Pakistan or going for the sake of jobs are very few, which is natural because there are not enough jobs for them in Pakistan. And if their established businesses in India are not affected, there is no reason for them to go.

But what of the women? This is a complicated question. Some say that about 12,000 women had been abducted by Hindus and Sikhs and twice that number had been abducted by Muslims in Pakistan. Some others say that this estimate is too low. I would say 12,000 is not a small number. Why, a thousand, or even one, is not a small number. Why should even a single woman be abducted? It is barbaric for a Hindu woman to be abducted by a Muslim or a Muslim woman to be abducted by a Hindu or a Sikh. Some people believe that 12,000 represents a very conservative figure. Let us say that 12,000 women had been abducted by Muslims of Pakistan and another 12,000



women had been abducted by Hindus and Sikhs of East Punjab. The problem is how to recover them. The women workers had been to Pakistan to consider how to solve this problem. The Hindu and Sikh women carried away by force should be restored to their families. Similarly the Muslim women taken away should be restored to theirs. This task should not be left to the families of the women. It should be our charge. They also met Ghazanfar Ali² and a police officer whose name I forget. Mridulabehn³ and Rameshwaribehn⁴, who had been to Lahore, both gave me separate reports and told me that they discussed the question of how abducted women should be recovered. Obviously it will not do to send police parties or armed units as an escort for these women. Of course some Hindu and Sikh women workers could go to Pakistan accompanied by police officers from East Punjab to bring back the abducted women. But this is not being done. It is said that the women concerned do not now want to return, but still they have to be brought back. Muslim women similarly have to be taken back to Pakistan. It is also said that the Sikh and Hindu women concerned have embraced Islam and married their Muslim abductors. It could be true. But I do not admit that they are not willing to return. Similar is the case of Muslim women in India.

We have become barbarous in our behaviour. It is true of East Punjab as well as of West Punjab. It is meaningless to ask which of them is more barbaric. Barbarity has no degrees. Raja Gazanfar Ali says that both parties have indulged in atrocious behaviour. It is not necessary to ask who has been more guilty. Atrocities have taken place on a mass scale and it is irrelevant who took the first step. The need is for women who have been abducted and harassed to be taken back to their homes. It is my belief that the police cannot do this. The army cannot do this. Yes, a team of women workers could be sent to East Punjab and another team to West Punjab but I do not think that would be effective. I can say as a man of experience that this is not the way to do this work. This is a task for the Governments to tackle. I am not saying that the Governments were behind the abductions. It was not the Government of East Punjab



which organized abductions. In East Punjab Hindus and Sikhs were responsible for them and in West Punjab Muslims were responsible. What further investigation is required? Whatever the number—I put it at 12,000 at least—East Punjab and West Punjab should return them.

It is being said that the families of the abducted women no longer want to receive them back. It would be a barbarian husband or a barbarian parent who would say that he would not take back his wife or daughter. I do not think the women concerned had done anything wrong. They had been subjected to violence. To put a blot on them and to say that they are no longer fit to be accepted in society is unjust. At least this does not happen among Muslims. At least Islam is liberal in this respect, so this is a matter that the Governments should take up. The Governments should trace all these women. They should be traced and restored to their families. The police and women social workers cannot effectively deal with this. The problem is difficult, which means to say that public opinion is not favourable. You cannot say that all the 12,000 women were abducted by ruffians. I do not think that is the case. It is good men that have become ruffians. People are not born as goondas; they become so under certain circumstances. Both the Governments had been weak in this respect. Neither Government has shown enough strength to recover the abducted women. Had both the Governments exercised authority, what happened in East Punjab and West Punjab would not have happened. But our independence was born only three months ago. It is still in its infancy.

In my view Pakistan is responsible for spreading this poison. But what good can come from apportioning responsibility? There is only one way of saving these women and that is that the Governments should even now wake up to their responsibility, give this task the first priority and all their time and accomplish it even at the cost of their



lives. Only thus can these women be rescued. Of course we should help the Government if it requires help.

Courtesy: All India Radio. Also *Prarthana Pravachan-II*, pp.178-82 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. XC, pp.191-94

1. An Inter-Dominion Conference was held in Lahore on December 6, to consider ways and means for the restoration of abducted women.

A joint appeal to the people of Pakistan and India to restore all abducted women was made by the representatives at the Conference. Prominent among the signatories to the appeal were: Ghazanfar Ali, Iftikhar Hussain Khan of Mamdot, Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, Begum Shah Nawaz, Begum Bashir Ahmed, Iftikhar-ud-din, K. C. Neogy, Swaran Singh, Rameshwari Nehru, Mridula Sarabhai and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.

2. Minister in charge of Relief and Rehabilitation in Pakistan; he had suggested at the Conference that a joint organization of the Dominions of India and Pakistan should be formed for the restoration of kidnapped women and children to their families.

3. Daughter of Ambalal Sarabhai; one of the trustees of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust.

4. Rameshwari Nehru; Vice-President, Central Board of Harijan Sevak Sangh; President of the women's section set up by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.



