

**THE
SACRED
TOUCH**

THE SACRED TOUCH

(An Autobiography)

By
T.S. AVINASHILINGAM

Benediction
by
SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Foreword
by
SRI C. SUBRAMANIAM



1986

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
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BENEDICTION

Sri T.S. Avinashilingam has asked me to write the Benediction to his autobiography to which he has given the inspiring title: *The Sacred Touch*. I am glad to do so in the conviction, after reading the manuscript, that it contains much that will educate our people in the ways and means to strengthen and make meaningful to the million of our weaker sections, our freedom and our democracy.

Even though the author is writing his own biography, what the reader gets is an inspiring, participatory excursion into the cultural heritage of his or her motherland, the re-shaping of that ancient culture in the modern age by great teachers and leaders like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi, the wonderful saga of our freedom struggle and the high level of character, patriotism, dedicated service, and sacrifices it evoked in millions of our people, including our children, and a re-examination of our post-freedom problems in the light of our pre-freedom attitudes and experiences. His own biography becomes only a background canvas to portray these wider events. He is able to achieve this largely impersonal approach due to his pure patriotism and his intimate association with some of the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and its tremendous impact on his multifaceted life and work. This is what he designates, appropriately, as the *Sacred Touch*.

Sri Avinashilingam has been in public life ever since he left college as a youth: but before entering public life, he received the blessings of Mahapurush Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the second President of the Ramakrishna Order; in this book, Sri Avinashilingam often refers to this *Sacred Touch* and its power that has sustained him in all his services for the people. This book will impress on all those who are engaged in the service of our nation, whether in the Union and State Governments, in the local/self government institutions, in the professions, or in the social service fields, the need to acquire spiritual strength in order to cultivate the humanistic attitude and character-energy, which alone can transform money resources into human welfare.

Books such as these must be translated into Tamil, Hindi, and our other national languages. These and similar books, widely circulated today, will help to bring the conviction to our people that ethical and humanistic values are primary for achieving steady progress in solving the colossal problem of total human development in our country; it will help impress the truth, into the soul of our nation, of what Swami Vivekananda had said in one

of his letters written in 1894. 'They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.' This is also the truth proclaimed in the dictum of the *Isha Upanishad*: *Kurvanneveha Karmani jivishet satam samah* — 'Desire to live (the full human span of) one hundred years by performing (good) works.' Apart from his political and administrative activities Sri Avinashilingam has filled his long life of the past 82 years with untiring and dedicated activities for the good of the nation, including literary monuments like the *Tamil Encyclopaedia*, the first of its kind in any of our national languages, the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya with its multifarious nation-building activities, and the Avinashilingam Home Science College.

Sri Avinashilingam has combined true religion and true politics into one in his life, under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda's famous *mantra*: 'The national ideals of India are renunciation and service: intensify her in those channels, the rest will take care of itself.' He has exemplified in his life and work the teaching about Dharma given by the merchant Tuladhara to the Brahmana ascetic Jajali, as given in our great Mahabharata epic (12. 254.9 Bhandarkar Edition).

Sarvesham yah suhrnityam
Sarvesham cha hite ratah;
Karmana, Manasa, Vacha,
sa dharmam veda, Jajale —

'O Jajali, he (or she) knows dharma, who is always the friend of all, and who, through action, thought, and speech, is always actively engaged in promoting the welfare of all.'

The story of the life of such a person is bound to interest all who respect, and seek for, the higher values of life. I am glad to commend this book to the large number of such readers in India and abroad.

Ramakrishna Math
 Hyderabad 500 029
 September 3, 1985

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

FOREWORD

Autobiographies and biographies of great, especially of good men, are most instructive and useful as helps, guides and incentives to others. Some of the best autobiographies — like Mahatma Gandhi's "My Experiments With Truth" — are almost equivalent to gospels, imparting the values of simple living, high thinking and energetic and persevering action for *Jana Kalyan* — welfare of the people.

The "Sacred Touch" belongs to this class. It is, in essence, the spiritual odyssey of one for whom Service to Man is Service to God — *Manava Seva is Madhava Seva*. It projects, in the process, the history of our times. It also gives glimpses of modern Indian renaissance, of which, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the "morning star", Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the "dawn" and Mahatma Gandhi, the "noon".

I have known, and known intimately, for more than sixty years now, Shri Avinashilingam. Writing a foreword to his autobiography is at once a pleasure and privilege. It is also an opportunity to recall to mind the events of a momentous era, the era of India's unique Pilgrimage to Freedom.

Perhaps, Ayya, as Shri Avinashilingam is affectionately called, chose me to write this foreword because I have a special kinship with him in that I am his *guru bandhu*. Both of us were blessed (at a very early age) to come in close contact with Swami Shivananda Maharaj, popularly known as Mahapurushji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Chinnu, who was my paternal uncle and a collegemate of Ayya, who too came under the spell of Mahapurushji, took to the ochre robe under the name Swami Chidbhananda. He shuffled off his mortal coil in November 1985, but will continue to shed spiritual radiance through his Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam at Tirupparaithurai, near Tiruchirappally in Tamil Nadu, and several other institutions of high excellence. Incidentally, he was the inspiration to found the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's "Gandhi Vidyashram" — a residential school for boys and girls in Kodaikanal, successfully attempting a harmonious blending of the best in Eastern and Western systems of education.

Swami Shivanandaji must have discerned that Ayya's temperament best fitted him not for the life of a recluse but one of intense selfless activity — *nishkama karma* — in the cause of the emancipation of the lowly and the downtrodden and the promotion of women's education. ~

Born in 1903 to pious parents in a rich family at Tiruppur in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu, Shri Avinashilingam would have, in the ordinary course, inherited his father's wealth, become a successful lawyer and led a life of ease and luxury. The "Sacred Touch" of Mahapurushaji transformed him and he dedicated himself heart and soul to the ideal "life is to give but not to take".

This happened in 1921, when Ayya was 18 and a junior B.A. student at the Pachaiyappa's College in Madras. The formal initiation came two years later. Says he: "Those blessings of his (Swami Shivananda's) have been with me ever since. They have been protecting me through all the vicissitudes of life. I have had difficulties, tribulations and my share of problems."

The *keynote*, the *adharasruti*, being the author's quest for God through Service to Man, as exhorted by Swami Vivekananda and by Gandhiji — these immortals have been extensively quoted — it is but natural that the didactic element should predominate in the autobiography.

A *brahmachari*, honours and awards such as the "Padma Bhushan" by the Government of free India and the Jamnalal Bajaj Award have come to him in the course of a life whose energies have been spent, not in rearing a personal family and in the pursuit of pelf and power, but in founding institutions for giving education to the younger generation on the right lines.

Ayya is a great institution-builder. He started the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya with just one destitute Harijan student in 1930 at a time when orthodoxy fiercely frowned on such ventures. Gandhiji did the Vidyalaya proud by laying its foundation stone. Today, this Vidyalaya has grown into a mighty banyan tree at Perianaickenpalayam in Coimbatore, having a dozen institutions including a College of Education, an Arts and Science College, both leading to Doctorate, a Physical Education College, a Polytechnic and an Institute of Agriculture.

The Avinashilingam Home Science College for Girls is the biggest institution of its kind in the country, providing scope for girls' education from pre-school to Ph.D. This is also in Coimbatore.

It was for his work in establishing the Vivekanandapuram Centre for Rural Development near Coimbatore, which has adopted more than a hundred villages where the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji are put into practice, that Ayya was given the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 1985.

The building of these institutions was, by no means, easy. The autobiography has many lessons for those who wish to set up educational and other institutions. Ayya's life shows that, for dedicated workers, help will come ultimately, whatever be the difficulties.

In a work which is more concerned with events than with persons, one does feel emotionally stirred on reading the Chapter 'Early Days and Family Background' in which the author fondly refers to his parents — the pious and loving mother, an ardent devotee of Shiva, and his father who looked after the affairs of a big joint family while supporting all worthy causes.

Reminiscent of Marcus Aurelius who, in his soul-stirring “Meditations” pays homage to his parents, Ayya says: “In grateful memory of my father and mother, two high schools have been established in their names in Tiruppur for boys and girls respectively.” Intimate glimpses of high-souled persons like his primary school teacher Shri Venkatasubramania Iyer, and his uncle Shri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar who had made provisions even for his servants in his will and who faced death with courage and faith, are indeed touching.

Plunging into politics was a hard decision for Ayya, especially because the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is divorced from politics. When he sought Mahapurushaji’s permission, the Guru’s words were: “Have no fear, my boy. You have lived so long with us. My love and blessings are ever with you. And so I am sure, wherever you are and in whatever circumstances you may be placed nothing will be able to drag you in the world and make you forget Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) who will be ever with you. He is your guide and goal.”

Mahapurushaji felt that Mahatma Gandhi’s advent was “to complete the unfinished work of Swami Vivekananda.” Ayya’s meetings with Gandhiji, beginning with the first one in 1920, are among the highlights of this autobiography, especially the chapter “A Week with the Mahatma” in which Gandhiji prophesies about his end that was to come decades later.

Ayya courted arrest four times — in 1930, 1932, 1941 and 1942 — and his jail days (some of them in solitary confinement) were a testing time for him. He utilized his enforced leisure as His Majesty’s Guest to delve deep into treasures of Tamil literature like *Kamba Ramayanam* and *Thirukkural*. This was the beginning of his great interest in Tamil which led him later to the founding of the Tamil Academy in 1946, the publication of the Tamil Encyclopaedia on the lines of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and also the publication of the Children’s Encyclopaedia in Tamil. He was also instrumental in getting the complete works of Mahatma Gandhi translated into Tamil in 17 volumes.

Shri Avinashilingam’s parliamentary life spanned over three decades. He was first elected to the Central Assembly in 1934. He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1951 and to the Rajya Sabha in 1957. He politely turned down the offer of a Congress ticket to the Lok Sabha elections in 1964. As the Education Minister of the composite Madras State in 1946, he introduced the Basic Education System and reorganised secondary education.

Lord R.B. Haldane in his well known autobiography has pointed out that what ultimately matters in one’s life is not the result or the success or failure but the *quality* of the work done, the *passion* that is brought to bear upon anything that one takes in hand. Shri Avinashilingam has indeed brought to bear upon every kind of work he undertook a passion that sprang from his commitment to spiritual ideals.

In sum, “Sacred Touch” is not just an autobiography of an individual. It is the story of the author’s life-time covering more than half a century. Readers of “Sacred Touch” will find in the pages that follow captivating

glimpses of the life, trials and tribulations, struggles and sacrifices, emotions and experiences, of a great patriot, social reformer, a *Karma Yogi*. At 82, he continues to be dynamic and active and devotes his life entirely to the service of our country and her people. I am doubly blessed that I have the opportunity of offering my respectful salutations to Shri Avinashilingam through these pages.

I am happy that "Sacred Touch" is being published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Bhavan has already brought out some excellent biographies and autobiographies of eminent men in different walks of life. These include "Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna" and "Mahayogi Aurobindo" by R.R. Diwakar; "Swami Shivananda" (Sri Mahapurush Maharaj) by Swami Ranganathananda and other devotees; "Swami Vivekananda" by Carebanu Cooper; "The Life of Mahatma Gandhi" by Louis Fischer; "The Indomitable Sardar" by K.L. Punjabi; "Narayana Guru" by M.K. Sanoo; "Munshi — His Life and Work" (4 volumes); Swami Shraddhanand by M.R. Jambunathan; "Jagdishchandra Bose" and "Prafullachandra Ray" by Manoranjan Gupta; "Sadguru Gnananada" by devotees; "Swami Narayan" by M.C. Parekh; "The Rishi (Sadhu Vaswani)" by T.L. Vaswani; "Sarojini Naidu" by K.A. Abbas; "U.Nu - Saturday's Son" by U.Nu; "Gulabrao Maharaj" by S.D. Kopardekar; "The Rajaji Story (1937-1972)" by Rajmohan Gandhi; "Roses in December" by M.C. Chagla; "To The Best of My Memory" by P.G. Gajendragadkar; "Many Worlds Revisited" by K.P.S. Menon; "Autumn Leaves" by O. Pulla Reddy; "A Philosopher Looks Back" by T.M.P. Mahadevan; "Ganpuley's Memoirs" by N.G. Ganpuley; "Whom Enemies Sheltered" by R.G. Salvi and "Light Of Other Days" by Saraswati Menon. Their popularity is attested by the fact that most of them have run into several editions.

Madras

Date: 31st March, 1986

C. SUBRAMANIAM

Vice-President

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

Preface

I am very grateful to all the blessings I have received all these years. The greatest of them are the Sacred Touch of Swami Shivananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the contacts I have had with Mahatma Gandhi. Through the former, the high spiritual values and traditions of our great country and the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were opened to my vision and they continue to be the bedrock of my life, thought and actions. Since the early twenties when I met him and Swami Brahmananda, another great disciple of the Master, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have been my second home. They have nurtured my spiritual life. The close contacts with Mahatma Gandhi, from the twenties upto his martyrdom, have given me a national fervour and dynamism, which have been a source of strength in my work in various fields.

I am grateful that the institutions which I had the privilege to start have grown well in the service of our people. It is a matter of pride and joy that the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya with its various institutions for Science and Arts, Teacher Education, Physical Education, Engineering and Agriculture continue to do good work. The Avinashilingam Home Science College, along with its sister institutions, has grown to be the biggest set-up in Home Science in our country with the largest outreach of people. The Tamil Academy after having brought out ten volumes of the Encyclopaedia in Tamil and ten volumes of the Children's Encyclopaedia is now involved in bringing out the second edition of the latter. The Vivekanandapuram Rural Centre has been doing commendable work. For these I am extremely grateful to my co-workers who have given their best for the development of these institutions and through them in the service of the nation. The silken threads that bind all these institutions are the messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

My family, friends and colleagues have been uniformly kind to me and blessed me with the depth of their love and affection, tolerating my youthful impetuositities and outbursts. I have been blessed with many co-workers both in the political and educational fields, who have worked with rare dedication to the cause and great personal affection for me. I don't know how to express my gratitude to them for their love, devotion and dedication, except to pray that God bless them.

The major portion of my life has been spent with the children in our institutions. While I have served them over these 50 years, I don't know whether I have given more or received more. Their love, affection and regard have been so immense that I feel that it is that love that has sustained me and made life worth living.

The writing of this book has brought back to me the memories of my early strivings and the heroic sacrifices of the Freedom struggle. It is to share the experiences with my friends and the younger generation that I have undertaken this effort.

I am very grateful to Swami Ranganathanandaji for writing the Benediction to the book. I cannot think of anyone better than him to do it. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Rajammal Devadas who, in spite of her heavy schedule of work and travels, gave generous time to go through its pages and made constructive suggestions. Dr. H. Visvesvaran spared no pains to edit it. The English translations of some of the Tamil songs, in the book are his. I am very grateful to him for his assistance. I must thank also my typist Sri S. Ramachandran and Artist Sri R. Aiyaswamy who has helped in selecting the pictures. My thanks are due to Sri C. Subramaniam for enabling it to be published through the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. I thank all those who have helped in bringing out this publication.

Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya,
Vijayadasami October 23, 1985

T.S. AVINASHILINGAM

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Sri Ramakrishna

1. The Sacred Touch

THE year was 1921. I was eighteen, and was studying in Madras in the Junior B.A. Class.

I had heard of Sri Ramakrishna as the Guru of Swami Vivekananda who represented Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, but I knew nothing more about him. My room-mate, Chinnu, who later became Swami Chidbhavananda (he passed away on 16th November, 1985), told me one day that there was a Ramakrishna Math in Madras and that two of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna would soon be coming there. That sounded interesting, for to see two direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and brother-disciples of Swami Vivekananda was no ordinary event. And so both of us made up our minds to visit the Math. This we did on an evening after college work was over.

The two disciples were Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shivananda (whom we reverentially call Raja Maharaj and Mahapurushji Maharaj) the then President and the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission. There was a small crowd at the Math waiting to see them. We also went in with others and made pranams. They did not seem to be different from others, except that they were older and kinder, and made affectionate enquiries. Swami Brahmananda was more withdrawn and reticent, and talked less, but Swami Shivananda was more communicative. He asked us to let him know our names, the class and the college in which we were studying and the place where we were staying. When we took leave of him, he said, 'Come again'. And so it was that we went again the next evening and the next. We did not know what attracted us to him, but attracted we were, as was evidenced by the fact that we trudged for nearly six months every day just to see him. It was the rainy season and we had to wade through water, drenched in rain but that did not affect our going. When he saw us he smiled, his eyes twinkled and he exclaimed in Bengali, 'Bhaloh' (Are you doing well?). And we were immensely happy and said, 'Yes, Maharaj'. The conversation was rarely more than this, but this, strangely enough, gave us great joy and fulfilment. And our going to him went on for the next twelve years till it was ended by the passing away of Sri Mahapurushji Maharaj in 1934.

I came to know Mahapurushji more intimately when I was in Bhubaneswar in 1923. I had just written my B.A. examination, but

instead of going back home for the summer holidays, I wished to go north to see Mahapurushji. His love and affection, magnificence and grandeur of spirit must have captured me. And so I started for Bhubaneswar, where he was then staying. The Calcutta mail reached there at dead of night, even as it does today, and a Sadhu was waiting for me at the station. When I saw Mahapurushji in the morning, I was indeed very very happy. He enquired after my health, studies. I must then have looked quite a small boy, for he enquired how I could come that far alone. I was deeply struck by his love and affection for me. It was here that he graciously gave me initiation (into spiritual life with instructions to follow it in daily practice). After a couple of days he suggested that I should visit Puri, the place hallowed by many saints through the ages. He asked a senior sadhu to accompany me. When I went to take leave of him, he said, 'What shall I give you?'. He looked around his table and there was a beautiful pencil in a golden holder, presented to him by a rich devotee. He took it and said, 'what shall I do with this golden pencil? You take it', and pressed me to accept it. Having once lost a gold ring, I had a dislike to have anything valuable with me, and said, 'No, Maharaj, I may lose it. I want only your blessing'. He said, 'Yes' and blessed me. Those blessings of his have been with me ever since. They have been protecting me through all the vicissitudes of life. I have had difficulties, tribulations and my share of problems, but I have felt that his blessings have always helped me to face them.

By that time Chinnu had chosen the spiritual life of the monk and joined the Ramakrishna Math and for that purpose had gone to the Math headquarters at Belur near Calcutta. To meet him I went to Calcutta. That was the first time I visited the Math. The serene surroundings on the banks of the Ganges, the many Swamis and brahmacharis absorbed in their devotions and dedicated service at once captivated me. That was the first of my continued intimate association with the Math for the rest of my life.

After meeting Mahapurushji Maharaj in Bhubaneswar, I used to go almost every year to Belur Math and stay with him for about five to six weeks at a time. The next time I had another unique opportunity of being with him and serving him for a length of time was in Coonoor and Ootacamund after a couple of years. In both these places he stayed for many months and it was my privilege to live with him, meet him often, go out with him for walks, closely observe his way of meeting people and see how he reacted to situations. I had also the unique privilege of serving him in a variety of ways, such as serving him food and massaging his feet. The more I observed him, the more was I struck by the grandeur of his spirit.

I have always read with interest Swami Vivekananda's 'Song of the Sannyasin'. It is indeed a great piece of inspiring and dynamic poetry. Two of its verses read thus:

Say, 'Peace to all. From me no danger be
 To aught that lives. In those that dwell on high,
 In those that lowly creep, I am the Self in all!
 All life both here and there, do I renounce,
 All heavens and earths and hells, all hope and fears'.
 Thus cut thy bonds, Sannyasin bold! Say — 'Om Tat Sat, Om!'
 Heed then no more how body lives or goes,
 Its task is done. Let Karma float it down;
 Let one put garlands on, another kick
 This frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be
 Where praiser praised, and blamer blamed, are — one.
 Thus be thou calm, sannyasin bold! Say — 'Om Tat Sat, Om!'

I have always wondered, whether men imbued with such ideas have ever existed. But insights into Mahapurushji's life showed me that here in our very presence and proximity was one such person in flesh and blood. When he was in Coonoor, the biggest personages in the land used to come and see him. I have seen the Cochin Maharaja prostrate at his feet. So also came to him the leaders of the erstwhile Madras Government. But Mahapurushji was not affected or elated in the least by their coming. He extended the same warm greetings; 'How are you?', 'Doing Well', with the same kindness and affection, to all. The mali in the garden and other servants came to him to pay their respects, and he treated them with the same love, affection and regard. He respected the human dignity in all. Once a rich gentleman presented him a costly shawl of wonderful workmanship. Mahapurushji received it with the pleasure of a boy who is presented with a rare gift. He unfolded it and said, 'How nice, how wonderful, how beautiful'. The gentleman was happy and left. After sometime a little girl came to make pranams to Mahapurushji. The girl looked at the shawl with wonder and longing. Mahapurushji with that deep love which he always had for children, asked her whether she would like to have it. She said with wide open eyes, 'Yes'. Immediately he opened out the shawl, put it round her with great joy and said, 'You may have it'. The girl was overjoyed and ran out with glee, and there was no more talk about it. Men came and went, money was offered and spent, things were presented and were given away, but he was always the same — serene, childlike, ever-loving, affectionate, rejecting none and accepting everyone who came to him.

I wished to keep a bust picture of Sri Ramakrishna on my table. For that purpose I purchased a good photo stand, got a picture, cut it bust-size to suit the stand and inserted it in the stand. It made a beautiful sight, the picture and the stand suited each other so well. I took it to Mahapurushji, having no doubt in my mind that he would also marvel at it. But as soon as I showed it to him, he received it with a burst of temper. 'I don't want this bust; where are his Holy Feet?', he exclaimed. 'It is his Holy Feet that we want'. This told me a lot about his devotion

to the Master and his attitude. Many times most beautiful fruits would be brought to him by his devotees and admirers. He would appreciate them and say 'Offer them to Sri Guru Maharaj'; the same was the case with flowers or anything beautiful. This was indeed most natural in one who had offered oneself completely at the feet of the Lord.

On another occasion, at Belur Math, I wished to go to Calcutta the next morning. On receiving Mahapurushji's permission, I started early before breakfast. I was and still am a strict vegetarian and do not take even eggs. In South India, vegetarians are proud of their not taking meat and they consider themselves superior. When I went to the town, I was hungry and so went into a restaurant and ordered bread and butter. The restaurant server made a couple of toasts, smeared them with a yellow substance which looked like butter and served me. When I went to pay at the counter, I was asked what I had taken, I said 'bread and butter'. The server interjected, 'What about the omelette?'. I was thunder-struck to know that I had taken a prohibited food, a thing I had never done before. I was sorely troubled. When I went back to the Math, I recounted the incident to Mahapurushji Maharaj. Instead of sympathising with me, he clapped his hands and said, 'Good, good; your ahankar (pride) is gone'. That suddenly removed the veil from my eyes, and I saw how foolish it was to be proud of one's vegetarianism.

When staying with him in Belur Math, Madras, Coonoor or Ooty we used to go to him after the morning meditation and worship and make pranams to him. On one of those occasions he said to us, 'Those who come here to Sri Guru Maharaj and Swamiji are destined to do great work. Be steadfast to the ideal they have given you, that will give you strength and show you the way.'

Those days with him, his simplicity, breadth of outlook, all-absorbing love for all was the sacred touch which like the dew, which unseen and unheard blossoms the flowers, transformed me and is still leading me on to higher life.

Along with the Rev. Mahapurushji Maharaj were many other sadhus, with whom I came into close contact. The photo taken on the opening of the Ooty Ramakrishna Ashrama, which is displayed in the Ashrama drawing room reminds me of those associated with him there. There are in it Swamis Yatiswarananda, who was President of the Madras Math and later of the Bangalore Ashrama, Swami Saswatananda, Swami Gangheshananda and my dear friend Chinnu who had become Swami Chidbhavananda. There were also others, C. Ramanujachariar, one of the founders of the Madras Sri Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Messrs. Kandaswamy Pillai, Krishnamachari, Mamundi, the dhobi whose relative donated the land to the Ashrama. There are also in it Sri C. Subramaniam, a life-long associate in my work in the educational and political fields, and myself sitting at the feet of Mahapurushji Maharaj. Of these I must make special mention of Swami Chidbhavananda who became the President of the Ooty



With Swami Shivananda, Swami Yatiswarananda, Swami Chidbhavananda, Shri C. Subramaniam and the author at Ooty Ashrama.

Ramakrishna Ashrama and later founded the Ramakrishna Tapovanam group of institutions at Tirupparaithurai, whose life-long love and friendship have been with me throughout the years and which have greatly sustained my spiritual life in my early days.

Swami Shivananda's great love for us made all of us always look up to him for advice and guidance. His was the inspiration which made me take to a life of service.

And when the idea came to me that I should start an institution where the poor children could be educated and brought up along with the well-to-do, I wrote to Swami Shivananda about it and he replied as follows in his letter to me dated 19th November, 1929: 'As regards starting an orphanage it is a very good and noble thing, no doubt. But it requires constant attention — both financially and in respect of the training of boys. Think seriously before undertaking it, whether it will be possible for you to devote unabating energy for the work and whether your friends are sincere and will stick to the work. If you can devote your energy unselfishly money will come.' With his blessings the institution, now known as the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, was started in 1930. If the Vidyalaya is today one of the foremost pioneering educational institutions in India, it is entirely due to his blessings.

When Mahatma Gandhi started the freedom movement I was irresistibly drawn to it. The Ramakrishna Mission as a religious body stuck to its principle of not participating in politics, and many of the Sadhus of the Mission said that I should not jump into the fray. But Mahapurushji saw deep into my mind and allowed me to do what I considered was right. While doing so he showed me all sympathy, love and understanding. He wrote, 'Have no fear, my boy. You have lived so long with us. My love and blessings are ever with you. And so I am sure, wherever you are and in whatever circumstances you may be placed, nothing will be able to drag you in this world and make you forget Thakur. Thakur will be ever with you. He is your guide and goal.' I have heard that love is understanding. Nowhere have I understood its meaning more than in Mahapurushji's life. His love did not force anything on others, even things which he considered good. He understood the nature of every one who came to him and helped him to grow in his own way. My entering the freedom movement is a case in point. I was deeply attached to the Ramakrishna Mission and its ideals and way of work. But when the call of the country came through Gandhiji, that was irresistible. It was easy for anyone to say — many in the Mission did say — that consistent with the work of the Mission, I should not enter politics, for that is how others viewed matters. But such a stand would have created conflicts in my mind which might have broken me. But never did a negative suggestion come from Mahapurushji. He understood the strength of my emotions and convictions and therefore he did not force his thoughts on me, but said that any life of sacrifice was good and great. He permitted me to seek imprisonment, but only said that I should always remember the

spiritual ideals for which Sri Ramakrishna stood. These thoughts, words and understanding gave me tremendous strength.

Mahapurushji considered Mahatma Gandhi as a votary of Truth who had come to finish the unfinished work of Swami Vivekananda, to bring freedom to this country. When I was in jail in the year 1932 Mahapurushji was struck with a paralytic attack and was confined to bed. Paralysis had affected his speech and one part of his body. On my release, I hurried to Belur Math to see him. He was lying on his bed, unable to speak to me, but in his eyes I saw such affection and love; they seemed to encircle me. He could not talk, but the love in his eyes enlivened and covered me as it were. I felt his grandeur of spirit as never before I had felt it. I felt that there was a spirit that transcended his body. He was not affected by anything, nothing mattered to him. His imperious spirit was even then the master, and he was at peace.

The body and its ailment and even its imminent dissolution did not seem to matter to him at all. It seemed as if he was proclaiming what the Gita has said:

देहिनोऽस्मिन् यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥

As are childhood, youth and old age, in this body, to the embodied soul, so also is the attaining of another body. Calm souls are not deluded by death (II. 13).

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
नथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा-
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥

Even as a man casts off worn-out clothes, and puts on others which are new, so the embodied one casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others which are new (II. 22).

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि-
न्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥

The soul is never born, nor does it die. It is not that, not having been, it again comes into being. This is unborn, eternal, changeless, ever itself; It is not killed when the body is killed (II. 20).

I am not a philosopher or scholar. I don't know how people judge Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. But if Sri Ramakrishna is an Avatar, an incarnation of God born once in many centuries to guide the world, those who were with him cannot be ordinary human beings. I was truly fortunate, that I could move with such spiritual giants, talk with them, get a share

of their love and affection and above all, be a part of the great work, which they came to fulfil.

Men like Mahapurushji Maharaj are the salt of the earth. They come quietly into the world, without fanfare and trumpets, but like the dew falling unseen and unheard in the quiet of night, help thousands of people to flower and live a richer existence, richer in love, affection and human achievement.

Nearly half a century has passed since his leaving his mortal coils. But the Sacred Touch of his feet, his loving and deeply penetrating eyes and above all his protective love and blessings have lingered with me all these years, giving peace and strength in all situations, good or bad and pleasant or difficult.

2. The Inspiration

MY contact with Swami Shivananda introduced me to the world of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The story of the meeting of these two souls is an inspiring epic. A young man of eighteen with all the vigour and impetuosity meets an old man in an out-of-the-way temple at Dakshineswar far away from the madding crowds of the western-oriented Calcutta. The young man, brought up in an enlightened Hindu household, refuses to accept the rigidities of the customs and formalities of Religion. He is the foremost student in his class and accepts nothing from others except on its own proof. Everybody around speaks to him about God. But he scoffs at the idea and asks, 'who has seen God?'. He goes to all those known learned men of his times, Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, Maharishi Devendranath Tagore and many others and asks them the straight question: 'Have you seen God, if not why preach something which you have not seen or known?' Naren heard of Sri Ramakrishna from one of his English teachers, Prof. Hastie, who directed him to Dakshineswar. There he sees a man sitting in contemplation and peace and speaking words of wisdom. It is good to read of their first meeting in Swami Vivekananda's own words.

That day in November 1881 when Swami Vivekananda (Narendra-nath, as he was then called) first met Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta and later in Dakshineswar is an important landmark in the religious history of India and the world. That was a meeting of the ancient spiritual traditions of the east with the modern scientific outlook of the west. It was a meeting between spiritual realisation and scientific agnosticism. That was an age when scientific researches were attacking the very roots of religious beliefs. And out of this meeting was born a new life-giving message which was to affect the lives of millions of people in the east and the west. About their first meeting Swami Vivekananda says: 'He (Sri Ramakrishna) looked just like an ordinary man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language and the thought, 'Can this man be a great teacher? — crept into my mind and I asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: "Do you believe in God, Sir?", "Yes", he replied. "Can you prove it?, Sir?", "Yes", "How?" "Because I see him just as I see you here, only in a much more intense sense". That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion

was a reality, to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance can change a whole life. I have read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, "Be thou be whole", and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It could be done, and my Master used to say, "Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world".

When I read this story in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda it made an indelible impression on me. I began reading their works, first, the *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* and later the works of Swami Vivekananda, later books written on them by Romain Rolland, Sister Nivedita and others. The first book of the Swami which I read was 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora' consisting of his speeches during his triumphant march from Colombo, where he landed first after return from the Parliament of Religions in Chicago to the various places in our country — Rameshwaram, Madras, Calcutta, Lahore, Almora and other places. These lectures made a deep impression on my young mind. They set my mind aflame with great thoughts and greater power and inspired me as nothing else had done in the past. This led me to read his other books. At that time, his complete works were published in seven volumes, of these the most interesting and inspiring and instructive were, the four Yogas, Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Jnana Yogas, his letters to many of his friends and devotees and the 'Inspired Talks' which in short sentences embedded depth of thought. These words spoke to me, as they must have spoken to thousands of others and inspired me to higher thoughts and greater deeds.

The chief tenets of Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings were:

1. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures, or in organisations. Religion consists in realisation. As a matter of fact, we all know that nothing will satisfy us until we know the truth for ourselves. However we may argue, however much we may hear, only one thing will satisfy us, and that is our own realisation; and such an experience is possible for every one of us, if we will only try with the requisite devotion and perseverance. The first step in this attempt to realise religion is renunciation. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God, will never go together. "We cannot serve God and Mammon together".

2. What is perhaps most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the needs of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your

national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries, in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can.

3. Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world is, "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show, by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.

He found in Ramakrishna a perfect example of this realisation. As he said: 'In the presence of my Master I found out that man could be perfect, even in this body. Those lips never cursed any one, never even criticised any one. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good. That tremendous purity, that tremendous renunciation is the one secret of spirituality'.

"Neither through wealth, nor through progeny, but through renunciation alone, is immortality to be reached", say the Vedas.

The work that Swami Vivekananda was assigned by his Master and what the Swami was destined to do was to awaken Mother India and her people to her great spiritual and cultural Heritage and give the message of universal love and religion to the world. His innate strength, genius to observe and understand the misery of the time, the mute appeal from oppressed India to his sensitive mind, the tragic contrast between the august grandeur of her ancient past and the degradation of the country made him think as to how to raise her to her ancient spiritual glory. And he went on a pilgrimage throughout India to see for himself the conditions prevailing in the country and the sufferings and sorrows of her children, so that he could find a way out of this degradation and misery.

The Swami wandered throughout the length and breadth of India, mostly on foot and saw for himself the condition of the country. For nearly seven years, he travelled from place to place, many times facing starvation, not knowing where he would get his next meal from. Meagrely clothed, he lived in places where the thermometer registered thirty degrees below zero. In some places he received a royal welcome from Princes and in some others he was treated with scant courtesy and even ridiculed. But he went on, indifferent alike to praise and blame, as he has himself sung in his "Song of the Sanyasin".

Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend!
 The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed, and food
 What chance may bring; well cooked or ill, judge not.
 Few may know the Truth. The rest will hate
 And scoff at thee, great one; but pay no heed;
 Go thou free, from place to place, and help
 Them out of darkness, Maya's veil.

In the midst of his perambulations, on one of his visits to Benaras, he underwent a strange experience which gave him a message. It is better said in his own words, "Once when I was in Varanasi, I was passing through a place where there was a large tank of water on one side and a high wall on the other. It was in the grounds where there were many monkeys. The monkeys of Varanasi are huge brutes and are sometimes surly. They now took it into their heads not to allow me to pass through their street, so they howled and shrieked and clutched at my feet as I passed. As they pressed closer, I began to run, but the faster I ran, the faster came the monkeys and they began to bite at me. It seemed impossible to escape, but just then I met a stranger who called out to me, "Don't run away, face the brutes".¹ I turned and faced the monkeys, and they fell back and finally fled. That is a lesson for all life — face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them. Cowards never win victories. We have to fight fear and troubles and ignorance if we expect them to flee before us. Avoiding problems don't solve them. We have to face them whatever they are with courage and faith".

He first went north to the Himalayas where he did intense tapas and visited some of the Himalayan shrines. Then he went west. He crossed Rajaputana, where a large part of the country was under the rule of the Maharajas and local chieftains. Then he visited Gujarat, Maharashtra and Mysore and then crossed to Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

He saw the degradation born out of the political slavery of the last few centuries. Political slavery led to economic exploitation and poverty and what was worse, cultural erosion. Indian men and women began losing faith in their own culture and religion and began copying western manners and ways of life. He studied the reasons for our downfall and asked 'why is it'. He asked, 'why is it that forty millions of Englishmen rule three hundred millions of people here? What is the psychological explanation? These forty millions put their wills together and that means infinite power, and we three hundred millions have a will each separate from the other. To make a great future for India, the secret lies in organisation, accumulation of power and coordination of wills. Therefore he said as the Atharva-Veda Samhita says, 'Be thou all of one mind, be thou all of one thought'. Being of one mind is the secret of success. The more you go on fighting and quarrelling about

all trivialities such as "Dravidian" and "Aryan" and the question of Brahmins and non-Brahmins, high caste and low caste, North and South, the further you are off from that accumulation of energy and power, which is needed to make a great India. For the future, India depends entirely upon this accumulation of will-power, coordination, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus. Therefore let us sink our petty differences and develop a national will, so that India will rise."

Everywhere he saw the colossal poverty of the people. He deeply appreciated that even amidst their hunger and poverty they had the culture to share whatever little they had with the wandering sadhus. Seeing their misery and sufferings, his mind was on fire and at last he reached the feet of the Great Mother at Kanyakumari where the three seas meet in tumultuous waves. The wind was rough and so no boatman would dare to take him to the lonely rock situated apart from the mainland. But there was even greater turmoil in his mind as to how to find a solution for the miseries of our people. He swam amidst the turbulent ocean and sat in meditation on the lonely rock on which now stands the majestic memorial of his penance there. Hours passed. Tears came in his eyes and he wept that children of the sages should be in this miserable condition.

His soul brooded with infinite tenderness and infinite anguish over India's poverty. Of what use is religion, he thought, without the welfare of masses? He saw that the poor and the lowly had been oppressed and downtrodden for hundreds of years by every power that ruled India in the last ten centuries. The tyranny of priesthood; the cruelty towards lower caste, the division that it created within the social body, making a large number of people outcastes — these the Swami saw as almost insurmountable barriers to the progress of the Indian Nation. His heart throbbed with the suffering of the masses. Agony was in his soul when he thought of those who prided themselves on being the custodians of Indian religion and held down the masses for ages upon ages. In a letter written some months later, he wrote, "In view of all this, specially of the poverty and ignorance, I got no sleep. At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan: We are so many Sanyasins wandering about, and teaching the people philosophy and metaphysics — it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva say again and again, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion?'

At Kanyakumari, his heart went out to the Divine Mother in a great prayer. From that moment, he dedicated his life to the service of India, but particularly to the outcastes, to the starving, to the millions of oppressed of his land. Every other thought, even realisation of God became subservient to the overwhelming desire to give himself utterly and entirely for the good of the Indian people.

His travels throughout the country and his moving intimately with the poor and the rich, the learned and the ignorant gave him an insight into the problems faced by the country. His deep love for the masses and the

poor and the sight of their sufferings gave him the vision and wisdom to find out the way for the Renaissance of India. He did not like the habit of blaming others for our ills. He said: "We as Vedantists must look at things from an introspective point of view. Know for certain that there is no power on earth to injure us, unless we first injure ourselves. No bacillus can attack the human frame until it is degraded and degenerated by bad food and privation while the healthy man passes scathless through masses of poisonous bacilli". Therefore he resolved that solution of our problems, great as they were, was possible only through our own self efforts.

He considered the neglect of the masses as our national sin. Therefore in stentorian voice, he appealed to the youth of India to dedicate themselves to serve them. He said: "Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. Your duty at present is to go from village to village and make the people understand that mere sitting about idly won't do any more. Make them understand their real condition and say, 'O, Ye Brothers all, arise! Awake! How much longer would you remain asleep?' Go and advise them how to improve their own condition and make them comprehend the sublime truths of the sastras, which preach purity and strength. Impress upon their minds that they have the same right to religion as the higher castes. Initiate even down to the Chandalas in these fiery mantras. Also instruct them in simple words about the necessities of life, such as trade, commerce, agriculture etc".

"Let us pray, 'Lead, kindly light'; a beam will come through the dark, and a hand will be stretched forth to lead us. Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions of India, who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny; pray day and night for them. I care more to preach to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I love the poor. Who feels for the three hundred millions of men and women sunken in poverty and ignorance? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them — who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God — think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly — the Lord will show you the way".

Swami Vivekananda gave a new and revolutionary definition to religion. He said, 'He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. With this strength you can achieve anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently, for, infinite power is within you. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith, death comes. Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith in God, this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have introduced into our midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you'.

‘Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. If there is sin, the only sin is to say that you are weak, or others are weak. Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be: If you think yourselves strong, strong you will be. Ye are the children of God, the children of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal’.

‘This is the great fact; Strength is life; weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery, weakness is death. To succeed, you must have tremendous perseverance, tremendous will. ‘I will drink the ocean’ says the persevering soul; ‘at my will, mountains will crumble up’. Have that sort of faith, energy and will; work hard, and you will reach the goal. Death is better than a vegetating ignorant life; it is better to die on the battlefield than to live a life of defeat. Can anything be done unless everybody exerts himself to his utmost? It is the man of action, the lion-heart that the Goddess of Wealth resorts to. No need of looking behind. FORWARD! We want infinite energy, infinite zeal, infinite courage, and infinite patience, then only will great things be achieved’.

These stirring words reverberated in my mind. Nobody who hears them or reads them can remain unaffected. They have inspired thousands of young men to action and to life. He wanted to revolutionise the world and India to higher and greater life and for that purpose wanted a thousand young men who, nerved to a lion’s courage out of their sympathy for the poor, will dedicate themselves to their service.

I was inspired by the message of the Swami and his Master and my heart yearned to be one of the thousand.



Swami Vivekananda



With Mahatma Gandhi during Tamil Nadu Tour.

3. Vivekananda and Gandhi

Vivekananda and Gandhi were the two great personalities who have had a large share in moulding the present Indian nation. Both were rooted in our ancient cultural heritage, and at the same time, were inspired by the ideals of modern progressive societies. Both were passionately devoted to Indian freedom. While the message of the one was mainly spiritual and religious, the message of the other was through organising a big mass movement for achieving national freedom based on spiritual values, love and peace. Swami Vivekananda preached a manly philosophy that we are the creators of our destiny and it is our actions and thoughts that mould our future.

The Swami said that “We only get what we deserve. It is a lie when we say, the world is bad and we are good. It can never be so. It is a terrible lie we tell ourselves. This is the first lesson to learn: be determined not to curse anything outside, not to lay the blame upon any one outside, but be a man, stand up, lay the blame on yourself.” He believed that with proper and well-directed effort, there was nothing one could not achieve.

His heart ached to think of the condition of the poor, the low in India. “So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance”, he declared, “I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them. Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is the cause of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed and well cared for. Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. Your duty at present is to go from village to village, and make the people understand that mere sitting about idly won’t do any more. And the first step in getting strength is to uphold the Upanishads and believe ‘I am the soul’, ‘Me the sword cannot cut; no weapon pierce Me: the fire cannot burn; Me the air cannot dry; I am the Omnipotent. I am the Omniscient.’ These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out from the forest and the cave, they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish and with the students that are studying.

“Let us pray, Lead, kindly light; a beam will come through the dark and a hand will be stretched forth to lead us. Let each one of us pray

day and night for the down-trodden millions of India, who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny; pray day and night for them.

“Let these people be your God — think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly — the Lord will show you the way.” “Thoughts are strong, they travel far. Every thought projected from every brain goes on pulsating until it meets a fit object to receive it.” The deep and noble thoughts uttered by the prophets and saints create an impact on other noble minds. Even so the deep feeling of compassion and love for the Indian masses of Swami Vivekananda had its reaction in a great and noble soul. The Swami said: “Him I call a Mahatman, whose heart bleeds for the poor” and lo! a Mahatma appeared on the scene. Gandhiji was deeply inspired by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Gandhiji was perhaps the greatest man the world had produced in the first half of the present century. No other person affected so many minds and hearts and moved to action such a large number of men and women in addition to giving a message to the world which will last for all time. Few others would have come into contact with as many men, women and children as Gandhiji. Wherever he went millions surrounded him. He taught these millions of people the way of a better life, better personal and social hygiene, greater punctuality and above all confidence to lead a life of strength and courage. He was perhaps the greatest expert in adult education the world has seen. Work for the millions in the country, had, by its very reason, to be impersonal and based on certain fundamental principles. But the glory and greatness of the Mahatma's life was that he was deeply devoted in a very personal way to the welfare of numerous workers in the national cause, with whom he came in contact during his constant tours all over India. He could always find time for their individual problems even in the midst of his pressing national tasks. It was this trait which bound him with unbreakable ties to the thousands of his fellow-workers, great and humble throughout the country. Many times he served them even at great personal risk, as may be seen in his service to Parachure Sastri, who was suffering from Leprosy.

The first thing Gandhi had to tackle was the attitude of fear in the minds of the Indian masses. Tyrannies lasting through many centuries and poverty arising out of exploitation by the foreigners and the richer classes had brought them to a very low level. The result was that they were imbued with fear of the foreign rulers and their Indian instruments, and had completely lost confidence in themselves. When Gandhiji came on the scene, he was quick to see the disease. He perceived that the first thing to be done was to infuse courage into the masses. He toured all over the country, even to its far-off nooks and corners. The people saw his transparent sincerity and unselfishness. He said everywhere; “Friends, do not be afraid”. He appealed to their self-respect and asked them to face the worst in asserting it. Strangely enough, while the intellectuals were sceptical about his message, the masses responded to it. He said, let us face the jails if necessary and

suffer for our principles. Thousands of young men were inspired and they followed him to the prisons. Thus the fear of the jail was conquered. Later in the course of two decades, lakhs of young men and women learned to face the worst possible privation and even face the bullet in working for the freedom of the country.

Swami Vivekananda had proclaimed: "Tell the truth boldly. All truth is eternal. Truth is the nature of all souls. And here is the test of Truth. Anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison. There is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity and Truth is all knowledge. Truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, and must be invigorating. Take up this philosophy. The greatest Truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence. Take them up, live them up and salvation of India will be at hand". Gandhiji lived up to these principles to such an extent that he considered Truth as God.

Love of the poor and down-trodden was the very breath of his life. He worked unceasingly for the uplift of the Harijans and all others who were considered socially outcast. He identified himself completely with them. All the various movements he had started and the programmes he administered, his campaigns for spread of Khadi, abolition of untouchability, spread of village and cottage industries and adult education — all had one objective in view, namely, service to the poor.

The truth about which he spoke and wrote was not a mere philosophical concept to be merely intellectually grasped, but something to be followed in daily life in relation to one's daily activities. He discussed truth as applied to the varied activities of our life, as students, teachers, administrators, politicians, public servants, merchants, doctors and other professional men and exhorted us to follow the Truth and apply it to our life situations. He proclaimed that Truth must be practised and followed at all costs, whatever may be the price one may have to pay. There were some who said that our ideal was to win Swaraj and that any means was good enough to attain it. But Gandhiji sternly set his face against such a step, and said that the means were as important as the end. While the end was independence for our country, the means through which this was to be attained, were truth and love, ahimsa and satya. Many considered that these ideals were good enough for a few individuals but cannot be followed by the common people in general. But the amazing truth about Gandhiji was that not only did he adhere in the fullest sense to these ideals, but he also succeeded in moulding and moving enormous numbers of men and women to follow these ideals.

There have been prophets before Gandhiji who have preached truth and love, brotherhood and service. They have inspired thousands of people during the centuries and have been responsible for founding and running many institutions of social service. But the special contribution of Gandhiji was that not only did he inspire individuals to dedicate their lives for these ideals, but also he sought a way of life for the society and the state in

furtherance of these principles. What is generally known as Gandhian Economics is just the application of these truths to human living, so that man may have love for brother man; and men and nations can live in equality and brotherhood with one another. He wanted to avoid differences in wealth, which was the source of all hatred and jealousy. He preached to the wealthy, that the wealth was not theirs, but that they should hold it in trust for the poor. He asked people to purchase Khadi and articles made through cottage industries even though more expensive, as that will be a practical expression of their love for the poor and the down-trodden. He appealed to the higher castes to go and serve their brethren among the Harijans. He inspired young men and women to dedicate themselves for service to the suffering humanity.

Gandhiji preached dignity of labour by his life. Of all things that create love and understanding, nothing has been so effective as working together. If social inequalities and exploitation are to be avoided it is necessary that all should learn to work and in team with others. And so he always stressed that every one should give atleast some time to manual work. His objective was to create a casteless and classless society, in which there will not be exploitation of the weaker sections by the stronger ones. The Indian society based on the system of castes as well as the educational systems devised by the foreigner ran contrary to these principles. In fact, the educated had contempt for manual work.

And so it was no wonder that Gandhiji wanted to evolve a new educational system, which could inspire and train the young of the nation, with faith in work, in habits of constant physical activity, with training in social sense and cooperative efforts. 'Basic Education', the system of education which he adumbrated, tries to bring out in practical life these great principles, which he had in view. In this new ideology of education, work is the pivot on which all instruction revolves. This work may be of various kinds and includes activities involving personal and community hygiene. Basic Education represents not only a new method of education, but also a new philosophy of life, for which Gandhiji lived and died. To quote his own words: "The ultimate objective of this New Education is not only a balanced and harmonious individual, but also a balanced and harmonious society — a just social order in which there is no unnatural dividing line between the haves and the have-nots and everybody is assured of a living wage and the right to freedom."

Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji believed that purity of personal life is the bedrock on which sound education can be built. He said, "Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building a sound education. My meetings with thousands of students and the correspondence which I continuously have with them, in which they pour out their innermost feelings and take me into their confidence, show me quite clearly that there is much to be desired. In our languages there is a beautiful word, equivalent for the word student, that is brahmachari. Vidyarthi is a coined word and a poor equivalent for brahmachari. And

I hope you know what the word brahmachari means. It means searcher after God, one who conducts himself so as to bring himself nearest to God in the least possible time. And all the great religions of the world, however much they may differ, are absolutely one on this fundamental thing that no man or woman with an impure heart can possibly appear before the Great White Throne. All our learning or recitation of the Vedas, correct knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil, Latin, Greek and what not, will avail us nothing if they do not enable us to cultivate absolute purity of heart. The end of all knowledge must be building up of character”.

Gandhiji's life is an example of the great message of Swamiji that each man is the maker of his own destiny. We are the makers of our fate. None else has the blame or the praise. This is the great message which we will have to learn, individually as well as collectively as a nation and this is a message which we get from Gandhiji's life. The future is in our hands. Others may help or hinder, but it is only we who are largely responsible for our future. Knowing that none else, but we ourselves are responsible for our destiny, let us give up our weakness and put forth our best efforts.

Gandhiji lived before our very eyes. He was of our blood and of our flesh. As a boy, he was quite ordinary, not distinguished for his intelligence or in any other manner. He had weaknesses which ordinary boys are heir to, and he grew up like many of them. But yet in the course of a few years, he chalked out for himself an ideal, and followed it most sincerely. In his autobiography, he has explained in no uncertain terms, his weaknesses. It has been said that man can descend low to the level of the brute or he can rise to heights and become a God. Gandhiji through his tremendous strivings, penances, fasts, and above all his righteous living and selfless service could overcome the flesh and rise above human failings. He had faith in himself and trust in God which carried him through his great trials and tribulations till it was said of him by Jawaharlal Nehru that where he sat became a temple and where he stood became sacred ground and what he spoke was scripture. At last when his end came, he died like a hero with God's name on his lips. Till the last moment at his post of duty, wanting nothing, desiring nothing but always ready to serve.

Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were fundamentally the same in their spirit and outlook. Both were rooted in the ancient culture of India, and looked forward to a glorious future for this great country. Both were convinced that India had a great message to deliver and that was a spiritual one. “India's destiny lies not along the bloody way of the west, but along the bloodless way of peace, that comes from a simple and Godly life. I feel her mission is different from that of others. India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world”. These words of Gandhiji echo the thoughts of the Swami. In the same manner, both believed that there is much we can profitably assimilate from the west. “Wisdom is no monopoly of one continent or race. But if India has the strength to resist to encroachments on her own civilization, which, though imperfect, has

hitherto stood the ravages of time, she can make a lasting contribution to the peace and solid progress of the world”.

Both were actively conscious of the grinding poverty of the masses in the country. They considered the first step for progress was to mitigate the poverty, for no spiritual message can ever be given to hungry stomachs.

But Vivekananda and Gandhi differed in the tools they created for the fulfilment of their mission. Gandhi was the leader of a momentous freedom movement — perhaps one of the biggest of such movements in the history of the world, involving millions of people in action. His message had necessarily to be on the widest scale and not confined to a select few. He affected the lives of lakhs of people and out of them, he created some as instruments for his mighty task. These men and women were not people dedicated to poverty, but who were consumed with the desire for achieving freedom for their country and therefore, dedicated to that purpose. It was the glory of Gandhiji's life that he inspired everyone from the lowest volunteer to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru first Prime Minister of India and Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India and helped them to grow into their stature in the process of doing his work; thus he spiritualised politics.

In contrast to this, Swami Vivekananda and his great Master created a small band of earnest disciples, who gave their all and sacrificed their everything for spreading the message of their master. Sri Ramakrishna had sixteen disciples of whom Swami Vivekananda was the leader. In co-operation with his brother-disciples the Swami laid the foundation for the Ramakrishna Mission. This Mission was a modern form given to the ancient ideal of bands of Sanyasins which was so famous in the time immediately following the Buddha. Their number was few, but those few were wholly dedicated to the ideal of renunciation and service and lost themselves in the task of furthering the message of the master. They were celibates who took the vow of poverty, with the result that they were completely dedicated. The result was that in half a century, the message of Sri Ramakrishna had spread throughout the nooks and corners of India and all over the world. This message is delivered to individuals and groups who seek peace and blessedness and is spread through acts of love in schools and colleges, dispensaries and hospitals and in relief work of all kinds during famine, flood and plague or cholera. Therefore, like the dew falling unseen and unheard and yet helping the whole world to flower, they are working for a revival of peace, blessedness and joy amidst millions of people, and without noise.

While I had the unique privilege of participating in the freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, I had also the fortune and blessedness to be associated with this great Mission.

4. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission

THE story of the Life of Sri Ramakrishna and his apostles and the story of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission will be considered among the milestones in the religious history of the world along with those of the Buddha and Christ. It is a story full of excitement for those interested in the spiritual movements which occur once in a few centuries for the uplift of people of all climes and countries.

The life of Sri Ramakrishna, his spiritual strivings and realisations, his verifying in his own life and experiences the various faiths and his proclamation of the harmony of religions are well known. Swami Vivekananda, his chief apostle, got a unique opportunity to proclaim this message to the world in the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. After the historic appearance he had a triumphant march in the United States of America and England, where people flocked to hear him, and were inspired by his message. When he returned to India, he was given a tumultuous welcome befitting a national hero. After the first visits to the various places in the country were over, he sat down with his fellow disciples to create a permanent organisation, consisting of monastic and lay members to channelise the enthusiasm into constructive work for the permanent good of mankind. The first meeting was held in 1897 and an association formally formed with Swami Vivekananda as President later followed by Swami Brahmananda, Swami Shivananda and others. After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, it was registered under the Societies' Registration Act 21 of 1860.

The following are the objectives of the Association:

- a) To impart and promote the study of the Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of Comparative Theology in its widest form.
- b) To impart and promote the study of arts, sciences and industries.
- c) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge above-mentioned, and enable them to reach the masses.
- d) To carry on educational work among the masses.

- e) To establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid and the afflicted, famine-relief works, and other educational and charitable works and institutions of a like nature.
- f) To print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.
- g) To carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being carried on in connection with, and calculated directly or indirectly to promote, any of the before-mentioned objects¹.

Members were to sign the following declarations:

- i) I look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an illustration and Embodiment of Religion Eternal, whose life and teachings help one to understand the plan and purpose of all the religions of the world and their underlying truth and harmony.
- ii) I look upon all religions as paths to God, and shall try to live in peace and fellowship with the followers of all religions.
- iii) I have full sympathy with all the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission as set forth in the Memorandum of Association, and I will actively cooperate with the work of the Mission.

All persons irrespective of colour, creed or caste sympathising with the objects of the association could become members of the association whether monastic or lay.

Along with this Association was founded the Ramakrishna Math registered as a Trust which was to consist of only monks who have renounced their families and wealth and adopted the vow of poverty, with renunciation and service as their life-long ideal. This was, as it were, revival of the order of Buddhist monks of old, but with this difference, that 'his was organised into an institution for the avowed purpose of one's own salvation and service to mankind. It is this organisation that is the background power of the institutions under the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, which constitute the Ramakrishna Movement.

Swami Vivekananda explained the implications of the new movement in the parting address that he gave to the Sadhus of the Math on the eve of his second journey to the West on 19th June, 1899.

“Those of you who are Sannyasins must try to do good to others, for Sannyasa means that — Let all our actions, eating, drinking and everything that we do — tend towards the sacrifice of oneself. You nourish your body by eating. What good is there in doing that if you do not hold it as a sacrifice to the well-being of others? You nourish your minds by reading books. There is no good in doing that unless you hold it also as a sacrifice to the whole

¹ Ramakrishna Movement — its ideals and activities by Tejasananda, p.40.

world. For, the whole world is one; you are a very insignificant part of it, and therefore, it is right that you should serve your millions of brothers rather than aggrandise this little self.

“In our country the old idea is, to sit in a cave and meditate and die. One must learn sooner or later, that one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of one’s brothers. You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate the fields. You must be prepared for all menial services, not only here, but elsewhere also.

“The next thing to remember is that the aim of this institution is to make men. You must not merely learn what the Rishis taught. You must be Rishis yourselves. You are also men as much as the greatest men that were ever born. What can mere book-learning do? What can mere meditation do? What can the Mantras and Tantras do? You must stand on your own feet. You must have this new method — the method of man-making. The true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman’s heart. You must feel for the millions of beings around you, and yet you must be strong and inflexible, though it may seem a little paradoxical. You must possess these apparently conflicting virtues. You must also possess obedience; if your superior orders you to throw yourself into a river and catch a crocodile, you must first obey and then reason with him. Even if the order be wrong, first obey and then contradict it².

Thus for the first time in India, an organisation came into existence with the following unique features:

1. All work done and duties performed with the motive of selfless service is sacred and therefore all work is worship.
2. Sadhus are no more to be confined to caves and forests to do Japa and Meditation only but should come out to serve the poor, the needy, the suffering and down-trodden, not with the patronising attitude of social service, but with the spiritual attitude of serving God through service to men.
3. The third unique feature of this organisation was the great message delivered by the life and experience of Sri Ramakrishna and later delivered with such power and conviction by Swami Vivekananda in the Parliament of Religions that all religions lead to the same God whatever the difference in name and form. Thus we find in the Ramakrishna Organisations people from all faiths, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Parsi belonging to various countries, speaking different languages, living together, serving together and getting spiritual fulfilment together.

After my first impact with the disciples of the master Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shivananda, their touch and inspiration made me to continue my visits to the Mylapore Ramakrishna Math. There I met many whose love and affection I remember even after nearly sixty years. Many

² Swamiji’s Complete Works — III — 446-8.

were distinguished students from universities who after passing their post-graduate courses with distinction adopted the life of renunciation and service and joined the Order. There I met Swami Ashokananda, Swami Akhilananda and Swami Siddhiswarananda who later took charge of the centres in San Francisco, Boston Providence and Paris.

There also I had the unique privilege of knowing and moving closely with Swami Chidbhavananda, Swami Rudrananda, Swami Sarvagna-nanda and Swami Kedareshwarananda. Swami Chidbhavananda, I had known from college days. My association with them was life-long. So also was my association with Swami Rudrananda, whose contact with the Mission was during the flood relief work organised by the Mission in 1924 in Tanjore District. He went to serve in the Mission Centre in Fiji and is the leading figure in that country for the uplift of our people and has established a big institution there with Education and Rural Development activities. Swami Sarvagnananda has given a life-time service in the various centres of the Mission like Madras and Ooty and was with me in the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya taking care of me and the children of the Vidyalaya for six years. He has now built a beautiful temple for Sri Ramakrishna at Nattarampalli and is doing wonderful Rural Development work in the health and spiritual sphere. Swami Kedareshwarananda came from Malaysia and joined the Order. He could sing Tamil rhymes beautifully and passed away while incharge of the Nattarampalli centre. It is this personal contact based on great personal affection and mutual respect, that helps to build our personalities.

It is again in the Madras Math that I learned the meaning of dedicated and detached social service. It first began with collecting subscriptions for serving in Maheswara Puja (poor-feeding) on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebrations. At that time there were floods in Tanjore and Kerala. In both the places the Mission promptly went into action arranging for relief to the poor. Volunteers were invited for that purpose. Swami Pavitrananda who later became the head of our New York Centre was in charge of the relief work. I was then a young boy studying in the F.L. class in the Law College. He asked me, 'Will you offer yourself for this work in Kerala?'. I enthusiastically responded and was immediately sent to do relief work in Thiriprayar and Edathuruthi in Kerala, where I was involved in the work under the inspiring leadership of Swami Atmaprakashananda — 'Priyada' as we affectionately called him. While I was there an incident took place which I would like to record here. Rice had to be brought from distant places through boats in the backwaters for distribution. While it was being transported at about midnight a sound was heard. Swami Atmaprakashananda who was always alert stood up and shouted what it was. Somebody had come to steal some bags and finding the Swami alert dropped them into the depth of the backwaters and ran away. The Swami asked the boatman to stop and asked them to dive and take them out. They refused to do so out of fear. At once the Swami took off his clothes

and plunged into the deep waters and brought them back on his shoulders. People were amazed at his courage, and when questioned why he took the risk, he answered, 'It was Guru Maharaj's property intended to be given to Sri Gurumaharaj's children and so all care should be taken about it'. Such was the spirit which inspired our Sadhus in the performance of their work.

While speaking about my living in and contacts with the Madras Math I must mention a unique experiment in social service that was made at that time by Swami Rudrananda. He had a great flair for social service and service of the poor. He gathered some enthusiastic young men, organised them into a 'Thondar Sangam' meaning service society, infused into them the spirit of service and the idea that serving the poor and deprived men, women and children is worship of God, selected some nearby slums, visited them regularly, undertook sanitation campaigns, conducted night schools, weaned many from drink, and conducted adult education schools in the evening for men and women. He greatly improved their cultural standard and introduced better life in the slum families, many of whom began even visiting our ashrama shrine. Thrift habits were introduced and many saved enough to start small business. The peculiarity of the Thondar Sangam was that its membership was not based on money subscription as is usual, but on three hours of service per week. This concept of service as membership requirement gave a respect for dignity of labour and devoted service besides enabling youth, who could not pay in cash to join the service. This work went on as long as Swami Rudrananda and Sarvagnananda were there. Apart from doing good to the slum dwellers, it did a lot of good to the youth and the sadhus and brahmacharis in the Mission in exposing them to the realities of poverty and suffering in the country and developing their own personalities by their dedicated service to the people, which was one of the main messages of the Founder of this great organisation. This sort of effort must be strengthened and carried out by all the centres of Sri Ramakrishna Mission in the present context of our country.

It was in Madras again that I was introduced to one of the outstanding educational institutions of our Mission, namely the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home at Mylapore. The dedication of Sri C. Ramaswamy Ayyangar and Sri C. Ramanujachariar was great and inspiring. That was one of the institutions which inspired me to start the Vidyalaya later. Both were householders, both were involved in Government service as full-time workers, and yet they found time to build that great institution. They rarely thought about their own comforts or their families, but were wholly devoted to the service of the Home and the children in it. No work was considered small or low. Everything was so neat and clean, the Shrine, the dormitory, the class-room, the office, the accounts etc. Their love was great. I learnt it is such love, dedication and single-minded service that can create institutions of lasting values.

While the contacts with the Madras Math were ennobling and supportive to my spiritual life, the brightest beacon which attracted me was far away, namely, Swami Shivananda who was in the Belur Math, Calcutta. And so every year during the summer vacation I used to go there attracted by divine love and ecstasy. There, living was austere, food indifferent and comforts were few. I was amongst people whose language I did not understand. But something transcended the physical inconveniences and made living a life of joy there. We had the pleasure of meeting Rev. Mahapurushji as we respectfully called him, in the mornings and later in the evenings before going to bed. There we had also the privilege of meeting Swami Saradananda, another direct disciple of the Master, the silent unperturbed spiritual giant who built the Mission as its Secretary from its inception till he passed away in 1927. There also I met many other senior Sadhus, Swami Shraddhananda, Swami Virajananda, Swami Madhavananda, Swami Vireshwarananda and others who were later to become successful Presidents of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. I must also mention Swami Dayananda, the founder of the first and biggest medical institutions in the Mission. Swami Dayananda and Swami Amriteswarananda who was then the Assistant Secretary of the Mission, showed great love and affection for me.

When one goes to the Belur Math, one does not stop with seeing the Math. The most sacred places relating to Sri Ramakrishna are in its vicinity, the nearest in Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna practised the major portion of his spiritual sadhanas and where his most intimate disciples met him and from where he delivered his spiritual message. As such it is perhaps the most holy place in this age. There you see the Bhavatharini Temple where Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Divine Mother. There are the Shiva Temples which he used to visit everyday. In one corner is the room where he was immersed in Divine ecstasy, and where he met many of his disciples and the talks which are recorded so faithfully in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Mahendranath Gupta 'called M', were given. I had the unique pleasure and privilege of meeting the great author of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in his house. Near the room where Sri Ramakrishna lived is a small building in which his consort the Holy Mother lived. A few steps away is Panchavati — the five trees planted by the Master with his own hands under which he did many of his sadhanas. A little farther away is the amlak tree where he did his Tantric Sadhanas. Near the Panchavati is a small shed where Sri Ramakrishna was lost in Nirvikalpa Samadhi for six months and was watched over by his Guru Totapuri. Nearby are the tanks where he washed and bathed and the country-yards where he walked. There the Ganges flows in eternal majesty as it was flowing before. Everything is there, except Sri Ramakrishna himself. When the Master went to Brindavan, he cried, 'O' Krishna! the Yamuna, near which you played, the fields in which you grazed the cows and played — they are all here. Only you are missing'. The same thought comes to us when

we go to Dakshineswar. There you feel the presence of the Master and his daily living. All the many things he said and did come to our mind naturally so that it becomes one long meditation.

About 80 miles from Calcutta is Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and two miles from it is Jayrambati the birthplace of the Holy Mother. In those early days the cottage in which the master was born was preserved as it was. But now a magnificent temple has come in its place. All these give the pilgrims a living touch of the master's life and message.

Calcutta is dotted with many centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Udbodhan where the Holy Mother lived and where Swami Saradananda served her and worked is one with most precious memories. Then there is the Balaram Mandir, the house of Balaram Bose, a lay disciple of the Master, which was visited by the Master often. There are many other institutions which have sprung up later, the most important of them being the Advaita Ashrama, where the complete works of Swami Vivekananda have been published and which is the biggest publication centre in English of the Mission. The Institute of Culture, a later organisation, is also one of the big Ramakrishna institutions in Calcutta.

The whole country is now studded with various institutions of the Mission. Apart from Calcutta, they are in Banaras, Lucknow, Brindavan, Patna, Kankhal, Bombay, Bhubaneshwar, Puri, Rajahmundry, Hyderabad, Kancheepuram, Madras, Kalady, Coimbatore, Trivandrum and many other places numbering 118 in 1982 of which 52 were Missions, 22 combined Maths and Mission Centres and 44 Math Centres. Those who see them now are likely to forget the humble way in which they were begun and the very hard work, dedication and suffering the early pioneers had to go through. For example the Banaras Sevashrama one of the leading hospitals of the Mission today began with four annas (25 paise). The Kankhal Sevashrama which is also one of our big medical centres started with less than Rs.28/-. The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya at Coimbatore started with only Rs.5.75. All these institutions had varying beginnings and history, but all of them had one factor in common — the inspiration of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and their message, namely, to seek and serve God in man.

It was Nietzsche the great German thinker who said: 'The greatest events are not our loudest; on the other hand they are the quietest. The world turns itself not around the discoveries of new noises, but around the discovery of new values'. The lives of the great Prophets, Buddha and Christ, Sankara, Nanak, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Gandhi and other torch-bearers of Truth tell us the same story. They discovered new values and viewed the march of mankind from the point of view of the highest ideals. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna into the area of Indian life in recent times is a turning point in the history of Human Culture, giving afresh the message of peace and harmony to a war-torn world, threatened with

annihilation by nuclear weapons. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission are instruments through which this much needed message is spread throughout the world.

It has been my good fortune and privilege that I could become a part of this august organisation. A home has been defined as a place where kindred spirits live. As such from the time of my first visit to the Madras Math, the Math and Mission, in its various centres has been my home, where I was spending a large portion of my time. In 1928 on the suggestion of Swami Amriteswarananda, I was enrolled as a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. This identification with the Mission has grown with the founding of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in Coimbatore. That story will be the subject of a subsequent chapter.

5. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Education

SWAMI Vivekananda believed that a good system of education is an essential prerequisite for the uplift of our country. This is true of all nations and people. Wherever the education system and the teachers handling it have been good, imbued with high ideals and discipline, that country has prospered. The first sign of the degeneration of a nation is when the educational system fails to keep up high standards and traditions. While the home and the family have a vital part in shaping the minds of children, it is the quality of teachers which is basic to any good educational system. In reshaping the education system, it is necessary to remember that it must be tailored to meet our national needs; it must uphold our national ideals; it must work to eradicate the evils in society and provide for all people regardless of caste, religion or economic status, a good education inspiring confidence, strength and integrity in our children.

Background — The National Scene

Endowed with a keen insight and understanding, during his wanderings throughout the length and breadth of India, Swami Vivekananda had occasion to observe in close quarters the ways of life, the cultural background, religious practices and the economic position of the various strata of Indian society. With deep love, sympathy and love for our people and our country, he could see the weaknesses which were the causes of our national downfall. In building a good educational system, it was necessary to know them, so that steps may be taken to correct them.

1. He said, as was mentioned before, that our great national sin was the neglect of the masses and that was the cause of our downfall. He warned that no amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India were once more well educated, well fed and well cared for. A nation advances in proportion to the spread of education and intelligence among the masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolising of education and the intelligence of the land by a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we can do it only by spreading education among the masses. The only service to be done for the lower classes is to give them an education which will help to develop their individuality. Give them ideas; open their eyes to what is going on in the world around them, so that they will work out their own salvation.

2. The second reason for the nation's downfall in Swamiji's opinion was the degradation of women. It was difficult for him to understand, why in this country so much difference was made between men and women, whereas our religion declares that one and the same Self is present in all beings. Writing down Smritis and so called sastras, and binding women by hard rules, men have turned them into mere child manufacturing machines. In the period of degradation, when the priests made the other castes incompetent to study the Vedas, they deprived women also of all their rights. It may be seen that in the Vedic and Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi and many other women were like learned Rishis. "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women can never become great, nor will ever be in future. The real Shakti-worshipper is he who knows that God is the Omnipresent force in the universe, and sees in women the manifestation of that force. In America men look upon their women in this light and treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence they are so prosperous, so learned, so free and so energetic. The principal reason why our race has so degenerated is that we had no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu says 'Where women are respected, there the Gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and efforts come to naught'. There is no hope of rise for that family or country where they live in sadness".

3. The Swami proclaimed that want of Shraddha and lack of faith in ourselves is the root cause of our individual and national downfall. He said, 'The faith in our own selves must be re-awakened and then only all the problems which face our country will gradually be solved by ourselves. What we want is Shraddha. What makes the difference between man and man is the difference in this Shraddha. What makes one man great and another weak and low is the difference in their Shraddha. He who thinks himself weak will become weak.

He considered the preaching of the doctrine of Shraddha or faith as the mission of his life. 'Let me repeat to you', he said, 'that faith is one of the most potent factors of humanity. First have faith in yourselves. Know that though one may be a little bubble and another may be a mountain high wave yet behind both the bubble and the wave there is the infinite ocean. The infinite ocean is the background of me as well as you. Mine also is that infinite ocean of life, of power, of spirituality as well as yours. Therefore teach this life-saving, great, ennobling, grand doctrine to your children even from their very birth'.¹

¹ The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, V.III, pp.444.

4. Swami Vivekananda also pointed out how physical weakness, mutual jealousy, partisan spirit and want of organisation undermined the national character and strength. 'Physical weakness' he said, 'is the cause of at least one-third of our miseries. We are lazy, we cannot work; we cannot combine, we do not love each other; we are intensely selfish, no three of us can come together without being jealous of each other. That is the state in which we are hopelessly disorganised, immensely selfish, fighting each other for centuries on such petty things as to whether a certain mark is to be put on our forehead this way or that way, writing volumes and volumes upon such silly questions as to whether the look of a man spoils my food or not! Though we think these things frivolous, we cannot give them up. We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it'. First of all, our young men must be strong. 'Be strong, my young friends', he said, 'that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Gita'.

5. The Atharva Veda Samhita says, 'Be thou all of one mind, be though all of one thought'. Being of one mind is the secret of success in every field. And the more you go on fighting and quarrelling about such trivialities such as "Dravidian" and "Aryan" and the question of Brahmins and non-Brahmins etc., the further you are off from that accumulation of energy and power which can make a great future for India. For, the future of India depends entirely upon the accumulation of will-power, coordination, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus. That is how it has gone on throughout the history of the world. We find compact little nations governing and ruling huge nations, because the little compact nations bring their ideas into the same focus, and thus they become developed, while the bigger nations cannot combine. Therefore all these dissensions must stop.

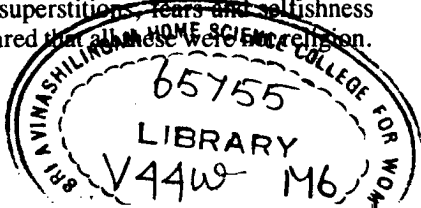
6. The Swami's great message was that work must be done as worship. At a time when spiritual men avoided society and work, in their search for God, and sought the solitude of the caves and the forests, the Swami's message came with significant originality. He said, "Where are you going to seek God? Is not God more present in the living beings around you? God has come in the shape of the poor and the miserable, the sick and the lowly, the suffering and the down-trodden. Serve them sincerely and with humility, work for them, and that will be the real worship of God".

7. Swami Vivekananda found also that religion had degenerated into mere ceremonials and meaningless forms. Memorising of scriptures and wearing of caste marks and observance of obsolete social taboos were considered as religion. Mere argumentation without understanding, empty talking without the will to follow it, quoting scriptures without observing them in daily life became the way of life of the people. Thus, while people talked about spirituality, superstitions, fears and selfishness ruled. Swami Vivekananda boldly declared that all these were religion.

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He said that religion was not frothy talk but progressive development and realisation. It is being and becoming. We have to realise in our life all that we consider highest and noblest. He declared from the housetops that all our age-old superstitions which had weakened and degraded us, all the social customs and caste restrictions that had made us narrow-minded and weak, these by whatever name called, should be given up. Real religion should be purifying, invigorating and strength-giving.

8. Swami Vivekananda was extremely distressed with the appalling poverty stalking over the land especially in the countryside. Maharajas and rich men were living in palatial buildings, and squandering wealth in spectacular luxuries out of the money earned from the exploitation of the masses, while in their neighbourhood, thousands of people, men, women and children were living in poverty, malnutrition, squalour, dirt and death. This spectacle bled his heart and he cried with tears in agony. He wanted this poverty to be eradicated; for no high ideals or spiritual values can be imparted to empty stomachs crying for a loaf of bread. No results will ever come out of lecturing to people who are poor and hungry all the time and so the first step in raising India even spiritually, was to destroy the abject poverty. He did not believe in a religion which cannot give bread in this life, but would promise eternal bliss in heaven. If India was to be raised, the poor should have food and education must be spread. The first task should then be eradication of the abject poverty which prevents development.

Therefore he pleaded for a spiritual socialism based on love for the poor and devotion to serve them, which will eradicate differences amongst various people, communities and religions so that all will have equal opportunities to develop their own personalities and strength for the welfare of the country and the world.

9. The Swami spoke of the urgent need for India to assimilate the spirit of modern science, develop technical efficiency and practical skills and through these, build up a healthy and progressive body politic. Education should be a blend of spiritual life and modern science. But spirituality, he held, must continue to remain the central theme of Indian life. He found no conflict between material well-being and spiritual welfare both of which he united into a comprehensive harmonious life.

10. The Swami recognised that the different religions in the world came to fulfil the needs of humanity, according to the conditions of life of the people, their history, culture and traditions. Today, when distance has been annihilated, when barriers between nations are vanishing, and countries are daily coming closer to each other, the external forms of religion which tend to divide, have to give place to the fundamentals which tend to unite. Pleading for the acceptance of all religions, he said: "Our watchword, then will be acceptance and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for the so-called toleration is often blasphemy. Toleration means that I think you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship them all".

The Message

To Swami Vivekananda education was the method and instrument for our regeneration and progress. He spelt out the background philosophy and the essential framework of such an educational system. Nowadays when we hear educationists discussing and declaiming on the forms necessary for our educational system and structure, the Swamiji's words and ideas come with refreshing vigour.

It is against this background of our country that Swami Vivekananda gave his message for Education. That message emphasised cultivation of faith and confidence on the basis of every man having the highest potentiality, inculcation of man-making and character-making education in the background of the cultural heritage of our country, importance of religion in the inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values, education for national integration as well as for international understanding, the qualities to be cultivated amongst teachers, the emphasis on every man doing his allotted duties and inculcation of patriotism. These are explained below:

1. Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man

The Swami believed that all souls are potentially divine and education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. The duty of the teacher is to help in the manifestation of this divinity by positive help and encouragement and by his own high example. As he said: "The light divine is obscured in most people. It is like a lamp in a cask of iron; no gleam of light can shine through it; gradually by purity and unselfishness, we can make the obscuring medium less dense, until at last it becomes as transparent as glass. The duty of the teacher is to help the child by positive guidance to become conscious of his great national and spiritual heritage and strive for it".

2. Not information but the assimilation of ideas

"Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. We want an education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet. What we need today is to study different branches of the knowledge that is our own, and with it the English language and western science; we need technical education and all else that will develop industries, so that men instead of seeking for services, may earn enough by independent self-employment.

3. Man-making and strength-giving

To the Swami, the end of all education and training should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under

control and become fruitful, is called education. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean, meeting death face to face.

4. Concentration of the mind

According to the Swami, the very essence of education is concentration of mind. From the lowest man to the highest Yogi, all have to use the same method to attain knowledge. The chemist who works in his laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind, brings them into one focus, and thus develops his knowledge. The astronomer concentrates the powers of his mind and brings them into one focus; and he throws them on to objects through his telescope; and stars and systems roll forward and reveal their secrets to him. So it is in every case; with the professor in his study, the student with his book, with every man who is working to know. Ninety percent of thought-force is wasted by the ordinary human being and therefore he is constantly committing blunders. The trained man or mind seldom makes a mistake. The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. An animal has very little power of concentration. Those who have trained animals find much difficulty in the fact that the animal is constantly forgetting what is told to it. It cannot concentrate its mind upon anything for a long time. This difference in the power of concentration constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration.

As a means to attain this power of concentration, the Swami emphasised the need for a high degree of purity and continence. 'Power comes to him who observes unbroken Brahmacharya for a period of twelve years. Complete continence gives great intellectual and spiritual powers. Controlled desire leads to the highest results, transforms the sexual energy into spiritual energy. The stronger this force, the more can be done with it. Only a powerful current of water can do hydraulic mining. It is owing to want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country. By observance of strict Brahmacharya, all learning can be mastered in a very short time; one acquires an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will power. Without chastity there can be no spiritual strength. Continence gives wonderful control over mankind. The spiritual leaders of men have been very continent and this is what gave them power'.

5. The Aim of education is formation of good character

Swami Vivekananda considered that formation of a good character is the essence of education and explained how it can be formed. "The character of any man is but the aggregate of his tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon

it different pictures, and the result of these combined impressions is what is called a man's character. We are what our thoughts have made us. Each thought is a little hammer blow on the lump of iron which our bodies are, manufacturing out of it what we want it to be. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far. And so take care of what you think. If a man thinks good thoughts and does good work, the sum total of these impressions will be good and they in a similar manner will force him to do good in spite of himself. When a man has done so much good work and thought so many good thoughts, there is an irresistible tendency in him to do good. Even if he wishes to do evil, his mind as the sum total of his tendencies will not allow him to do so. He is completely under the influence of the good tendencies. When such is the case, a man's good character is said to be established.

6. Development of personality

The Swami laid great stress on the development of personality. For this it is necessary to understand what is personality. When we say a man has a good personality, the first thing that comes to the mind is his physical appearance. While physical appearance gives the first impression, it is not everything. Some of the greatest personalities of the world, who have wielded tremendous power over millions of men, did not have a very prepossessing appearance. Napoleon was of less than average height. Abraham Lincoln was by no means a handsome person. Gandhiji, who before our own eyes commanded the worshipful reverence of millions of people did not have an outstanding physique. Milton was blind, Tamerlane was lame and Roosevelt was a cripple. History is full of examples of men and women who were not very beautiful in appearance but yet commanded the admiration and loyalties of millions of men and influenced the lives of thousands of people for good or evil.