415. SPEECH AT PRAYER MEETING

NEW DELHI,

December 26, 1947

BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Another matter I wish to speak about is that of abducted girls. I spoke on the matter once.¹ But I must speak again and again, for only then will the people understand. It is not a question of a mere ten or twenty girls. The number could be in hundreds or even thousands. Nobody knows. Where are all those girls? Muslims have abducted Hindu and Sikh girls. We want to recover them. In Lahore some Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women met and decided to have these abducted girls recovered and restored to their homes. They decided that Muslim girls carried away by Hindus and Sikhs should also be returned. I have received a long list of girls abducted from Patiala. Some of them come from very well-to-do Muslim families. When they are recovered it will not be difficult for them to be returned to their parents. As regards Hindu girls it is still doubtful whether they will be accepted by their families. This is very bad. If a girl has lost her parents or husband it is not her fault. And yet Hindu society does not look upon such a girl with respect any more. The mistake is ours, not the girl's. Even if the girl has been forced into marriage by a Muslim, even if she has been violated, I would still take her back with respect. I do not want that a single Hindu or Sikh should take up the attitude that if a girl has been abducted by a Muslim she is no longer acceptable to society. We should not hate her. We should sympathize with her and take pity on her. If a girl is a Sikh, in my eyes she remains a Sikh, if a Hindu, she remains a Hindu. If my daughter has been violated by a rascal and made pregnant, must I cast her and her child away? Nor can I take the position that the child so born is Muslim by faith. Its faith can only be the faith of the mother who bore it. After the child grows up he or she will be free to take up any religion. Today we are in such an unfortunate situation



that some girls say that they do not want to come back, for they know that if they return they will only face disgrace and humiliation. The parents will tell them to go away, so will the husbands. I have suggested that a sort of home should be established for such girls which should take up the responsibility for their food and shelter and education, so that they can stand on their own feet. These girls are innocent. The culprits are those—be they Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs—who have abducted them. Let the Hindus and Sikhs who have abducted Muslim girls return them. Let the Muslims who have abducted Hindu and Sikh girls return them. And let them confess publicly that they are guilty. The list I have received makes me tremble. What has happened in Kashmir? A large number of Muslims have been slaughtered. Women have been slaughtered and young girls have been abducted. If my voice can reach those guilty of this outrage, I shall ask them to return all those girls. I am told that several hundred Hindu and Sikh girls had similarly been carried away. I am also told that a certain *pir*² is holding in his house a large number of Hindu and Sikh girls. Those who have abducted them are reported to have said that they do not mean to harm or dishonour these girls in any way but that they will not return them so long as the abducted Muslim girls are not returned. This will be a wicked bargain. We should not act in such a way. We should behave like decent men. We must return all the abducted girls without any preconditions. If we want to retain our freedom we must learn decency of conduct.

Courtesy: All India Radio. Also *Prarthana Pravachan-II*, pp.241-3 [From Hindi]

CWMG, Vol. XC, pp.301-302

1. *Vide* Item 414, p.394.

2. A Muslim saint



416. A MESSAGE¹

NEW DELHI,

December 31, 1947

I am certain that no sin or guilt can be imputed to those Hindu and Sikh sisters who have been abducted, molested or converted by Muslims. They should be received with open arms and given the same place which they occupied before in society.

The saintly poet Tulsidas once said: "Compassion is the root of religion." If we do not show regard to those sisters of ours, we cease to have any religion at all.

The Hindu, 1-1-1948

CWMMG, Vol. XC, p.333

1. The message, addressed to the refugees, was released through the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND CAREER

The Indian women in the Transvaal had indeed already played a memorable part, by the fine understanding they had displayed of the purposes of the whole movement, and by the wholehearted sympathy and encouragement which they had given to their men-folk. But the time had now come for women themselves to step into the flaming breach. Like an arrow in the heart did they receive the judicial dictum which pronounced their marriages to be invalid. Or rather it was that the entrance of this arrow was but the occasion for the opening of the flood-gates of that idealism of which women's heart is the chosen home. And in what a deluge did it thereafter pour! How many hundreds were the Indian women that sanctified the prison-houses of South Africa! And how superb was the intoxication that came upon the men-folk as they beheld their own mothers, wives and sisters mock at the crucifixion of the body! Never before in the history of the world had a more signal proof been given of the power of the human soul to defy the arrayed forces of wickedness and embrace suffering in the battle for honour and self-respect. The splendour and ecstasy of it all will last through the ages.

The account given by Mrs. Polak in the pages of *Indian Opinion* of the part played by women in the struggle is so interesting that it deserves to be quoted in full. She writes:

Ruskin has said: 'A woman's duty is twofold, her duty to her home and her duty to the state.' Scarcely an Indian woman in South Africa has read Ruskin's words, probably never heard of them, but the spirit of truth manifests itself in many ways and places, and the Indian women of South Africa intuitively knew this as one of the true laws of life, and their work showed that they performed their greater duty accordingly. These women, without any training for public life, accustomed to the retirement of



women of India, not versed or read in the science of sociology, just patient, dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters of a struggling class of workers, in an hour of need, moved by the spirit of a larger life, took up their duty to their country, and served it with that heroism of which such men alone are capable.