"No physical law that we know of explains personality development. How can we explain it by chemical and physical knowledge? Can the proportion of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon or the placement of many molecules in different positions, or the number of cells, etc. ever explain this mysterious personality? Yet we see, the personality of the man is the real man; and it is that man that lives and moves and works, it is that man that influences and moves his fellow-being. His intellect, books and works are but traces left behind. Compare the great teachers of religion with the great philosophers. The philosophers scarcely influenced anybody's inner man, and yet they wrote most marvellous books. The religious teachers, on the other hand, moved countries in their life-time. The difference was made by their personality. In the philosopher, it is a faint personality that influences; in the great prophets, it is a tremendous personality. In the former we touch the intellect, in the latter, we touch life".

Personality is thus something beyond the body. It is a combination of many qualities. Strength, courage, firmness, ability to inspire people are some of the qualities common to men and women of outstanding

personalities. Personality is the sum total of all biological and acquired dispositions, impulses, tendencies and instincts of the individual. It is the total quality of an individual's behaviour, as it is revealed in his habits, thoughts and expression, attitudes and interests, his manner of functioning and his personal philosophy of life.

Development of personality is essential for all men and women whatever may be their avocation, position or status in life, whether as spiritual men or householders, whether teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators or politicians. The Swami advised that Raja Yoga shows the path and method for the development of personality.

7. Qualities of a good student

Swami Vivekananda's idea of education was Gurugriha-vasa. Without the personal life of the teacher who lives what he teaches by his own example, there would be no good education. There are certain conditions necessary in the taught. They are purity, a real thirst after knowledge and perseverance. Purity in thought, speech and actions is absolutely necessary. As for the thirst after knowledge, it is an old law that we all get whatever we want. None of us can get anything other than what we fix our hearts upon. There must be a continuous struggle, constant fight, an unremitting grappling with our lower nature, till the higher want is actually achieved. The student who sets out with such a spirit of perseverance will surely find success at last.

8. Removal of obstacles to the growth of the child

Swami Vivekananda believed that the work of the teachers was only to remove the obstacles and help the child to grow. "You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant. The plant develops its own nature. The child also teaches itself. But you can help it to go forward in its own way. You can take away the obstacles, and knowledge comes out easily. Put a hedge round it; see that it is not killed by anything. You can supply the growing seed with the materials for the making up of its body, bringing to it to the earth, the water, the air that it wants. It will take all that it wants by its own nature. So with the education of the child".

9. Qualities of a Good Teacher

The teacher knows the spirit of the scriptures. The whole world reads the Bible, The Vedas and the Koran; but they are all only words, syntax, etymology, philology — the dry bones of religion. The teacher who deals too much in words and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words loses the spirit. It is the knowledge of the spirit of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true teacher. The second condition necessary for the teacher is sinlessness. The question is often asked: why should we look into the character and personality of a teacher? Will not his proficiency in his subject be sufficient? This is not right. The *sine quo non* of acquiring truth for oneself, or for imparting to others, is purity of heart and soul. The teacher

must be perfectly pure, and only then can come the value of his words. The function of the teacher is indeed an affair of the transference of something and not one of mere stimulation of existing intellectual or other faculties in the taught. Something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the taught; therefore, the teacher must be pure.

The third condition is in regard to the motive. The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive, for money, name or fame. His work must be out of love, out of pure love for his students and mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted is love. Any selfish motive, such as the desire for selfish gain will destroy the conveying medium.

10. Religion, the innermost core of education

The Swami considered Religion as the innermost core of education. "I do not mean my own or any one else's opinion about religion. The true eternal principles have to be held before the people. First of all we have to introduce the worship of the great saints. Those great souled ones who have realised the eternal truths are to be presented before the people as the ideals to be followed — Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Mahavira, Sri Ramakrishna and others. Keep aside for the present the Vrindavan aspect of Sri Krishna and spread far and wide the worship of Sri Krishna roaring out the Gita with the voice of a lion, and bring into daily use the worship of Shakti — the Divine Mother, the source of all power. We now mostly need the ideal of the hero with the tremendous spirit of Rajas thrilling through his veins from head to foot — the hero who will dare and die in pursuit of his ideals, whose sword is wisdom. We now want the spirit of the brave warrior in the battlefield. Make the character of Mahavira Hanuman your ideal. At the command of Ramachandra he crossed the ocean! He had no care for life or death. He was a perfect master of the sense and wonderfully sagacious. Build your life on this great ideal of personal service. Through that ideal all the other ideals will gradually manifest themselves in life. Obedience to the Guru and strict observance of Brahmacharya — this is the secret of success. Hanuman represents the ideal of service on the one hand and on the other he represents leonine courage, striking the world with awe. He has not the least hesitation in sacrificing his life for the good of Rama, a supreme indifference to everything except the service of Rama. Only the carrying out of Sri Rama's behest is the one vow of his life. Such whole-hearted devotion is wanted".

11. Education for international understanding

Swamiji also saw that nations could no longer live apart, and that true nationalism should promote the spirit of internationalism. He said: Even in politics and sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago can no longer be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international perspectives. International

organisation, international cooperation, international laws and matters affecting global growth and welfare are the cry of the day. It is becoming clearer everyday that the solution of many problems can never be attained on racial, national or other narrow grounds.

But the Swami gave us a warning. Beggars will never be respected. We must have something to give in order to receive. In these thirty years of independence, our country has developed a great deal in Science and Technology, which we are glad we can offer for the use of other developing countries. But yet we need a great deal in the higher levels of science and technology, like space research, utilisation of solar energy and nuclear power for peaceful purposes and many other fields. For these the greatest thing we can give back in return is not science, technology or in the material field. As Swamiji proclaimed that the gift of India to the world should be the gift of religion and philosophy, wisdom and spirituality.

Swamiji foresaw that the whole of Western Civilisation would crumble to pieces in the next few decades if there was no spiritual foundation. The nuclear arms race and the concern of humanity in case the next war is fought with nuclear arms have confirmed the fears of Swami Vivekananda. To prevent this catastrophe from happening and to see that a new page is turned in human history, Swamiji exhorted his countrymen to be proud of India and to see that she regains her lost spiritual glory, so that India may make a lasting and effective contribution to world peace. He wanted India to live in order that the world may live. Thus Swamiji's nationalism was not conceived in any narrow spirit. India's special mission was the spread of spirituality in the world.

12. Education for national integration

Social and national integration is crucial to the creation of a strong and united nation and education must become an instrument to achieve it. Other things may help in varying measures. But a national system of education is the only agency that can reach people living all over India, in various conditions of economy. Such a system of national education must have two essential features; First, cultivation of a deep sense of national, social and spiritual values, or the obligations of citizenship, and a growing identification with the nation as a whole, transcending sectional and regional loyalties. Secondly, steady efforts should be made to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the under-privileged, city and village, the educated and the uneducated, through provision of adequate facilities to all for their development.

While emphasising spiritual and religious values, it is necessary to understand clearly what we really mean when we say that we are a secular state. By some, the expression has been understood to mean that we stand for irreligion or that we are anti-religious. Such an interpretation is wholly wrong. As Dr. Radhakrishnan has explained: Secularism does not imply that we have forsworn religion or religious practices. The ideal of secularism

is to give up prejudices against others who follow a different religion and extend equal treatment and privileges to followers of all faiths.

By declaring India a secular State, the Indian people have by no means rejected the Divine or the relevance of religion to life and enthroned irreligion. Secularism only means that the State will not identify itself with any particular religion, that no person shall suffer any disability or discrimination on account of his religion. All will be free to share to the fullest degree our common national, spiritual heritage.

13. Education for spiritual awakening

The Swami further said: When the life-blood is strong and pure, no disease germ can live in that body. Our life-blood is spirituality. If it flows clear, if it flows strong and pure and vigorous, everything will be right. Political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land will all be cured if that blood is pure.

The Swami was keenly aware of the tremendous amount of work that had to be done in India and abroad. India had to be resuscitated and rebuilt. A new, strong, virile, independent India, taking its stand on love, unselfishness and service had to rise on the ashes of its immediate past steeped in slavery and poverty. While material wealth was necessary he regarded the human element as far more important. This is clear from the letter he wrote to his Madras friends from Yokohama, Japan, while on his way to America, 1893: "India", he wrote, "wants the sacrifices of at least a thousand of her young men. How many men, unselfish, thorough-going men is Madras now ready to supply to struggle unto life and death to bring about a new state of things, sympathy for the poor and bread to their hungry mouths, and enlightenment to the people at large"? After reaching the United States, he wrote again in the same strain: "A hundred thousand men and women, fortified with the eternal faith in the Lord and nerved to a lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor, the fallen and the down-trodden, who will go over the length and breadth of the land preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up and the gospel of equality are necessary".

14. Inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values in education

It is unfortunate that our education system, as pointed out by the Kothari Education Commission, lays greater emphasis on narrow individualism, unhealthy competition to the neglect of social good, verbal fluency in language, and mere acquisition of information, while it neglects social objectives, cooperation, manual work, training skills and building up of character. This can be changed only by inculcation of spiritual values in Education. We should also remind ourselves that spiritual value does not consist in following ceremonials or even the mere study of scriptures. As Swami Vivekananda has said, we may study all the books in the world, yet we may not understand a word of religion or spiritual life. We may

talk and reason all our life, but we shall not understand a word of truth until we experience it ourselves. We may be the most intellectual people the world ever saw and yet we may not come near God. On the other hand, irreligious men have been produced from the most intellectual training. It makes men selfish and exploiting. But the cultivation of the heart makes one go to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach. It goes beyond the intellect and reaches what is called inspiration'.

Therefore, the challenge before us is to revitalise our country and all sections of our society by inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values. We have become slaves of material civilization, the dominant impulse of today is not only the greed for riches and desire for luxuriant living, but also desire for wealth and power by fair or foul means. How to give our society a worthy purpose in life, motivated by ethical, social and spiritual values is the main problem facing the nation.

Following the teachings of Swamiji, the report of the National Seminar conducted by the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya on Inculcation of Social, Ethical and Spiritual values in education has drawn out a detailed syllabi of instruction and activities for the various stages of education, namely, nursery, primary, secondary and college levels and for the teacher-training colleges. To the Swami, the inculcation of these values is the essence of religion.

15. Do your duty

As part of training in character and religion, the Swami laid great emphasis on each man doing his allotted duty. To Swami Vivekananda every work is holy. The greatness of a man is not in what work he does but with what attitude he does it. He said that all work must be done as worship, without selfishness and without expecting any reward. Duty so performed becomes the highest tapasya and makes one attain high spiritual tapas done in the quiet seclusion of caves and forests. The Swami tells a story to illustrate this.

A young Sannyasin went to a forest; there he meditated, worshipped, and practised Yoga for a long time. After years of hard work and practice, he was one day sitting under a tree, when some dry leaves fell upon his head. He looked up and saw a crow and a crane fighting on the top of the tree, which made him very angry. He said, "What! Dare you throw these dry leaves upon my head!" As with these words he angrily glanced at them, a flash of fire went out of his eyes — such was the Yogi's power — and burnt the birds to ashes. He was very glad, almost overjoyed at this development of power — he could burn the crow and the crane by a look. After a time he had to go to the town to beg his bread. He went, stood at a door, and said, "Mother, give me food". A voice came from inside the house, "Wait a little, my son". The young man thought, "You wretched woman, how dare you make me wait! You do not know my power yet". While he was thinking thus the voice came again: "Boy, don't think too

much of yourself. Here is neither crow nor crane''. He was astonished; still he had to wait. At last the woman came, and he fell at her feet and said, "Mother, how did you know that? ". She said, "My boy, I do not know your Yoga or your practices. I am an ordinary woman. I made you wait because my husband is ill, and I was nursing him. All my life I have struggled to do my duty. When I was unmarried, I did my duty to my parents; now that I am married, I do my duty to my husband; that is all the Yoga I practise. But by doing my duty I have become illumined; thus I could read your thoughts and know what you had done in the forest."

Swami Vivekananda therefore urged that one should perform his daily duty to one's parents, family, teachers, community and country with shraddha and devotion, with courage and strength and without fearing anything and expecting nothing. Only such a person will be able to achieve great things in life.

16. Education for instilling patriotism

Swami Vivekananda's writings inspire the readers with a rare and intense love for the country. At a time when India was in the lowest ebb of political and cultural life, he was the first to raise his stentorian voice and say, 'Be proud you are an Indian'. To him patriotism was not mere frothy talk or lectures on public platforms. It meant a burning sense of love for the country and the people. It meant feeling for their poverty, miseries and ignorance. It must make one sacrifice his everything in service of the people and the country.

It was this message of Swami Vivekananda that ignited the fire of patriotism in millions of men and women to sacrifice themselves in the freedom movement. It was again his words that inspired thousands of persons to give up their personal ambitions and start institutions to serve the poor and the needy. It was his fiery words that made me start the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya and inspired me constantly towards continuing service.

Swami Vivekananda was not a classroom teacher, but was one of the great teachers of mankind like Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and Gandhi, whose teachings contained the principles and philosophy which are the basis of all good educational systems. The Vivekananda Centenary Celebrations in 1963 gave me the idea that I may write a book on his philosophy of education. The book was a humble effort to bring out the message of Swami Vivekananda on Education. In doing so, I have tried as far as possible to use the words of the Swami, for it is well-nigh impossible to portray his fire, enthusiasm and grandeur in any words other than his own. He had a personality which was unequalled in his time. Those who met him in the United States said of him that he had the scholarship of the University President, the dignity of an archbishop and the guilelessness of the child. As Romain Rolland said: "He had an olive complexion, a full face, vast forehead, strong jaw, a pair of magnificent eyes, large, dark and rather prominent, with heavy lids, whose shape recalled the classic comparison

to a lotus petal. But his pre-eminent characteristic was kingliness. He was a born king and nobody ever came near him either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty”.

Swami Vivekananda's concept of education is as broad-based as life itself. It is not utilitarian being not confined only to bread-winning. It is not merely national, as it transcends the narrowness of geographical boundaries. He wanted the use of technology for eradicating the poverty of the masses. He wanted the development of a strong and healthy body. But both these were not ends in themselves but the means for a higher life, leading to spiritual blessedness.

The book deals with Swamiji's ideas on various aspects of education as aims of education, need for a positive approach, the role of the teacher, Concentration as the only method of Education, Learning to think, Power of love, Sublimation of the mind through work, love and meditation and knowledge, control of the mind, Education for national and international integration and rural development, methods of inculcating spiritual values in the various stages of education etc. I am grateful to teachers and students of education for receiving it well as indicated by the fact that it has gone through four reprints.

I am no philosopher, writer or trained educationist in the formal sense. But the desire that such a publication may be brought out on the occasion of the Swamiji's Centenary Celebrations made me undertake this difficult work. It was Swamiji's inspiration that enabled me to complete it.

If the message of Swami Vivekananda can be in one word, it is manliness. He wanted that all of us should shed our weakness and become men. In a Bengali article published in the Udbodhan, he poured out the upsurgings of his heart as follows: 'Forget not', he said, 'that your wealth and life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for your individual personal happiness, but that you are born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar, forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler and the sweeper, are your flesh and blood, your brothers. Be proud that you are an Indian, and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian, every Indian, poor or destitute, is my brother'. Proudly proclaim at the top of the voice that the soil of India is your highest heaven, the good of India is your good and pray day and night, 'O thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me; O Mother of strength take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness and make me a man!'

It is this message that he sought to give through education.*

* Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda by T.S. Avinashilingam, published by Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore-641 020.

6. Early Days and Family Backgrounds

I was born on 5th May 1903 in an affluent family in Tiruppur — then a sleepy town in Coimbatore District. My mother Palani Ammal was a deeply religious woman, who was given much to worship and looking after her family. My father K. Subramania Chettiar was a successful merchant and banker, at the same time charitably disposed. We were a large joint family with four families living in the same house and having a common kitchen and living as one family. The four parents had each a room for their privacy and all the children ate and slept together in the ample common hall in the house. The widowed aunts also lived as part of the family and we as children heard all the stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhakthi Vijayam, Vikramaditya and Peria Puranam from these aunts. In this age of nuclear families such joint families can rarely be seen. Living together was not always without problems. There were occasional quarrels amongst the womenfolk and some misunderstandings among the men. But the respect with which the elders were treated and obeyed was something marvellous. Living together in a joint family gave a training to respect others' needs, wishes and conveniences and created a background of affection and love.

Our family was an old and respected one. My father, grand-fathers and others before them had made a judicious use of their money. They earned well and led a good life. Their earnings were not done in a few years or even in a life-time. It is difficult to acquire large wealth within a short time by fair means. The wealth of my forefathers had been built up slowly and with patience. They had no spectacular earnings. Many times I had heard my father say that the wealth of our family was built up by savings rather than by any large earnings at any particular time. In addition to their duties to their own families, they did also their duty to the community. It makes me happy every time I see the choultry which my forefathers had built in Palladam, now about two hundred years old. Our family has provided for Puja every day in the Avinashi Temple. It makes one good to think that this has been going on for nearly a century. They had built choultries in many other pilgrim centres like Avinashi, Perur, Thirumuruganpundi and provided for worship in many shrines. The choultry in Tiruppur is the biggest, built nearly a century back. In it provision had also been made for the feeding of Brahmin pilgrims, who happened to pass that side. Our

forefathers were great men who commanded the respect of their times, and did good work according to the then prevailing mores.

My father was a good and affectionate man, given much to going to temples and fasting. He loved his family and children deeply, but did not hesitate to correct them when wrong. An incident now comes to my mind. I was about seven or eight years old. There was an old servant in the house, Venkatachalam by name. My father and elders called him by name. One day I also called him by his name. My father at once slapped me and said, "Simply because he is a servant and I call him by name, should you also do it? Call him 'Anna' (elder brother)". That was how trusted servants were treated at that time. At present in many rich families even relatives 'if poor' are not respected. In those days no family functions such as marriage and other ceremonials will take place in families until the near relatives, however poor, came and participated.

My mother was ill with constant asthma. Sometimes the asthma would take a serious turn making her bed-ridden and gasping for breath for many days together. But in spite of the sickness, she carried on her household duties bravely. One thing she never missed except when absolutely bed-ridden. That was to go to the neighbouring Shiva temple in the evening with oil for the temple lamps. While I was young, I used to accompany her. When she could not go to the temple because of asthma she asked me to take the daily oil to the temple lamps. She was simple and would give away whatever money she had to poor relatives and others who came with tales of their sufferings and difficulties. My father thought she was gullible and easily deceived; and so rebuked her for it. But that never mended her habits. And so my father had to tolerate it. When I had shifted to Coimbatore and Madras for studies and when I returned from those places for holidays, she would invite me to sit with her and tell her everything about those places. In my ignorance as an adolescent youth, I would tell her that she would not understand those things. Little did I know then what she wanted was not the news but my company, nearness and affection. In grateful memory for my father and mother, two high schools have been established in their names in Tiruppur for boys and girls respectively.

Our family was a large one with four brothers and four sisters. My eldest brother Kandaswamy Chettiar completed his studies in Coimbatore and studied for some time in the Presidency College in Madras. He was a good and kind-hearted man, was managing the family bank in Tiruppur and throughout his life was devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and Gandhi. It was through him that I first heard about Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda's great and spectacular success in the Chicago Parliament of Religions and Mahatma Gandhi, all of whom were to have a lasting impression on me throughout my life. So also was my next elder brother T.S. Thirugnasambandam Chettiar who managed the family properties in Coimbatore. My younger brother T.S. Thandapani became closely associated with my

educational work. He is a selfless soul who continues to be a bachelor living in the Vidyalaya and serving it in various ways.

Apart from my father and mother, the person who influenced me most in my family was T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, whose centenary was celebrated recently. He was a great man in many ways. He had a distinguished academic record. As many others at that time he chose the legal profession, in which he rose to be the leader first in Tiruppur and later in the bigger bar at Coimbatore. His integrity, courage, outspokenness and character commanded respect from everybody, even from those who differed from him. He occupied some of the most distinguished positions in public life available to non-officials in public life at that time. He was successively the Chairman of the Coimbatore Municipality, President of the District Board, was elected to the Madras Legislative Council and later to the Constituent Assembly and the Parliament of India unopposed.

He earned well but did not care to amass wealth. At the height of his legal practice, when he reached sixty, he voluntarily retired from practice to devote himself wholly for public service. He was devoted to 'Cooperation' and was considered the father of the Cooperative Movement in Tamil Nadu. Later, in order to be able to spend freely for charity, he partitioned and gave his sons their share and used his whole income for charitable purpose. After I came to Coimbatore, I was practising as his junior and lived with him and he regarded me as his son. And so I had occasion to observe him closely and was influenced by his courage, integrity and high standards of public life.

He was also a great devotee of Lord Muruga. When the end came he faced death with faith and courage. In 1951, after his unanimous election to Parliament, he had a heart attack. He made no fuss about it. He wrote his will. In it he had made provision even for his servants who had served him faithfully over the years, along with the provisions for his daughter and his grandchildren and the balance for charity. He was in bed as if nothing had happened. The second heart attack came in a couple of weeks. I went to Madras and got a heart specialist to advise on the treatment for his illness. The doctor happened to be the son of one of his co-workers in the Cooperative Movement. When the doctor came, he said, 'I am all right. These boys are making unnecessary fuss'. He then told the doctor what dedicated work his father did for the Cooperative Movement. The doctor was amazed at his philosophical courage while he was facing death. On the Sarvodaya Day, that is the 13th anniversary of Gandhiji's demise, when I was involved in that function in Perur, the news came that he had passed away, quietly and with dignity. The members of the Cooperative Movement showed their appreciation by putting up a bust in the District Central Cooperative Bank of which he was the President. They have given his name to the building which houses one of the apex cooperative institutions in Madras. A grateful public named after him the Perunthurai T.B. Sanatorium for building which he was responsible. A beautiful High School has also been established in his name in Coimbatore.

Needless to say that a man of such qualities made an indelible impression on me by his courage, strength, integrity and character. He was my philosopher and guide in building the Vidyalaya and also in my political life, in which I was to take such a large part later.

I must also mention here another who did not belong to our family, but who was closely related to it and who was to have a great deal of influence in my life. Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder was a close friend of my uncle. He was one of the most influential men in the district and considered to be the uncrowned king of the Vellala Gounder Community, which formed the major portion of Coimbatore District. He was tall, stately and had a fine physical personality. He had a dignity and nobility of character, an attachment to principles and devotion to public service. He was not educated in the present sense of the term, but occupied some of the highest positions open to non-official leadership. He was successively President of the District Board, Member of the Madras Legislative Council and later of the Council of States at the Centre. He was early attracted to Gandhiji's constructive programme, particularly the Prohibition part of it. At the call of Gandhiji, he was one of the first to refuse to lease his coconut gardens for toddy tapping, though it meant considerable monetary loss. He always wore Khadi. The Gandhian principles which I followed attracted him. He loved me like a son. He was to be my close help and support in my Gandhian constructive and political work, and in the work of the Vidyalaya. He was with me on all occasions and difficulties. There is now a High School and a hostel for boys run in his name. There is a plaque commemorating his love and devotion in the Appar Nilayam in the Vidyalaya as a permanent tribute to his love for me and the Vidyalaya.

I have said before how I grew up along with the sons of my uncles as part of a large family. Of these, I must mention T.S. Kalyanasundaram who was to be my life-long co-worker in the Vidyalaya. His mother was a second mother to me and he was more than a brother to me. Both of them took a prominent part in building the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya.

I must also mention another lasting influence in my life, while in Tiruppur. That was my teacher Venkatasubramania Iyer in the primary school in which I studied. By modern standards he was very poor. The salary of the elementary school teacher at that time was only Rs.6/- per month. But he was rich in the affection and respect he commanded from his pupils. He had much love for his children in the school. It was not mere love, but respect for the personality, that made the children literally worship him. On occasions we used to go to his house and make sashtanga pranams to him. My respect for him was so great, that long after I ceased to study under him, after I grew to be a young man and had graduated from the college, I used to feel the same affection and respect for him. Throughout my life I have had great respect for my teachers. Much of this, I believe, is due to the respect inspired by him, my first teacher in the primary school.

After V Standard, I had to go to Coimbatore where I was admitted in what was then called the London Mission High School. I remember

with respect many of my teachers there especially, Sathyavageswara Iyer, Rama Iyer, Tamil Pandit Chokkalingam Pillai and our Headmaster, Devasahayam. They all took paternal care of the students. To them teaching was a mission and not a mere job for living. In Madras I studied in Pachaiyappa's College, where I gratefully remember C.S. Srinivasachariar, our Professor of History and our Principal M. Ruthnaswamy. All of them brought dignity to their profession. I lived in the Victoria Hostel and later after three years, I shifted to Pachaiyappa's Hostel in Chetput for completing the under-graduate and legal studies. It was while I was in Victoria Hostel, one of the incidents which later changed the course of my life happened. In the hostel, I met Chinnu, who later became Swami Chidbhanananda. The story of our going to the Mylapore Ramakrishna Math and meeting the two eminent disciples of the great Master, has already been mentioned earlier.

Both of us used to visit the Math often and meet the direct disciples of Sri Guru Maharaj. Their sacred touch changed the lives of all the three of us — Chinnu joined the Order, became Swami Chidbhanananda and founded the Ramakrishna Tapovanam near Tiruchirappalli. There also we met another kindred spirit Krishnan Nambiar from Kerala who was later to become Swami Agamananda who founded the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Kaladi, the birth place of the great Sankaracharya, the founder of the Advaita Philosophy, and I had the privilege of founding the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya. These Institutions are only symbolic of the great spiritual direction which these holy men gave to our minds and lives.

After passing Law, I was duly apprenticed and enrolled as an advocate and practised law first in Tiruppur and later at Coimbatore along with my uncle. In Coimbatore, I made a good start. Others thought that my future in the profession was assured. But I had no satisfaction or joy in that work. The inspiring passages of Swami Vivekananda — 'You are born to do great things — a life of love and sacrifice, not to spend your life in petty thinking of your own welfare and money' came into my mind continuously. When I wrote to Mahapurushji about this he wrote, 'Whatever you do and whatever profession you undertake, always remember that you are a child of Guru Maharaj, come into this world to serve Him, to love His children and His cause. That is the Mission of your life. I am blessing you — May you ever feel His grace'. Again he wrote later, 'Have no fear my boy — you know the end and aim of human life. I am sure wherever and whatever circumstances you may be placed in, nothing will be able to drag you into this world and make you forget Thakur. He will be ever with you and guide you'.

At about this time, another thing happened which gave an impetus to my spiritual life. In 1924, Mahapurushji Maharaj's health became indifferent and he was advised rest in a quiet place. Coonoor was recommended for that purpose. At that time the Mission did not have any Ashrama in the Nilgiris. But Ratnasabapathi Gounder, brother of Swami Chidbhanananda,

agreed to make all arrangement in a place called Springfields. There Mahapurushji lived for about six months and we had the privilege of being with him and serving him. Springfields was near the then Cochin palace. The way in which Mahapurushji received the Cochin Maharaja and others has been told in another place. His health improved considerably. And so in 1926, it was again arranged that he should take rest in the Nilgiris. This time he stayed in the Hathi Ramji Math and Godavari House, which then belonged to T. Prakasam, the great Congress leader in whose memory, a District has been named in Andhra Pradesh. The days that we spent with Mahapurushji were very inspiring. As usual, he never spoke much. He was not given to exhortations. But his presence, his love, his affection, made an indelible spiritual influence on all around.

It was during his visits to the Nilgiris that the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Ooty took shape. Knowing that Mahapurushji Maharaj liked the place, the devotees headed by C. Ramanujachariar and others wanted to establish an Ashrama there. They were looking for possible sites. When they came to Bishops Down - as it was then called, when standing over a site which commanded a magnificent view, they thought that it would be a good place for the Ashrama. At that time a few dhobies were passing by. They asked the dhobies whose site it was and whether it will be available for an Ashrama. A dhobi, to their surprise, said that it belonged to him, that in the previous night his family deity appeared before him and asked him to give it to an ashrama of sadhus. And so on the spot he promised to give two acres of his precious land as gift. That is how the Ashrama was built there. It was opened in 1926 before Mahapurushji's departure. That picture with him and all of us including the dhobi who gave his gift, C. Ramanujachariar, Swamis Yatiswarananda, Gangeshananda, Avinashananda, Chidbhavananda and myself and other devotees is the proud possession of the Ooty Ramakrishna Ashrama.

As time passed on, the legal profession lost its attraction for me. More and more the call was for a life of dedicated service. My uncle's family was very affectionate to me, but yet I turned more and more for Ashrama life. Often I used to go to the Ooty Ashrama, where my friend Swami Chidbhavananda was in charge. There we used to have long talks about my future course of action. There was also much time for meditation and introspection. At last we came to the conclusion that I must start an orphanage thus providing scope for dedicated service. I could wait no more. The decision had to be made.

The year was 1929. The day was Vijaya Dasami. In the Ooty Ashrama Puja was performed to the Divine Mother. We finished our worship and were sitting in the veranda. And then the idea struck me, why not make a beginning for an orphanage right now, on that Holy Vijaya Dasami Day. I communicated it to Swami Chidbhavananda and he agreed. To make a symbolic beginning, I gave Rs.5/-. He gave eight annas (fifty paise). There was 25 paise coin found on the road. With that amount of Rs. 5.75, the

Vidyalaya had begun in thought and mind. The actual beginning was to wait for a few more months.

I wrote about it to Mahapurushji Maharaj. He sent as usual his very affectionate blessings. At that time Swami Yatiswarananda was the President of the Madras Ramakrishna Math. He also warmly supported the idea. The date for its opening was to be 3rd February 1930.

I had requested Swami Yatiswarananda to come for the occasion. He readily agreed and arrived in Coimbatore on the previous morning. On that evening we had a preliminary meeting in my uncle's house to discuss the project. It was a very small group. Swami Yatiswarananda, my uncle and myself. Possibly my cousin, T.S. Kalyanasundaram, who was to be a life-long worker of the Vidyalaya was also there. The discussion was who were to be admitted in the orphanage and how it was to be conducted. I suggested that children of all castes should be admitted. It was unthinkable in those days, that was a few years before Gandhiji's starting the Harijan movement. They opposed the idea. All opined that if untouchables were to be admitted, children of higher castes would not join. They all considered it a very rash step. But I, in the impetuosity of youth, said that come what may, untouchables should be admitted. They had to agree. And so the first boy admitted was a Harijan. But what they stated proved true. For a long time the institution was boycotted and it was sneered at. It took many years to break the social stigma.

The next day dawned. To all the others it was just another day. But to me it was a morning of joy, hope and fears. Joy because a long ambition of dedicated love and service was going to be fulfilled. Hope that it will grow under the guidance of Sri Guru Maharaj and fear as to what the future has in store for me and the institution. The following words of Swamiji was ringing in my ears: 'Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart. What is in the intellect or reason? It goes a few steps and there it stops. But through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates. Feel, therefore, my would-be patriots. Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with the one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the very first step.

"You may feel then; but instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, to soothe their miseries, to bring them out of this living death? Yet that is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If the whole world

stands against you, swords in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right? If your wives and children are against you, if all your name dies, your wealth vanishes, would you still stick to it? Would you still pursue it and go on steadily towards your own goal? As the great king Bhartrihari says, 'Let the sages blame or let them praise; let the Goddess of Fortune come or let Her go wherever She likes, let death come today or let it come in hundreds of years, he indeed is the steady man who does not move one inch from the way of truth'. Have you got that steadfastness? If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles. Let us pray, 'Lead, kindly Light'; a beam will come through the dark and a hand will be stretched forth to lead us'.¹

And again the letter that Swami Vivekananda wrote to Alasinga Perumal in the year seemed to have been written to me: 'It is not the work of a day, the path is full of thorns. But Parthasarathy is ready to be our sarathi.....Faith, sympathy — fiery faith and fiery sympathy. Life is nothing, death is nothing, hunger and cold nothing. Glory unto the Lord and march on'.²

¹ Pages 74-75 in Education by Swami Vivekananda.

² Page 17 — Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 17.

7. Founding the Ramakrishna Vidyalaya

THE opening function for the Vidyalaya on 3rd February, 1930 at 6.30 a.m. was a very simple one in a tiled building belonging to our family in the Race Course in Coimbatore City. Less than a dozen people were present. Amongst them were Swami Yatiswarananda who was then the President of the Madras Ramakrishna Math and had come specially for that purpose on my request, my uncle T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, V.C. Vellingiri Gounder, R. Ramakrishnan, T.S. Kalyanasundaram who were to help me later in the work, Kundu Panikkar, a good and pious man who was then Sub-judge at Coimbatore, C.B. Ratnasabapathy Mudaliar, a prominent citizen of Coimbatore, C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, an educationist, myself and the Harijan boy who was the first to be admitted in the institution. My brother Kalyanasundaram had made a small peetam (the seat for the deity) for placing Sri Guru Maharaj in the centre and the pictures of Swamiji and Mahapurushji Maharaj at the sides. The pictures were decorated with a few flowers. I did aarati (waving lights before the image of god) with camphor and both Yatiswaranandaji and myself sang Om Hrim, the Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna sung in all our institutions. For many months, I was to do the Puja and sing Om Hrim in a lonely voice till some of the children could be trained for the purpose. After the aarati, there was not much talking. Those who were present blessed and said a few words of encouragement and left.

Thereafter I was left to loneliness and solitude. The harsh realities of beginning a new institution dawned on me. That a Harijan boy has been admitted led to social boycott and for some time no other boys were forthcoming, even though everything was provided — free food, lodging, clothing, education, books, notebooks and pencils and even travel charges to home and back for holidays. But slowly the situation thawed, and some children, the poorest in the community attracted by the free facilities began to come. I said, I felt alone and lonely. No! there was one other person always with me counselling, encouraging, guiding and protecting me. That was Sri Ramakrishna. It was not a mere platitude, but evidence of it was coming to me in various ways. That belief continues in me even today after fifty-two years of trials and difficulties.

In the early days, many people pooh-poohed and sneered at this idea. A senior lawyer, whose name it is not fair to disclose, said, 'What

Avinashilingam, I understand you have opened a school — another school to be opened and closed'. There were orthodox people who said that I have come to spoil the Hindu customs and religion. But I believe there were also many who silently sympathised with this effort though they thought that it was foolish of me to have undertaken it.

And then there was the question of funds. For any institution funds are important and have to be collected. With my background of a well-to-do family I had never had occasion to ask for anything from anybody. My father in his love used to send me generous funds, when I was studying in Madras. That money I had utilized to help my poorer friends. I have never had occasion to ask anything from anybody. And so the very idea of begging even for good causes was distasteful. But in the name of the Lord and to help his children, it had to be done and done continuously year after year. People will be ready to give money when an institution grows into a size. With regard to an institution which was just beginning, people had reservations. My heart swells with gratitude at the help given by numerous friends and well-wishers in those early days. The first donation of any size was Rs. 100/- from C.V. Verivada Chettiar, a good friend of my father. But such sums will not help to build a fund for the institution. My father loved me dearly, but he did not like my giving up the legal profession and home and identifying myself with this project, giving up the comforts of home and family. One day, I went to him. In our family, we had great respect for elders and did not ordinarily sit in their presence. I stood nearby wanting to talk to him. He asked me what the matter was. I had opened a collection book for big donations. I presented it to him. He asked me what he should do. I requested that he may sign his name for Rs. 10,000/-. He signed Rs. 10,001/- and gave it back to me. I thought he would be angry. On the other hand, his love for me overcame his dissatisfactions about me and said, 'This money is nothing, my boy! We can give you much more. May God bless you'. Literally, my family fulfilled that promise in the course of years.

Rs. Ten thousand in those days was a large sum and this gave me courage to approach other people. People have been kind and respectful to me partly because of the goodness of the cause and partly because of my social status, but yet in all these years, there have not been more than about a dozen who have contributed this amount to the Vidyalaya. And I believe it is God's wish that it should be so for the good of the institution. I have seen many institutions where people who had given large contributions bossing over the workers who had built those institutions with their life-blood, much to the detriment of the quality of the work of the institutions. The Vidyalaya has been built not by a few big donations, but by a large number of friends and well-wishers who have contributed small amounts, with humility and love for the cause. To develop a broad base of support by hundreds of people who are in sympathy for the cause will always be for the permanent good of the institution, especially in the maintenance of high ideals and objectives.

But this is not to say that going for collections will always be smooth sailing. Many times one will have to put up with abuse and insults. I remember an instance, when Sri C. Subramaniam and I went to a gentleman asking for support. He treated us with contempt and asked us virtually to get out of his house. We have to put up with such insults and still carry on the work in the name of the Lord. As Swamiji says in his song of the Sanyasin 'Let one put garland on, another kick this frame, say naught, be thou calm'. The cultivation of this attitude is difficult, but that is Karma Yoga, work without attachment is necessary, if social work should also be a spiritual Sadhana.

While money is necessary and important, for doing all work, let us not forget that men are more important. For it is men that can build institutions and also by their life attract the necessary funds. What is of supreme importance, is men of purity and character. As Swami Vivekananda said 'we want young men and women who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for the sake of the country. A hundred thousand young men, fired with zeal of holiness and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor will revolutionise the world'. The history of all great work in the world is the history of such men and women. And so what the Vidyalaya needed and what every institution needs for their development and progress are men who will sacrifice their lives in the service of our children and the country.

To my good fortune and the good fortune of the Vidyalaya, they came one after another, in the course of the years.

The first to come was Sri M.P. Periaswamy. I did not know him before. But some of my friends like Sri C. Subramaniam and Dr. L.K. Muthuswamy who knew him in college told me that he was a man of ideals and will be suitable for the Vidyalaya. He was then working in Gobichettipalayam. I invited him to join the Vidyalaya. He came immediately, as though he was waiting for my call. And I am grateful he came. He was a young man full of idealism and desire to serve. He was a man of character and dedication. He was also a scholar and poet in Tamil. He was the first Headmaster of the Vidyalaya needed and what every institution needs for its development until I myself called him to Madras to do the work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia about which mention will be made later.

Then came Sri K. Arunachalam. How he came to the Vidyalaya, I don't know. He belonged to a village in Madurai District. I did not know him before. He must have heard about the Vidyalaya and came to see it, and stayed. When he came, he was a young man, very simple, clad in spotless Khadi. He did not want any work on payment but to serve in villages on a voluntary basis. He had devotion and dedication to Gandhian ideals. He was a graduate of the Madras University. When I wanted to start the first Basic School, he offered to serve in it and for that purpose studied the B.T. Course and came back to serve as the Headmaster of the Basic School. Later he became the Headmaster of the Gandhi Basic Training School in the

Vidyalaya, in which position he served for nearly 22 years and built up that institution. Later he was deputed to the USA for Master's degree in Education, after which he returned and served as Principal of the Vidyalaya Teachers College. Later he wanted to devote himself entirely for public work and so retired before his time and went to serve in his native district. Now he is the President of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi doing Gandhian work all over India. He is also now a member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council.

The third was Sri K. Venkatachalam. He belonged to a village near Coimbatore and was a relative of Sri C. Subramaniam and so must have known about the Vidyalaya. When he came he at once became one with the spirit of the Vidyalaya. He succeeded Sri M.P. Periaswamy as Headmaster and did dedicated work in that capacity. He was a man of great character and devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. He retired after nearly thirty years of dedicated service and is now in his place devoting the larger portion of his time to devotion of Sri Ramakrishna.

I must mention also Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman, a leading political figure and freedom fighter in Madurai who has been associated with the Vidyalaya almost from its very inception. I met him first in the Tamil Nadu Political Conference held in Madurai after our release from jail in the Salt Satyagraha in 1932. He was a man of wealth, culture and character, a rare combination anywhere. He was also the Treasurer of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee headed by Rajaji. We at once took a liking to each other. I will have more to say about him while giving an account of the freedom struggle later. His love for me, and his continuous devotion and service to the Vidyalaya have lasted more than half a century. He was President of the Vidyalaya Managing Committee for nearly two decades.

Sri N. Ramakrishna Naidu was a simple peasant from Athippalayam, a nearby village. He was not educated much having studied only upto the elementary school. But his sterling character, sense of sacrifice and devotion to all good causes and to Sri Ramakrishna are rare anywhere in the world. He has given selfless service to the Vidyalaya for over half a century.

I should not fail to mention Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram. He was a younger brother to me in every way. His mother was a second mother to me and his home a second home, where I ate, rested and was nursed when I became sick. He had a high integrity, love and loyalty towards the Vidyalaya and its workers and children. He was its Correspondent from its inception until his sudden passing away in 1952. In his demise, the Vidyalaya lost a very trusted and dedicated worker. Such workers are the permanent assets of the Vidyalaya.

While on the opening day, after everybody had left leaving me alone, I had a feeling of being in terrible loneliness; but later got the feeling that I was not alone but Sri Guru Maharaj was with me. There were many incidents that followed, that gave me proof of His benign presence and help at every stage.

The Vidyalaya was started on 3rd February, 1930. Barely had it started and just four boys had joined, when the call of the nation and Gandhi came in the shape of the Freedom Movement. The call was irresistible and I jumped into it. I was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment on 4th July. People thought that the prophecy of my lawyer friend had become true and that was the end of the institution. But help came from an unexpected quarter. I have referred to Sri R. Ramakrishnan who was present on the opening day. He used to come to the Vidyalaya, occasionally. He was working as a clerk in the office of the District Educational Officer. When I was in a quandary as to what to do, he said: 'Don't worry. I will look after the institution in your absence for six months. The boys are going to the school and coming back in the evening. I shall stay here, go to my office and return and be with them and look after them and the puja and worship'. Strangely enough I was sentenced only for six months imprisonment at that time.

I returned from jail in December. Our original idea was to start a residential school. We considered how to do it. We did not like to start it in the city. Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder was generous enough to offer free of rent one of his garden lands comprising of 4 acres for this purpose. It was on the 5th mile 6th furlong in the Mettupalayam road from Coimbatore. There was a small farm building in it. A thatched shed was put up and a school was started. With the starting of the school, the number of children had increased to 49. Two teachers and myself lived with the children. The farm house provided the place for the kitchen and dining hall. But within a few months, we had another and bigger challenge. Mahatma Gandhi, who went to the Second Round Table Conference, could not succeed in his efforts to persuade the British Government to concede freedom to India. Therefore when he returned, a bigger and larger political struggle was ahead. This time repression would be merciless and every political leader would be clapped into jail. I had then assumed the leadership of the Congress in the Coimbatore District and the State as the President of the District Congress Committee and Member of the Tamil Nadu Working Committee. And so I was sure to be arrested. What shall we do and how shall we face the situation were the big questions. But a most wonderful thing happened. One Manickasamy Mudaliar who retired from Government service in Rangoon and came to settle with his family in Madras, came to the Vidyalaya. He was a devotee of Sri Guru Maharaj. He had heard that I had started an ashrama school and came to visit it. He liked the place and he liked the children. When we were deeply worried, he told me 'Don't worry, I shall take care of the children and the school for one year'. As if prearranged, on that occasion my sentence was for one year only. I had not known him before, I had not even heard about him. How do we account for his coming except that it was the guidance and help of Sri Ramakrishna, the unseen power behind the institution? There are other proofs to give for the guidance of that Divine Power.

I returned from jail in 1933. Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder was very helpful and considerate. His mother Parvati Ammal took a mother's interest

in the children and would often visit them with eatables. But then the place was infested with snakes. Everyday the children used to catch and kill one or two. This created uneasiness and fear in our minds. There was also water scarcity and difficulty. So we were in search of another place. This time we went south to Podanur where Sri A. Kandaswamy Chettiar had a house and Sri G.D. Naidu had a bungalow with space around. We shifted the Vidyalaya there — the school and all the children with all our goods packed in a couple of lorries and shifted to Podanur. But in Podanur also there was acute water difficulty. We had to go about half a mile to bathe. And so where to go was the big question. We had gone north to Vellakinar and we had come south to Podanur, both were not found suitable. In the east was the mill area with cotton dust and in the west was Perur where there was yearly outbreak of cholera. Where else to go? Deeply worried, a few of us were discussing it, when lo! something wonderful happened again.

Two people came in a single bullock cart. They were Sri N. Ramakrishna Naidu and his brother-in-law Sri R. Ramakrishna Naidu. They asked us what we were discussing and what we were worried about. We mentioned our problem. They said, 'There is a dry land belonging to Sri R. Ramakrishna Naidu — 14 acres in extent, in Perianaickenpalayam on the road to Mettupalayam. We are prepared to donate the land'. We thanked them for their kind offer and visited the site. It was a beautiful spot eleven miles from Coimbatore with the hills in sight, but at that time transport facilities were meagre. The site was about a mile from the nearest human habitations. I consulted my elders Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar and Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder and friends. They all said, 'How can you take the institution so far away? Who will come there? What will become of your political life? Will it be safe to stay in that out of the way place with so many children without medical or any other facilities?' There was a land of five acres in the cross-cut road in the outskirts of Coimbatore available for just Rs. 5,000/-, why not purchase it and establish the institution there?

But to me it seemed to be Sri Ramakrishna's will and in spite of the opposition of my elders I decided we should accept the offer and establish the Vidyalaya there. The early days in Perianaickenpalayam were indeed very difficult. There also we faced and are still facing water difficulties, but later history has proved the wisdom of the choice beyond measure. Now we have acquired there three hundred acres of land, an unimaginable thing now near a city and we have established a variety of institutions. People thought I was immature and rash when I decided to shift to Perianaickenpalayam. That I was rash and immature might have been true, but what they did not know was that the decision was not mine but that of a Divine power guiding me and the Vidyalaya.

I express our heartfelt gratitude to Sri R. Ramakrishna Naidu for this generous gift which enabled the Vidyalaya to come to its permanent habitation.

The first report of the Vidyalaya was published in 1933. It gives the ideas and ideals of this new institution. It is surprising to see how relevant they are even today. It says:

“There is no justification for our starting a new institution, if this is also of the common type. We have attempted to evolve a type of education by which the boys will grow into strong and self-dependent young men, always ready to serve the country and the community. With that end in view, the whole scheme of the institution has been drawn. It is for that reason, all the work of the Vidyalaya is done by the boys themselves.

The work of the Vidyalaya is divided into many sections and each section is entrusted to a captain under whom there will be a batch of boys. The captain will be responsible for the work entrusted to him, and he in turn will have to get the work done by others under him. This develops the latent instincts of leadership in the boys besides teaching them the value of team work. Thus all the work of the Vidyalaya is done by the boys without the aid of any servant. Even cooking is done by the boys themselves in a big cooker.

Caste prejudices are not respected in the Vidyalaya. Among the pupils of the Vidyalaya are representatives from all main castes of the Hindu society including Harijans. They are learning to move together like brothers and feel themselves as part of the same household. In fact, the boys forget their caste consciousness and feel that they all belong to the great Indian community.

The rich and the poor are treated alike. No differentiation is made among the boys on grounds of wealth. This bringing together of the rich and the poor under the same household is beneficial to both. It teaches the rich boys a sense of simplicity, humility and brotherhood, besides dignity of labour; and the poor boys acquire a bold and independent spirit.

We are also attempting to give vocational bias to the education imparted in the Vidyalaya. It has been the experience of the last half-a-century that our aimless education has resulted in the creation of clerks. But we are handicapped by the fact that, if we are to follow the usual curriculum of our schools, there is not much time left for a vocational or professional training. Labouring under these difficulties we have started tailoring and vegetable gardening. We are considering as to what other industries we may start. If we are to really teach an efficient avocation, we think it can only be done when the boys devote the major part of their time to learning that profession. We are considering some schemes with that end in view.

We would like the boys to grow with healthy national and religious ideals. Love of country and service are taught to them through national songs. Occasionally they are taken to clean the slums and such other

places where their services are necessary. Religion as preached by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is imparted to them through stories.

Freedom and cheerfulness are the first conditions of growth for anybody and specially for children. If the boys are to attain the maximum benefit of their education, they should feel free and happy in this atmosphere. They must feel the Vidyalaya is their own. With that end in view, the greater part of the work in the Vidyalaya is adjusted and regulated according to their suggestions and wishes. Once a month a meeting is held and the boys are asked to suggest improvements or represent their difficulties. And we are glad to say here that their suggestions have generally been sane, practical and reasonable. This is another proof to show that under freedom and responsibility man develops sobriety and practical ability.

They are also asked to settle their disputes among themselves. There is a court elected by themselves to administer justice in their cases. Each class elects a judge. The judge must have the qualification of being the highest in rank in the class and committing the least mistakes. These representatives form the panel of judges. All the complaints they have, are written in a complaint book. The court sits once a week and goes through its work. The way in which they do their work is something very interesting. Flimsy cases are dismissed with a mere reprimand. Graver offences are punished. If either party tries to hide the truth, he is subjected to severe cross-examination, witnesses are heard and justice done”.

The report published in 1934 adds:

Medical Inspection: Before the school begins every day, the Dress Inspection takes place and marks are given according to the cleanliness of the boys. On every Sunday, there is the Weekly File when it is observed whether the children are keeping all their things such as beddings etc. neat and clean. Particular attention is paid to their teeth and nails. Marks are given for all items of cleanliness and the weekly medal is given to the boys who gets the highest marks. The weights of the boys are taken on the 1st of every month and height and chest measurements every 3 months. They are medically examined twice a year. Charts are maintained to show their physical progress.

The Bala Bharathi: A journal has been started in the Vidyalaya under the name ‘Bala Bharathi’ to which handwritten articles (in Tamil) and drawings are contributed by the children. This helps to draw out the latent capacities of the children in art and literature and to make them think for themselves.

The Vidyalaya Shop: To supply the small needs of the children such as pencils, erasers, buttons, clips, washing soaps, post-cards, clothes etc. a shop was found necessary. To meet this want as well as to train the children

on the importance of keeping accounts, a shop has been opened in the Vidyalaya. Two of the boys are incharge of the shop. Some funds have been entrusted to them to serve as a capital. They purchase the articles, sell them and maintain the accounts. It is proposed to convert it into a children's cooperative society.

Excursions: We believe in giving a general knowledge and culture which will teach the children to live and move properly in society. With that end in view, besides the usual curriculum of studies, they are given talks on subjects of general importance. Visiting the Spinning and Weaving Mills, the Agricultural and Forest Colleges, the Siruvani Water Works (26 miles away from Coimbatore town, from where the town gets its water supply) etc. would do them much good and give them a lot of general knowledge. During the year under review, the students were taken on a series of excursions. Batches of boys were taken out to see the Mettur Dam and this was both a great pleasure and a source of instruction. At another time they were taken to see the cement factory at Madukkarai. The children also went and saw a sugar factory and a Railway engine in the Railway workshop. Four boys were sent to Vedaranyam to learn Thevaram. On their way to and back from Vedaranyam, they visited various places of interest in Palani, Dindigul, Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur.

Rural Service: It has always been our desire and earnest wish that the Vidyalaya should become a centre of service to the surrounding villages. With that end in view we tried to find out in what ways we could be of service to them. As Christ said, "The Harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few"; the villages have many problems. With the sympathetic cooperation of the villagers we have been able to do some service in a few of the villages around us.

Most of the people in the villages are either labourers or cultivators. They find it impossible to attend school during daytime without hindrance to their work. To serve their needs we are running night schools at Perianaickenpalayam, Veerapandiputhur and Athippalayam.

It is interesting to note that the report was signed by Sri T.S. Avinashilingam and Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman as General Secretaries, Sri C. Subramaniam, Sri Krishna Boyar, Sri C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, and Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram and others as office-bearers. Of these, Sri C. Subramaniam who entered the Freedom movement with me and who was later Minister in the State and Central Governments still continues his love and interest in our work. Sri C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, Sri Krishna Boyar and Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram are no more. We must be eternally grateful to them for helping in the growth of the Vidyalaya at its most crucial time in the early stages of its growth.

During this time two other incidents happened which are of lasting importance to the Vidyalaya. They were, Mahatma Gandhi laid the foundation stone for the Vidyalaya on the 7th February, 1934. Of this we will hear more later. The second is of more fundamental importance.

On 8th January, 1935, I received a wire from the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission as follows: 'Congratulations. Recognition Mission Branch Centre yesterday' — Signed Saswatananda who was then the Assistant Secretary of the Mission. This was followed by a copy of the proceedings of the meeting of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission held on 7th January, 1935 as follows:

Letters of T.S. Avinashilingam and Swami Amriteswarananda regarding the affiliation of the Podanur Vidyalaya were considered.

1. a) Resolved that the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya be made a Branch Centre of the Ramakrishna Mission.

b) That Mr. T.S. Avinashilingam be appointed as Secretary of the Institution.

Proposed by Swami Madhavananda

Seconded by Swami Atmaprakashananda.

Sd..... Swami Vireswarananda
Chairman of the meeting.

Along with the resolution was enclosed the formal Charter of recognition and appointment. Needless to say I was overjoyed. From that day the Vidyalaya became a part and parcel of the Ramakrishna Mission. The line was clear for further development and progress.

Following the affiliation came the Ramakrishna Centenary. 1936 was a significant year in the annals of the Ramakrishna Mission as it was the occasion for great jubilation and celebration as the Centenary year of the birth of the Great Master. Sri Ramakrishna compressed in four decades of his life, the spiritual experiences of the world. When he had completed the sadhanas (spiritual attainments) and the realisations, he knew, he had a message to deliver. Thousands of people in various walks of life flocked to him to hear the ambrosia of his words. But his mind yearned to meet the purest souls, who could be fitting instruments for absorbing his message and spreading it throughout the world. And they came one by one, Rakhal, Tarak, Jogin, Balaram, Sasi, Sarat and the greatest of them all, Naren. These later became Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, Yogananda, Premananda, Saradananda, Ramakrishnananda, Vivekananda and others. Orphaned by the Master's death, they were benumbed by the loss. The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's love and guidance was at that time a great strength. The householder disciples Surendra, Balaram and others gave them consolation and support. While Swami Ramakrishnananda looked after the Shrine at Baranagore, others took to the life of wandering monks. When Swami Vivekananda shot into prominence in the Chicago Parliament of Religions and returned to India, the wandering brothers came together at Belur Math. That was the beginning of the Ramakrishna Mission. From then on the Mission grew steadily into a great and mighty organisation and the Ramakrishna Centenary was an occasion to express the joy and exhilaration of its growth and the spread of the message of love and harmony which the Master came to preach.

The Centenary celebrations commenced on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna on February 24, 1936 and ended a week after the next birthday on March 21, 1937. The response of the public was spontaneous and widespread. Thousands of men and women individually and collectively both in India and abroad, participated in the various functions in cooperation with the celebration committee in Calcutta, which was formed by prominent citizens with Swami Akhandananda, the then President of the Mission as President, and Poet Rabindranath Tagore, Romain Rolland of France, Rajendra Prasad, T.B. Saprú, the Scientist J.C. Bose, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the eminent philosopher, U. Set of Burma, S.W. Dassenaik of Sri Lanka, Ba Yin, Giovanni Gentile of Italy, Sylvian Levi of France and many others as Vice-Presidents with Swami Sambuddhananda and D.R. Sarkar as Secretaries. The celebrations were inaugurated at the Belur Math on February 24, 1936 and continued for a week. The magnetic influence of the name of the Master brought huge concourse of people everyday to the math; but on the opening and last day, the rush was unprecedented and beyond expectation. The serene grandeur of the occasion, coupled with the devout enthusiasm of the devotees, filled every heart with spiritual inspiration and exhilaration. Simultaneously with the Belur Math functions, celebrations were held at innumerable other places throughout India and the world: Varanasi, Allahabad, Bombay, Madras, Nagpur, Karachi and other places in India, in New York, Chicago, Providence, Boston, San Francisco and other places in U.S.A. In Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Colombo, London and other countries abroad also celebrations were organised. The whole of India, as also many other countries, joined in the expression of their joy and reverence for the Master. India especially did so in innumerable towns and villages.

As a fitting conclusion to the Centenary Celebrations, an International Parliament of Religions was held in the Calcutta Town Hall for eight days from March 1, 1937, which I had the privilege to attend. For the first time in the history of the country a congregation of distinguished men and women from different parts of the world assembled on the soil of India. Amongst those who presided over the fifteen sessions, were one each from Argentina, China, Czechoslovakia, England, Iran and the United States of America. Among the Indian celebrities who presided were Sir Brajendra Nath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, Kaka Kalekar, Dr. D.R. Bhandarkar and Dr. A.B. Dhruva. The number of papers read and lectures delivered was one hundred and ten. The full texts or resumes of the papers and speeches were printed into beautiful volumes called the 'Religions of the World' edited by Swami Gnanananda.

Another publication of lasting interest was the Cultural Heritage of India, a monumental work in three volumes, in which one hundred eminent Indian scholars presented the achievements of India in the fields of arts, architecture, science, literature, philosophy and religion, along with an interpretative life of Sri Ramakrishna. The first edition of the Cultural Heritage of India which gave a comprehensive outlook of Indian culture

through the age was acclaimed as a remarkable contribution to the Cultural History of the World and sold out in a couple of years. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture thereupon brought out a second and enlarged edition in four volumes.

As a fitting epilogue to the year-long Centenary Celebrations was the erection of the magnificent temple of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math, which partly synchronised with the Centenary. As the plan emanating from Swami Vivekananda envisaged a very large temple involving great cost, it had to wait for nearly four decades. The foundation for the temple was laid by Swami Shivananda on March 13, 1929, though the wherewithal for the construction was nowhere in sight at that time. Then in 1934 came a devoted offer from across the seas. Swami Akhilananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Providence, U.S.A. proposed to meet all the expenses of the temple. It was the munificence of a devoted student of his, Miss Helen F. Ruble, also known as Bhakti, which enabled him to meet the major portion of the expenditure.

The Ramakrishna Centenary was celebrated also in the Vidyalaya though in a humble way. The Vidyalaya was just in its beginning years. It had just then shifted to its permanent habitat. The Centenary was the first major celebration organised in the Vidyalaya. The picture of Sri Ramakrishna was decorated with flowers and a simple puja done. A few hundred devotees gathered, did Bhajan and simple prasad was distributed.

In memory of the Centenary a play festival was organised for the children of the elementary schools in the surrounding villages which was inaugurated by Mrs. Ashadevi Aryanayakam, Secretary of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh (Basic Education), Wardha. That celebration in commemoration of the Centenary continues every year in which about twenty schools in the surrounding villages and three thousand children participate.

The Vidyalaya was then in its infancy. It was housed in a few tiled sheds with bamboo mat walls. The life in the Vidyalaya was simple. But to me the Vidyalaya has been sacred soil, where many of my dreams have been dreamt and some achieved. In these many years, thousands of children and workers have passed through the portals of its institutions. While I have worked for them, it is their love and affection which has shaped me and made life worth living for me. We have had many hurdles, which at that time seemed unsurmountable and difficult to bear. But it is these difficulties that have given us faith and brought out the strength of our character. As Swami Vivekananda said it is difficulties and tribulations that shape our character more than prosperity and happiness.

In the Vidyalaya scores of dedicated workers have joined in building the great national edifice where many institutions have come into existence in an once barren land. Here I have learned that real greatness is not to be measured by position, power, wealth or educational attainments but by the sincerity and dedication with which daily duties are performed. Here

I had fallen sick and been nursed back to health with loving care. I have had the realisation that there is a great divine power guiding me which make even a weak human body the instruments of great work. Men may come and go, generations may change, but the work which bears His name and follows His ideals will live through a thousand years, training thousands of young men and women in love and service. Though the Vidyalaya is mainly for men, I have said men and women, because I consider the Avinashilingam Home Science College and its sister institutions working for women are part of this great effort inspired by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

If our country is to rise once again and become the queen among nations, nothing is more important than imparting sound education to our youths. A strong body, a noble spirit, a generous nature, a broad outlook, a love of service, an ability and willingness to appreciate all that is best and beautiful in human nature — all these go to make up an ideal student. Any education worth the name should contribute towards all these or at least make an effort along these directions. The Vidyalaya and other educational institutions in the Mission are humble efforts towards building up such an education.

As it has been said, 'There is no end to the progress of a nation'. Even so there is no end to the growth of the institutions which work for the progress of our people. They will fulfil for generations to come the needs and aspirations of the nation. We may disappear, but they will go on, giving the eternal message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to successive generations.

8. On Begging for Public Causes

MY friend Sri C.P. Subbiah used to call me a professional beggar. This is not by way of being derogatory. Mahatma Gandhi used to call Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya a princely beggar, as he used to collect large sums of money from the Indian Princes and businessmen for the Banaras Hindu University, of which he was the Founder and builder. In the same way, Gandhi used to call himself a professional beggar and Sri Subbiah used the same terms for me in affectionate appreciation of my tireless begging from the early days of the Vidyalaya for the first forty years. In view of the importance of collection of public donations by social workers for public causes, I thought it will be useful to give my experiences in this aspect of my public life.

Gandhiji was a votary of Truth. He followed strictly Ahimsa and Satya which form the first two vows in his famous prayer at Sevagram, which is now being repeated in all prayer groups following him such as the Gandhian Ashramas, Sarvodaya Sanghs etc. To the Mahatma, Satya — Truth — was even more important than Ahimsa, for while Truth is the 'ideal', Ahimsa is the 'method'. To him expression of Truth in daily life for public workers and institutions was keeping of truthful accounts. This means writing the accounts daily and spending the money collected with meticulous care and economy, for the purpose it was donated. Once while on tour, some persons in Gandhiji's party purchased biscuit tins, and they were foreign at that time, to quench their hunger. Gandhiji protested and said that the money collected by him was for poor people. He said, "We are Trustees for the proper utilisation of that money and so must be most careful in spending it".

A corollary to this careful keeping of proper accounts for the money collected and its good utilisation is, publishing annual audited accounts. It is not enough to keep good accounts, but people must be taken into confidence and they must know how much, and from what sources, monies have been received and how they have been spent. Thus audit and publication of annual accounts is a must to all good institutions. Institutions which follow this procedure always inspire confidence amongst the people. I have seen many good people, who have contributed large sums of their own money to public causes were reviled and abused as corrupt simply because they had not kept accounts and published them. It is for this reason that the

Vidyalaya from the very beginning is publishing its annual accounts. One can find even in its first report, published in the year 1934, all the names of the donors, not only those who gave thousands and hundreds, but also those who had given even one rupee. In addition, donations in kinds such as clothes, bamboos, kerosene, wooden racks, rice, dhall and coconuts with their money value are also mentioned. Besides giving a true picture of the accounts to the public this procedure imparts also a sense of satisfaction to the donors and creates confidence in the public.

Another matter that people involved in public work should remember is how and where the money is deposited. I know of cases in which public accounts are kept in the personal name of the workers. They might be people of wealth and integrity and will not utilise the funds except for the institutions but yet it is not proper to do so. This is another matter which I learned from Gandhiji, that public funds should always be kept in public institutions such as banks and that too only in the name of the institutions concerned, even though it may be for a short time. When Gandhiji was in Coimbatore during the Harijan tour, a drama troupe devoted to him promised to give one day's income to the 'Harijan Fund' and requested him to come to the theatre at the beginning of the show to bless them by his presence for a few minutes. He asked me what would be the minimum amount they would give. I said Rs. 1,500/-. We thought much more would be realised because of his coming to the theatre. But unfortunately, he came there soon after the public meeting, and so people who had gone in such large numbers to the meeting had no time to come to the theatre and the fund collected was much less. But I had promised Rs. 1,500/-. And so I deposited the amount collected in my personal account and gave a cheque for the amount. At this, Gandhiji was angry and chided me saying 'Avinashi, how can you put the public money in your personal account?' This was a great lesson to me, then and ever after.

Since then, I have been involved in collecting funds for many public causes and institutions. Apart from the Vidyalaya, there have been numerous causes for which I had collected funds — Harijan Fund, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund, Gandhi Nidhi, Funds to support families of friends who were in jail in the Freedom Movement, Tamil Valarchi Kazhagam (Tamil Academy) and many others. Gandhiji's rebuke and advice have always been in mind, however small the amount, an account was opened in its name in the bank and separate account maintained.

There is yet another aspect to funds of public institutions which should be borne in mind and that is the manner in which the monies should be invested. I know a few institutions which out of desire for greater interest rates and greater income, gave loans to private parties or weak firms and thereby lost heavily. In such cases, the people responsible have come in for very sharp and sometimes uncharitable criticism. Apart from the mental anguish it causes, this leads also to loss of prestige and confidence in the institution. It is for this reason that it is always desirable to invest public

funds in safe modes of investment like nationalised banks or where there is government guarantees, the safety of which can neither be questioned nor doubted. Running institutions is itself a great responsibility and the people responsible for the institutions should not have the additional worry about watching the security of the investments.

There is one other matter that people who run public institutions should remember. Institutions which depend on one large donor or a few big donors many times come to grief. Such donors always expect that their wishes should be obeyed. The result is many times pressure is used in the daily working of the institution in situations such as admissions, appointments and promotions, many times to the detriment of the ideals of the institutions. When the pressure is resisted, misunderstandings arise followed by stoppage of donations. Therefore it is necessary that public institutions should be broad-based. Instead of a few donors giving large amounts, a large number of people who give moderate and small amounts will help in the permanent stabilising of the institutions and avoidance of undue influences. This will also help in the maintenance of the institution besides fulfilling its stature.

As important as this aspect or perhaps more important, is to build a cadre of workers having faith in the ideals of the institutions. It is also essential to build good traditions which will help in the continuous following of the ideals for which the institution stands. While money is needed, it is building a cadre of workers with ideals of service, purity, integrity and hard work that will form the bedrock for the good running of public institutions for a long time.

As King Bhartruhari says in his Niti Sataka there are four kinds of people in the world.

1. 'Satpurusas', good people, who engage themselves in the good of others sacrificing their own self-interest;
2. The Samanyas, the generality of people, who engage themselves in the good of others so long as it does not involve the sacrifice of their own self-interest;
3. There are those others, the Manava-Raksasas, devilish men, who sacrifice the good of others to gain their own selfish ends; and
4. The fourth class the worst of all, who sacrifice the good of others without gaining thereby any good even to themselves or to any one else, and who take pleasure in doing evil. The poet says, he does not know what name to give these people.

A social worker is bound to come into contact with all these kinds of people. But he must take care to see that he is not affected by their love or hate.

Collection of donations is no easy task at any time. The people who appreciate and sympathise with good causes are not always many. We do not know who has sympathy and who has not. And so we approach many people, especially people who are rich. It takes two things to make people

give for good causes. They must have the mind and they must have the means. Those who have the mind may not always have the means. And those who have the means may not have the mind. From the latter people, we are liable to get a lot of abuse. People who want to build institutions or follow good causes should have immense patience and perseverance in the face of odds. In the early days of the Vidyalaya, I have wept many times at night and cried to Sri Ramakrishna, "How long should I have to go on like this". My elder brothers, relatives and friends have asked why I should undergo these insults and abuses. But yet with Faith in the Lord, public workers should go on, having in mind the words of Swami Vivekananda in his song of the Sanyasin: "Let one put garlands on, another kick this frame; say naught". We should not return hatred with hatred and contempt with contempt, but as the great Buddha has said, 'Hatred never ceases by hatred, by love alone it ceases'. By sustained effort, earnestness, discipline and self-control, let the wiseman make himself a rock which no flood can overwhelm'.

In regard to management of public funds and public institutions, it is good to know what Mahatma Gandhi with his life-long service to the nation had to say: "Carefully kept accounts are a *sine qua non* for any organisation. Without them it falls into disrepute. Without properly kept accounts it is impossible to maintain truth in its pristine purity. I have never known a good cause backed by good men ever to have died for want of funds; only we often mistake a bad cause for good and bad men for good and then complain that the cause fails for want of funds".

"My experience has taught me that no movement ever stops or languishes for want of funds. This does not mean that any temporal movement can go on without money but it does mean that wherever it has good men at its helm, it is bound to attract to itself the requisite funds. On the other hand, I have also observed that a movement takes its downward course from the time it is affected with a plethora of funds. When, therefore, a public institution is managed from the interest of investments, I dare not call it a sin, but I do say that it is a highly improper procedure. The public should be the bank for all public institutions which should not last a day longer than the public wish. An institution run with the interest of accumulated capital ceases to be amenable to public opinion and becomes autocratic and self-righteous.

Organisations die always only for want of men of honesty, efficiency and self-sacrifice. Organisations, like men, if they are to command respect and grow, must have a sense of honour and must fulfil their promise. No movement or activity that has the sure foundation of purity of character of its workers, is ever in danger to come to an end for want of funds.

All public institutions are public trusts and those who are incharge of them have oftentimes to harden their hearts and rigorously collect

all debts owing to the trust and their charges. Leniency in the management of public trust is a misplaced virtue and may often amount to an unpardonable breach''.

Gandhiji had extreme opinions about the building of permanent funds for running institutions. He said, 'It has become my firm conviction that it is not good to run public institutions on permanent funds. A permanent fund carries in itself the seed of the moral fall of the institution. A public institution means an institution conducted with the approval, and from the funds, of the public. When such an institution ceases to have public support it forfeits its rights to exist. Institutions maintained on permanent funds are often found to ignore public opinion, and are frequently responsible for acts contrary to it. I have no doubt that the ideal for public institutions is to live like nature, from day-to-day. The subscriptions that an institution annually receives are a test of its popularity and the honesty of its management. But let no one misunderstand me. My remarks do not apply to the bodies which cannot by their very nature, be conducted without permanent buildings. What I mean to say is that the current expenditure should be found from subscriptions voluntarily received from year to year'¹.

It is necessary that persons associated with public work should be motivated with proper attitudes. There are two kinds of attitudes for doing social service. One is the usual attitude of people involved in service of the poor, namely the attitude of patronising benevolence. They usually adopt a superior attitude and expect gratitude from those who receive. The result is when they do not get the gratitude, they get sour and disappointed and bitter. I know of a gentleman who was running an orphanage with great devotion. He approached an old student who was well-placed after having been benefited through the orphanage, for collecting funds for the institution. He was shocked when he was not properly received nor was there any response. The result was a great disappointment with anger. He cursed the old boy as an ungrateful wretch. Such experiences are not rare. We should remember that behind every expectation, there is a possibility of disappointment, which causes many times deep and lasting misery and bitterness. Such things happen also in our relationship with friends and relatives, husbands, wives and children, to whom we are deeply attached. When we do not get the consideration, affection or gratitude we expect, the reaction comes as a blow, which causes great sorrow throughout life. Therefore the question is how to get the joy out of social service and avoid the misery arising out of attachment and expectation.

Swami Vivekananda says in his Karma Yoga, "There are two ways of giving up all attachments. One is for those who do not believe in God. They are left to their own devices; they have simply to work with their

¹ Pages 182-184, Wit and Wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi, Ed. by N.B. Sen

own will, with the powers of their mind and discrimination, saying, "I must be non-attached and should not expect anything". For those who believe in God there is another way, which is much less difficult. They give up the fruits of work unto the Lord; they work and are never attached to the results. Whatever they see, feel, hear, or do, is for Him, for whatever good work we may do, let us not claim any praise or benefit. It is the Lord's; give up the fruits unto Him. Let us think that we are only servants obeying the Lord, and that every impulse for action comes from Him every moment. As the Gita says whatever thou worshipping, whatever thou perceivest, whatever thou doest, give up all unto Him and be at rest. Let us be at peace, perfect peace, with ourselves and give up our whole body and mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto the Lord. Instead of the sacrifice of pouring oblations into the fire, perform this one great sacrifice day and night — the sacrifice of your little self.²

Do you ask anything from your children in return for what you have given them? It is your duty to work for them, and there the matter ends. In whatever you do for a particular person, a city, or a state, assume the same attitude towards it as you have towards your children — expect nothing in return. If you can invariably take the position of a giver, in which everything given by you is a free offering to the world, without any thought of return, then will your work bring you no attachment or misery. Attachment comes only where we expect a return.

There is another way in which this idea of mercy and selfless charity can be put into practice; that is, by looking upon work as "Worship" in case we believe in a personal God. Here we give up all the fruits of our work unto the Lord, and worshipping Him thus, we have no right to expect anything from mankind for the work we do. Just as water cannot wet the lotus leaf, so work cannot bind the unselfish man by giving rise to attachment to results. The selfless and unattached man may live in the very heart of a crowded and sinful city; he will not be touched by sin³.

The Karma Yogi asks why you require any motive to work other than the inborn love of service. Be beyond the common worldly motives. "To work you have the right, but not to the fruits thereof". Man can train himself to know and to practise that, says the Karma Yogi. When the idea of doing good becomes a part of his very being, then he will not seek for any motive outside. Let us do good because it is good to do good"⁴.

In this connection Swami Vivekananda refers to the Buddha. "He is the one man who ever carried this into perfect practice. All the

² Page 102. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. I Karma Yoga

³ Ibid. pages 59 and 60

⁴ The complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I — Karma Yoga.

prophets of the world, except Buddha, had external motives to move them to unselfish action. But Buddha is the only prophet who said, "I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is". He was, in the conduct of his life, absolutely without personal motives. What man worked more than he? This great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet had the deepest sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never put forth any claims for himself. He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world⁵.

Therefore to get the joy of service, it is necessary that people involved in public service should cultivate this attitude of love towards people and at the same time He detached without expecting any return. Such unselfish love is one of the noblest expressions of human life. Such a person gets the highest joy and spiritual experience which a Bhakta gets through his devotion, a Yogi through psychic sadhana or a Gnani through his intellect and discrimination. For such a man social service becomes the source of highest fulfilment.

⁵ Ibid

9. Plunging into the Freedom Struggle

WHEN the Vidyalaya was started on 3rd February, 1930, I had not the slightest thought that I would be diverted from it. But Providence willed otherwise. It so happened, I was irresistibly drawn into the vortex of the Freedom Movement.

I first met Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, when he came to Madras during the Non-Cooperation movement. I was then a young boy in the Intermediate Class in Madras. With many other students I attended the meeting in the Madras beach where he addressed them along with Moulana Shaukat Ali. The contrast between them was great. Gandhiji was a medium-sized man but Shaukat Ali was a huge man, impressive by his size. It was a vast meeting of over fifty thousand people. There were no loud speakers at that time. Gandhiji spoke slowly and in deliberate, measured terms. Every word that he said referring to the sufferings, insults undergone by the people in Jallianwalla Bagh was heard in respectful silence and went deep into people's minds. He said, 'It is darkest before dawn. The sufferings themselves are an indication of the dawn of freedom to come'. He appealed for people's cooperation in the non-violent non-cooperation movement he was starting and also asked all people to wear hand-spun and hand-woven Khadi to provide employment to the poor. We were deeply impressed and some of us resolved that henceforth 'we will wear Khadi only'. At that time Khadi was not the nice, beautiful fibre it is today.

In the years immediately following my introduction to Swami Vivekananda's books set aflame the ideals of patriotism and love for the country: Gandhiji seemed to confirm what Swamiji said: "India will be raised not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit, not with the flag of destruction but with the flag of peace and love. The ancient mother has awakened once more, sitting on her throne — rejuvenated, more glorious than ever".

The next time I met Gandhiji was in 1926 at Tiruppur, when he toured all over India to spread the Khadi Movement. He was put up with a respected friend of mine Sri K.S. Ramaswamy Gounder, a man of nobility and character. There I had the opportunity to come closer to Gandhiji. While conversing with him, I asked, 'Economists say that Khadi cannot compete with mill cloth and so will Khadi last?'. I still remember

his reply. 'In South India, you have large temples built at huge cost, which are not run on any economic basis but by the sacrifice and faith of the devotees, because they fulfil a vital purpose in human life. And so economics is not everything. If Khadi is the way to give employment to the millions, Khadi should be spread even at some sacrifice'.

The years following Non-Cooperation movement and its suspension after the Chauri Chaura Tragedy was lull in the political life of the country devoted to constructive work. 1929 brought a fresh force in the Freedom struggle when the Lahore Congress passed the resolution declaring 'Complete Independence — Purna Swaraj' as the objective of the Indian National Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Independence means complete freedom from British domination". The operative portion of the resolution passed in the Congress said: "That nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference. As a preliminary step towards organising a campaign of Independence and in order to make the Congress Policy as consistent as possible with the change of creed, this Congress resolves upon complete boycott of the legislatures and committees constituted by the Government and calls upon Congressmen and others taking part in the National Movement to abstain from participating in the future elections. This Congress appeals to the nation zealously to prosecute the constructive programme of the Congress and authorises the All India Congress Committee, whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including the non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary".

At midnight, as 1930 ushered in, the flag of Indian Independence, the Tricolour was unfurled, to the deafening shouts of "Inquilab Zindabad", "Long Live Revolution". On January 26th, 1930, the following pledge was taken in largely attended public meetings throughout the country.

— *We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connections and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence.*

We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We recognise, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will prepare ourselves, by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government,

and will prepare for Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help, stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj"¹.

Following the pledge, Gandhiji addressed many public meetings throughout the country, in which he inspired thousands of men and women towards courageous action based on Non-Violence. Addressing the students of Gujarat Vidyapith, he said; "All those studying in national institutions and connected with them must do all the things that the country has to do, and must go through the same discipline as the country has to go through for the attainment of Swaraj, so that they may be ready to offer themselves willing sacrifices when the time comes..... Think what the students in Europe did during the Great War. Are we prepared to make the sacrifices that they made? If deep down in us is the conviction that we may not even breathe in peace until we have freedom, we will live and move and have our being in carrying out the Constructive Programme."

*"I want you to shed the fear of death, so that when the history of Freedom comes to be written, the names of the boys and girls of national schools and colleges may be mentioned therein as of those who died not doing violence but in resisting it, no matter by whom committed. The strength to kill is not essential for self-defence; one ought to have the strength to die. When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. History is replete with instances of men who by dying with courage and compassion on their lips converted the hearts of their violent opponents"*².

In Young India of 27th February, 1930 Gandhiji published his Code of Discipline and Conduct for Congress Volunteers joining the Freedom Movement.

*"The Satyagrahi must harbour no anger, must suffer the anger of his opponent, putting up with assaults but refusing to retaliate; but he must not submit, out of fear of punishment or the like, to any order given in anger. He must refrain from insults and swearing, he must protect opponents from insult or attack even at the risk of his life. He must neither resist his arrest nor the attachment of his property, but if he has got any property in his possession as a trustee, he must refuse to surrender it, even though in defending it he might lose his life. As a prisoner he must behave in an exemplary manner, as a member of his unit in the struggle, he must obey the orders of his leaders, although he may resign in the event of serious disagreement. He may not expect guarantee for maintenance of his dependents"*³.

It was resolved that the Civil Disobedience to be started was by breaking the Salt Law. On March 2nd, 1930, he wrote a final historical letter to the Viceroy explaining the reason for starting the disobedience movement.

To this the Viceroy replied that if he breaks the Salt Law, he would be guilty of violation of law and danger to public peace.

On this Gandhiji said:

"The reply says I contemplate a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace. In spite of the forest of books containing rules and regulations, the only law that the nation knows is the will of the British administrators, the only public peace the nation knows is the peace of a public prison. India is one vast prison-house. I repudiate this law, and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of the compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation for want of free vent".

The march to Dandi, where the Salt Law was to be challenged, began on Wednesday the 12th March, 1930. On March 9th, a mammoth meeting of 75,000 people in Ahmedabad passed a resolution that 'without achieving freedom for the country, we shall not rest in peace. We solemnly believe that Indian emancipation lies through Truth and Non-violence'. The first batch of Satyagrahis, all of them belonging to Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashrama, consisted of 79 persons from almost all parts of India — Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Sind, Kerala, Rajaputana, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Bangalore and Utkal. Their ages varied from 16 to 61, the oldest being Gandhiji. On the eve of the March, Gandhiji gave the following message:

In all probability this will be my last speech to you. Even if the Government allows me to march tomorrow morning, this will be my last speech on the sacred banks of the Sabarmati. Possibly, these may be the last words of my life here.

I have already told you yesterday what I had to say. Today I shall confine myself to what you all should do after my companions and I are arrested. The programme of the march must be fulfilled as originally settled. From what I have seen and heard during the last fortnight, I am inclined to believe that the stream of civil resisters will flow unbroken.