It is said so often that woman does not reason, and perhaps it is a charge largely true, but where the elementary laws of being are concerned, woman follows a surer path than any dictated by reason, and sooner or later gets to her goal.

Every reform movement has shown that, from the moment women stand side by side with men in the maintenance of a principle, however dimly understood by them, the spirit of the movement grows, is crystallised, and success to the movement is assured.

The Western is so accustomed to think of the Indian woman as one living in retirement, without any broad thought and without any interest in public affairs, that it must have come with a shock of surprise to learn that many Indian women, some with babies in their arms, some expecting babies to be born to them and some quite young girls, were leaving their homes and taking part in all the hardships of the Passive Resistance Campaign.

The last phase of the fight, and the one through which today we rejoice in peace, was practically led in the early stages by a small band of women from Natal, who challenged prison to vindicate their right to the legal recognition of their wifehood, and a similar small band of women from Johannesburg.

The women from Natal, all of them wives of well-known members of the Indian community, travelled up to Volksrust, were arrested and sentenced to three months' hard labour, and were the first of hundreds to go to gaol. The women from the Transvaal travelled down the line, taking in the mines on their way, holding meetings



and calling upon the men to refuse to work and to die rather than live as slaves, and at the call of these women, thousands laid down their tools and went on strike. I think it may safely be said that, but for the early work of these brave women, during the middle of last year, the wonderful response to the call of honour and country might never have taken place. About six weeks after, the Transvaal women left, they also were arrested, and a similar sentence to that passed upon the women of Natal, was passed upon them; and they were forcibly vaccinated. So these brave women were shut away from life, but the fight now so splendidly begun, went on.

A few days after the release of these last women, two gave birth to children, and another, a young girl of about twenty, passed away, and a third hovered between life and death for months, but the goal was won. Today all these women are back in their homes and are busy in the usual routine of an Indian woman's life. There is absolutely none of the pride of heroism about them. They are the same patient, dutiful women that India has produced for centuries; yet they endured the publicity, and no one who does not know India can understand how terrible to the Indian woman such publicity is. They endured the physical hardship, the mental sorrow, the heartache; for nearly all who did not take young children with them left young ones at home, endured hunger strikes, because they were deprived of fat to eat and sandals to put on—endured it all without harshness or bitterness. India has many things to be proud of, but of none more than the part the Indian women of South Africa took in the uplifting and recognition of a people here despised.”

Mahatma Gandhi: His Life, Writings and Speeches, Ganesh & Co., Madras,

Enlarged Edition, July 1921, pp.35-38



APPENDIX II: WOMEN AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE

Conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi:

The ladies were allowed to join the struggle after great effort was made by them to take part in it. When Mrs. Gandhi understood the marriage difficulty, she was incensed and said to Mr. Gandhi: "Then I am not your wife, according to the laws of this country." Mr. Gandhi replied that, that 'was so and added that their children were not theirs. "Then" she said "let us go to India." Mr. Gandhi replied that, that would be cowardly and that it would not solve the difficulty. "Could I not, then, join the struggle and be imprisoned myself?" Mr. Gandhi told her she could but that it was not a small matter. Her health was not good, she had not known that type of hardship and it would be disgraceful if, after her joining the struggle, she weakened. But Mrs. Gandhi was not to be moved. The other ladies, so closely related and living on the settlement, would not be gainsaid. They insisted that, apart from their own convictions, just as strong as Mrs. Gandhi's, they could not possibly remain out and allow Mrs. Gandhi to go to gaol. The proposal caused the gravest anxiety. The step was momentous. If the decision was based on the impulse of the moment, they and those who allowed them to join might have to rue the day that it was made and accepted. Then how could they ensure being arrested without making a fuss?

They wanted to avoid all publicity till they were safely in gaol. Then there was the risk of the Government leaving them alone as being harmless maniacs and fanatics. If, at the last moment, they flinched, their prominence might seriously damage the cause they sought to advance. All these and several other considerations suggested that the best course would be to deliberately and openly decline to disclose their identity on courting arrest. And if the move failed even then, they were to proceed to Johannesburg and take up hawking without licences and compel arrest. Any hardship



was light enough compared to that of having to bear the insult to them or their sisters of not being considered lawful wives of their husbands.

Mahatma Gandhi: His Life, Writings and Speeches, Ganesh & Co., Madras,

Enlarged Edition, July 1921, pp.242-43



APPENDIX III: ALL-INDIA SOCIAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

Equally important is the question of the status of women both Hindu and Mahomedan. Are they or are they not to play their full part in the plan of regeneration alongside of their husbands? They must be enfranchised. They can no longer be treated either as dolls or slaves without the social body remaining in a condition of social paralysis. And here again I would venture to suggest to the reformer that the way to woman's freedom is not through education but through the change of attitude on the part of men and corresponding action. Education is necessary but it must follow the freedom. We dare not wait for literary education to restore our womanhood to its proper state. Even without literary education our women are as cultured as any on the face of the earth. The remedy largely lies in the hands of husbands.