But let there be not a semblance of breach of peace even after all of us have been arrested. We have resolved to utilise all our resources in the pursuit of an exclusively non-violent struggle. Let no one commit a wrong in anger. This is my hope and prayer. I wish these words of mine reaches every nook and corner of the land. My task shall be done if I perish and so do my comrades. It will then be for the Working Committee of the Congress to show you the way and it will be up to you to follow its lead. When I am arrested, the whole responsibility shifts to the Congress Working Committee. No one who believes in non-violence as a creed, need therefore, sit still. My contact with the Congress ends as soon as I am arrested. In that case there should be no slackness in the enrolment of volunteers. Wherever possible,

civil disobedience of salt laws should be started. These laws can be violated in three ways. It is an offence to manufacture salt wherever there are facilities for doing so. The possession and sale of contraband salt, which includes natural salt or salt earth, is also an offence. The purchasers of such salt will be equally guilty. To carry away the natural salt deposits on the seashore is likewise violation of law. So is the hawking of such salt. In short, you may choose any one or all of these devices to break the salt monopoly.

We are, however, not to be content with this alone. There is no ban by the Congress and wherever the local workers have self-confidence other suitable measures may be adopted. I prescribe only one condition namely, let our pledge of Truth and Non-Violence as the only means for the attainment of swaraj, be faithfully kept. For the rest, every one has a free hand. Wherever there are local leaders, their orders should be obeyed by the people. Where there are no leaders and only a handful of men have faith in the programme, they may do what they can, if they have enough self-confidence. They have a right, nay it is their duty, to do so. The history of the world is full of instances of men who rose to leadership by sheer force of self-confidence, bravery and tenacity. We, too, if we sincerely aspire to swaraj and are impatient to attain it, should have similar self-confidence. Our ranks will swell and our hearts will strengthen as the number of our arrests by Government increases.

You may take it as my will. It was the message that I desired to impart to you before starting on the march or for the jail. I wish that there be no suspension or abandonment of the campaign that commences tomorrow morning, or earlier if I am arrested before that time. I shall eagerly await the news that ten batches are ready, as soon as my batch is arrested. I believe there are men in India to complete the work begun by me. I have faith in the righteousness of our cause and the purity of our weapons. And where the means are clean, there God is undoubtedly present with His blessings. And where these three combine, there defeat is an impossibility. A satyagrahi, whether free or incarcerated, is always victorious''¹.

Seeing him march ahead with the volunteers Jawaharlal Nehru observed:

Today the pilgrim marches onward on his long trek, staff in hand he goes along the dusty roads of Gujarat, clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him. Many a journey he has undertaken in the past, many a weary road traversed. But longer than any that have gone before is this last journey of his, and many are the obstacles in his way. But the fire of a great resolve is in him and surpassing love of his miserable countrymen, and love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires. And none that passes him can escape the spell, and men of common clay feel

the spark of life. It is a long journey, for the goal is the Independence of India and the ending of the exploitation of her millions².

He reached Dandi on the 5th April. On the way, at every village thousands of people gathered to hear his message of courage and strength, which inspired millions of young men and women throughout the nooks and corners of the country. In the prayer meeting on the morning of April 6th, he appointed Sri Abbas Tyabji, former judge of the Gujarat High Court and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu as his successors to conduct the struggle after he was arrested. Soon after the prayers he went to the sea to bathe. At 8.30 a.m. he bent down and picked up natural salt and thus broke the salt law. Gandhiji's breaking of the salt law was the signal for which the country was waiting. All over the country the struggle for freedom had begun. On the 4th May, Gandhiji was arrested in a strange manner. At dead of night on that day at 12.15 a.m. the District Magistrate of Surat, and two police officers armed with pistols and some thirty policemen armed with rifles, silently and suddenly came into the peaceful little compound in Karadi camp, three miles from Dandi where he was staying. They surrounded the hut. The British Officer went up to Gandhiji's bed, turned a torchlight on him and asked, "Are you Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi?" "You want me?" Gandhiji asked gently and said, "Please give me time for ablutions". There was no objection. While Gandhi cleaned his teeth, the officers, timepiece in hand, stood watching him. As the volunteers gathered round Gandhiji, the police made a cordon. Soon the cordon was relaxed and the volunteers had access to the leader. It was nearing one. Gandhiji packed up his few necessities and handed over his papers to a volunteer. "Please give me a few minutes more for prayer", he said. This was granted. He asked Pandit Khare, one of the Satyagrahis, to recite his favourite Vaishnavajanato Hymn, with which he had begun his march. Gandhi stood up, his eyes closed, his head bent, while the hymn was sung. All of the party then bowed before him one by one, and bade an affectionate farewell. At ten past one, the police put him in the lorry, on the way to Yeravada Central Jail. "At dead of night, like thieves they came to steal him away", observed Mirabeau. "For when they sought to lay hand on him, they feared the multitudes"¹.

Gandhi's successor, Mr. Abbas Tyabji, ex-justice of Gujarat High Court, who was getting ready for the march at Karadi received on May 11, 1930 a notice inviting him to reconsider the serious nature and the consequences of the course on which he proposed to embark. The next day the volunteers fell into line ready for the march, but before they traversed a few fields Tyabji and his followers were arrested.

Mrs. Naidu succeeded Abbas Tyabji. On May 21 over 2,000 volunteers led by her raided the Dharasana Salt Depot and she was arrested. But before her arrest, she had a prayer meeting with the volunteers and addressed them briefly: "Gandhiji's body is in jail but his soul is with you. India's prestige is now in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist, you must not even raise

a hand to ward off blows''. With Manilal, Gandhi's son in the forefront the throng moved forward towards the salt pans, which were now surrounded with barbed-wire stockade and ditches filled with water, guarded by four hundred police with half a dozen British officials in command. The police carried big lathis, five-foot clubs tipped with steel. Inside the stockade twenty-five riflemen stood ready. And now came the most brutal attacks ever made on peaceful men. Here is an eye account of an American journalist Mr. Miller.

"One hundred yards from the stockade, the fearless Satyagrahis drew up and a packed column advanced, wading the ditches and approaching the barbed wire. Police officers ordered them to disperse. The column calmly ignored the warning and slowly walked forward. Suddenly at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like nine pins. From where I stood, I heard sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow. Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors without breaking ranks, silently and doggedly marched on until struck down.

"And so it went on. When the first column was gone, another marched forward. Although every one knew that within a few minutes he would be beaten down, and perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear. They marched steadily with heads up, without the encouragement of music or cheering or any possibility that they might escape serious injury or death. The police rushed out and methodically and mechanically beat down the second column. There was no fight, no struggle; the marchers simply walked forward until struck down. There were no outcries, only groans after they fell. There were not enough stretcher-bearers to carry off the wounded; I saw eighteen injured being carried off simultaneously, while forty-two still lay bleeding on the ground, awaiting the stretcher-bearers. The blankets used as stretchers were sodden with blood.

After a while tactics were varied, and twenty-five men would advance and sit waiting. The police beat them with their big lathis. Bodies toppled over in threes and fours, bleeding from great gashes on their scalps. Group after group walked forward, sat down, and submitted to being beaten into insensibility without raising an arm to fend off the blows. Finally the policemen became enraged by the non-resistance of the demonstrators for not fighting back. They commenced savagely kicking the seated men in the abdomen and testicles. The injured men writhed and squealed in agony, which seemed to inflame the fury of the police and the crowd again almost broke away from their leaders. The police then began dragging the sitting men by the arms or feet, sometimes for a hundred yards, and throwing them

into the ditches. One was dragged to a ditch where I stood; the splash of his body doused me with muddy water, another policeman dragged a man to the ditch, threw him in, and then belaboured him over the head with his lathi. Hour after hour stretcher-bearers carried back a stream of inert, bleeding bodies”.

By eleven in the morning, at a temperature of 116° in shade, all activities slackened. Miller went to the temporary hospital where he counted 320 injured, many still unconscious with fractured skulls, and others writhing in agony from kicks in the testicles and stomach. Scores of injured had received no treatment for hours and two men had died. The Government made every effort to prevent Mr. Miller from communicating his reports to his newspaper. “In eighteen years of my reporting in twenty countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana”; remarked Miller. His story of the beatings caused a sensation when it appeared in the 1,350 newspapers served by the United Press throughout the world¹.

[On the 5th May, 1930] I was in Ooty in our Ashrama. After taking the midday meals, we came to the Ashrama's front verandah and looked at the day's newspaper. In the front was a seven column headline in big letters — “Mahatma Gandhi arrested”. For the last many months, I had read the news of the freedom struggle. I had read with pain and tears every line of what Gandhiji was saying. His speeches must have inflamed the hearts and minds of lakhs of young men and women. When the news of brutal beatings of the volunteers came, I could not resist the call of the country any more. I took leave of my friend and brother Swami Chidbhavananda and other monks in the Ashrama and came to Coimbatore. I did not know anybody in the Congress and where the office was. I enquired and went there and enquired whether I can enrol myself as a Congress member. At that time joining the Congress meant jumping into the freedom struggle and facing arrests and countless troubles. I met there a young and bright middle aged gentleman who enquired about me and gave me a membership form. That was Sri C.P. Subbia, who along with Sri K. Subramaniam were to be my life-long comrades in the freedom struggle.

My father and mother protested and could not understand this madness. My lawyer friends said that I was foolish and losing a good legal career. Everybody thought I was unwise and foolish. It was a kind of madness to jump into the fire. Immediately a Congress Committee for Coimbatore was formed with me as its President. Later I was elected as President of the District Congress Committee also, which position I held throughout the freedom struggle. On 5th July, along with Sri T. Raghayachari, we made salt in Valangulam and both were arrested the next day. Sri C.P. Subbia, Sri K. Subri and hundreds of others in the Coimbatore town and district followed. The same thing happened in other districts in Tamil Nadu and all over India. We were sentenced at that time to six months rigorous

imprisonment, were first taken to the Coimbatore Central Jail and later to the Central Jail at Vellore.

Among those who joined the Freedom Movement in Coimbatore who were to be my intimate associates in this great national struggle for quarter of a century were Messrs. C.P. Subbia, Sri K. Subri, Sri N. Subramania Iyer, Sri C. Subramaniam, Sri T. Raghavachari, from Coimbatore, Sri K.K. Subbanna Gounder, Sri R.S. Srikanta Iyer, Swami Gounder and Sri G.S. Lakshmanan from Gobi, Sri M.A. Eswaran, Sri K.S. Ramaswamy Gounder, Sri R.M. Magudapathi and Sri K.S. Periaswamy from Erode, Sri R.M. Kumaraswamy from Palladam, Sri Vadivel from Dharapuram, Sri Velappa Naidu from Udamalpet, Sri B.K. Nallaswamy and Sri Rangaswamy Reddiar from Bhavani and many others, too numerous to mention.

Of these I shall be failing in my duty if I don't say a few words about three friends whose work in the freedom movement was outstanding. The first is Sri C.P. Subbia. Coming out of the people, he developed into a mass leader. His character and dedication to the country were great. The aspect in which he surpassed all others was his wonderful capacity to speak in the language of the people to deliver the message of the freedom struggle to the masses. He was an impressive speaker, combining dignity with humour. The number of people who were inspired by his speeches to join the freedom movement must have been in thousands in the nooks and corners of the district.

Happily Sri Subri — K. Subramanian is his full name, is still with us. His father was a distinguished lawyer and Subri could have become a lawyer like his elder brother. He had a large family. Yet he gave up everything to work for the freedom of India. With his sterling character and quiet strength, he was the background of the movement in the district. He had the distinction of courting imprisonment with his whole family, with his wife and child. He has now retired from politics as many other workers who were in the freedom struggle have done and has become a poet composing devotional songs.

Sri K.K. Subbanna Gounder is one of the rare men in any generation. He was rich, well-to-do, and influential but was very quiet, gentle and unassuming. He along with Sri R.S. Srikanta Iyer, and P.S. Nalla Gounder formed the trio who converted the whole Gobi Taluk to the freedom movement. His wife followed her husband to jail. After independence he was some time in the legislature even as Sri C.P. Subbia and Sri Subri were, but later devoted himself wholly to religious work. The Bhavani Temple which he renovated will be the permanent memorial for his selfless work.

The names mentioned above are a few among the hundreds of volunteers who participated in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932. Thousands of others were to follow in the later years. About these we will hear later. It was my good fortune to have had their love, loyalty and unquestioned acceptance throughout the years of the freedom struggle. That was a time when we were inextricably bound by

loyalty to a great common cause, the cause of Indian freedom. When I look back on my life, rich as it has been in many ways, the richest and most fulfilling part of it has been the years of the freedom struggle, when we wanted nothing for ourselves but only thought of the country and its Freedom.

The influences of the Freedom movement were many and great. First it gave us, the individuals and the nation, something to live for, work for and strive for. It has been truly said, "The joy is in the striving and in the effort, more than in the achievement".

The second great effect of the freedom struggle was, it made a nation which was enslaved, afraid and which has lacked national confidence for the many centuries, free from fear and gave people a new sense of confidence and courage. It freed us from the fear of suffering and death. Thousands of boys, girls, men and women did not ask anything for themselves. Inspired by a cause, it was an unselfish struggle, namely, attainment of Freedom for the great Mother and for the future generations yet to come. This gave the nation a new identity, unity of purpose, a new confidence, and tremendous strength both individually and as a nation.

Greater than all these, insistence on Truth and Love as the method of the Freedom struggle, spiritualised politics and public life, as nothing else had done in the past. The whole country was raised to a higher level of ethical living and selfless service.

In Jail

My life in jail is one of the unforgettable experiences in my life. It must have been so to the lakhs of people who courted imprisonment in the Freedom Movement. There were discomforts, privations and pangs of separation from the family and the near and dear ones. Specially when one was kept in solitary confinement, the agony was greatest. Solitary confinement means being put in a cell of about 8' x 8' and locked throughout the day and the night with a pot placed inside for sanitary convenience. The cell was opened in the morning, midday and evening to give some food and clean the pot. Otherwise all alone, with nobody to see or converse. During the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932, when repression was at a high pitch, some of us were put in solitary confinement. Under that strain, some broke down and apologised and were released — that was the objective of the solitary confinement. But many to save their own honour and the honour of the country braved it. People who had memorised devotional songs would sing those songs loud or in silence and contemplate on God, which helped them to bear the strain. Some people lost their business and income, but the exhilaration of suffering for a great cause and the company of a large number of like-minded people helped to overcome the difficulties and privations.

Jail life had also great compensations. [It was in jail that] I met some rare persons and formed some of my deepest friendships. After some time, when books and paper and pen were allowed, an opportunity to read, study in depth and write was made available. [My deep study of Thirukkural, my study of Kamba Ramayana, my going through the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna many times and intensive study of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda and other selected devotional books were done there.] There we formed into groups for conducting classes on Thirukkural, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Silappathikaram and other classics.

My life in jail was enriched by coming into close contact with many distinguished persons, persons of purity, patriotism and dedication. At that time, Madras was a composite state consisting of Tamil Nadu, the Circars and Rayalseema parts of Andhra Pradesh, Malabar District in Kerala, Bellary and South Canara of Karnataka. We had in jail people from all these areas and also from Coorg, many of whom rose to very high positions in political and social life later. Rajaji was the greatest of them all. Along with

him were elders like T. Prakasam, who became Chief Minister in composite Madras and later in Andhra Pradesh, A. Vaidyanatha Aiyar of Madurai and the famous orator Sri S. Satyamurti who played a big part in the Central Assembly, Karnad Sadasiva Rao from Mangalore. Amongst the next age-group of people may be mentioned Sri O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, Sri K. Santhanam, Sardar A. Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri V.V. Giri, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman, Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam, Sri O.V. Alagesan, Sri P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, Sri L. Krishnaswamy Bharati, Gollapalli Sitarama Sastri, Mutnuri Krishna Rao, Tenneti Visvanatham, B. Gopala Reddy, Pallam Raju, T. Subramaniam, U. Gopala Menon, Poonacha and many others. I am beholden to those who sent me to the jail for the deep, life-time friendships with Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, N.M.R. Subbaraman and K. Santhanam. We will hear about them later.

Now to resume the happenings in the country during our stay in prison, agitation mounted in all parts of the country. Peaceful demonstrations against the arrest of leaders were organised throughout the country. Thousands of men and women courted imprisonment breaking the salt law or prohibitory orders. In addition boycott of foreign cloth and liquor shops were organised in all the cities and towns. The agitation was greatest in the provincial capitals. In this Bombay seemed to have been caught more in the spirit of the Satyagraha and thousands of young men and women joined the movement.

Women dressed in orange khadi saris picketed shops dealing in foreign goods. Consequently few entered these shops. If anyone attempted to enter, the woman volunteer joined her hands in supplication and she pleaded; if all else failed, she would throw herself across the threshold and challenged the customer to walk over her body. The volunteers flung themselves even in front of a motor car, until its owner yielded and took back to the shop the forbidden goods. Most of the Indian shops gave an undertaking not to sell foreign cloths and liquors. Everyday began with a 'prabhat pheri'* At dawn, from every street issued procession of a khadi-clad agitation squad. Men, women and children recited songs, which extolled the leaders, called for a boycott of British goods, and proclaimed the determination to win liberty or to die.

Besides thousands of young children in their teens organised themselves as 'Vanara Senas' to help in the boycott of British goods. The result was that by the Autumn of 1930, imports of cotton piece-goods had gone down to between a third and a fourth of what they were in the corresponding months of the previous year. The cigarettes had fallen in value to a sixth of the old figure. Sixteen British-owned mills in Bombay had to close down. On the other hand, the Indian-owned mills which had given the pledge not to manufacture yarn which competed with Khadi, were working in double shifts. About one hundred and thirteen mills signed a declaration to eliminate competition of mill cloth with Khaddar, by refraining from producing cloth of counts below eighteen. So great was the rush for

Khaddar that all stocks were depleted though the production all over had risen by 70 percent, from 63 lakhs to 113 lakhs of yards¹.

It was at this juncture that Dr. M.R. Jayakar and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru emerged as intermediaries between Gandhiji and the Congress Working Committee and the Viceroy. The extraordinary situation caused by the Salt Satyagraha made the British Government realise the realities of the situation. Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy said: "However emphatically we may condemn the Civil Disobedience Movement, we should, I am satisfied, make a profound mistake, if we underestimate the genuine and powerful spirit of Nationalism that is today animating much of Indian thought"² :

Some time later, on January 25, 1931, Gandhiji and members of the Congress Working Committee were released to enable them to negotiate a peaceful settlement. With the release of the leaders, on the first anniversary of the Independence Day on 26.1.1931, mammoth meetings were held throughout the country in which the following resolution was passed :

"We, the citizens of record our proud and grateful appreciation of the sons and daughters of India who have taken part in the struggle for Independence and have suffered and sacrificed so that the motherland may be free; of our great, beloved leader Mahatma Gandhi, who has been a constant inspiration for us, ever pointing to the path of high purpose and noble endeavour; of the hundreds of our brave youths who have laid down their lives at the altar of freedom; of the martyrs of Peshawar and the N.W. Frontier Province, Sholapur, Midnapur and Bombay; of the scores of thousands who have faced and suffered barbarous lathi attacks from the forces of the enemy; of the men of the Garhwali Regiment, and other Indians in the military and police ranks of the Government, who have refused, at the peril of their own lives, to fire or take other action against their own countrymen; of the indomitable peasantry of Gujarat, which has faced without flinching and turning back, all acts of terrorism, and the brave and long-suffering peasantry of the other parts of India, which has taken part in the struggle despite every effort to suppress it; of the merchants and other members of the commercial community, who have helped, at great loss to themselves, in the national struggle and especially in the boycott of foreign cloth and British goods; of the one hundred thousand men and women who have gone to prisons and suffered all manner of privations and sometimes assaults and beatings even inside of jail walls; and especially of the ordinary volunteer who, like a true soldier of India, without care of fame or reward, thinking only of the great cause he served, has laboured unceasingly and peacefully through suffering and hardship.

We record our homage and deep admiration for the womanhood of India, who, in the hour of peril for the motherland, forsook shelter of their homes and, with unfailing courage and endurance, stood shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk in the front line of the national

army, to share with them the sacrifices and triumphs of the struggle; and our pride at the youth of the country and the Vanara Sena, whom even their tender age could not prevent from participating in the struggle.

And further, we record our grateful appreciation of the fact that all the major and minor communities and classes in India have joined together in the great struggle and given their best to the cause; of particularly, the minority communities — Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and others who by their valour and loyal devotion to the cause of our motherland, have helped in building up a united and indissoluble nation, and resolved to achieve and maintain the independence of India, and to use this new freedom to break the shackles from and to remove the inequalities among all classes of people of India, and thus also to serve the larger cause of humanity. And with this splendid and inspiring example of sacrifice and suffering in India's cause before us, we repeat our Pledge of Independence, and resolve to carry on the fight till India is completely free.³

Then began the long and protracted negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Irwin, the Viceroy. For the first time, Gandhiji as representative of the Indian National Congress had dialogues on equal terms with the British Government. The Gandhi-Irwin talks commenced on the 17th February, 1931. The demands of Gandhiji were six, namely:

1. General amnesty to all those in jail under the Salt Satyagraha movement.
2. Immediate cessation of all repression by Government.
3. Restitution of all property confiscated by the police.
4. Reinstatement of all Government servants punished on political grounds.
5. Liberty to manufacture salt and picket liquor and foreign cloth shops, and
6. Enquiry into the excesses committed by the police.

But the British Government did not yield on some points namely amnesty to those involved in violence like Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukha Dev and enquiry into police excesses. Gandhiji met Lord Irwin many times after consulting the Congress Working Committee in all details of the negotiations. Finally the main points of the agreement arrived at were: (1) general amnesty to political prisoners not convicted on charges of committing violent acts, (2) permission for people in the seaside to pick salts, (3) right of people to boycott foreign cloths and liquor shops, and (4) that Gandhiji should attend the Second Round Table Conference. The Gandhi-Irwin pact was to be put before the General Body of the Indian National Congress to be held in Karachi in March, 1931. On the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin pact all the satyagraha prisoners in jail were released. This created tremendous prestige for the Congress and enthusiasm amongst the people and Congress Volunteers. High hopes were also pinned on the outcome of the Second Round Table Conference to be held in London in which Gandhiji and his selected team were participating as the representatives of the Indian National Congress. The pact was to be placed before the Indian National Congress at its Karachi session.

I attended the Karachi Congress along with Sardar A. Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman, Sri B. Gopal Reddy and many others. We sailed from Bombay to Karachi. The Congressmen of Karachi had made splendid arrangements for the vast gathering, not only for receiving them but also to accommodate them during the Congress. The enthusiasm and morale of the Congress delegates were very high. Everybody felt the glow of success. But at the same time there was a group led by Subash Chandra Bose, Jamnadas Mehta and others, who bitterly opposed the pact.

In the Karachi Congress, Gandhiji was greeted with 'Gandhi go back', 'Down with Gandhism', 'Gandhi truce has led Bhagat Singh to the gallows'. The atmosphere was charged with emotion and Gandhiji had a very tough time in talking to those young men and persuading them to be patient. He explained that he did everything possible to save Bhagat Singh and others, but could not succeed in spite of his best efforts. He also reaffirmed in no uncertain terms his faith in Non-Violence. He said: 'We cannot win Swaraj for the famishing millions, for our deaf and dumb, for our lame and crippled, by the way of the sword. With God as witness, I want to proclaim this truth, that the way of violence cannot bring Swaraj, it can only lead to disaster. I wish to tell these young men with all the authority with which a father can speak to his children, that the way of violence can only lead to perdition. I shall explain to you why. Do you think that all the women and children who covered themselves with glory during the last campaign would have done so if we had pursued the path of violence? Would they have been here today? Would our women known as the meekest on earth have done the unique service they did if we had violence in us? And our children — our Vanara Sena. How could you have had these innocent ones, who renounced their toys, their kites, their crackers and joined as soldiers of swaraj — how could you have enlisted them in a violent struggle? We were able to enlist as soldiers, millions of men, women and children, because we were pledged to non-violence. I beseech you to have patience and self-control. Anger cannot take us forward. We need not consider the Englishmen as our enemies. I have used satyagraha against them but have never thought of them as enemies. I want to convert them and the only way is the way of love. Rowdy demonstrations cannot help us. Could they call Bhagat Singh back to life? They can only retard the advent of swaraj. I agree that the Government has given sufficient cause for great provocation, but I want the impatient youth in the name of God, in the name of our motherland, to throw themselves heart and soul in the non-violent struggle.'⁴

"But if they will not, they might kill me but they cannot kill Gandhism. If truth can be killed, Gandhism can be killed. For what is Gandhism but winning Swaraj through truth and non-violence?"

The Karachi Congress was presided over by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who had led the great no tax campaign in Gujarat. The following were among the resolutions passed in the Congress:

The first one was of condolence on the death of Motilal Nehru, Mahomed Ali and other heroes and heroines of the freedom struggle. The second was on the Cawnpore riots and the third urged the release of all political prisoners. Jawaharlal Nehru then moved the resolution on Bhagat Singh and his comrades, which was drafted by Gandhiji.

"This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, Sukhadev and Rajguru and mourns with the bereaved families the loss of these lives. This Congress is of opinion that the Government have lost the golden opportunity of promoting goodwill between the two nations, admittedly held to be essential at this juncture, and of winning over to the method of peace, the party which, being driven to despair, resorts to political violence".

The main resolution dealing with the Gandhi-Irwin pact and its terms and the proposed participation in Round Table Conference were as follows: "This Congress, having considered the provisional settlement between the Working Committee and the Government of India, endorses it, and desires to make it clear, that the Congress goal of Purna Swaraj remains intact. In the event of the way being otherwise open to the Congress to be represented at any conference with the representatives of the British Government, the Congress delegation will work for this object, and in particular, so as to give the nation control over the army, the external affairs, finance and fiscal and economic policy, and to have scrutiny by an impartial tribunal, of the financial transactions of the British Government in India, and to examine and assess the obligations to be undertaken by India or England, and the right to either party to end the partnership at will, provided, however, that the Congress delegation will be free to accept such adjustments as may be demonstrably necessary in the interest of India". It further said: "The Congress authorises Mahatma Gandhi to represent it at the conference with the addition of such other delegates as the Working Committee may appoint to act under his leadership".⁵

This was moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and supported by Abdul Gaffar Khan from the North West Frontier Province and others. It was opposed by Jamnadas Mehta. Gandhiji in the end gave a detailed reply. After meeting the many points raised by them he ended by giving a warning.

"One thing more. If this delegation goes as far as the conference, it does not mean that the delegation will bring in its pocket Purna Swaraj. If it does not bring Purna Swaraj, it does not mean that it returns humiliated. Nothing of the kind. All that we expect to be able to do is to go and tell the British people and the British Minister what we want, and if we do not get what the Congress expects the delegation to accept within the terms of the resolution, we are bound to return empty-handed and receive your compliments, not curses. But you will be entitled to give us curses, if we return having sold the interests

*of the country. That is what you have a perfect right to do. But it will not be proper for you to say, 'You were not able to fulfil your promises'. No promise has ever been made. No promise is being made now that if the deputation goes to the conference, whether here or in England or enters upon further negotiations, that deputation is going to bring Purna Swaraj. Purna Swaraj will come when the full authority of the Congress has been manifested and not a minute before. And it will be the greatest achievement of the Congress to bring swaraj if it does. All that I promise faithfully to you on my own behalf and on behalf of any delegation that you might wish to send with me is that we shall not be disloyal to the Congress in any shape or form.*⁶

The resolution was thereafter passed.

The Karachi Congress was a great inspiring experience to me. In that atmosphere of tension and enthusiasm, there was the unforgettable experience of a million people assembled for the great cause of the Freedom of Mother India. It gave each of us strength, confidence and courage. From Karachi, I, along with many others returned by ship. But I got down at Okhla to see Dwaraka, the place where Sri Krishna is supposed to have ruled, in which Sankaracharya had founded one of his four Maths for the western region, along with Sringeri for the South, Puri in the East and Jothirmath in the North. That reminded me of the cultural unity of India held by our forefathers over a thousand years back. From Dwaraka I went to Veraval, where Sri Krishna is said to have given up his mortal coils, saw the Girnar Hills where there are wonderful Jain temples and sculptures and then to Ahmedabad, from where I took a train to Bombay and back home.

After the Karachi Congress there was some trouble in the implementation of the Pact by the Government. And so Gandhiji had to meet Lord Irwin, and as clarification, a second Pact was signed. On 29th August Gandhiji departed for England to attend the Second Round Table Conference with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Prabhaskar Pattani, Mahadev Desai, Mira Behn and G.D. Birla. Before his departure he issued the following statement: "I must go to London with God as my only guide", Gandhi observed, "He is a jealous Lord. He will allow no one to share His authority. One had, therefore, to appear before Him in all one's weakness, empty-handed and in a spirit of full surrender, and then He enables you to stand before a whole world and protects you from all harm. When I think of the prospects in London, when I know all is not well in India, that the Second settlement is bereft of all grace and is charged with no pleasant memories, there is nothing wanting to fill me with utter despair. The horizon is as black as it possibly could be. There is every chance of my returning empty-handed. But believing as I do, that God has made the way to London clear for me, I approach the visit with hope, and feel that any result that comes out of it would be good for the nation, if I do not prove faithless to the mandate given to me by the Congress"⁷

On my return from Karachi, two big tasks were waiting for me. The first was to spread the message of the Freedom Movement throughout the nooks and corners of the district of which I was the Congress President. In this, the work was ably shared by Sri C.P. Subbia, Sri K. Subramaniam (Subri) and others. In addition I had to respect the calls from other districts particularly Tanjore, Madurai and Salem which were headed by Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Sri Venkatachala Reddiar.

The other task was a more difficult one. The Vidyalaya recently started on 3rd February, 1930 was a hostel with five boys, studying in neighbouring schools. The idea was to shift it to a rural area and make it a completely residential institution. As mentioned previously due to the generous help of Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder it was shifted to one of his gardens in Vellakinar. Running a residential institution in a village far away from the city was no easy job. The permission to start the School had to be obtained. In this, I was greatly helped by Sri C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, a man of nobility and erudition. Sheds had to be erected for class-room and living. The farmhouse in the garden served as the kitchen and dining hall. As we had admitted a Harijan boy, there was social boycott and respectable high caste families refused to send their children to the new school. To attract children, everything was given free — tuition, boarding, clothes and books. The first batch of children consisted of 22 boys. The Report of the Vidyalaya for 1931 and 1932 says as follows:

"In the year 1931-32 it expanded into a residential institution. It was shifted to a garden at Vellakinar, belonging to the Hon'ble Mr. V.C. Vellingiri Gounder. The strength of the Vidyalaya during the year was 22 and a school was also started, attached to the Vidyalaya with fourth, fifth and sixth classes. The beginning of the year 1932-33 saw the increase of the strength of the Vidyalaya to 34 and the seventh class was added on to the school and the fourth class abolished. This year there are four teachers in the school besides the Secretary (i.e., myself) who acts both as the Warden and the moral and religious instructor".

Everything had to be organised afresh and with no previous experience, there was a great deal of difficulty in putting up the buildings, getting good teachers for the school and taking care of the children, setting up new and good tradition. But God in His mercy gave the courage, strength and enthusiasm and I was young enough to face difficulties and learn from them. Purchase of food materials, putting up of shed, making of needed furniture however simple, construction of a simple shrine and organising daily prayers, teaching the children to sing the slokas and songs in the worship, above all providing an affectionate atmosphere for the children and training the newly recruited young staff in the ideals of Sri Guru Maharaj and Swami Vivekananda — almost everything had to be done from scratch. In this my only asset was my health and enthusiasm and the sympathy of a few friends. And so there was so much to do. But the turn of events in the Second Round Table Conference came as a bolt from the blue.

Gandhiji's visit to England, while it was a great cultural and personal success in that people in England and the west could appreciate his lofty principles and spiritual ideals, the political aspect was a failure. Owing to the obstinacy and wrong attitude of Mr. Jinnah and Sir Samuel Hoare, no political agreement could be reached. In his last parting speech Gandhiji said: 'Our ways are in different directions. The dignity of human life requires that we must face the storms of life. I do not know in what way my life will be?'

The failure of the Round Table Conference was a signal to Lord Wellington who had succeeded Lord Irwin as Viceroy to take the strongest repressive measures to suppress the Freedom Movement. Many ordinances were issued for that purpose. They were clear declaration of war against the Congress. Immediately after his return to the country, Gandhiji and the Congress Working Committee members were arrested. This meant that all the leaders of the movement throughout India will also be put in prison. There was no doubt that I will be one of them.

What to do was the big question. Shall I consider the exigencies of the newly started Vidyalaya and back out from the Freedom struggle, thus bringing ignominy and contempt on myself and the Freedom Movement? Or shall I leave the Vidyalaya to whatever may happen to it including its possible closure? The struggle in my mind was tense and great. I prayed to Sri Gurumaharaj for help day and night so that he may show the way to conduct the institution and allow me to do my duty by the country. Glory unto the Lord — help came and in time.

One Sri Manickaswamy Mudaliar from Burma whom I had never met before wrote to me that he would like to come and stay a few days with me in the Vidyalaya. At that time Burma was part of India. He was a native of Madras and had gone there to serve in the Accountant General's office in Rangoon. After retirement, he returned to Madras. He was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He had heard about me and the newly started institution. He wrote that he was coming to see it. He came according to his letter. I received him at the Railway Station and brought him to the Vidyalaya in Vellakinar. He was a good and grandfatherly man. He quickly perceived my dilemma and said with great affection: "Please don't worry. I will take care of the children and the institution for a year". God had helped and Sri Ramakrishna had come to my aid. My imprisonment that time was just one year.

I have heard of the story of a boy Gopala in the Upanishads. A poor mother had an only child. She wanted to put her child to a school. But between her home and the school there was a big forest. The child was afraid of passing through the forest alone and cried to his mother somebody must accompany him. What can a poor woman who had to work for her living do? She said to her child, 'You have a brother in the forest. Call to him sincerely and he will help'. The next day he went, he was afraid, but had faith in his mother and cried for his brother. And a brother did

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come out of the forest to help him. The Lord came in that form. Faith of the mother in God and faith of the child in his mother made the Lord come. It seemed the days of such miracles were not over. Faith and earnest prayer had worked against odds and the Lord had come to my help.

And I went to jail in the service of the Mother India in peace, love and hope.

There were more evidences of the Lord being behind the Vidyalaya in its work in the years to come.

11. The Second Imprisonment

WHEN I went to jail last time I had no previous experience. And so I did not know what I could take to jail and what would be allowed to be taken. With the first experience, we knew that political books of any kind, books by Gandhiji and other political leaders would not be allowed. But religious books and pictures or books on economics and other academic subjects were allowed. And so this time I took with me two table pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for my daily worship and along with them the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and devotional songs like Thevaram, Thirukkural.

During my second imprisonment I was first taken to Madurai District Jail and later to Cuddalore District Jail. In the Madurai Jail, there were big mosquitos swarming in the rooms and outside. For covering the body, we were given thick woollen country blankets, which could not be used in the sultry weather. How to avoid the bite of these mosquitos was the big problem. This was solved by smearing all over the body with kerosene out of the hurricane lamps given to us. In Madurai I had another excruciating experience. Criminals sentenced to be hanged used to be taken that way in the early morning for execution. Some used to cry and weep aloud. That was a dreadful experience. At last we were relieved when we were transferred to Cuddalore where the major part of my second sentence was spent.

During the Freedom Movement, we often sang Bharati's songs in public meetings. Bharati's songs not only inspired us with patriotism but also with love of Tamil. One of the songs which were often sung was:

யாம் அறிந்த மொழிகளிலே தமிழ் மொழிபோல்
இனிதாவது எங்கும் காணேம்

யாமறிந்த புலவரிலே கம்பனைப்போல்
வள்ளுவர்போல், இளங்கோவைப்போல்
பூமிதனில் யாங்கனுமே பிறந்ததிலே

சேமமுற வேண்டுமெனில்
 பிறநாட்டு நல்லறிஞர் சாத்திரங்கள்
 தமிழ் மொழியிற் பெயர்த்தல் வேண்டும்;
 இறவாத புகழுடைய புதுநூல்கள்
 தமிழ் மொழியில் இயற்றல் வேண்டும்.
 மறைவாக நமக்குள்ளே பழங்கதைகள்
 சொல்வதிலோர் மகிமை இல்லை
 திறமான புலமையெனில், வெளிநாட்டோர்
 அதை வணக்கஞ் செய்தல் வேண்டும்.

“புத்தம் புதிய கலைகள் — பஞ்ச
 பூதச் செயல்களின் நுட்பங்கள் கூறும்;
 மெத்த வளருது மேற்கே — அந்த
 மேன்மைக் கலைகள் தமிழினில் இல்லை
 சென்றிருவீர் எட்டுத் திக்கும் — கலைச்
 செல்வங்கள் யாவும் கொணர்ந்திங்குச் சேர்ப்பீர்”

These were a few amongst many other songs of Poet Subramania Bharati which were sung in public meetings on those days. Their meaning is: “There is no sweeter language than Tamil. There are no greater poets than Kambar, Thiruvalluvar and Ilango. But there is no use of being self-satisfied with singing our old glories. Tamil must contain books on all sciences and arts. Get them in Tamil by translation or original writing. Go into the world in all directions and gather the best in every language to enrich the Tamil language”.

These words inspired us and made us think what we should do in the great work of enriching the Tamil language. While in Vellore Jail some of us thought that we should do whatever we could to write books on various subjects to enrich our language. The literature in Tamil at that time consisted largely of the old classics like Kamba Ramayanam, Thirukkural, Villi Bharatham, Silappathikaram etc. There were also novels written by some authors, many being translations or adaptations from English, Bengali and other languages. There were very few books on modern sciences and arts. To make Tamil language a modern one, it must contain books on all subjects like economics, political science, physics, chemistry, biology etc. and each of us who could, should contribute in whatever way we can. Being an economics student I thought of writing a book on economics. For that purpose I took also Indian Economics by Jather and Beri with me. This led me to write a book on Indian Economics in Tamil entitled. “இந்தியப் பொருளாதார நூல்”. It was printed and published on my release and was the first of its kind in Tamil.

This was followed by ‘Swami Vivekananda on Education’ — a compilation of the Swamiji’s writings and ‘Thirukkethara Yathirai’ while

in Tiruchi Jail and translation of 'Swami Vivekananda's Colombo to Almora' in Tamil while in Vellore Jail in the 1942 movement. As a follow-up of this effort I took up the publication of an Encyclopaedia in Tamil on the lines of the British Encyclopaedia, some years later.

I am extremely beholden to the Cuddalore Jail for meeting Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Sri K. Santhanam. We lived in neighbouring cells in the Cuddalore prison and that gave us opportunities to move with each other intimately. Such men of character, sacrifice and dedication are rare. Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai was a very quiet, unassuming and austere man. Though he lived in Vedaranyam in a far-off corner in Thanjavur District, he dominated the Freedom movement in the District and in Tamil Nadu. He was the prime person who organised the campaign in Vedaranyam when Rajaji led his group there for Salt Satyagraha. Even now stories are told of how the people of Vedaranyam gave their whole-hearted cooperation to the Satyagraha under the leadership of Rajaji and Annachi, as Vedaratnam Pillai was universally called. After the passing away of Kasturba Gandhi, he started an orphanage for girls in a village near Vedaranyam, which has grown to be the biggest and one of the finest Hindu orphanages for girls in South India under the dedicated guidance of his son Sri V. Appakutti.

Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman known as Madurai Gandhi was deeply devoted to Gandhian ideals. His body was slim — only skin and bones and his health was poor. He needed special diet. But in spite of it, he courted incarceration four times in the Freedom struggle. His sincerity of purpose in whatever he undertook and patience was proverbial. When he was approached for gift of lands during Vinobaji's Bhoodan movement, he gave 50 acres of his most valuable lands worth many lakhs of rupees. He helped all who went to him for succour without any ostentation and publicity, as the Bible said without the left hand knowing what the right hand gave. He never sought positions but they came to him. He was successfully Chairman of the Madurai Municipality, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Parliament, President of Tamil Nadu Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, President of Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh, Gandhi Niketan, President of the Managing Committee, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore and Member of the Avinashilingam Education Trust and numerous other bodies. His love and affection and kindness to me personally were great. His friendship is one of the very precious gifts which I have been fortunate enough to get in my life.

Sri K. Santhanam was different. He was an intellectual and a scholar. He succeeded Rajaji as the leader in the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha after Rajaji was arrested. He was Editor of the Indian Express, was Minister of Railways in the Government of India and Chairman of the Union Finance Commission. He was Governor of Vindhya Pradesh for a term. He was also a profound scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil. The jail provided opportunities to meet him and many others and forge intimate friendships which lasted for over half a century — throughout my life.

Life in jail was not without its excitement. We were allowed to write and receive one letter per month and the long-awaited letter when it arrived was a great excitement, especially for those who were married and had families. A prisoner was entitled to one interview per month. It was indeed a very great occasion looked forward to, when it happened. Nor were interviews always very quiet. Sometimes joy of meeting and pangs of parting were accompanied by uncontrolled weeping and tears. In my own case, my father who bore my first imprisonment with courage, broke down during my second term. He left his home and was on constant pilgrimage to shrines all over Tamil Nadu. But these could not give him consolation or peace. When he came to see me in jail, he wept like a child and nobody could pacify him. Needless to say I was deeply affected. In that love and misery, we could rarely speak to each other. After the time allowed was over, we were rudely separated by the inevitable process of Law. He passed away soon after my release. Sri C.S. Ratnasabapathy Mudaliar, a leading citizen of Coimbatore in whose name a township has been developed in Coimbatore used to tell me, that I had shortened my father's life by five years by going to jail. If such was the case with me who had no family and who was fortified by detachment out of absorption of the Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the misery caused by pangs of separation to those who had dearly loved families can be imagined.

We had little news from outside, except when a new prisoner was brought in and we crowded around him to know the latest happenings in the country and as to how the civil disobedience movement was going on. From what we could understand, the repressive measures taken by the Government were very severe. It seemed the Government was determined to crush the Freedom Movement and took extreme steps to do so. All the Congress Committees were declared illegal including the Congress Working Committee and the provincial, district and local committees. Together with the Congress all its allied or sympathetic organisations like kisan organisations, youth leagues, students' associations, national universities and schools, Congress hospitals, libraries etc. were declared unlawful. The banned institutions went into many hundreds in each province. Under the ban about 7,000 arrests were made, including hundreds of the most prominent Congress workers. Many Ordinances were issued for this purpose. Winston Churchill with his characteristic bluntness had said that the ordinances were more drastic than any since the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. A new feature of one of the Ordinances was that the parents and the guardians were to be punished for the offences of their children or wards. A general feature of the Government's policy on this occasion was widespread confiscation of property, houses, motor-cars, monies in banks both of organisations and individuals who were connected with the Freedom Movement. The deliberate policy of the authorities seemed to be to make the lot of the political prisoners very severe and difficult. Confidential circulars were sent to all the prison authorities stressing that civil

disobedience prisoners must be dealt with firmly. Whipping became a frequent punishment. Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, told the House of Commons that they would fight to the finish till the Congress was completely subjugated or destroyed.

But even these repressive measures did not succeed in suppressing the freedom spirit amongst the people. The boycott and the civil disobedience movement continued rising: strikes and disturbances broke out in various parts of the country. During the first four months there were 80,000 arrests. The people continued to struggle, but it was a struggle without a leadership as all the leaders were clapped in jail. The activities of the civil resisters were of the usual pattern ranging from holding of banned meetings and processions, boycott of foreign goods and liquor shops. The no-tax campaign was also much in evidence in certain places.

The Government countered the Congress with every resource at its command. Municipalities were made to haul down the Tri-colour flag to make place for the Union Jack. To a greater or less extent all the provinces went through the fire of repression but the North-West Frontier Province under the leadership of Abdul Gaffar Khan and Bengal suffered most. Punitive police were often stationed and it was a practice to impose heavy collective fines on villages and occasionally on towns. Some parts of Bengal presented an extra-ordinary spectacle. The Government treated the entire population of certain districts of Bengal and especially the Hindus as 'hostile', and everyone, man and woman, boy or girl, between twelve and twenty-five years — had to carry identity cards. Schools were in many cases closed and even bicycles were not allowed. Movements had to be reported to the police, curfew, sunset law, military marches, punitive police, collective fines and a host of other repressive measures were enforced.

All these news trickled down into the jail and made us all anxious. But on top of all these, came another news which shocked and perplexed us greater. Early in September 1932, news was received that Gandhiji was going to undertake a fast unto death. In the shock created by that news, some broke down into weeping. All of us were dazed why and what for was he taking this extreme step? Above all, what will happen to the country and the Freedom Movement if anything happens to him? These were the anxious questions which troubled our minds. Gradually further information was received. In the Second Round Table Conference held on 13th November 1931, Jinnah and the Muslim League had pressed their case for separate electorates not only for the Muslims but for all the religious minorities, like Christians, Parsis and Sikhs. In addition it was represented that the scheduled castes though Hindus in religion should also be segregated from the Hindus and be given separate electorates. This suited the British Rulers, who had always believed in Divide and Rule. But Gandhiji opposed it strongly that the Hindu Scheduled Castes should not be separated from the main body of Hindus. He also said at the conference that if any such thing was done he will resist it with his life. The matter was left to the

Prime Minister of England to decide. But at that time nobody seemed to have taken Gandhiji's warning seriously. Neither did the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald or Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India care or respect Gandhiji's repeated representations that separate electorates for the Harijans should not be given, whatever might be done for the other minorities.

On August 17, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald announced the scheme of minority representation, commonly known as the 'Communal Award'. The scheme fixed the number of seats in the provincial legislatures at approximately double the number in the existing councils. Separate electorates were retained for the minority communities and also for the Muslims in Bengal and Punjab, despite their numerical majority. The weightage was also conceded to the Muslims in provinces in which they were a minority and to the Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab. The depressed classes were also recognised as a minority community entitled to separate electorate.

To this Gandhiji replied as follows:

"I have read the British Government's decision on the representation of minorities and have slept over it. In pursuance of my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare and my declaration at the meeting of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference on the 13th November, 1931, at St. James' Palace, I have to resist your decision with my life. The only way I can do so is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda. This fast will cease if, during its progress, the British Government of its own motion or under pressure of the public opinion, revise their decision and withdraw their scheme of communal electorates for the depressed classes, whose representatives should be elected by the general electorates under the common franchise no matter how wide it is.

"The fast will come into operation in the ordinary course from the noon of 20th September next, unless the said decision is meanwhile revised in the manner suggested above".

The Premier's reply to Gandhi's letter was sent on September 8th. He regretted that the Government's decision could not be changed except on the conditions laid down in that decision.

On this Gandhiji explained his position:

"I should not be against even over-representation of the Depressed Classes. What I am against is their statutory separation even in a limited form from the Hindu fold, so long as they choose to belong to it. Do you realize that if your decision stands and the constitution comes into being, you arrest the marvellous growth of the work of the Hindu reformers who have dedicated themselves to the uplift of their suppressed brethren in every walk of life?

"I have, therefore, been compelled reluctantly to adhere to the decision conveyed to you".

The announcement of Gandhi's decision to fast unto death served as a signal for a countrywide demand for revision of the Premier's decision. A beginning was made by the Depressed Class leader of Madras Sri M.C. Rajah, in a statement dated September 13, in which he condemned the Communal Award and made an appeal for concerted action on the part of all sections of our people to save Gandhi's life. Except for Dr. Ambedkar, who described the fast as a 'political stunt', Indian leaders made a supreme effort to avoid the crisis. Tej Bahadur Sapru demanded Gandhi's immediate release and expressed the hope that the Government would take no risks with the life of one "who alone could make a contribution to the solution of the communal problem by mutual agreement". Yakub Hasan warned his co-religionists against "disrespectful belittling" of the noble sacrifice of Gandhi. "The Hindu Society is on its trial", said Rajendra Prasad, "and if it has life in it, it must respond with the great and magnificent act". On September 14th, all the temples in Allahabad were thrown open to the members of the Depressed classes, and this example was followed in several other cities. On September 19, public meetings were held all over the country, demanding withdrawal of the Premier's decision in respect of the separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. The attention of the world was focussed on the frail old man, sitting in Yeravada prison. Anxious enquiries were coming from all parts of the country to postpone the fast.

To this Gandhiji replied:

"The fast which I am approaching was resolved upon in the name of God, for His work and, as I believe in all humility, at His call. Friends have urged me to postpone the date for giving the public a chance to organize itself. I am sorry it is not open to me to change even the hour except for the reason stated in my letter to the Prime Minister".

Explaining the import of the fast, Gandhiji wrote:

"The impending fast is against those who have faith in me, whether Indians or foreigners, and not for those who have it not. Therefore, it is not against the English Official world, but it is against those Englishmen and English-women, who, in spite of the contrary teaching of the official world, believe in me and the justice of the cause I represent. Nor is it against those of my countrymen who have no faith in me, whether they be Hindus or others, but it is against those countless Indians, no matter to what persuasion they belong, who believe that I represent a just cause. Above all it is intended to sting Hindu conscience into right religious action.

"There should be no coercion of those who are opposed to joint electorates. I have no difficulty in understanding their bitter opposition. They have every right to distrust me. Do I not belong to the Hindu section miscalled superior class or Caste Hindus, who have ground down the so-called untouchables? The marvel is that the latter have

remained nevertheless in the Hindu fold. There is subtle something quite indefinable in Hinduism, which keeps them in it even in spite of themselves. And this is that makes it imperative for a man like me with a living experience of it, to resist the contemplated separation, even though the effect should cost my life.

"Fasting for light and penance is a hoary institution. I have observed it in Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is replete with instances of fasting for purification and penance. But it is a privilege if it is also a duty".

Gandhiji's impending fast roused the nation to immediate and stupendous action throughout the country. The public and the leaders of all shades of political opinion were panicky. But Gandhiji remained unruffled. In his letter to the members of his Ashrama at Sabarmati he wrote on the 18th September, "Inscrutable are the ways of Providence, I feel that I am dancing to His tune. I, therefore, feel light and buoyant in spirit. Do we not in the ashrama everyday, rehearse the lesson of renouncing attachment to the flesh? Now is the time to prove that we have really assimilated that lesson. Let there not be, therefore, any anxiety or vain sorrow on my account. Rather you should all rejoice, that it has been given to one of your members to go through the final test. You should wish and pray that He may show me the way to come out of the ordeal successfully. It is easy, comparatively speaking, to take the plunge, but how many swim across and reach the other shore? Whilst, therefore, no one may feel elated before the end, I feel secure in the faith that He in whose name the work is undertaken will also bring it to a successful issue".

He wrote to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore for his blessings and the Poet replied in brave terms:

"It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love".

In the meanwhile, a Hindu Leaders' Conference of over one hundred delegates met in Bombay on September 19th, under the Presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Prominent among those who participated in the conference were Sapru, Jayakar, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, M.C. Rajah, Dr. Ambedkar, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, M.S. Aney, Dr. Moonje, Kunzru and A.V. Thakkar. The discussion revealed a complete unanimity of opinion on two points: Gandhiji's life must be saved at all costs and the blot of untouchability must be eradicated at the earliest moment. Accordingly, a manifesto was drafted the following day, at the instance of Mr. M.C. Rajah, to be signed by all present pledging themselves to fight untouchability till it was completely eradicated. With regard to the constitutional issues, however, as Dr. Ambedkar felt that he could not proceed any further with the discussion till Gandhiji's terms were definitely known, the conference was adjourned.

On Tuesday September 20, Gandhi said his morning prayer and took his usual breakfast of milk and fruit. From half past six to eight he heard the recitation of the Gita, and at half past eleven he took his last meal of lemon juice and honey with hot water. The zero hour approached. "Oh traveller, arise, it is dawn; where is the night that thou still sleepest", a Hindi song, was sung by Gandhiji, Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbai Patel. The jail bell struck twelve and his fast commenced.

In the evening, the journalists came to see Gandhiji, who immediately plunged into the question uppermost in his mind: "If people won't laugh at me, I would gently put forward a claim which I have always asserted that I am a 'touchable' by birth, but an 'untouchable' by choice, and I have endeavoured to qualify myself to represent, not the upper ten even among the 'untouchables', because be it said to their shame there are castes and classes among them, but my ambition is to represent and identify myself with, as far as possible, the lowest strata of the 'untouchables' namely the 'invisibles' and the 'un-approachables'", whom I have always before my mind's eye wherever I go; for they have indeed drunk deep of the poisoned cup. I have met them in Malabar and in Orissa, and am convinced that if they are ever to rise, it will not be by reservation of seats but will be by the strenuous work of Hindu reformers in their midst and it is because I feel that this separation would have killed all prospect of reform that my whole soul has rebelled against it; and, let me make it plain, that the withdrawal of separate electorates will satisfy the letter of my vow but will not satisfy the spirit behind it, and in my capacity of being a self-chosen 'untouchable', I am not going to rest content with a patched up pact between 'touchables' and 'untouchables'.

"What I want, and what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch. I want, therefore, a living pact whose life-giving effect should be felt not in the distant tomorrow but today, and therefore, the pact should be sealed by an All-India demonstration of the 'touchables' and 'untouchables' meeting together not by way of a theatrical show, but in real brotherly embrace. It is to achieve this, the dream of my life for the past fifty years, that I have entered today the fiery gates. The British Government's decision, was the last straw. Therefore, for me the abolition of separate electorates would be but the beginning of the end, and I would warn all those leaders assembled at Bombay and others against coming to any hasty decision.

"My life, I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith. I would urge them not to swerve an inch from the path of strictest justice. My fast I want to throw in the scales of justice and if it wakes up the Caste Hindus from their slumber, and if they are roused to a sense of duty, it will have served its purpose.

Whereas, if out of blind affection for me, they would somehow or other come to a rough and ready agreement so as to secure the abrogation and then go off to sleep, they will commit a grievous blunder and will have made my life a misery. For, while the abrogation of the separate electorates would result in my breaking the fast, it would be a living death for me if the vital pact for which I am striving is not arrived at. It would simply mean that, as soon as I call off the fast, I should have to give notice of another in order to achieve the spirit of the vow to the fullest extent.

"This may look childish to the onlooker, but not so to me. If I had anything more to give, I would throw in that also to remove this curse, but I have nothing more than my life.

"I believe that if untouchability is really rooted out, it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot but its repercussion will be worldwide. My fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity".

Millions offered fervent prayers and fasted on September 20th. "A shadow is darkening today over India like a shadow cast by an eclipsed sun" said Tagore in an address delivered to the inmates of Visva Bharati. "Mahatmaji has pronounced his ultimatum, and though it may be our misfortune to lose him in the battlefield, the fight will be passed on to every one of us to be carried on to the final end. It is the gift of the fight which he is going to offer to us, and if we do not know how to accept it humbly and yet with proud determination, if we cheaply dismiss it with some ceremonials to which we are accustomed, and allow the noble life to be wasted with its great meaning missed, then our people will passively roll down the slope of degradation".

On that historic day, the deep-seated prejudices seemed to give way; the Caste Hindus fraternized with the untouchables and mixed freely in thousands of meetings all over the country. The doors of a large number of temples were suddenly thrown open to the untouchables throughout India. "That some of the great temples should have spontaneously admitted the 'untouchables' without restriction is to me a modern miracle" Gandhiji observed in a message to the friends abroad. "They have only now admitted God. Hitherto the images, which the custodians, falsely and in their pride, thought had God within were Godless. The cabinet decision was to me a timely warning from God, that I was asleep when He was knocking at the door and waking me up. The agony of the soul is not going to end until every trace of untouchability is gone. Thank God there is not only one man in this movement but thousands who will lay down their lives in order to achieve this reform in its fullness."

There were long and protracted negotiations between the Hindu leaders like Sri C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, H.N. Kunzru and others on the one side and Dr. Ambedkar,

Sri M.C. Rajah and others on the other side. Various formulas were discussed, but many were not accepted by Dr. Ambedkar. What was conceded by Dr. Ambedkar was not good enough for Gandhiji to break his fast. At last an agreement was reached as drafted by Gandhiji which was as follows: "This conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth, and those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and other public institutions. This right will have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest acts of the Swaraj parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before, to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including the bar in respect of admission to temples".

Urgent telegrams were sent by Sapru, Dr. Ambedkar and Pandit Malaviya appealing to the Premier to lose no time in taking necessary steps to accept the resolution and amend the Communal Award. On receiving the cabled message about the Yeravada Pact, Ramsay Mac Donald who had gone to Sussex hurried down to London, where he was joined by Sir Samuel Hoare. After prolonged deliberations extending to midnight, the cabinet members finally agreed upon the terms of the statement announcing the Government's decision be amended by corresponding provisions of the Yeravada pact. Simultaneous statements on behalf of the cabinet were issued in England and in India on the morning of September 26.

The people now were anxious as to when Gandhi would break his fast. Anxiety rose to a high pitch, when on the morning of 26th September the doctors issued an alarming health bulletin, saying that Gandhi's condition had entered into the danger zone. On the assurance of legal luminaries like Sri M.R. Jayakar and Sri Tej Bahadur Sapru that the Government communicate has incorporated all that was in the Agreement, Gandhiji broke his fast. He called the Superintendent of the jail who brought the message from the Government and informed him: 'I have decided to break my fast. But before I break my fast I want to make one thing clear. If after I break my fast, all the old restrictions are re-imposed on me, it will interrupt the work of reform that has been begun. I would, therefore, expect that all facilities necessary for carrying on of my untouchability work to continue, if I am to remain here'.

To those like us within prison who were watching with great anxiety and fear these happenings in Yeravada Jail it was a great relief to learn that an agreement was reached and Gandhiji's life was saved. We all felt that the problem had been solved. But to Mahatma Gandhi his work had just begun, namely the uplift of the depressed classes to an equal status with the caste Hindus. He began his soul stirring appeals to the Caste Hindus and all social workers and institutions to take up this work of eradication of untouchability in right earnest and give their dedicated services for the work.

With this diversion of energies of the people to the Harijan uplift work, the political movement faded. After finishing our sentences, when we were released and came back home, we put ourselves heart and soul to that work. After his release Gandhiji took up a gignatic tour throughout India commonly called the Harijan work with the specific purpose of organising work for the uplift of Harijans. During the tour he also came to Coimbatore. As President of the District Congress Committee it was my privilege to organise his tour in the district, and also be with him when he stayed for a week of well-earned rest in Sri Nageswara Rao's bungalow in Coonoor. This gave me the unique privilege of travelling and conversing with him and observing and knowing him more intimately.

The movement initiated by Gandhiji for the uplift of the Harijans had a vast impact. It stung the Hindu conscience into action. As its result in the new Constitution Act of India, untouchability was abolished in law. Thousands of Harijans are now occupying high positions as Ministers, Administrators, Engineers and Doctors. But in spite of all these, much more needs to be done. While there is no difference in the towns and cities, much remains to be done in the village. Thousands of young men and women should come forward to complete the work for which Gandhiji offered to lay down his life.

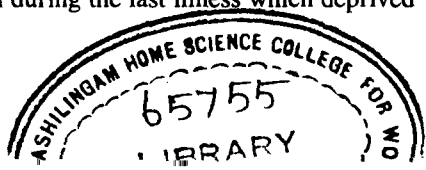
12. A Week with The Mahatma

WHEN I returned from jail bad news was awaiting me. Every time after my release, I used to go to Madras to offer worship at the Ramakrishna Math in Mylapore before returning home. This time when I went to the Math to my great shock and sorrow, I was informed that Rev. Mahapurushji Maharaj, as Swami Shivananda was respectfully called had had a paralytic stroke and both his speech and the limbs on one side were paralysed. It was a great personal loss to me as he had been a tower of strength encouraging and inspiring me in all my work.

His total surrender of himself to the Master, his veneration for the Holy Mother, his loyalty and affection for Swami Vivekananda, his extreme brotherly affection and regard for the apostles of Sri Ramakrishna on the one hand, and his deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his disciples, his sympathy for the suffering, his passion for ameliorating the masses and his great sympathy for the lowly on the other made him a unique personality. He was far above the ordinary human, but yet very very human. King Albert of Belgium met him at Belur Math and remarked, "For the first time I have met one with whom I could talk as man to man". The Swami did not write books; he gave no lectures; but his letters to devotees and disciples give us an idea of his deep compassion, and his unlimited love which expected nothing in return.

Age, which diminishes physical and mental vigour, serves only to heighten the force and charm of spiritual personalities. The last years of Swami Shivananda's life were days which showed the majesty of a spiritual sovereign. The assumption of the vast spiritual responsibilities of the Presidentship of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission tore off the austere mask of his reserve and showed the vastness, depth and purity of his love and sympathy to all without difference of caste, social status, wealth or scholarship. Thousands came to him, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, the homeless and the outcast, men battered by fate and reeling under miseries to which man is prey, and went away lifted up in spirits. His look, full of affection, his cheering words, and an impalpable something from him which was nevertheless most real, put new hope and energy into persons whose lives had almost been blasted by frustrations and despair. He cheerfully bore all discomfort and hardship in the service of the helpless and the needy. Even during the last illness which deprived

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him of the use of speech and half of his limbs, the same anxiety to be of help to all was evident and his kindly look and the gentle movement of his left hand in blessing braced up the drooping spirits of the devotees.

On hearing about his illness I rushed to Calcutta and Belur Math. He was laid up in bed. He could not speak. But the glimmer in his eyes and the pressing of my hand in his own, spoke volumes about his love and blessings. It was as if he said, "What does it matter if this body goes? My blessings are always with you. Carry on bravely my boy. Sri Ramakrishna is always with you". That was the last occasion I could stay with him and had the benefit of his spiritual presence. Shortly after, he passed away. It was as if he was waiting to give me his last blessings. To me it was an irreparable loss. But spiritual personages don't really die after the dissolution of the physical body. Their influence on people who have gained their love and grace lasts for ever.

On my return, I found that in the Vidyalaya also all were not well. In my absence they were carrying on bravely. Sri Manikkasami Mudaliar took care of the institution with love and courage, in spite of his declining health. But the place was infested with snakes and almost every week one or two were killed. The water level in the well had gone down and so there was water problem. In addition to these, one day the kitchen thatched shed had caught fire. Whether it was due to accident or it was an act of miscreants, nobody was sure. All these difficulties made us think that we should search for a better place for the Vidyalaya. And that was no easy task. Vellakinar was in the North of Coimbatore. The east was full of textile mills with a lot of cotton dust and not considered very healthy. In the West we could go to Perur which had also the advantage of a beautiful temple but every year there was an outbreak of cholera in the rainy season owing to insanitary surroundings on the banks of the Noyyal river. And so we explored the South. In Podanur, Sri A. Kandaswamy Chettiar had a spacious house which he was willing to let out on hire. Opposite to that house, Sri G.D. Naidu had a bungalow which he was kind enough to give us free of rent. And so we shifted from Vellakinar lock, stock and barrel with all our children, staff and things to Podanur. Sri Manikkasami Mudaliar left some time after my arrival, as mysteriously as he came, as if the Lord was saying that his task to help to keep the Vidyalaya going had been done and so he could go. We are eternally grateful to him for his devoted help when we needed it most.

In the meantime, Gandhiji was completely devoting himself to the cause of eradication of untouchability. His fervent appeals expressing the agony of his mind to this dastardly disease in Hindu Society appealed to thousands of people all over the country. Opening of all temples to Harijans, Gandhiji said, was the acid test for the change of mind of the higher castes. Agitation began in the famous Guruvayur Temple in Kerala to open it to all Hindus whatever their caste. Sri Ranga Iyer and Dr. Subbarayan introduced bills for that purpose in the Central Assembly and in the Madras Council.

Under Gandhiji's inspiration a weekly called 'Harijan' was published. In it Gandhiji explained as to why and how that name was chosen.

"It is not a name of my own coining. Some years ago, several 'untouchable' correspondents complained that I used the word 'asprishya' in the pages of the Navajivan. 'Asprishya' means literally untouchable. I then invited them to suggest a better name, and one of them suggested the adoption of the name 'Harijan' on the strength of its having been used by the first poet-saint of Gujarat. I thought that it was a good word. Harijan means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world described God as the friend of the friendless, help of the helpless, and protector of the weak. If, therefore, any body of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence in the pages of the Navajivan, since the correspondence, I have adopted Harijan as the name signifying 'untouchables'. I recoil with horror from that word and all it implies. Not that change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of a term which is itself one of reproach. When the Caste Hindus have of their own inner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily got rid of the present day untouchability, we shall all be called Harijans, for according to my opinion, the Caste Hindus will then have found favour with God and may, therefore, be fitly described as His men".

But the movement evoked great and bitter opposition from the orthodox and the so-called Sanatanists. They distorted Gandhiji's views and put in his mouth fantastic utterances. Gandhiji was immensely pained. Under the caption "Thinking Aloud", in the 'Harijan', Gandhiji observed: "I have a profound belief in the method of the fast, both private and public. It may come again any day without warning even to me. If it comes, I shall welcome it as a great privilege and a joy. Untouchability is a big sin. It may not be washed without the blood of many servants. But they will have to be fit instruments. The occasion will come to me, if I am found worthy for 'the sacrifice'".

On April 29, Gandhiji announced his decision to fast. On the eve of the announcement, he had a spiritual experience unique in his life. To quote his own words, "I had gone to sleep the night before without the slightest idea of having to declare a fast next morning. At about twelve O'clock in the night something woke me up suddenly, and some voice within or without I cannot say, whispered 'Thou must go on a fast'. 'How many days?', I asked 'Twenty-one days', It said. "I went off to sleep after making the decision. I did not tell anything to my companions until after the morning prayer". On the next day, Gandhiji issued the following statement: "A tempest has been raging within me for some days, and I have been struggling against it. On the eve of the Harijan Day, the voice became insistent, and said: 'Why don't you do it?' I resisted it. But resistance was in vain, and the resolution was made to go on an unconditional and irrevocable fast for

21 days commencing from Monday noon, the 8th May, ending on Monday noon, the 29th May.

“As I look back upon the immediate past, many are the causes, too sacred to mention, that must have precipitated the fast. But they are all connected with the Harijan cause. The fast is against nobody in particular, and against everybody who want to participate in the joy of it without, for the time being, having to fast himself or herself. But it is particularly against myself. It is a heart prayer for purification of myself and my associates, But nobody who does not appreciate the step about to be taken is to join me. Any such fast will be a torture of themselves and of me. Let this fast, however, be a preparation for many such fasts to be taken by purer and more deserving persons than myself.

“Let there be no misunderstanding about the impending fast”, he added, ‘I have no desire to die. I want to live for the cause. I need for me and for fellow workers greater purity, greater application and dedication. I want more workers of unassailable purity. Shocking cases of impurity have come under my notice. I would like my fast to be an urgent appeal to such people to leave the cause alone.

“I know that many of my sanatanist friends and others think that the movement is a deep political game. How I wish this fast would convince them that it is purely religious.

“If God has more service to take from this body, He will hold it together despite the deprivation of earthly food. He will send me spiritual food. But, He works through earthly agents and everyone who believes in the imperative necessity of removing untouchability will send me the food I need, by working to the best of his or her ability, for the complete fulfilment of the pledge given to Harijans in the name of Caste Hindus”.

The whole country was shocked at the new announcement of Gandhiji to fast. Valued friends in India and abroad protested vehemently that his frail body will not be able to survive this ordeal. Among them were General Smuts from South Africa, Dr. Ansari, Sri C.Rajagopalachari, Kasthurba, Mira Bhen and many others. To these he replied: ‘My claim to hear the voice of God is not new. He gives His willing slave the power to go through the fiercest of ordeals. God’s ways are inscrutable’. To those who were afraid that he may die’, he said. “Surely, it is depressing to think that men’s ability to serve dies with the dissolution of the body, which for the moment he is inhabiting. Who doubts that the spirits of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Dayanand and Ramatirth, are working today among our midst, in flesh. It is not true that what good men do is oft buried with them. We burn the evil men do, with their mortal remains. We treasure the memory of the good they do, and distance magnifies it. And why should exaggerated importance be given to the services of a single person, however good or able he may be?”

Only Charlie F. Andrews, his faithful friend from the South African days, wired 'Accept and understand'. Romain Rolland said, 'Ever with you', and the fast began on the appointed day. The Government of India did not want to take the responsibility of keeping him in jail during the fast and so he was released and he was transferred to Lady Thackersay's house in Poona.

The fast stung the conscience of the higher castes to action. Many measures for the amelioration of Harijans were taken throughout the country. Hostels for Harijan students, for their education were started by Congressmen and others in many towns. Gandhiji said that the Brahmins and the higher castes should lead the way in this task of amelioration of Harijans. In Coimbatore Sri S.E. Narayana Iyer started a hostel for the Harijan boys. Sri D.S. Rama Iyengar and Sri K.S. Ramaswamy Gounder started similar institutions in Gobichettipalayam and Tiruppur. In Madurai Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman started the Sevalaya. Such institutions were started in innumerable places. The rigidity of caste seemed to give way under the new wave of sympathy for the Harijans.

It was not as if there was no opposition from the orthodox side. In spite of it the work was going on.

The Harijan movement had its repercussion on the Vidyalaya also. The social boycott of the early days because Harijan boys are treated equally with others gave way and parents from well-to-do families began to admit their children in the Vidyalaya. Prominent amongst them were Sri N. Ramakrishna Naidu and Sri S.K. Chenniappa Gounder of Erode and Sri M.R. Chinnaswamy Gounder of Pollachi and Sri Narayanaswamy Iyer and Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai from Thanjavur District. Now that the ice was broken, others flocked for admission and the prestige of the Institution went up. The prestige was further enhanced when Mahatma Gandhi came and spent a night in the Vidyalaya, during the Harijan tour.

After the fast, Gandhiji was released, and he began a tour all over the country which was wholly devoted to the work of the uplift of the Harijans. For the time being politics was entirely forgotten and all his efforts were concentrated in this great task of eradicating untouchability and ameliorating the condition of the Harijans. He made passionate appeals for their amelioration. He said again and again: "This Harijan work is essentially religious from my standpoint. That it has many other results is also equally true. There never has been a single truly religious activity but has not had its influence on many departments of life. That, perhaps, is one of the tests, by which we recognise any great religious movement. I would like to state in all humility, but with perfect confidence, that I have taken up this movement in no spirit of antagonism to any other religion or community. I have never believed anyone to be my enemy. My faith demands that I should consider no one as such. I may not wish ill to anything that lives. It is my firm conviction that, if the Hindu heart is completely purged of the taint of untouchability, the event will have its inevitable influence not only upon all the communities in India but also on the whole world."

In reply to some of the arguments of the Sanatanists, Gandhiji replied:

"It is said that untouchables are so, because of the evil in them. But are the 'touchables' better? Are they sinless? Indeed, the defenders of untouchability claim that some people are always untouchables and that no amount of pure conduct can cure them of the taint with which they are born. They must remain social lepers for ever. The fact is that whatever weaknesses we may notice about untouchables, are a reflection of our own weaknesses and sins. They are a direct result of the ill-treatment that we have heaped upon their devoted heads. Their real rise, therefore, depends upon removing untouchability root and branch and upon showing a growing purity in our lives. Thus the movement is dependent not so much upon pecuniary help, as upon correct conduct. Pecuniary help is to be an earnest of our determination to rid ourselves of the evil and to achieve self-purification".

During the tour at every meeting, collections for the Harijan fund were made and currency notes, silver and copper coins poured in. "For me, the money you give is a token of your identification with the Harijan cause", he stated repeatedly. "Mere money will not avail; I must have your heart also with your money". At a wayside meeting which some villagers had arranged and where the collection was made on the spot, he observed: "You may not think that you have lost your money. Those who have given, have gained it, and those who, though able, have refrained, have lost it. The money spent in gambling, drink and lust is a double loss, for you lose your money and also your reputation and health. Whereas those who give even a paise for the service of humanity gain more than they give. Untouchability is a blot on Hinduism. It is a canker eating into its vitals. I see with my eyes and smell with my nose that the body is in the process of destruction. If you think with me, you should contribute your mite to this cause. Once we lose the spiritual power of Hinduism, I do not know where we should be. A man without religion, is like a ship without a rudder. The money, therefore, that you give is to my mind a token of your desire to save Hinduism from spiritual destruction".

"Harijan service is a religious obligation. There is no room in it for cunning. It has to be truthful and non-violent. It can be accomplished only by sacrifice and penance. I very much fear that we shall not be able to win the trust of the Harijans without self-purification. It should not surprise us if today they look upon all we do with suspicion and distrust. Hitherto, we have been riding on their shoulders. We must dismount, if we would do justice to them, and regard them as we regard the other Hindus".

Gandhiji also appealed to the women who attended his meetings in large numbers to give up their ornaments for the Harijan cause. "I would like the thousands of sisters who attend my meetings to give me most, if not all, of the jewellery they wear. In this our country of semi-starvation of

millions and insufficient nutrition of practically eighty percent of the people, the wearing of jewellery is an offence to the eye. A woman in India has rarely any cash which she can call her own. But the jewellery she wears does belong to her, though even that she will not, dare not, give away, without the consent of her lord and master. It ennobles her to part with, for a good cause, something she calls her own".

On the first day of his stay in Madras, Gandhiji addressed six meetings. To the women, he said: "I have come here to request you to do one thing. Forget altogether that some are high and some are low. Forget altogether that some are touchables and some are untouchables. I know that you all believe in God as I do. And God cannot be so cruel and unjust, as to make the distinctions of high and low between man and man, and woman and woman. This untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism, and I have not hesitated to say that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies. I have no hesitation in saying that even God's patience can be exhausted, and He will no longer be patient towards this atrocity that man has been doing to man in Hindu India". Addressing the students, Gandhi asked them to take the broom and the bucket and clean out all the Harijan quarters of Madras city and serve the Harijans in a "concrete manner".

Madras city gave a unique demonstration of its affection for Gandhiji that evening. The public meeting held on the beach, attended by over a lakh of people, was the largest gathering the city had ever witnessed. In a short speech, Gandhiji said: "This is a wonderful demonstration that you have made of your affection. I hope that every one of you realise the seriousness and magnitude of the mission that I am trying to carry out in the name of God, for His sake, and for His forsaken children whom we have come to understand and the Harijans".

From Madras Gandhiji proceeded to Karnataka and Kerala and from Kerala he came to Tamil Nadu. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan of Trichinopoly was in charge of his Tamil Nadu tour. Gandhiji's task was an onerous and difficult one. Every town, big and small, and many villages wanted the tour to be so arranged that he would visit them. Obviously, everybody could not be satisfied. But the tour throughout Tamil Nadu was a triumphant one. Everywhere thousands of people, men and women, attended the meeting. People vied with each other in contributing funds to the Harijan cause. Women gave their ornaments. Even the poorest contributed their mite and these were greatly appreciated by the Mahatma. Addresses were presented to him by various institutions, Municipalities and Panchayats. Everywhere there was great enthusiasm over the visit which gave a great fillip to the work of amelioration of Harijans. But there was also opposition from the orthodox Hindus. The Madras Mail, a pro-British paper became the forum for writing acrimonious and sometimes even abusive articles against Gandhiji and the Harijan movement. They quoted the so-called Sastras and said that Hinduism will be destroyed if the Harijans were admitted to equal status with caste Hindus and allowed into the temples for worship. They were

dead against admitting them into temples for worship. They also sought an audience with Gandhiji. He graciously agreed to meet them subject to his hectic tour and met everyone of their objections in his weekly Harijan.

In Kerala he had a very touching experience about which he wrote as follows:

"It has been my privilege to witness several touching and soul-stirring scenes during a busy life packed with a variety of rich experiences. But at the moment of writing this, I cannot recall a scene more touching than an experience in my Harijan tour. I had just finished my speech at Badagara. In it I had made a reasoned appeal to the women present for jewellery. I had finished my speaking and was selling the presents received when gently walked up to the platform Kaumudi, a girl sixteen years old. She took out a bangle and asked me if I would give my autograph. I was preparing to give it, when off came the other bangle. She had only one on each hand. I said, 'You need not give me both. I shall give you the autograph for one bangle only'. Kaumudi replied by taking off her golden necklace. This was no easy performance. It had to be disengaged from her long plait of hair. "But have you the permission of your parents?" I asked. There was no answer. She had not yet completed her renunciation. Her hands automatically went to her ears and out came her jewelled ear-rings amid the ringing cheers of the public, whose expression of joy was no longer to be suppressed. I asked her again whether she had her parent's consent to the sacrifice. Before I could extract any answer from the shy girl, someone told me that her father was present at the meeting, that he was himself helping me by bidding for the things I was auctioning and that he was as generous as his daughter in giving to worthy causes. I reminded Kaumudi that she was not to have the ornaments replaced. She resolutely assented to the condition. As I handed her the autograph, I could not help prefacing it with the remark, 'Your renunciation is a truer ornament than the jewellery that you have discarded'. This incident Gandhiji mentioned in many meetings in Tamil Nadu where large numbers of women were present.

From Kerala he entered Tamil Nadu in the South and covered Ramnad, Tirunelveli and Madurai Districts. In Madurai the arrangements were looked after by Sri A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman in whose house Gandhiji stayed during that visit. From Madurai, he came to Coimbatore via Palani. Everyday he had to address dozens of meetings, including the way-side ones. Many days he could go to bed only in the small hours of the morning. But whatever might have been the time he went to bed, he would not miss his morning prayer and so he would get up at 4.00 a.m. for that purpose. The evening prayer at 5.00 p.m. was held wherever he was. At every meeting things presented to him were auctioned and the proceeds went to the Harijan fund, Money so realised as well as presented were to be counted, calculated and accounted for before going to bed every day. Many of the younger men who accompanied him could not cope up with this heavy work. But Gandhiji's vitality at 65 was amazing and inspired

thousands of young men and women to take up the service of Harijans. But this incessant travelling, speaking and lack of sleep affected his body and he became tired. He needed rest very badly. Therefore it was planned that he should take this much needed rest in Coonoor. Sri K. Nageswara Rao, the proprietor of Amritanjan generously placed his bungalow in Coonoor at his disposal. And so when he entered Coimbatore District after visiting Udumalpet, it was arranged that he should go to Coonoor to stay there for a week and after that rest, he should take up the rest of the tour in Coimbatore. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan was also tired. I was to be incharge of the tour in the Nilgiris and Coimbatore. This was indeed a rare and great gift for me. And I had the great privilege and pleasure in being with the Mahatma, travelling with him and serving him for over a week.

On the very day we arrived in Coonoor, an incident occurred. When we reached there it was late in the day and everybody was tired and after taking the waiting lunch, went to take rest. After rest, we got up at about 4.00 p.m. and were going round the compound. When we were so engaged Gandhiji came out with his usual stick. What we have not noted struck his eyes immediately. The servants had thrown the leaves on which we had taken meals near the house thus making the surroundings dirty and insanitary. They should have been put in the dung pit intended for such waste materials. Gandhiji did not speak anything to anybody or ask anybody. 'Why were the surroundings so dirtied?'. He simply laid down the stick and with both his hands lifted the thrown out dirty leaves and took them to the dung pit. We were horror-stricken and ran to the place and cleared the place within a few minutes. Gandhiji once told a Correspondent, when asked for a message, 'My life is my Message. I have no separate message to give'. This incident gave the commentary on what he said.

While in Coonoor Gandhiji visited Ooty. Meetings were arranged in Kotagiri, Coonoor and other places. After a stay of about a week, he resumed the tour. Apart from the public meeting he visited the Ramakrishna Ashrama and the Kandal Math.

In the tour, the visit to Chokkampalayam village was a memorable one. Sri Chikkanna Chettiar, Sri V. Srinivasa Rao and others insisted on our visiting the village and promised to pay in advance Rs. 1,000/- for the Harijan fund. The village was neat and clean. All the village audience was dressed in Khadi. Their devotion was extraordinary and Gandhiji was deeply impressed. In the absence of loudspeakers in many of these meetings Sri K. Subri (Subramaniam) translated the speeches. Gandhiji with his usual humour called him his loudspeaker. His inspiration has continued over the years and Chokkampalayam continues to be a village devoted to Gandhian ideals under the leadership of Sri R. Bettian and C. Chinnian Chettiar, both of whom participated in the 1942 Freedom Movement. They have established there a Gandhi Mandap, a Harijan Hostel, a Spinning Centre, a High School and many other institutions and are running them with great devotion.