Mahatma Gandhi: His Life, Writings and Speeches, Ganesh & Co., Madras,

Enlarged Edition, July 1921, pp.262-63



APPENDIX IV: THE TRAVAIL

What touched Gandhiji even more deeply than the arson, murder and loot was the cry of outraged womanhood. “It is not death that matters but how you meet death.” he remarked at one of his prayer gatherings. “To die at the hands of your brother is a privilege, provided you die bravely. But what about women who are being abducted and forcibly converted? Why should Indian women feel so helpless? Is bravery the monopoly of men?” (Prayer speech; October 17, 1946)

The question of the protection of the honour of women from criminal assaults in terms of non-violence had long engaged Gandhiji’s attention. He had come to the conclusion that in the ultimate analysis it is not their physical weakness that encourages assaults on women or makes them fall a victim to the same but a defect of will-to-resist. When a person wants to be violent, physical weakness does not come in the way of its effective use even against a physically powerful opponent. “In truth we fear death most and hence we ultimately submit to superior brute force. ... Some will resort to bribery, some will crawl on their bellies or submit to other forms of humiliation, and some women will even give their bodies rather than die. Whether we crawl on our bellies or whether a woman yields to the lust of man is symbolic of the same love of life which makes us stoop to anything. Therefore, only he who loses his life shall save it... To enjoy life one should give up the lure of life.”

But he was afraid that “the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half-a-dozen Romeos. She loves adventure...dresses...to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls. Definite rules govern the development of the non-violent spirit in us. It marks a revolution in the way of thinking and living.” (*Harijan*, December 31, 1938, p.408)



What that way of living and thinking was, he had indicated in an article setting forth the ideal of the “twentieth century Sati”: “She would prove her *satihood* with every breath that she breathes. ... by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would *refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family*, but would utilise every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating... Self-discipline, and *by completely indentifying herself with her husband learn to identify herself with the whole world.*” (*Young India*, May 21, 1931 p.115) (Italics mine).

Such a Sati would ever strive to “make her husband’s ideals and virtues live again (after his death) in her actions and thereby win for him the crown of immortality.” And since the average wife who strives to attain the ideal of Sati will be a mother too, “she must...add to her various...qualities...a knowledge of rearing and bringing up children so that they might live to be true servants of humanity...*Satihood* is the acme of purity. This purity...can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day.”

No ruffian would dare to cast an evil eye on such a Sati. “However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity.” (*Harijan*, March 1, 1942, p.60)

The answer to the women’s dilemma, Gandhiji said, would be found not in aping the manners of the West but conserving the best that was in India’s culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what was base and degrading. “This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis, not of Amazons and prudes.” (*Young India*, October 17, 1929 p.340)

The Ramayana speaks of Sita as having such resplendent purity that even the mighty Ravana, her abductor, dared not molest her though she was completely within



his power. Similarly, in the Mahabharat, Draupadi is sought to be dishonoured by the evil king Duryodhan, who orders her to be stripped naked in the presence of all his courtiers. Alone and helpless she prays to Lord Krishna:

O Lord of Dwarika, Krishna, why dost Thou seem not to know me besieged by the unrighteous Kauravas?

O Lord of Vraja, help of the helpless and the afflicted, do Thou rescue me struggling in the ocean of the Kauravas' wickedness.

O Krishna, Krishna, mighty yogin, the Soul and Creator of the universe, protect me. I seek refuge in Thee from the persecution of the Kauravas.

Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase (Second Edition), Vol. I, Book one, pp.305-307



APPENDIX V: BRAHMACHARYA

1

There are certain rules laid down in the Shastras for the would be Brahmachari—the so-called nine-fold wall of protection. Thus he may not live among women, animals and eunuchs: he may not teach a woman alone or even in a group, he may not sit on the same mat as a woman, he may not look at any part of a woman's body; he may not take milk, curds, *ghee* or any fatty substance or indulge in hot baths and oily massage. Gandhiji had read about these rules while he was in South Africa but his own approach to the ideal of Brahmacharya had not been by that way. He had come across men and women in the West who observed Brahmacharya but had never known that any of these restraints were necessary. Nor had he himself been any the worse for non-observance of the same. He mixed freely with members of the other sex. In South Africa he had brought up boys and girls under his care in the company of other boys and girls without interposing any barriers although the experiment, as he found to his cost, was not free from risks.