Tiruppur was familiar to Gandhiji as he had visited it previously during the Khadi tour in 1926. It became and continues to be a big Khadi Centre and he used to call it the Khadi Capital of India. The meeting there was largely attended and as everywhere collections were made. He took his noon meal with Sri P.D. Asher, who was a great Gandhi enthusiastic. At about 2.30 p.m. we left for Coimbatore. The sun was very hot. And Gandhiji always travelled in an open car. I pointed out the heat and said we may put on the cover of the car. He laughed his usual big toothless laugh and said, 'But the crowd will be hotter'. I could understand it only when we went to Palladam. About fifteen thousand were waiting in the hot sun to get his darshan. If the car had been covered, they would not have been able to see Gandhiji and in those circumstances crowds would pull down the shade by breaking it. And so the only alternative was to travel in the open car without the shade.

Gandhiji's tour was conducted in a specially constructed Buick which could go at very high speed. While lying down on the seat between meetings he would ask the driver at what speed he was going. The driver would reply '50 miles'. Gandhiji would remark, 'Is that all?'. He would increase it to 60, 70, 80 miles, but nothing seemed enough for the Mahatma. We shuddered to think of the consequences if any accident happened. And referring to the heat and the speed, I asked Gandhiji, 'How long could you go on like this? Is this not taking a very big risk for your life?'. To this Gandhiji replied in a story. 'Avinashi! Have you heard of the man who went to purchase a coconut?'. I said, 'No'. Then he told the story. The man went to the village shop and asked 'What is the price of a coconut?'. He was told, 'One rupee'. 'Where can I get it cheaper?' he enquired. The shopman said, 'Go to the wholesalers. There the price was 75 paise'. To get cheaper the wholesaler advised him to go to the coconut garden. There the price was 50 paise. When he wanted it cheaper still the gardener said, 'If you can climb the tree, take it for 25 paise'. He did not know how to climb a coconut tree. But still in his enthusiasm he climbed, but fell down and died. 'I am like that man. I am trying to do better every time and I do not know what will come next'. After that he added, 'I hold my life in the palm of my hand. I know I am playing with fire. I will have no ordinary death. It will be either by the hang-man or the bullet'. This he said on the 6th February 1934. Many years later when the end came, this utterance looked like a prophecy.

At Coimbatore Gandhiji took his evening meals in our Oppanakkara Street house. As usual everywhere he went, the family members made obeisance to him. My brother's eldest daughters and others gave their ornaments for the Harijan cause. Then came the public meeting. Over sixty thousand people were waiting to see and hear him in the park. He spoke with great feeling on the sin of many centuries committed by the high caste Hindus on the Harijans and appealed to young men and women to come forward to eradicate the blot on Hinduism. He passionately pleaded that

they must be admitted on equal terms for worship in the temples. He asked them to help in the Harijan cause. He was heard in rapt attention. Money was collected and things given were auctioned. He also visited the P.S.G. Institute. After that there was yet another function. The Rajamanickam-Bhagavathi Brothers — famous for their dramatic troupe were performing to big audiences in Coimbatore. They were nationalists and devoted to Gandhiji. They begged of me that I should bring him to the play even for a few minutes. I asked them the question, which Gandhiji was sure to ask, namely, what they would give to the Harijan fund. They said, 'the proceeds of that day'. They expected that as Gandhiji was attending the show, there will be a large audience and a bumper income, but the minimum they were to pay was to be Rs. 1,500/-. I agreed with this arrangement and told Gandhiji. First he was averse to going to the show, but as I had agreed, he consented to come. From the meeting, we went to the theatre where Rajamanickam troupe was enacting. As most of the people had gone to the public meeting addressed by Gandhiji and as there was no time for them to return, the audience was poor, consequently the collection was less than what we had expected. After staying for a few minutes, we left for the Vidyalaya, where he was to spend the night.

There was a bad incident on the way. After going to Podanur we had to cross a railway crossing before reaching the Vidyalaya. It was in the bend and not very visible. The car was coming in high speed and I forget to warn the driver. Therefore the driver could not stop the car when he found that the railway gate was closed, but he dashed against the railway gate. The heavy iron lamp with the red signal flew above in the air and fell between me and the driver in the front seat. I was scared that such a thing had happened and what Gandhiji would say. But Gandhiji sized up the situation in a moment. Such was his nervous strength and presence of mind that he laughed as if nothing had happened. On seeing me frightened and in remorse, he consoled me saying. 'Don't bother'. I shuddered to think of the consequences, if anything had happened to him and I thanked God a million times for the providential escape. In a few minutes we were in the Vidyalaya.

13. Gandhiji at the Vidyalaya

THE time had come for our long-cherished desire to be fulfilled. Ever since we heard about Gandhiji's plan for visiting the South in the Harijan cause, it was the earnest desire of all connected with the Vidyalaya that we should have the fortune of having him in the Vidyalaya atleast for a night. The Vidyalaya was then a very humble institution comprising an elementary school with the 6, 7, 8th standards only. Sri M.P. Periaswamy who was to be one of our life-long workers had joined only recently. Sri C. Subramanian, Sri Krishna Boyar, Sri N. Ramakrishna Naidu, Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram and many of my friends in the Congress were very excited over the proposed visit of Gandhiji. The children who had been told about him and the freedom movement were anxious to offer their obeisance to him and receive his blessings. He was to stay in the G.D. Naidu bungalow occupied by the Vidyalaya. The whole building was kept neat and clean awaiting the big occasion. When at last he arrived at about 11.00 p.m. at night on 6.2.1934 every body went to him and bowed to his feet. And Gandhiji felt as if he was in his own place.

After the first formalities of introductions and pranams were over, Gandhiji began his usual routine. The building was not electrically connected and so only hurricane lanterns were available. He sat down on a mat spread on the veranda inside. He asked for an empty bucket, which he placed upside down. On that he placed the hurricane light and sat down near it. The waiting post which was a rather big one was given to him which he read quickly and began to reply. There was no steno to be dictated to. All his letters were handwritten. His right thigh was his table. There were no letter pads. The back of the envelopes in which he received letters were used for writing replies. He had also to write his articles for the weekly Harijan. Those were also written on similar used paper. The amount of work that he turned out in this manner was amazing.

In the meantime, the other members of the party, after taking their meals, had other work to do. Gandhiji, during his tour in meetings or elsewhere got donations of all kinds from the poorest to the richest — from one paisa to hundreds of rupees in coins and notes. In addition he received things, ornaments and other presents which were usually auctioned at the meetings where he received them. All these had to be counted, calculated

and accounted for, that very night. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and Prof. Malkhani and one or two others who accompanied him in his tour were there. When they had any doubts they would ask for clarification and he would give it in the midst of his writings. And all this work should be completed that very night before going to bed without postponing it for the next day. I think it was about 2.00 a.m. when they finished the day's work and went to bed.

This reminded me of the arrangement which the great Saint Ramanujacharya who founded the Visishtadwaita Philosophy a thousand years back had made for accounting the receipts in the Tirupathi Temple. He had laid down that every night before the temple was closed, all the monies received in the Hundi must be counted and accounted for, and reported to Lord Venkateswara.

Gandhiji's bed was spread on a simple cot in the open. After finishing his work, he went to bed and fell asleep within minutes! In my tour with him I was amazed how he could go to sleep at will and get up at will. At times when we had some distance to traverse, he would ask. 'Avinashi! How many miles for the next place and how long will it take?' I would reply, 'Twenty minutes'. 'All right. I will take rest and wake me up after 20 minutes'. We could see he would close his eyes and be asleep immediately. I, with my watch in hand, would stretch my hand to touch his feet to wake him when the time was up. Before I could touch him he would wake up and say, 'Is 20 minutes over?'. This was not once or twice, but many times. Such was his control even over sleep!

Another habit with Gandhiji was, whatever the time when he had gone to bed, he would get up at 4.00 a.m. and have his morning prayer. In his morning prayer, the following passages from the Gita were recited.

प्रजहाति यदा काभान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान् । आत्मन्येवात्मना तृष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥	11-55
दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः । वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥	11-56
यः सर्वज्ञानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् । नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥	11-57
यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः । इन्द्रियाणोन्द्रियार्थस्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥	11-58
विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः । रसवर्जं रसोप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥	11-59
यततो ह्यापि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः । इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥	11-60
तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत मत्परः । विशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥	11-61

ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः संगस्तेषूपजायते । संगात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥	11-62
क्रोधाद्भवति संमोहः संमोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः । स्मृतिभ्रशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥	11-63
रागद्वेषविषुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियंश्चरन् । आत्मवश्येविधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥	11-54
प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते । प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठति ॥	11-65
नास्ति बुद्धिरयुक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना । न चाभावायतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥	11-66
इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते । तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नाविमबाम्भसि ॥	11-67
तस्माद्यस्य महाबाहो निगूहीतानि सर्वशः । इन्द्रियाणोन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥	11-68
विहाय कामान् यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निस्पृहः । निर्ममो निरहंकारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥	11-71
एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थनृनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति । स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥	11-72

Its English translation is as follows:

"When a man completely casts away all the desires of the mind, satisfied in the Self alone by the Self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom. He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after happiness, who has become free from attachment, fear and wrath, is indeed the sage of steady wisdom. He who is everywhere unattached, not pleased at receiving good nor vexed at evil, his wisdom is fixed. When also, like the tortoise drawing in its limbs, he can completely withdraw the senses from their objects, then his wisdom becomes steady.

Objects fall away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind. But his longing also ceases, when he sees the Supreme. The turbulent senses do violently snatch away the mind of even a wise man, striving after perfection. The steadfast one, having controlled them all, should sit with his mind focussed on Me, as the Supreme. His wisdom is steady, whose senses are under control.

Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed in a man. From attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. From anger

comes delusion, and from delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of discrimination, and from the ruin of discrimination he perishes.

But the self-controlled man, moving among objects with senses under restraint, and free from attraction and aversion, attains tranquility. In tranquillity, all sorrow is destroyed. For, the intellect of him who is tranquil-minded, is soon established in firmness. No knowledge (of the Self) has the unsteady man. Nor has he meditation. To the unmeditative there is no peace. And how can one without peace have happiness? For, the mind which follows in the wake of the wandering senses carries away his discrimination, as a wind (carries away from its course) a boat on the waters. Therefore, his knowledge is steady, whose senses are completely restrained from their objects.

That man who lives devoid of longing, abandoning all desires, without the sense of 'I' and 'mine' he attains to peace. This is to have one's being in Brahman. None, attaining to this, becomes deluded. Being established therein, even at the end of life, a man attains to oneness with Brahman''.

This recitation from the Gita was accompanied by 'Vaishnava Janatho' describing the qualities of a true devotee. Its English version is as follows: "He is a real vaishnava, who feels the suffering of others as his own suffering.

He is ever ready to serve, and is never guilty of overweening pride.

He bows before every one, despises none, preserves purity in thought, word and deed. Blessed is the mother of such a son.

Every woman he reveres as his mother. He preserves equanimity and never stains his mouth with falsehood, nor touches the riches of another. The bonds of desire cannot hold him.

Ever in harmony with Ramanama, his body in itself possesses all the places of pilgrimage.

He knows neither desire nor disappointment, neither passion nor wrath''.

Then there will be Rama Nama.....

“Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram

Pathitha Pavana Sita Ram

Eswara Allah Thera Nam

Sabko Sanmathi De Bhagavan

Rama Rama Jaya Raja Ram

Rama Rama Jaya Sita Ram''.

Explaining the significance of Rama Nama he said: The first condition was that it should come from the heart. What did that mean? People did not mind going to the ends of the earth to find a cure for their physical ailments, which were much less important than the mental or spiritual.

Man's physical being is after all perishable. It cannot, by its very nature, last for ever. And yet men make a fetish of it while neglecting the immortal spirit within. A man who believed in Ramanama would not make a fetish of the body, but would regard it only as a means of serving God. And for making it into a fit instrument for that purpose, Ramanama was the sovereign means.

To instal Ramanama in the heart requires infinite patience. But the effort is worthwhile. Even so, success depends on the grace of God. Ramanama will not come from the heart unless one has cultivated the virtues of truth, honesty and purity within and without. If one had no control over one's thoughts, does not observe purity in mind, speech and action, his recitation of Ramanama may be in vain.

That, however, does not mean that one should give up reciting Ramanama on the ground that one had not the requisite purity. For recitation of Ramanama is also a means for acquiring purity. In the case of a man who repeats Ramanama from the heart, discipline and self-control will come easily. Observance of the rules of health and hygiene will become his second nature. His life will run an even course. He will never want to hurt anyone. To suffer in order to relieve other's suffering will become a part of his being and fill him with an ineffable and perennial joy. Therefore, said Gandhiji, we should persevere and ceaselessly repeat Ramanama during waking hours. Ultimately, God's Grace would then fill them with perfect health of body, mind and spirit.

If there are other language groups as in Tamil Nadu, one or two devotional songs in the local language were also sung during the prayer. On that sacred morning in the Vidyalaya, the following Tamil song was sung.

ஒருமையுடன் நினதுதிரு மலரடி நினைக்கின்ற
உத்தமர்தம் உறவு வேண்டும்
உள்ளொன்று வைத்துப் புறமொன்று பேசுவார்
உறவு கலவாமை வேண்டும்
பெருமைபெறும் நினதுபுகழ் பேசவேண்டும்; பொய்மை
பேசாதிருக்க வேண்டும்
பெருநெறி பிடித்தொழுக வேண்டும்மத மானபேய்
பிடியாதிருக்க வேண்டும்
மருவுழு வாசையை மறக்கவே வேண்டும்உளை
மறவாதிருக்கவேண்டும்
மதிவேண்டும்; நின்கருணை நிதி வேண்டும்; நோயற்ற
வாழ்வில்நான் வாழ வேண்டும்
தருமமிகு சென்னையில் கந்தகோட்டத்துள்வளர்
தலமோங்கு கந்தவேளே!
தண்முகத் தூயமணி உண்முகச் சைவமணி
சண்முகத் தெய்வமணியே!



*Mahatma Gandhi laying the Foundation stone for Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya.
To his left is the author.*

Its translation in English is as follows:

“Association with the noble ones
Who comtemplate with one-pointed devotion
Your holy feet
I want
Association with those
who have in mind something
and speak something else outside,
I want not.
Your renowned praises I should speak;
lies I should never speak.
Lofty ideals I should hold
and live up to them;
the devil called pride should not possess me.
I should give up desires for women and gold and land
You, I should always remember,
Wisdom I want; also the wealth of Your mercy;
disease-free life I should lead.
Grant me these — my prayer,
O Lord of Kandhakottam!”¹

Gandhiji would be deeply immersed in meditation during the prayer. For him prayer, as he had said often, was more important than food. In his own words: ‘I can live without food for many days. But I cannot live without prayer even for a day’.

We wanted that Gandhiji should lay the foundation stone for the Vidyalaya. But how to do it was the big question. We were in a rented building. We had no land of our own. But then the Lord showed the way. Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram had a piece of land of five acres nearby. He was generous and quickly solved the problem by offering it as a gift to the Vidyalaya. And so it was arranged that the first function on the morning of 7th February 1934 would be for Gandhiji to lay the foundation-stone for the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya. Gandhiji readily agreed. Sri C.K. Krishna Boyar who was a building contractor was entrusted with the arrangement for the laying of the foundation-stone. On a stool nearby, a picture of Sri Ramakrishna was placed. Arati was done for the picture by one of the students. A prayer song was sung and the foundation-stone was laid by Gandhiji.

At that time, we had a teacher Veeraraghavan by name. He had drawn a beautiful bust portrait of Gandhiji during the Dandi March. We wanted Gandhiji to autograph it and he did it graciously writing. ‘I hope the boys of the Vidyalaya will be strong in Truth and faithful in God’ and signed both in Gujarati and in Tamil as *மேபா.க.காந்தி*. That picture with his signature will be a permanent token of his love and blessing to the Vidyalaya,

¹ A temple in Madras.

all its workers and children for ages to come. When the Vidyalaya was shifted to its permanent abode in Perianaickenpalayam, we carried with us the foundation-stone laid by Gandhiji and his portrait autographed by him as proud memento of his visit and blessings.

Another incident happened when he was in the Vidyalaya, which showed how meticulously and zealously he guarded the utilisation of the Harijan Fund. During Gandhiji's tour it is very difficult to get food at appointed times and so Prof. Malkhani had purchased a tin of Huntly Palmers Biscuits. When this was known to Gandhiji, he was deeply sorry that money given for the Harijan cause had been spent this way. Thereafter no such purchases were made.

Travelling with Gandhiji was by no means an easy task. Apart from my days with him in Coimbatore and Nilgiris, once I had an occasion to travel with him from Calcutta to Bombay. I had gone to the Ramakrishna Math at Belur. As Gandhiji was in Calcutta I went to see him. I was also planning to go to Bombay and so Gandhiji said, 'If you like, you could go with me'. I readily agreed as that would be a great joy and privilege. But soon I discovered what a difficult task it was. At every station the train stopped, there were tens of thousands of people in the platform shouting, 'Mahatma Gandhiji Ki Jai'. Gandhiji who travelled in a reserved III class compartment would at once get up and stretch out his hands — saying 'Harijan ke liye'. Money of all denominations would pour in. After the train started that money had to be counted and accounted before the next stop. In the vast crowd it was difficult to get any food. Due to disturbances of crowds at all stations no good or continuous sleep was possible. Before reaching Bombay, Gandhiji alighted at a wayside unannounced station and was taken to his destination. And so travelling with him required great sturdiness and devotion.

This brings to my mind another incident which happened in Tuticorin in Tirunelveli District. There was a large gathering of about thirty thousand people in the beach. The lighting arrangements were superb and beautiful and must have cost a considerable amount. But Gandhiji quietly called Dr. T.S.S. Rajan to his side and enquired who was paying for the lavish arrangement or whether it was met out of the collections made for the Harijan cause. He said that the money collected for the service and amelioration of the Harijans should not be spent on decorative purposes. He was satisfied only when he was told that a rich merchant enthusiast was bearing the whole cost and that it would not be met out of the collections for the Harijan fund.

On the whole Gandhiji was very pleased with the arrangements and collections in the Coimbatore and Nilgiri Districts. Coimbatore alone contributed $\frac{1}{4}$ of the amount collected in the whole of Tamil Nadu. From Coimbatore via Pollachi and Udamalpet we went to Vanniarvalasu near Madathukkulam where Appavoo, a Harijan worker was doing dedicated

work. From there Gandhiji went to Dindigul and Tiruchi. I was again to meet him at Karur to take him to complete his tour in Coimbatore District in Erode Taluk.

My contact with Gandhiji during the Harijan tour was the beginning of a long, affectionate and intimate relationship with one of the greatest men of the century, which had a large share in giving direction to my life. From that time onwards I had had occasions to meet him many times in Delhi and Wardha. Every time the visit was inspiring and elevating. I will have occasion to write about them in later chapters.

14. In the Central Assembly

SHORTLY after the release of Gandhiji from jail and the diversion of his attention to Harijan work, the Congress Working Committee withdrew the Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhiji was of opinion that the whole country should plunge into the constructive programme, like Khadi, Village Industries, Harijan Uplift, Hindu-Muslim Unity, Village Development etc. But there was a very vocal group in the country both in the ranks and leadership, that there must be a political forum in the Central and State Legislatures through which the struggle for freedom should be carried on incessantly. For this purpose, they thought that the Congress must fight the ensuing elections and enter the Central Assembly. Previously the Swarajya Party under the leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru had entered the Central Assembly with the support of the Congress. It was now proposed that the Congress itself should fight the elections. For that a Parliamentary Board was set up under the Chairmanship of Sri Bhulabhai Desai, an eminent lawyer of Bombay. The Board visited all parts of the country for selecting candidates on behalf of the Indian National Congress. In Madras the guiding spirit was revered Rajaji¹.

As this was the first time the Congress was entering the Legislatures, the decision evoked great enthusiasm among the people. The British Government were expecting that as they had suppressed the Civil Disobedience Movement by repression, the Congress was discredited and would not evoke much following. Their supporters, who were sitting members in the Central Assembly gave them hopes of their success. One of them went so far as to say, "They say that the Congress will sweep the polls, but they will only sweep the floors".

At that time, the Central Assembly Constituencies were large constituting two and some times three districts covering extensive areas. In Tamil Nadu, Sri S. Satyamurthi was chosen for Madras, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan for Trichy and Tanjore, Sri P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja for Madurai, Tinnevely and Ramnad and myself for Coimbatore, Salem and North Arcot districts. Sami Venkatachalam Chettiar was chosen by the Congress for the Commerce seat, the electorate of which consisted of wealthy business men. He opposed Sri R.K. Shanmukham Chetty, who was then the Speaker of the Assembly and a staunch supporter of the British Government. From the Andhra part

of Madras Sri M. Ananthasayanam Aiyangar, Prof. N.G. Ranga, Sri V.V. Giri and Sri K.S. Gupta were put up. Contrary to the expectations of the British Government, the Congress came out with a thumping majority. Even in the Commerce Constituency, contrary to the expectations of the Government, Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty was defeated by Sri Sami Venkatachalam Chettiar.

There was a touching incident in the aftermath of the elections which I would like to mention here. Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty also hailed from Coimbatore and I knew him well though we were at antipodes politically. I was then a young man, the youngest in the newly elected Central Assembly, not familiar with parliamentary politics. But I looked even younger as "Periyar" Sri E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, who supported Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu against the Congress, wrote that the Congress had set up a college boy against a big veteran. Rajaji when he took me around for electioneering suggested I must wear my dothi as elderly people do with 'pancha kacham', just to give an appearance of age. Coimbatore had a good number of votes in the Commerce Constituency consisting of business magnates. Sri R.K. depended heavily on them. I was partly responsible for splitting them for the benefit of the Congress candidate. When the results were announced Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty was sorely disappointed and grieved as that was a blow not only to his own personal prestige, but that of his party. At that sad moment, I went to see him in all humility, seeking his advice. He was a veteran and I was a beginner and hence wanted to get his advice.

He was surprised that I who worked against him should come to see him at that time. When he came to the drawing room to meet me, he was visibly surprised. I stood up to pay my respects to an elder and took my seat only after he had sat down. He enquired about the purpose of my visit. I told him that I had come to seek his advice born out of my personal respect for an elder, and because of his great experience in Parliamentary life. I sought his advice as to what I, a young beginner, should do to make a good contribution to the discussions in the Assembly. He was pleased at my humility and respectful attitude and he gave me sound advice. 'For some time observe, don't be in a hurry to speak', he said. 'There will be many subjects coming for discussion. Choose one or two and specialise in them and speak only on those subjects with depth. Never ~~speak~~ without previous preparation'. This was a good advice indeed. I have ~~certainly~~ profited by his counsel.

Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty was not the only stalwart thrown out in this election. Another stalwart of the previous Assembly, Sir Hari Singh Gour also went the same way. In Madras, S. Satyamurthi, the Congress candidate, defeated Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, one of the important leaders of the Justice Party, and in Bihar Sri Anugrah Narain Sinha defeated Seth Ramakrishna Dalmia, a big industrialist of the time. The Liberals too were virtually eliminated. In other words, the election results showed that

despite the repression by the British Government and the debacle of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Congress had retained the confidence of the electorate. After the first elections, the new Central Assembly presented an altogether new look. The Congress emerged as the largest single party in the Central Assembly. The composition of the Assembly was Congress 44, Congress Nationalists 11, Independents 22 (except three all Muslims), Europeans 11, nominated officials 26 and nominated non-officials 13. The Congress Party was led by Bhulabhai Desai, the brilliant lawyer of Bombay. Govind Ballabh Pant was the Deputy Leader of the party. Sri S. Satyamurthi, who proved himself to be a distinguished Parliamentarian, was one of the Secretaries, Sri Nilakantha Das being the other Secretary. Sri Asaf Ali was the Chief Whip. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and Sri N.V. Gadgil were the other Whips. Sri V.V. Giri, N.G. Ranga, N.M. Joshi and Mohanlal Saksena, interested themselves particularly in labour and peasant legislation, while I was interested in economics and education.

Sri M.A. Jinnah was leading the Independents. The Congress Nationalists were led by Sri M.S. Aney. Sir H.P. Mody and Sir Cowasji Jehangir represented moderate and liberal politics. All in all, the fifth Assembly, like the second and the third Assemblies but unlike the fourth Assembly contained some of the stalwarts of Indian politics of the time. The Gandhi caps worn by the Congress members and the atmosphere of confidence they emanated heightened the dramatic element in the setting. The confidence of the Congress members was, however, tempered by the realisation, that they could decisively defeat the Government only when they received the support of Jinnah and his Independents. Jinnah, on his part, was fully conscious of his crucial value. So was the Government of India and therefore, its representatives in the Assembly tried their utmost to bear with Jinnah and accommodate him in every way to keep him away from the Congress fold.

The policy of the Congress Party was one of political opposition, on the ground that the British had no right to rule India. It was for this reason, the successive budgets submitted by the then Government of India were rejected by the Assembly. They were later certified by the Viceroy to get over the hurdle and it was a rule by Certification. While the opposition was fierce, the discussions were dignified. The discussions were of a very high order. Sri Bhulabhai Desai was a wonderful speaker and debator who could marshal his argument with great clarity and force. Sri S. Satyamurthi proved himself to be a great and unrivalled Parliamentarian of whom the country was proud. Amongst those from other states, Sri Sri Prakasa, who was later Governor of Tamil Nadu, Sri G.B. Pant who later became Home Minister, Sri N.V. Gadgil, Sri V.V. Giri, Fifth President of India, as representative of labour, Asaf Ali from New Delhi made notable contributions. Sri M. Ananthasayanam Aiyangar who later became Speaker of the Lok Sabha and later Governor of Bihar, Sami Venkatachalam Chettiar, Sri K. Santhanam who came in after Dr. T.S.S. Rajan left for the State Legislature in 1937, were other prominent contributors.

1937 was an important year in the history of the Parliamentary Democracy in India. Under the Government of India Act of 1935 passed by the British Parliament, it was proposed to confer autonomy to the Provinces under the supervision of the Governor. And so elections for the Provincial Assemblies were ordered. The Congress participated in these elections also. In February 1937 the results of the general elections were announced. The Congress secured an overwhelming victory at the polls and was returned as a majority party in six out of the eleven provinces and as the largest single party in all the Provinces. The Congress secured absolute majorities in the Provinces of Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa. In Assam it was the strongest party. The striking result was in Madras, where the Justice Party, which had been in unbroken control of the legislature since 1922, obtained only 21 seats in the lower house against the Congress's 159! In the predominant Muslim North-West Frontier Province under the leadership of Sri Abdul Gaffar Khan, the Congress candidates were elected to 15 out of the 36 seats reserved for Muslims, while the Muslim League under Sri M.A. Jinnah was not able to win even a single seat. The Congress victory made a very profound impression in Great Britain. Even *The London Times*, which had considered the Congress as an insignificant vociferous minority till then, now wrote that the elections had shown that the Congress Party alone was organised on more than a provincial basis and that the Party had won its victories on issues which interested millions of Indian rural voters and scores of millions who had no votes.

In February the Congress Working Committee met at Wardha and passed the following resolutions. "The Committee realises the high responsibility with which the nation has charged it, and it calls upon the Congress organisation and in particular, the newly elected Congress members of the legislature to remember always this trust and responsibility, to uphold the Congress ideals and principles, to be true to the faith of the people and to labour unceasingly as Soldiers of Swaraj for the freedom of the motherland and the emancipation of her suffering and exploited millions". It reminded the Congress Legislators that their work in the legislatures must have the sanction of the people behind it and therefore, all work in the legislatures must be coordinated with the Congress activity outside. It further confirmed that, "The Congress adheres to its general and basic policy of non-cooperation with the apparatus of British Imperialism except in so far as circumstances may require a variation. The object of the Congress is complete Independence and to that end its activities should be directed. The immediate objective of the Congress is to fight the new Constitution and to lay stress on the nation's demand for a Constituent Assembly. Congress members of the legislatures must remember the Congress Policy of not assisting or cooperating with any official functions or activities calculated to enhance the power or prestige of British Imperialism in India. No Congress member of the legislatures may accept a title given by the British Government. Congress members should press

for the carrying out of the Congress programme as enunciated in the election manifesto and its agrarian resolution. Under the existing Act with all its safeguards and special power in the hands of the Viceroy or the Governor and its protection of the services, deadlocks are inevitable. They should not be avoided when they occur while pursuing Congress Policy''.

In March, 1937, Gandhiji was requested to attend and guide the A.I.C.C. meeting which met in New Delhi. Opinion within the Congress leadership was sharply divided on the question of office acceptance. The right-wing leaders maintained that by forming Ministries the Congress could improve its position in the fight for Swaraj. Nehru, Bose and the left-wing groups were opposed to acceptance of office. After two days' discussion the A.I.C.C. adopted Gandhi's compromise formula. The resolution authorised the acceptance of offices in the provinces where the Congress commanded a majority in the legislature, provided that "the Ministership shall not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress Party in the Legislature is satisfied and is able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of the Ministers in regard to their constitutional activities''.

Explaining the resolution Gandhiji said:

"The object of that section of the Congress which believed in office acceptance was, pending the creation by means consistent with the Congress creed of non-violence of a situation that would transfer all power to the people, to work in offices so as to strengthen the Congress which has been shown predominantly to represent mass opinion. This object could not be secured, unless there was a gentlemanly understanding between the Governors and their Congress Ministers, that the Governors would not exercise their special powers of interference so long as Ministers acted within the Constitution. I felt that honesty demanded that understanding. It is common cause that Governors have discretionary powers. Surely here was nothing extra-constitutional in their saying that they would not exercise their discretion against Ministers carrying on their constitutional activities''.

On March 1938, an All India Convention of all the Congress members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures met at Delhi. It was the first of its kind and over one thousand members of the Central and the State legislatures from all over India attended. In the convention the following pledge was taken by all the members. The pledge read as follows:

"I, a member of this All India Convention of Congress Legislatures pledge myself to the service of India and to work in the legislatures and outside for the Independence of India and the ending of the exploitation and the poverty of her people. I pledge myself to work under the discipline of the Congress for the furtherance of the Congress ideals and objectives to the end that India may be free and independent and her millions freed from the heavy burdens they suffer from''.

At that time I was staying in a house in Ferozha Road, New Delhi, allotted for the members of the Central Assembly. Sri A. Vedaratnam Pillai and Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman who were elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly were staying with me and we attended the Convention together. One morning after the Convention, we went to see Mahatmaji who was staying in the Harijan Sevak Sangh in Kingsway (now Rajpath). The night had been cold and we were there early in the morning. He received us warmly and said with peeling laughter. 'Look' you are a member of the Central Assembly, and they are Members of the State Assembly'. It was as if a proud grandfather expressed that his grandchildren had been elected to these places. Then referring to the resolution on office acceptance, he said: 'I have seen some plants in South Africa which would attract flies and even animals into them and then devour them. Even so, if we accept office without this acceptance of non-interference by the Governor, the same thing may happen to our Ministers'. And so he was sure that a definite assurance in this regard was necessary, before acceptance of office by Congress Ministers. Like a jubitant boy, he said, 'Come. I shall show you something'. The previous day he had placed a plate of water in the open. He took us there and said, 'See. How the water has frozen in the cold and become a thing like a plate of glass'. He made us happy with his love and jokes and bid us good-bye.

Some time later, the Viceroy issued a statement which led to the ending of the deadlock. Considering the statement, the Congress Working Committee resolved that Congressmen be permitted to accept office. But it added that it wished to make it clear that office was to be accepted and utilised for the purpose of working in accordance with the lines laid down in the Congress Manifesto and for prosecuting the Constructive Programme. Within a few days, the leaders of the Congress Parties in the six provinces were invited to form cabinets. Congress ministries were thus formed in Bombay, Madras, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Orissa. Soon after, the acceptance of a group of eight non-Congress members in the North-West Frontier Province to cooperate with the Congress gave the Congress an absolute majority there also leading to the formation of a Congress Ministry. Thus Congress Ministries were formed in seven of the eleven provinces. In the erstwhile Madras Province, the Congress Ministry was formed under the leadership of Revered Rajaji with Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, Sri V.I. Munuswamy Pillai, Dr. P. Subbaroyan, Sri V.V. Giri, Sri B. Gopala Reddy, Sri A.B. Shetty and others as Ministers. Sri Govind Ballabh Pant, Sri Krishna Sinha and Sri Khan Sahib, brother of Abdul Gaffar Khan who were in the Central Assembly went as Chief Ministers of their home Provinces namely Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and North-West Frontier Province. Thus began a new role of self-rule in the provinces.

In the Harijan Gandhiji wrote as to what the Congress Ministers should do and how they should conduct themselves. "The Ministers may enforce immediate prohibition. The jails may be turned into reformatories and

workshops; they should be educational instead of spending and punitive departments. All purchases of cloth should be in Khadi. Attention should now be given more to the villages and the peasantry than to the cities. These are but illustrations taken at random”.

“With regard to the personal behaviour of the Ministers and how they will discharge themselves? Congressmen have for the past seventeen years disciplined themselves in simplicity. The nation will expect the Ministers to introduce that simplicity in the administration of their Provinces. They will not be ashamed of it, they will be proud of it. We are the poorest nation on earth, many millions living in semi-starvation. Its representatives should not live in a style and in a manner out of all correspondence with their electors. The Englishmen coming as conquerors and rulers set up a standard of living which took no account whatsoever of the helpless conquered. If the Ministers will simply refrain from copying the Governors and the secured civil service, they will have shown the marked contrast that exist between the Congress outlook and theirs. Congress Ministers, if they will retain the simplicity and economy they have inherited since 1920, will have thousands of rupees and will give hope to the poor and probably change the tone of the services. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that simplicity does not mean shoddiness. There is a beauty and an art in simplicity which he who cares may see. It does not require money to be neat, clean and dignified. Pomp and pageantry are often synonymous with vulgarity”.

These words written nearly forty-five years back are as relevant today as when they were written. Those who are in office and power will benefit from reflecting and following them.

The discussions in the Fifth Central Assembly were dominated by political issues, though certain non-controversial bills and other legislations were also passed from time to time. It is difficult to give in this short space the details of these discussions. However, some may be mentioned. The Joint Select Committee Report of Parliament was unanimously rejected by the House, including M.A. Jinnah and the Muslim League. A demand for a Constituent Assembly was made in 1937 by Sri S. Satyamurthi. The Khudai Khitmatgar, the Red Shirt Organisation started by the Frontier Gandhi in the North-West Frontier Province was at that time declared illegal and this became the occasion for the House to discuss and condemn the repressive measure taken by the British Government against those working for the country's freedom. The Indians abroad was another subject in which the House showed great interest. The Government of India prompted by British interest had devised the Indian tariff to give British goods a competitive advantage. This imperial preference was strongly opposed by all sections including Govind Ballabh Pant, Sami Venkatachalam Chettiar and others. But in the meanwhile the Government announced a 3% reduction of duty on British textiles without consulting the Assembly, seeking

to implement the imperial preference on which I moved an adjournment motion. Govind Ballabh Pant, Krishna Kant Malinga, N.M. Joshi and others supported the motion which was adopted.

One of the persistent demands of Indian nationalists had been the Indianisation of the Army. The Indian Sandhurst Committee of 1926 had unanimously agreed that the pace of the Indianisation of the Army should be reviewed in 1938 with a view to considering whether the success achieved was not sufficiently solid to warrant a further acceleration of the rate of progress. On 2nd September 1938, Shaukat Ali moved a resolution in the Assembly which recommended to the Governor-General in Council to take early steps to constitute a committee of the Central Legislature to devise a scheme for implementing the recommendations of the Sandhurst Committee. To this I moved an amendment that immediate steps be taken for this purpose and that in the Committee there should be a majority of the elected members. Many participated in the discussion including Mrs. Radha Bai Subbaroyan, Kuladhar Chaliha and Bhulabhai Desai who demanded that the Indian Army should be completely Indianised within fifteen years. At the end, the resolution was passed incorporating the amendment. There were also demands made for better deal to labour in which mainly V.V. Giri, N.M. Joshi, N.G. Ranga and Mohanlal Saksena took prominent part.

In the meantime, war clouds were gathering in Europe. In 1939, the AICC expressed its determination to oppose all attempts to impose a war on India and use Indian resources in a war without the consent of the Indian people. When the Congress Working Committee met in August 1939, it resented that Indian troops had been sent to Egypt and Singapore against the declared will of the Indian people. It also opposed the Government of India for prolonging the life of the Central Legislative Assembly by one year. As a protest against this, the Working Committee called upon all Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly. So when the autumn session of the Central Legislative Assembly started on 30th August, the Congress Members were not in the Assembly. On 3rd September, the Second World War broke out in Europe. Britain declared war on Germany. Within a few hours, the Viceroy proclaimed that India was a belligerent country. He did not take counsel with the Legislative Assembly nor did he consult the Indian leaders. Immediately the Defence of India Ordinance was also proclaimed.

The Central Assembly gave me opportunities to know and move with Sri M.A. Jinnah. I used to have many friendly talks with him in the lobby. I found him very bitter against the Hindu Community as a whole. I don't know what experience in his early life had created that bitterness, but bitter he was. He used to tell me, 'Avinashilingam, You, Hindus will not eat food touched by us; will not drink water touched by us; we go to difference places for worship; you will not eat even things that we eat — what is common between us?'. In the early days the bitterness was within limits. He had

a feeling he was not treated with respect by Hindu leaders. Proud man that he was, he reacted with great bitterness and hatred to such feelings.

At that time Sri Sri Prakasa who later became Governor of Madras and who used to sit one tier behind me, asked me, 'Avinashi, Have you heard about the proposal of a separate State for Muslims — Pakistan?' I said, 'I have not heard about it'. He said that the Muslims were waiting to divide India into Hindu India and Muslim India and the States with a majority or near majority of Muslims like Sind, Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and a large part of Bengal would form part of Muslim India. In the South, there is not so much bitterness between Hindus and Muslims and so I could not believe it. I said to him, 'Don't talk nonsense, it will never be'. But he wisely observed, 'who knows? It may happen'. It was in March 1940 for the first time that the Muslim League formulated its plan for Pakistan at its meeting in Lahore. From about that time while Congress made the demand for an Independent India, it was opposed by the Muslim League by its proposal for the division of India. To placate and threaten the British Mr. Jinnah made the following statement in the Central Assembly in November 1940.

"We have never said a word that you should agree to give me 'Pakistan' before I support you in the war: and believe me, whatever my friends of the Congress Party may say, we have finally determined that Pakistan is our goal; and we will fight for it and die for it. Make no mistake about it. Democracy is dead — the democracy of Mr. Desai's kind. We may be less in numbers, and we are; but we could give you, I venture to say, and perhaps you do not know it, but I do, and I am not saying this by way of a threat, but by way of information to you, that we can give you hundred times more trouble than the Congress can give you if we so determine".

This attitude was convenient to the British Government to avoid a settlement with the Congress. And so the Congress had no other alternative than to resort to direct action and that was the 'Quit India Movement' of 1942.

But before going into the story of the 1942 Movement, I must mention a few things that happened in the intervening period, namely, my pilgrimage to the shrines in the Himalayas which gave me the wonderful experience of meeting a Sadhu living in the snowy heights and the growth of the Vidyalaya in its first decade.