The aim of Ashram disciplines being to enable men and women who were drawn into the non-violent struggle to go forth into the fray with an added sense of security and freedom, Gandhiji felt that Brahmacharya that could not be sustained except in strict segregation was not worth much. It was the same, more or less, in regard to the other Ashram disciplines as well. For instance, the aim of accustoming oneself to simple, spice-free diet in the Ashram was to enable a Satyagrahi to go to his post of duty with the confidence that he would be able to subsist on whatever the locality might provide or what he himself could improvise out of locally available means, not to make of himself a nuisance to his hosts or to feel inhibited where his particular brand of cookery was not available. Similarly, if Brahmacharya instead of enabling a woman or a girl to go among and face even ruffians fearlessly—as they had often to



do during Satyagraha struggles—made her run away from duty and seek security within the four walls of her home, it would stultify itself. The ideal, said Gandhiji, should, therefore, be that an Ashramite should have “the same freedom in meeting another as is enjoyed by a son in meeting his mother or by a brother meeting his sister. ...The restrictions that are generally imposed for the protection of Brahmacharya are lifted in the Satyagrah Ashram, where we believe that Brahmacharya which ever stands in need of such adventitious support is no Brahmacharya at all. The restrictions may be necessary at first but must wither away in time. Their disappearance does not mean that a Brahmachari goes about seeking the company of women, but it does mean that if there is an occasion for him to minister to a woman, he may not refuse such ministry under the impression that it is forbidden to him.”

In other words, such a Brahmachari “does not flee from the company of women...For him the distinction between men and women almost disappears. No one should distort my words to use them as an argument in favour of licentiousness...It must be so...His conception of beauty alters. He will not look at the external form. He or she whose character is beautiful will be beautiful in his eyes...Even his sexual organs will begin to look different. (They will remain as a mere symbol of his sex.) He does not become impotent but...(internal) secretions in his case are sublimated into a vital force pervading his whole being. It is said that an impotent man is not free from the sexual desire...But the cultivated impotency of the man, whose sexual desire has been burnt up and whose sexual secretions are being converted into vital force, is wholly different. It is to be desired by everybody.”

The Ashram ideal in this respect thus involved to a certain extent “a deliberate imitation of life in the West”, where segregation of the sexes is not observed. He had even “grave doubts”, Gandhiji said, as to his competence to undertake such an experiment. ‘But this applies to all my experiments...Those who have joined the



Ashram after due deliberation have joined...fully conscious of all the risks involved therein. As for the young boys and girl, I look upon them as my own children, *and as such they are automatically drawn within the pale of my experiments*. These experiments are undertaken in the name of the God of Truth. He is the Master Potter while we are mere clay in His all powerful hands.” (Italics mine).

The result had been quite encouraging. Both “men as well as women have on the whole derived benefit from it... The greatest benefit has in my opinion accrued to women.” And this in spite of the fact that “some of us have fallen, some have risen after sustaining a fall”. The possibility of stumbling, he maintained, was implicit in all such experimentation. “Where there is cent per cent success, it is not an experiment but a characteristic of omniscience.”

This was written in 1932. The limiting factor in these experiments. Gandhiji felt was his own immaturity. “A Brahmachari is one who controls his organs of sense in thought word and deed. The meaning of this definition...is not quite clear even now, for I do not claim to be a perfect Brahmachari, evil thoughts having been held in restraint but not eradicated. When they are eradicated, I will discover further implications of the definition.”

According to the Gita, sense objects depart from one who starves or restrains the five senses but not the yearning for them. As St. John of the Cross put it. “absence is not detachment if the desire remains”; detachment “consists in suppressing desire. It is this that sets the soul free, even though possession may be still retained.” This yearning, too, disappears says the Gita, when one beholds the Supreme. Truth, Brahma or God—“not...with the physical eye” or by “witnessing a miracle. Seeing God means realisation of the fact that God abides in one’s heart.” When that happens the attainment becomes permanent without the possibility of a fall.



Researches in Brahmacharya, as in the case of non-violence, are necessarily slow. New experiments can be made only in extraordinary circumstances and such circumstances are in the very nature of things rare. And so six more years elapsed. As the non-violent freedom struggle deepened and became long drawn out. Gandhiji again felt the need for experimentation as a necessary part of his striving.

The Congress had started with an initial handicap in 1920. Very few believed in truth and non-violence as a creed. Most members had accepted them as a policy. Gandhiji had hoped that many would accept them as their creed after they had watched the working of the Congress under the new policy. Only a few did. In the beginning stages the change that came over the foremost leaders was profound. Pandit Motilal Nehru and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in their letters from prison wrote to Gandhiji how they had experienced “a new joy and a new hope” in a life of self-denial, simplicity and self-sacrifice.

The Ali Brothers had almost become fakirs. As we toured from place to place. I watched with delight the change that was coming over the brothers. What was true of these four leaders was true of many others whom I can name. The enthusiasm of the leaders had infected the rank and file.

But this phenomenal change was due to the spell of “Swaraj in one year”. The conditions I had attached to the fulfilment of the formula were forgotten. ...I should have made sure that the conditions were such that they would be fulfilled. ...I had no such prevision in me. The use of non-violence on a mass scale and for political purposes was, even for myself, an experiment. ...My conditions were meant to be a measure of popular response... Mistakes, miscalculations were always possible. Be that as it may, when the fight for Swaraj became prolonged...enthusiasm began to wane, confidence in non-violence even as a policy began to be shaken, and untruth crept in...The evil...continued to grow.



He began to look afresh for means which would enable him to tackle the evil effectively:

“There is no such thing as compulsion in non-violence. Reliance has to be placed upon ability to reach the heart. ... There must be power in the word of a Satyagraha general—not the power that the possession of limitless arms gives but the power that purity of life, strict vigilance and ceaseless application produces. This is impossible without the observance of Brahmacharya. ...*All power comes from the preservation of and sublimation of the vitality that is responsible for the creation of life.* This vitality is continuously and even unconsciously dissipated by evil or ever rambling, disorderly, unwanted thoughts. And since thought is the root of all speech and action, the quality of the latter corresponds to that of the former. *Hence perfectly controlled thought is itself power of the highest potency and becomes self acting...*If man is after the image of God, he has but to will a thing in the limited sphere allotted to him and it becomes. *Such power is impossible in one who dissipates his energy in any way whatsoever.*” (Italics mine.)

Why did he lack that power? he asked himself. The answer again was: “I have not acquired that control over my thoughts that I need for my researches in non-violence. If my non-violence is to be contagious and infectious. I must acquire greater control over my thoughts. There is perhaps a flaw somewhere which accounts for the apparent failure of my leadership.”

Did the flaw consist in his limited conception or practice of the ideal of Brahmacharya about which he had said that “without Brahmacharya no one may expect to see Him, and without seeing Him one cannot observe Brahmacharya to perfection?” There were some who held that perfect Brahmacharya such as this, if it was at all attainable, could be attained only by cave-dwellers. “A Brahmachari...should never see, much less touch a woman.” Even so they had said that absolute Ahimsa was



only for the saint and the ascetic and altogether inapplicable to the present day world. He joined issue with them: “Doubtless a Brahmachari may not think of, speak of, see or touch a woman *lustfully*. But the prohibition one finds in books on Brahmacharya is mentioned without this important adverb. The reason for the omission seems to be that a man is no impartial judge in such matters....*It is not woman whose touch defiles man, but he is often himself too impure to touch her.* But recently a doubt has seized me as to the nature of the limitations that a Brahmachari or Brahmacharini should not put upon himself or herself, regarding contacts with the opposite sex. *I have set limitations which do not satisfy me. What they should be, I do not know.*” (Italics mine).

And so he set out to discover them for himself. He had hoped to place his final conclusion arrived at as a result of his experiments before the public. But before he could do so, he quitted the mortal frame. In one of his books which came out posthumously, the following occurs:

“I cannot say I have attained the full Brahmacharya of my definition but, in my opinion, I have made substantial progress towards it. If God wills it. I might attain even perfection in this life. ...I do not consider thirty-six years too long a period for the effort. The richer the prize, the greater must the effort be. Meanwhile my ideas regarding the necessity for Brahmacharya have become stronger. Some of my experiments have not reached a stage when they might be placed before the public with advantage. I hope to do so some day if they succeed to my Satisfaction. Success might make the attainment of Brahmacharya (by others) comparatively easier.”

Woman to Gandhiji was the emblem of Ahimsa—non-violence—“weak in striking...strong in suffering”; she had come to occupy a pivotal position in his plan of Satyagraha. He wanted to convert her self-sacrifice and suffering into *shakti*-power. In South Africa, as well as in India’s non-violent struggle for independence, she had



played an equal part with men, if not greater. The deepest inspiration in his own life had been the piety and penance of his devout mother. His heart yearned for the “suppressed-half” of humanity. As he contemplated the scene around him, especially in India, a piteous spectacle met his gaze: “The physique of our girls is ruined through false modesty. We forget that the girls of today are the mothers of tomorrow. At a tender and critical stage in her development when she needs a mother’s understanding love and guidance most, she is given a step-motherly treatment as if she had sinned against society in growing up and must needs be suppressed. She is made a victim of hide-bound social rules and conventions. She can’t stir out, play, take outdoor exercise. The same about dress. She is made to follow the mode, put in tight laces, which deform her body and stunt her growth. She is kept in ignorance of the basic facts of life and in consequence dumbly suffers from various ailments through false modesty. The psychological harm that it does is even worse than the physical. She looks grey and old when she should be carefree and happy as a bird. It is a heart-rending spectacle. If in respect of their food, dress and conduct, conversation and reading, study and recreation, our girls could be brought up in nature’s healthy simplicity and allowed to grow in freedom, untrammelled by anything but the limits of natural modesty, they would rise to the full height of their stature and once more present us with a galaxy of heroes and saints such as India had boasted in the past. I have dreamt of such a race of ideal women who will be India’s pride and the guarantee of her future.” He saw no hope for India’s emancipation while her womanhood remained unemancipated.

He held men to be largely responsible for the tragedy. In the course of his social reform work the realisation came to him, he told a woman worker, that if he wanted to reform and purify society of the various evils that had crept into it, he had to cultivate a mother’s heart. And so partly to expiate for a state of things in which as a



man he felt he had a share, he became as mother in a special sense to one of them as he had been before to thousands of girls in a general way.

Manu Gandhi was his grand-niece. She was as a grand-daughter to him. She had lost her mother in her childhood. Kasturba Gandhi, during her final illness in the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp, had asked for her services; She was at the time undergoing detention in another prison. Sent for, she came and nursed her with rare devotion. In her she found the mother she had lost Dying, Kasturba had entrusted her to Gandhiji, who became her “mother” in Kasturba’s place. “I have been father to many,” he wrote in one of his letters to her, “but to you I am a mother.”

She was nineteen. She claimed to be a complete stranger to sexual awakening generally associated with a girl of her age. Gandhiji had come to have an uneasy feeling that either she did not know her own mind or she was deceiving herself and others. As her guardian and “parent”, he had to guide her in life. As a “mother”, he felt, he must know.

He held very strong views about the marriage of girls. In India orthodox parents frown upon the institution of spinsterhood. They do not encourage their daughters to remain unmarried after they have attained maturity. To Gandhiji all this was abomination. He wanted full freedom for girls to grow up and remain Brahmacharinis as long as they liked. But suppression is bad. He did not want to encourage suppression through false modesty. It was their bane and undoing. Where did Manu stand?

Girls often conceal their real feelings from their fathers but not from their mothers. Gandhiji had claimed that he was mother to her and she had endorsed the claim. If the truth of it could be tested, it would provide a clue to the problem that baffled him. Incidentally it would enable him also to know how far he had advanced on the road to perfect Brahmacharya—complete sexlessness.



For some time past she had drifted away from him. It had pained him. Soon after he came for his lone sojourn at Srirampur, in Noakhali, she had written to him wishing to return provide she could stay with him and serve him. He had decided to send away all his old companions. But he made an exception in her case, as part of his *yajna*. The condition was that she must be completely truthful and be prepared to go through any test that he might put her to. There were to be no mental reservations or secrets between them. He would not judge her in the sense that he would never put her away so long as she chose to remain with him and submit to his discipline. But she would be perfectly free to go away whenever she liked without forfeiting his affection. There was to be only one condition. *The moment he discovered that she was deliberately untruthful or had deceived him they must part company.* She had said that she literally regarded him as her mother, that she had experienced nothing but a mother's love in him. He accepted her word implicitly and decided to put her and himself to the test.

He did for her everything that a mother usually does for her daughter. He supervised her education, her food, dress, rest and sleep. For closer supervision and guidance he made her share the same bed with him. Now a girl, if her mind is perfectly innocent, never feels embarrassment in sleeping with her mother. If Manu was not what she claimed to be, he would know. He was aware of the fallacies that could vitiate the result. But there were ways of eliminating them. His definition of Brahmacharya was so wide and comprehensive ("There is something very striking about a full fledged Brahmachari. His speech, his thoughts and his actions all bespeak possession of vital force.") that it would need a super Brahmachari to fake it successfully.

He maintained that it was impossible for any girl to keep up the camouflage under his penetrating scrutiny for any length of time. If there was any flaw in him then, too, he would know. If there was no dross in her or in him she should grow from day to day in truthfulness and courage and wisdom. Her life should be a model of



discipline, orderliness and self control. There should be clarity in thinking and firmness in speech, qualities which she had hitherto lacked. The mind should be vigorous, alert, always fresh. There should be no fidgetiness, no mooning, no absent-mindedness or forgetting of duties; no laziness or mental sloth. Sleep should be calm, undisturbed, and natural like a child's. There should be steadiness and firmness in resolves and an even, unruffled temper. A joyous brightness should be on the face all the time. There should be no mental or physical fatigue, no infirmity, no illness. Above all, there should be no attachment or feeling of exclusive possessiveness, no jealousy or envy but pure single-minded devotion to duty.

It was suggested to him that in the very nature of things any result that the test might yield in the case under question would not be conclusive. Gandhiji said he was prepared for that, too. His technique had not only diagnostic value but therapeutic value also. A perfect Brahmachari is not only himself completely free from sex-feeling or sex-consciousness but he induces that state in members of the opposite sex with whom he comes in contact. If he had the requisite purity in him it should sublimate any residuary dross that, unknown to her might be lurking within his grand-daughter. Patanjali says in his *Yogasutra* that in the presence of perfect non-violence all enmity ceases. Even so, argued Gandhiji, in the presence of perfect Brahmacharya all passions should flee. His own life provided a living demonstration of it. Young girls and women came to him without fear or a feeling of shyness and shared their innermost confidences with him. It enabled him to serve and help them as he would never have been able to otherwise.

He had made experiments before in Brahmacharya, as in Truth and Ahimsa. *But this came to him not as an "experiment" but as a matter of strict duty and so became a part of his penance or yajna*, as he called his venture of faith in Noakhali. But it provoked quite a storm. One of his co-workers, whom he had taken with him to



Srirampur as a member of his entourage, asked to be relieved of his duties as a mark of dissent, unless his viewpoint was conceded. Gandhiji told him that he was right in asking to be relieved in those circumstances. In a letter giving him leave to go, he wrote:

“I have read your letter. ... It contains half-truths which are dangerous. ... I cannot concede your demands. The other points you make do not make much appeal to me....Since such is my opinion and there is a conflict of ideals, and you yourself wish to be relieved, you are at liberty to leave me today. That will be honourable and truthful. I like your frankness and boldness. ...I was looking forward to taking a hand in bringing out your other qualities. I am sorry it cannot be.... I shall always be interested in your future and shall be glad to hear from you when you feel like writing to me. Finally, let me tell you that you are at liberty to publish whatever wrong you have noticed in me and my surroundings....

Friends asked Gandhiji how he could afford to lavish his time and attention on this when he was engaged in his great mission. “They think it is a sign of infatuation on my part,” he remarked to Manu. “I laugh at their ignorance. They do not understand. I regard the time and energy spent on you as time and energy well spent. If out of India’s millions of daughters, I can train even one into an ideal woman by becoming and ideal mother to you, I shall thereby have rendered a unique service to womankind. *Only by becoming a perfect Brahmachari can one truly serve the woman.*”

That to him implied his becoming one with womankind through the conquest and sublimation of sex. He once described himself as “half a woman” Mrs. Polak has noted specially in her reminiscences of him this trait of “sexlessness” which was so pronounced even during his, South Africa days, and which enabled members of the opposite sex to shed their shyness in his presence. “There are some things relating to our lives,” remarked a highly educated, aristocratic. Indian society lady once, “which



we, women, can speak of to, or discuss with, no man. But while speaking to Gandhiji we somehow forgot the fact that he was a man”.

That trait of his had developed with time. He had ministered nature cure treatment both to men and women in South Africa and in it, as everybody knows, there is no room for squeamishness. He had extended the practice on his return to India. In his Ashram at Sevagram he very often set male nurses to nurse women patients both Indian and European and vice versa. There were no “walls” in his Ashram, either at Sevagram or at Sabarmati. He had no private life. His most intimate functions were performed not in privacy. Thus, he had his massage practically naked, with young girls very often as masseurs. He often received visitors and even members of the Working Committee while stretched on the massage table. Similarly, while having hydropathic treatment, he allowed both men and women to assist him, and any and almost everybody had free access to him in his bath. In his celebrated letter to Churchill, while appropriating as a compliment the disparaging epithet of the “half-naked fakir”, which the Tory leader had applied to him, he went on to say that it was his ambition to become completely naked-literally as well as metaphorically—the latter being of course the more difficult.

There is in India’s ancient philosophical lore the legend of Shukadeva who was born passionless, having attained complete sublimation from birth. Though he was young and went about naked, women felt no shame or embarrassment in his presence, whereas they did not feel free in the presence of Vyasa, his father, although he was old, very learned and known for his self-restraint. The reason given is that in spite of his tremendous self control Vyasa had not yet attained that state of sexlessness or freedom from sex-consciousness which is the hall-mark of the perfect Brahmachari. And has not Jesus, too, referred to those “who become eunuchs for my sake”? “There are some eunuchs, who were so born from the mother’s womb, some



were made so by men, and some who have made themselves so for the love of the Kingdom of Heaven.” Jesus, however, was careful to add that this truth was not practicable for everyone, it was only for those who have the gift. “Let anyone practise it for whom it is practicable.”

“The ideal of absolute Brahmacharya or of married Brahmacharya,” said Gandhiji, “is for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life; it is the *sine qua non* of such life.” Sexual intercourse for the purpose of carnal satisfaction is “reversion to animality” and it should be man’s endeavour to rise above it. “But failure to do so as between husband and wife cannot be regarded as a sin or a matter of obloquy. Millions in this world eat for the satisfaction of their palate; similarly, millions of husbands and wives indulge in the sex act for their carnal satisfaction and will continue to do so and also pay the inexorable penalty. Very few eat to live but they are the ones who really know the law of eating. Similarly, those only really marry who marry in order to experience the purity and sanctity of the marriage tie and thereby realise the divinity within.”

Gandhiji did not share the Christian ascetic view represented by the early Desert Fathers that “life itself was evil” or as St. Gregory of Rome put it: “if you marry you will have children and the larger number of them are more likely to be damned than to be saved—so it is a pity to have children”; nor that “by restraining sex-passion you suffer...(and) because Christ’s sufferings—and not his teaching—are supposed to have rescued the world from everlasting torments...(therefore) to join in his suffering is a good thing in itself.” But he did come very close to the attitude which, according to Gerald Heard, “the Christian ascetics did understand-though not consciously that...apart from taking little as little as possible out of life that others may have more... austerly in food and continence in sex did make possible the type of high attention which true contemplation requires.”



To sum up, while Gandhiji refused to regard marriage as a “fall from grace” in any sense of the term, or the instinct “to see oneself perpetuated through one’s descendants” to be “unlawful”, he did hold that the sexual act for mere pleasure’s sake was not compatible with the highest spiritual development. “Sex urge is a fine and noble thing. There is nothing to be ashamed of in it. But it is meant only for the act of creation. Any other use of it is a sin against God and humanity.”

For himself, it was Gandhiji’s ambition literally to attain the state of complete sexlessness referred to by Jesus. His quest of truth could not be complete without it. It became an integral part of his Noakhali *yajna*.

Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase, Vol. I, Book Two, pp.210-19

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