15. Trek to the Himalayas — A Spiritual Experience

THE Himalayas can be described only in superlatives. It is the highest mountain in the world with the highest peaks, the deepest gorges, the highest living animals. The Himalayas confront us with phenomena that exist nowhere else on the earth. Other mountain ranges can be digested by the landscape: they are penetrable, harnessed by roads and railways. But no railways cross the Himalayas, and there are few roads. They are mountains so stupendous that they can only be overflowed but they cannot be tunnelled; they can be climbed but never be tamed, mapped out fully but seldom visited. They are what has been called, "the greatest physical feature of the earth." The two rivers, the Indus and Brahmaputra, which rise from near Kailas are the greatest in the Himalayas, greater than either the Irawaddy or the Ganga, which also spring from the same mountains. The Brahmaputra and the Indus are about the same length — 1800 miles — and both flow parallel to the Himalayan range before breaking through it at opposite ends. The Brahmaputra receives a lot of rainfall; the Indus is fed by snow-melt-water, and then receives tributaries in such abundance that it carries at its mouth twice the volume of the Nile.

To the Hindus, the Himalayas are central to their mythology. On one of these peaks, Mount Kailas, sits God Shiva in a state of perpetual meditation, generating the spiritual force that sustains the cosmos. And when God Vishnu caused the Ganga to flow from Heaven, he made it reach the Earth on the highest peaks, where Shiva caught it up on his head. To the Tibetans also the Himalayan peaks are the sacred ground for 'a multitude of gods'. The names of many peaks reflect this mystical tradition. The highest of them all, Everest, is called Chomolungma by the Tibetans, meaning Goddess Mother of the Earth. Annapurna means Giver of Life. The mountain richest in Tibetan mythology is Kanchenjunga with the Five Treasures of the Eternal Snows, gold, silver, copper, corn and sacred books.

Longfellow sang: "Religion, what treasure resides in that holy word, more precious than silver and gold or all that this earth can afford". To every Hindu, the Himalayas have a similar appeal. Swami Vivekananda speaking about the Himalayas said in poetic ecstasy: "This is the holy land where every Indian wants to come at the end of his life and to close

the last chapter of his mortal career. On the tops of these mountains, in the depths of its caves, on the banks of its rushing rivers have been thought out the most wonderful thoughts". In his speech at Ramnad in South India the Swami said: "A voice is coming to us — away back where history and even tradition fail to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected as it were, from peak to peak of the infinite Himalayas of knowledge, and of love, and of work, India, this motherland of ours — a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, India is awakening; like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that the great Mother is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet".

The Himalayas are also the source of the river Ganga considered very sacred by the Hindus. Jawaharlal Nehru in his last will and testament while requesting that his ashes should be immersed in the Ganga, said in a poetic vein. "The Ganga is specially the river of India, beloved of her people round which are intertwined her racial memoirs, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and defeats; she has been a symbol of India's age long culture and civilisation — ever-changing ever-flowing and yet ever the same Ganga".

The Ganga emerges under the name of Bhagirathi from an ice cave at the foot of the Gangotri Glacier, 12,770 feet up in the Garhwal Himalayas, 12 miles above the Gangotri. Nearly all who reach Gomukh, its source, refer to the mystical and spiritual feelings which the place engenders. The final approach to Gomukh is said to be an awe-inspiring experience, especially for those who have been born and lived their lives in the plains of India, many of whom have never seen anything larger than a hillock now find themselves at the feet of the world's greatest peaks. From Gangotri those pilgrims who are intent on going to the Shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath should travel a hundred miles, before reaching Kedarnath on the south side of the same massif in which the Bhagirathi is born. The glaciers above Kedarnath give birth to the sacred Mandakini river which joins the even more sacred Alakananda, a major tributary of the Ganga, on the banks of which Badrinath is situated.

Kedarnath and Badrinath have been sanctified by the visit of Sri Sankaracharya — the exponent of the Advaita philosophy. The story of Sankara is an exciting one. He was born in the 9th Century A.D. in Kalady, then in the Chera Kingdom of Tamil Nadu, now in Kerala. It may be remembered that Malayalam which began as a dialect of Tamil became a separate language a few centuries later. Sri Sankaracharya finished his studies at the age of 16 and renounced the world and accepted the life of Sanyasa. When his relatives wanted to persuade him to enter the usual

married life, he said, 'The married life looks attractive at first, but after a time man feels it as a great affliction. Goaded by desires and avarice a householder goes on accumulating wealth and all that can be lost in no time. The very maintenance of his wealth and family becomes a misery'. He renounced and took sanyasa and wandered throughout India, establishing the Advaita Philosophy wherever he went. It must be remembered that the travel in those days was by foot and the common language for the scholars seems to have been Sanskrit. And so all his commentaries on the Gita and the Upanishads, which stand up till today as a monument of high intellectual acumen are in Sanskrit. He had the vision of national integration of India and so established four Maths in the four sides of India, namely Sringeri in the South, Puri in the East, Dwaraka in the West and Badrinath in the North in the Himalayas. After completing this colossal task of going throughout our vast country and revivifying Hinduism, he gave up his mortal coils in the Himalayan heights. Of him Dr. Radhakrishnan, the great statesman-philosopher of modern India says: "He is a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer. Such diverse gifts did he possess that different images present themselves, if we try to recall his personality. One sees him in youth, on fire with intellectual ambition, a stiff and intrepid debater; another regards him as a shrewd political genius and patriot attempting to impress on the people of India a sense of their unity; for a third he is a calm philosopher engaged in the single effort to expose the contradictions of life and thought, with an unmatched incisiveness; for a fourth, he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know. There have been few minds more universal than his."

I had an irresistible desire for long to visit Kedarnath and Badrinath and was looking for a good guide and good company to go there. For the journey in those days was by walk or pony or dandi (a chair carried by men). The duration of the pilgrimage was about five to six weeks during which period we walked nearly four hundred miles. This meant a lot of preparation. Food had to be prepared on the way and so a cook with the required vessels, foodgrains and other accessories like milk-powder to be used where milk was not available was necessary. While travelling in those cold heights, a thermos flask is very useful and a kerosene stove with some kerosene supply is a must. More than all these one must be well protected against the cold with shoes, socks, sweater and woollen coats, overcoat and cap. An umbrella was useful in the rain and sun. Above all to get the full benefit of the pilgrimage, one must be in the mood to think about God and enjoy the wonderful scenery while trekking. I was exceedingly fortunate that Swami Gnanananda of our Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Banaras, a seasoned guide who had been many times to these shrines agreed to be my guide. I was very happy that Swami Rudrananda, who was like an affectionate elder brother to me and who is now the head of the Ramakrishna Mission in Fiji agreed to join in the pilgrimage. One could not have wished for better company on this long and arduous journey.

After the summer session of the Central Assembly which was held at that time in Simla, I started on 13th September, 1937. I reached Almora the next day where I met Swamis Gnanananda and Rudra-nanda. Ram Maharaj who was then the head of the Ramakrishna Ashrama met me with great affection. Almora itself was hallowed by the visit of Swami Shivananda and so I was very happy to visit that Ashrama and began our journey from there. From Almora we went to Garud by bus and from there our trek by foot began. Our route was first to Karnaprayag. From there one can go north to Badrinath or south to Rudraprayag where the road branches to Kedarnath. We wanted to visit Kedarnath first and went South. Rudraprayag is the junction of Mandakini and Alakananda, the two wild rivers from the Himalayas tumbling down into each other making a wild, loud roaring sound both majestic and beautiful. From there our journey was along the banks of the Mandakini till we reached Kedarnath.

On the way there are cottages called chattis as they call them, small choultries built by the great Kali Kamblivala. His story is a very interesting one. In those days many pilgrims and sadhus faced great hardships and sometimes death due to cold and starvation. Kali Kamblivala, a sadhu who saw their miseries wanted to build shelters for the pilgrims and provide food for the sadhus from the starting point of Hrishikesh to Kedarnath and Badrinath. This would cost a lot of money. Where will a poor sadhu get so much money? His begging was of no avail and so he did Tapas in a peculiar way. He went to Calcutta, the richest town in India in those days and stood on one leg near the Howrah bridge, appealing to the people of Calcutta, help for the holy cause. First people were indifferent. But persistence was rewarded. Many rich and poor came forward to help. And it was with their help that not only numerous chattis were built through the pilgrim path to Kedar and Badri, but food was also given to sadhu pilgrims. It was in the chattis built by him that we also stayed. Foodgrains, vegetables and also milk were available in shops near the chattis. We cooked and ate and proceeded walking about six or seven miles in the morning and in the evening. Thus after many days we reached Gupta Kashi.

From Gupta Kashi one gets a grand view of the Himalayan snowy ranges. Below us the ground fell away in terraces to a deep valley and then mounted again to another ridge, and beyond it to another, and then another, looking like a vast amphitheatre. In the North we saw before us a frontier written against the sky, and ultimate lift of the earth's surface, covered with the eternal snow, dividing India and Tibet. It was more than a mere frontier for it divides climates, cultures, religions and centuries. By their permanent covering of snow, the upper few thousand feet of the Himalayas were a spectacular scene when seen through the binoculars. Himalaya means 'Abode of Snow'. There lay its roof-tops. Occasionally a small cloud hitched itself to a peak and flew for an hour like the tattered pennant, but most of the range remained untarnished-white until shortly before sundown, when the light dropped suddenly, when the valleys, last to receive it and first

to lose it, became immersed in darkness. But for a long time afterwards, the snow mountains were swept by colour.

Near Gupta Kashi, on the way to Kedar, is Gowri Kunda where there is a hot spring in which we bathed and got refreshed. From Gupta Kashi it was steep and the climb was very difficult. As it was the last stage of the pilgrimage to Kedarnath, pilgrims do it with great devotion. Gnan Maharaj told us about an incident which took place some time back. It was evening getting dark. When it becomes dark in the hills, cold also will increase. At that time while climbing a difficult hill, a sadhu who was also a pilgrim to go to Kedarnath heard groans and wails nearby. He stopped and listened and found it was from an old woman some distance ahead. She was ill and finding it difficult to breathe and feeling extremely difficult to climb. The sadhu went to her and said, 'Mother, it will be very dark and cold very soon. The next stop is at some distance. Instead why don't you go down to the place which you left, rest there for the night and be refreshed and begin the climbing tomorrow morning'. To this she replied sternly. 'It is un-becoming of a sadhu with garua cloth to advise me to turn back when I am going towards the Lord of Kedarnath. Whatever the difficulties, I shall not turn back. I may die in the attempt but there is no going back. The Lord will protect me.' It was such burning faith that the pilgrims were inspired with, which made them overcome all obstacles and difficulties. When we meet other pilgrims, on the the road totally strangers, speaking different languages and with different ways of life, always the greetings were 'Kedarnath Ki Jai' and all of us felt one in that devotion to the Lord.

It was with great difficulty we could manage the last climb. Not only was it becoming dark, but it was also cloudy. In the rarefied atmosphere of twelve thousand feet above sea level, we began to gasp for breath. But still we hastened, for if get caught in the rain, it would be dangerous for health. Atlast when the climb was finished, we had our reward, it was a most wonderful sight — the sight of the Kedarnath temple with the background of the Kedarnath peak, covered with the eternal snow. It then began to rain, and so we unfolded our umbrellas and we hastened. At that time we had another wonderful experience.

For people in South India, where snowing is unknown, it was a very exciting sight and feeling when it began to snow. When it rains there is so much noise made by the rain-water hitting the earth. But when it snows there is absolute, deep and almost unnatural silence. The snowflakes are soft, softer than flowers when they fall and so there is no noise. After they fall they harden on the ground. It was like the Devas doing worship to the Lord of Kedarnath. We were then nearing Kedarnath and so held our breath and ran a little distance and entered a Kutia cottage.¹ By then it had begun to snow heavily. Every thing around was turning white. In a short time

¹ Cottage.

all the ground and the tops of the buildings etc. were covered with snow and every thing was sparkling white. In that unusual silence and after the tiresomeness of the journey, we took food and rested.

In the morning we went to the temple of Kedarnath. There were not many people. In the whole place there would have been only ten persons including the priests. There were not many conveniences in Kedarnath for pilgrims. There was only one shop where a few things were available. Due to the difficulties of the journey and lack of conveniences there were not many pilgrims. And even the few pilgrims who visited Kedarnath came there in the morning, and returned the same evening. Therefore we were the only pilgrims present in the temple. It was surrounded by snow and was very bright in the sunlight with glare. We walked round the temple on the hardened snow and entered the great Shrine which we had come to visit from thousands of miles away and we were thrilled and deeply excited. In the temple was a Swayambhu Lingam²², a symbolic image of Siva which has emerged out spontaneously. In Kedarnath anybody, regardless of caste or creed can enter the sanctum sanctorum, touch the Sivalingam and do puja according to his or her liking. The puja done by the priest was exactly like the puja in our Siva temples in the south with the same Sanskrit slokas, the same archanas¹, thus showing that all Indians from the Himalayas to the Kanyakumari are one whole nation. The priest who did the puja there hailed from Dharwar in the South — that is the tradition, thus proving again our national integration. We worshipped in silence with deep joy and contentment and returned to our place.

With the evening, came a superhuman silence. No sound, or noise was heard from anywhere. Even the rivers which roared gushing in speed were hushed, for, in that cold, water got frozen. In that silence, the mind naturally turned inwards. We sat in meditation. I was sitting facing South and it seemed as though the whole of India lay before me from the Indus to the Brahmaputra and Deep South from the Himalayas to the Kanyakumari. The whole history of India passed before my mind's eye — her ancient culture, thousands of years back when India was the queen among the nations of the then known world, when civilisation had not peeped into the West, when people came to India from all over the world to study in the great educational centres and in the age of the Upanishads and the Gita. And then Buddha appeared and gave his great message of love and service. After Buddha there was another period of great Hindu culture and civilisation. With degeneration of our ideals consequent on our deviation from our spiritual goals, we lost our strength of character and courage and fell a prey to the Muslim hordes which invaded India followed by the Europeans and the British. The body shivered and my mind panted and I wept at this downfall. But then the thought came that we will rise again and it is for that purpose that Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Gandhiji had appeared. I prayed and

²² A symbolic image of Siva which has emerged out spontaneously.

cried at the Holy feet of Kedarnath that He may give the nation mighty strength and vision, which comes out of dedicated selfless service, so that our country may again become a respected member in the comity of nations and our people will be respected throughout the world.

After the meditation was finished, I came out of the cottage. It was the day before the Amavasya and so I expected that it would be a dark night. But what was my surprise when it looked like a full moon night! The ground covered with white snow reflecting the light from the stars in the clear sky had produced that effect. I looked North beyond the temple and there I saw an enchanting sight, the like of which I had never seen before. There was the mighty Kedarnath peak, 24,000 feet high in all its majesty. Beyond the peak was a star which seemed to adorn the peak. Around the peak were grey clouds which looked like dishevelled hair, it looked as though a mighty man was sitting there lost in eternal meditation. At once the idea struck my mind, here is the great Siva with the moon on His head, with His hair dishevelled and the Ganga falling out of His locks, flowing below us, sitting lost in divine contemplation unshaken by thunder and lightning, rain or snow, unaffected by anything happening around Him and at the same time blessing everyone. Perhaps it was this majestic sight which inspired our ancient rishis to the vision of Siva. For a long time I was looking at that all-absorbing sight, unable as it were to think about anything else. The deep silence of the night and the exquisite beauty of the surroundings and the heights to which they could lift the mind were truly inspiring.

The story of Kedarnath is also interesting. The shrine had existed from the ancient times. The Pandavas are said to have come here. In ancient times, temples as we know now, did not exist. They came into existence after the Buddhist period. Sankaracharya in the course of his gigantic tour revivifying Hinduism came to Kedarnath also and introduced the Hindu worship. He did an outstanding act of national integration. He ordained that the priests of Kedarnath should come from Dharwar in the South. And that tradition continues till today. It is said there is a memorial to Sankara here which is said to be the place from where he last disappeared from the earth. It is mentioned that he crossed the mountains and left his mortal body at Sat Pant which is reachable from Badri. And this put the idea into our mind that we should go there if possible.

Taking leave of Kedarnath was no easy task. On the fourth day, we made pranams in the temple and walked back slowly with our belongings. But the final leave-taking was about a mile away, from where we first got its Darshan. After that the descent was quick and swift. At Gupta Kashi, the road divides to go to Badrinath. On the way we visited Tunganath and then proceeded to Chamoli and then to Badrinath. On the way is Jothirmath regarded as the Northern math founded by Sankaracharya. While on the way to Kedar we were greeted by pilgrims with 'Kedarnath ki Jai'. The height of Badri is less by two thousand feet. There are more facilities than in Kedarnath. Above all there is a hot spring from which steaming hot water

gushes out. To make it fit for bathing, boiling spring water and the water of the icy Alakananda have been diverted in a pool in which pilgrims bathe with great joy. Due to these reasons, more pilgrims go to Badrinath.

A great surprise awaited me when I entered the temple. The head priest 'Raval', as he was called, greeted and welcomed me in Tamil. I was visibly surprised and moved by his affectionate welcome. The head priest of Badrinath hailed from Trivandrum and so knew Tamil and Malayalam. This tradition was introduced by Sankaracharya as a mark of national integration and it has been continued for the last twelve centuries inspite of the vagaries of history. The puja in Badri is just on the lines of the puja in Srirangam or Tirupathi, same songs, same namavali, same ashtothram and the same Sahasranama archana. It is wonderful to contemplate, how in those days thousands of years back, when communication was extremely difficult this cultural unity and integration had been established.

We stayed in Badri also for four days. The weather was good. Being less in height, it was less cold. There were more pilgrims coming there and more people living there. But it must be remembered that both in Kedar and Badri, people lived only for six months in the year. In the winter, both the temples were closed as they will be covered with many feet of snow. To reopen it when summer sets in, people have to go with pick-axe and shovel to clear the snow. In the winter all the people with their cattle go to Gupta Kashi and Chamoli or lower still according to their convenience. The trade route to China which went through Badrinath and Manapass would also be closed as the whole route would be covered by snow and impossible to cross.

We heard the story of Badri and went round the temple. My imagination was fired about the snowy peaks and the story of how Sankara had shrugged off his body at Sat Pant. It was said to be nearly sixteen miles from Badri at about 18,000 feet above sea level, but the way lay over icy rocks amidst glaciers, and was very difficult to travel. There were no regular paths as people rarely went there. There were no villages or other human habitations on the way and the cold was extreme, much more severe than in Badri or Kedarnath. Even the porters who came with us from Almora refused to come to Sat Pant in view of the dangers involved and so new porters who had been there before had to be engaged. If it rains or snows there will be no place to rest and people warned us against the grave dangers and difficulties in undertaking the journey. But the very dangers and their warnings became a challenge to us. Swami Rudrananda and I were young in age and spirits. Swami Gnananda was a seasoned Himalaya traveller and we resolved to accept the challenge.

We started from Badri with the blessings of people there on what some considered as a foolhardy and risky journey. Saying Badrinath Ki Jai, we started. For a couple of miles there was a footpath and at its end there was a small Devi temple. That is the last temple of India in the North. Opposite

to it was Mana the last village in India. If we go straight the path leads to Manapass and Tibet. To go to Sat-Pant we turned left. This was an uncharted area difficult to climb. As we proceeded we saw the three sides in the front were bordered by huge mountains covered by snow glittering in the sunshine. Then a few clouds appeared and they became dark. We were afraid that we might be caught in the rain, but fortunately it cleared and we proceeded and reached a cave on the banks of the Alakananda. The guide said that it was the place of our night stay. In the cave we could crawl in and lie down but could not sit straight. We placed our things inside and examined the surroundings. Nearby we found a japa mala, a dhoti etc. An unfortunate pilgrim should have been caught in the cold and died. In the Himalayas when anybody sees a dead body it is thrown into the Ganga as the last ritual. We might have been at about 13,000 feet above sea level. The night and cold were setting in, and inspite of our many clothes, we felt cold. We went into the cave, cooked our food and ate. For the bitter cold in that height and surroundings, no clothes would suffice and so the warmth of the fire is the only protection and so we lighted a fire in the centre of the cave and slept around it. Even the Alakananda which was roaring in the day seemed to be afraid of the night and was hushed into silence. In the morning when we woke up and came out we found the reason for the silence. The water had frozen in some places to a depth of five or six inches and so there was no flow of water except in the depths. We could walk over it. It was like walking over thick glass, with everything below visible.

After sunrise it became warmer. We took our food and started on our journey. This time it was over many hillocks. They looked like being covered by earth. But if we scratched it, we found ice. They were really mountains formed out of ice in the course of the centuries. Sometime in the sides there were yawning chasms. When we looked down, it was about eighty or ninety feet of ice-wall. If anybody slips and falls, he loses consciousness in the cold and unless immediately taken out and warmed, slowly succumbs to coma and death. The guide who went ahead of us tested the earth with his heavy stick and took us through firm path.

I had worn all the available clothes and had put on socks, stockings and shoes, baniyan, shirt, armless sweater, full sweater and coat and over it an overcoat and cap and also gloves for the hands. The sun was bright. As I walked some distance a creeping sensation came into my fingers, then I could not use my hand to hold my stick and umbrella and my legs began to wobble and I could not walk. Tears came from my eyes. I sat on the ground unable to walk. Swami Rudrananda who was walking with me got concerned and called Gnana Maharaj who was at some distance behind and he came running, saw me and immediately sized up the situation. He at once called the porters, took out the kerosene and firewood and lit a fire. They took off my socks and gloves and warmed them. The warmth brought me back to normalcy. But this unexpected incident brought doubt about

my ability to bear the cold and proceed further. I recovered soon and felt better. I thought that having gone so far, we should complete the journey, and so we proceeded further, depending on God's Grace and protection.

Proceeding a few miles we came to a tank, looking like a bright expansive sapphire planted amidst the mountains. That was the Sat Pant where Sankara is said to have given up his body. All around were snowy mountains which supplied water to the tank. On one side of the tank was a mound and on it a few caves. The porters said that a sadhu was living there. We could not imagine how a man could live in that snowy desert, where no vegetation existed and where no life of even animals was visible. How could one live there we wondered. We climbed the hill slowly panting in that high rarefied atmosphere. The sadhu must have heard the noise of our talks breaking the deep silence of the place and he came out of his cave. He was a majestic personality. About five feet ten inches in height, wearing holy ashes on his forehead, with spectacles in which there was glass in only one eye, wearing just one rude rough woollen clothing covering him upto the knees. When he saw us he raised both his hands and welcomed us with warmth and joy saying 'Ananda Ho, Ananda Ho' meaning 'Be Happy', beaming out joy from his lips and eye. When we reached the cave he invited us into the cave. It was about the size of 10' x 10'. A rough bed made of a mat and woollen mattress was spread on the floor. There was a deer skin, which he evidently used for meditation and a few clothes and a few small vessels for water etc. He asked us from where we came. We told him that from the far south. Even when we were wondering as to how he lived there and how he could sustain his body and protect it from the cruel cold, as if answering our unasked question, he said in his affectionate voice. 'How wonderful you have come from so far, but nothing is impossible if there is the Lord's grace and he sang:

*Mukam Karothi Vachalam
Pangum langhayate girim
Yat kripa Tam Aham Vande
Paramananda Madhavam*

There was nothing in that place like good food, good residence or anything pleasurable to the senses which ordinary men desire. Yet there he was immersed in joy. And I was reminded of the sloka in the Gita which says: 'Whose happiness is within, whose relaxation is within, whose light is within, that Yogi, becoming brahman gains absolute freedom and joy' (V-24). We offered him what we had brought, some dry fruits and sugar candy and he in his turn gave us prasad of similar things, which we received with great devotion and humility. We were with him for a couple of hours without feeling the passage of time till our Himalayan guides reminded us that we should start so that we could reach our cave resort before it became dark and cold. We bowed down before him and took leave of him leaving him to the joy of his solitude.



With Dandi Sadhu at Sat Pant, 18,000 ft. in the Himalayas.

That night we spent in the cave as before and the next day started for Badri. Our newly-made friends in Badri welcomed us with pleasure. The next day we had our bath in the hot spring and took leave of the great God of Badri who protected us in our journey and the priest who received us with affection and respect and started on our return journey. On the way we passed through Joshimath, Chamoli, Nandaprayag and reached Karnaprayag and from there to Garud and by bus to Almora.

It is over forty years since I had made this journey to the Himalayas. The long trek of nearly four hundred miles done in silence made an indelible impression on me. It was as if it was one long meditation. There were no telephones, no letters to reply, no correspondence to attend to and no visitor to receive and no formalities to observe. We were just lost in our own thoughts and thoughts of the divine. It is over four decades since we had been there and after the passage of all these years, the majesty of the Kedarnath peak, one of the greatest phenomena of nature and the majesty of the Sadhu in the Sat Pant cave who with his indomitable will, strength and courage, was attempting to conquer nature, continue to reverberate in my mind and inspire me to greater life, greater love, greater service and greater vision.

In these two score years modern civilisation has moved to the pilgrim path to Badri and Kedar. Now buses ply upto the temple gates of Badri and till Gupta Kashi on the way to Kedar. Consequently facilities and crowds have increased. But this has also defiled the spiritual atmosphere of these places.

16. The Challenge of the First Decade

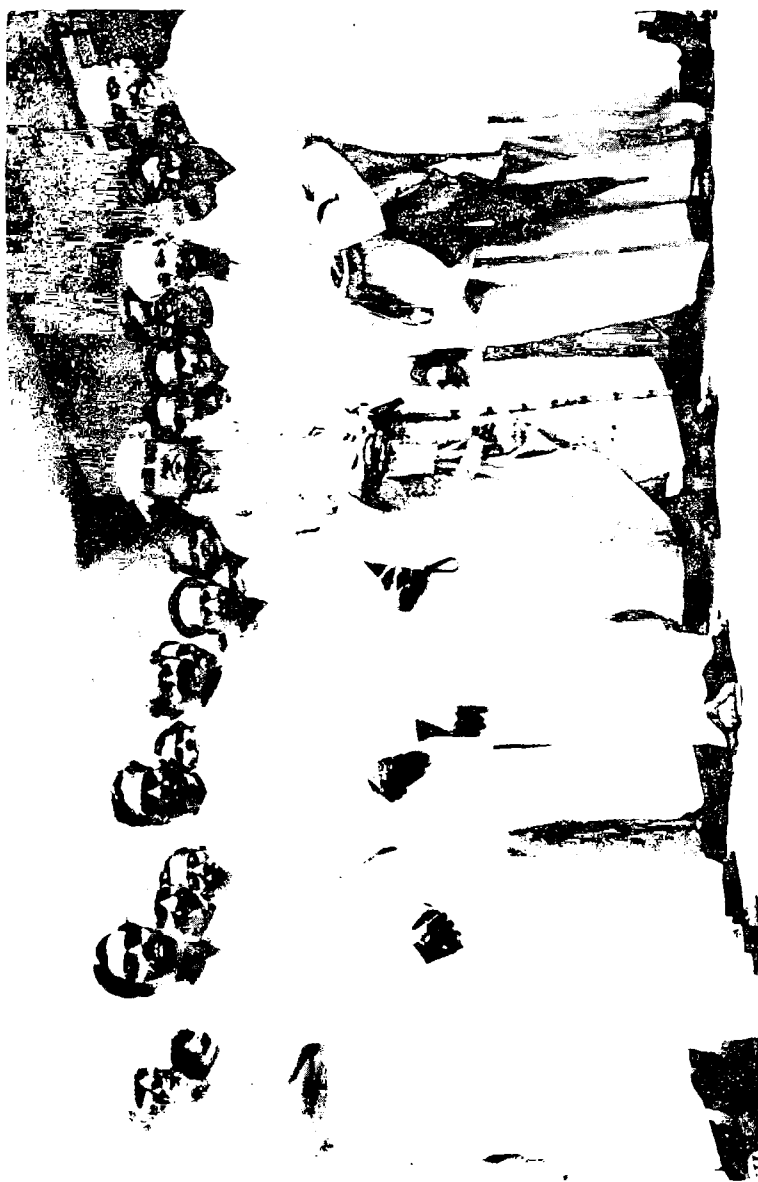
The early difficulties faced by the Vidyalaya by my first two imprisonments and the miraculous ways in which they were solved, the social boycott suffered due to the admission of Harijans and the wandering search for a permanent home till it reached its present habitation have been recounted earlier. The social boycott because of admission of Harijans affected greatly the prestige and economy of the institution. Well-to-do people had a sneering contempt and considered it an 'inferior' school. Even the poor would not come without inducement. To run it merely for Harijan children would defeat the very purpose of Harijan uplift and the objective of providing education to all castes and creeds in the school. And so in the early days only the poorest came and everything was found for them, free food, clothing, residence, books, paper, pencil and for those coming from distance, also the cost of transport. This naturally meant great expenditure and funds had to be raised.

Raising funds was no easy task. It was not for nothing that the great Thiruvalluvar had said 'Don't beg even for a good cause'. But those who want to build institutions with an ideal must suffer many privations and swallow many indignities. I had to swallow my pride of family, education and social prestige and go about making collections. There were occasions when we were rudely insulted. People would promise and sign for certain amounts as donation and one had to go to them many times for realising it. When anybody gives a big donation, he expects to be obeyed and wants to interfere with internal administration. This makes the position very difficult indeed when institutions are run on certain principles. I thank God that the Vidyalaya throughout its fifty years of service had never had more than a dozen people who have given Rs. 10,000/- or more. And these were from members of my family and very dear friends like N.M.R. Subbaraman, V.C. Vellingiri Gounder, C.K. Kumaraswamy Gounder, Dr. Rajammal Devados and others who loved and respected me and the cause and so, far from interfering, never expected anything in return.

It must also be remembered that that was an age when money was scarce. Hundred rupees were considered a very big donation. Donations in thousands were not ordinarily even thought of. Rs. 10,000/- were considered magnificent and very rare. But unlike today, when the value of the rupee had been depleted, the purchasing power of the rupee at



With the children of Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya whom he loves immensely.



With Swami Madhavananda, (7) President of the Mission in Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya. Seen in the picture are Sri S. Pattabiraman (1), Dr. K. Kulandaivel (2), Dr. H. Visvesvaran (3), Sri V. Srinivasa Iyer (4), Author (5), Sri N. Shannugham (6), Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman (8) and others.

that time was correspondingly great. The cost of a bag of good quality rice was only Rs.11/-. The cost of a sovereign was only Rs.13.75. The cost of maintenance of a student was Rs.6/- per month as against Rs.200/- today. The Secondary School teacher's pay was Rs.25/-; the graduate's Rs.50/- and the Headmaster's Rs.60/-. In the absence of large sums, we had to go in for smaller donations which middle class people could afford. People who gave smaller donations were more respectful and appreciative of service to the poor. It is for that reason, we find in the reports of those years appeals made for donations of Rs.5/- and Rs.10/-. This meant approaching many people. This consumed more time and effort and was more difficult. But it is difficulties and tribulations that mould the human character. Prosperity is mostly accompanied by pride, which takes one farther away from God. But adversities infuse faith in God and make people strong and self-reliant. It was perhaps for this reason that Kunthi, the mother of the Pandavas, is reported to have prayed 'O, God, give me adversities so that I will always remember Thee'.

In 1940 a great tragedy occurred in the Vidyalaya which affected me a great deal. The Second World War had begun. And so there was petrol rationing. Consequently, I used to travel to Coimbatore by train, keeping the car for local use in the town. One evening, when I was returning by train, P.K. Natarajan, one of our senior students came running and met me at Thudiyalur station, crying 'Shanmugaratnam (one of our boys) is dead; his body is floating in the well'. I was shocked and dazed. When I returned, the matter was reported to the Police and his parents. And they came around 10.00 p.m. The parents and their relatives were rough people from the west of Coimbatore. They were naturally greatly grieved and upset and began abusing us. They began enquiring whether it could have been foul play by somebody. Unaccustomed to all these, we were greatly affected. For one moment I thought that Sri Ramakrishna had deserted us. It was about 11.00 p.m. when help, succor and solace came unexpectedly. Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder whose leadership was unquestioned in that community, had heard about it and knew that I needed help. His car driver was not available and even so he came in his horse carriage in the darkness of that night. His coming was relief. He pacified them and the usual formalities were undergone. We knew that Gurumaharaj had not and would not desert his children.

As in the case of the growth and the development of the child the first years of an institution are the most crucial. The ideals for which an institution stands must be spelt out, understood and then followed by all concerned. A band of sincere workers devoted to the cause should be gathered. Creation of good traditions is of utmost importance in any institution and particularly in educational institutions. Workers of integrity who share the ideals of the institution are essential for this purpose. It is difficult to find them; even more difficult is to keep them happy and enthusiastic and retain them in the institutions inspite of attractive offers from outside. In this, the Founder

has immense responsibility. He must live those ideals however difficult they may be and his life must inspire the workers and children. Leadership consists in one's own conviction for the cause and one's capacity to impart that conviction to others. This means a lot of patience and give-and-take and above all, love, sympathy and understanding.

It is necessary that all public workers must take care that they do not lose their temper in dealing with the public, colleagues and students. It is not for nothing that ethical codes of all religions have warned against anger. When one loses temper and becomes angry, one loses balance and instead of good words, harsh words come out of one's mouth which is liable to be taken as insulting by others. Man is predominantly ruled by emotions and so even though the cause is right, harsh words may injure. Through losing temper many times one loses valued colleagues or good supporters and even the love of one's own children. I know personally how difficult it is to be patient, especially at very provocative times. For the sake of the institutions, so dear to me, I have trained myself to be restrained. At the same time we should also remember that restraint and patience do not mean tolerating evil, bad habits, corruption, dereliction of duty or slovenliness. These will undermine any institution and should never be countenanced.

Another aspect which all people who want to build institutions should learn is the art of appreciation. There is nothing like appreciation to build the human personality. To train children and workers, we should actively express appreciation when they do some thing good. Along with it, we should also help them in doing better by giving positive suggestions. Such appreciation not only establishes better human relationship, but also acts as a big encouragement for the mental growth and better performance of the workers in the future.

From the very beginning the ideals of the Vidyalaya were to provide an education as preached by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Their ideals of education in their own words are given below:

Mahatma Gandhi says, "The question of religious education is very difficult. Yet we cannot do without it. India will never be godless. Rank atheism cannot flourish in this land. The task is indeed difficult. To me religion means Truth and Ahimsa or rather Truth alone, because Truth includes Ahimsa, Ahimsa being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. Therefore anything that promotes the practice of these virtues is a means for imparting religious education and the best way to do this, in my opinion, is for the teachers rigorously to practise these virtues in their own person. Their very association with the boys, whether on the playground or in the class-room, will then give the pupils a training in these fundamental virtues".

Quoting his experience on the Tolstoy Farm where Gandhiji taught children, he said: "I had always given the first place to the culture of the heart and the building of character. As I felt confident that moral training should be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their

upbringing, I decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. I regarded character-building as the proper foundation for their education, and if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.

"While I fully appreciated the necessity of a literary training, I did not underrate the building up of the body. This they got in the course of their daily routine. For there were no servants on the Farm, and all the work, from cooking down to scavenging, was done by the inmates. There were many fruit trees to be looked after, and enough gardening to be done as well. It was obligatory on all, young and old, who were not engaged in the kitchen, to give some time to gardening. The children had the lion's share of this work, which included digging pits, felling timber and lifting loads. This gave them ample exercises. Of course some of them and sometimes all of them, malingered and shirked. But I was strict with them. I daresay they did not like the strictness, but I do not recollect their having resisted it. Whenever I was strict, I would, by argument, convince them that it was not right to play with one's work. The conviction would, however, be shortlived, the next moment they would again leave their work and go to play. All the same we got along, and at any rate they built up fine physiques. There was scarcely any illness on the Farm, though it must be said that good air and water and regular hours of food were not a little responsible for this".

"On Tolstoy Farm we made it a rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do, and therefore when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher cooperating and actually working with them. Hence whatever the youngsters learnt, they learnt cheerfully".

At the same time the teachings of Swami Vivekananda were our constant inspiration. He said:

"We should give positive ideals. Negative thoughts only weaken men. Do you not find that where parents are constantly taxing their sons to read and write, telling them that they will never learn anything and calling them fools and so forth, the latter do actually turn out to be so in many cases? If you speak kind words to them and encourage them, they are bound to improve in time. If you can give them positive ideas, people will grow up to be men and learn to stand on their own legs. In language and literature, in poetry and arts, in everything, we must not only point out the mistakes that people are making in their thoughts and actions, but the way in which they will be able to do these things better. The teaching must be modified according to the needs of the taught. Take everyone where he stands and push him forward. We have seen how Sri Ramakrishna would encourage even those whom we considered worthless and change the very course of their lives thereby!

He never destroyed a single man's special inclinations. He gave words of hope and encouragement even to the most degraded of persons and lifted them up.

Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any of you dare to say, 'I will work out the salvation of this woman or child'. Don't you know that every soul is the Soul of God? Look upon every one as God. You can only serve. Serve the children of the Lord if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of his children, blessed you are. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as worship.

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased. The end of all education, all training, should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secret of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean, meeting death face to face. It is man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want''.

The teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji highlight the following principles of education.

1. The end of all education is man-making and training in good character. For doing that a good religious background in its widest and purest sense is necessary.
2. For a good educational system good teachers imbued with national ideals of service and dedication are necessary.
3. Children should be trained through activities of various kinds, vocational or otherwise, so that they will grow with strength and confidence. The teaching must be according to the needs of the taught.
4. Schools should not be islands in society, but service in villages should be part of the school programme.
5. Good training of children is possible only through positive suggestions and guidance and by the example of the teachers and elders.
6. Strictness is necessary; when children are given the reasons behind strict action, they understand and cooperate.

The great job of the Vidyalaya, was how to implement these ideals in practice. It was a matter of constant thinking, experimentation and implementation of what we thought was good. As the prevailing notions in society were based on caste prejudices and absence of a sense of dignity of labour and a thinking that certain duties were low, we did meet with opposition from society, parents and children for our ideals. We had to convince them that the principles we followed were in the best interests of children. This was not always easy. One had to have immense conviction, patience and firmness in carrying conviction to them.

In this great task of inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values, the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission who had worked in the Vidyalaya from time to time have made a significant contribution. The first Swami deputed by the Headquarters, Swami Hrishikeshananda, arrived in 1939. He was a bright young man from Bengal who, due to his love for the children picked up a working knowledge of Tamil easily. He looked after the children during my absence during my third imprisonment. After a small gap he was followed by Nishkamananda and later by Swami Sarvagnananda a senior Swami who is now the head of our Nattarampalli Math doing good rural work in the surrounding villages. He was assisted by Swami Ayyayananda who later served in our Colombo Ashrama for many years and is now the head of our Kancheepuram Centre. Swamis Tadananda, Rasagnananda and Samagrananda served in the Vidyalaya for brief periods. Swami Sarvagnananda was followed by Swami Somananda who has been with us for over a quarter of a century. The last to arrive is Swami Atmagnananda in 1983.

I must also mention another Swami. I refer to our dear Muthu Anna, who had participated in the Freedom Movement. He was a Brahmachari and after the winning of freedom wanted to devote himself to constructive work. First he began as a worker in our Industrial section. His calmness, humility, dignity and hard work won him the respect of all. Later he took sanyasa from Hrishikesh and became Swami Mukthananda. He was looking after our agriculture in the Vidyalaya for over thirty years. After his demise, the garden which he helped to develop has been named after him.

One special word about Swami Somananda. Quiet, affectionate and unassuming, at the same time hard working and dedicated, he is not only taking care of the children, but also is taking care of me during my periods of illness. I am personally grateful to him for all his love and care. By his long and dedicated service, he has endeared himself to the staff and students, devotees and friends. He came in the later fifties, when the Vidyalaya was geared for development and the starting of its institutions of higher learning. He has grown with the Vidyalaya and has become identified with it. His contribution to the growth of the Vidyalaya has been great.

The following extracts from the annual reports of those years give an idea of how these principles were sought to be implemented in practice. The first report of the Vidyalaya for the year ending with September 1933

states as follows: There is no justification for our starting a new institution, if this is also of the common type. We have attempted to evolve a type of education by which the boys will grow into strong and self-dependent young men, always ready to serve the country and the community. With that end in view the whole scheme of the institution has been drawn. It is for that reason all the work of the Vidyalaya is done by the boys themselves. Caste prejudices are not respected in the Vidyalaya. The rich and poor are treated alike. We are trying to give a vocational bias to education. We would like the boys to grow with healthy, national and religious ideals. Freedom and cheerfulness are the first conditions of growth. The reports of the following years spell out how these were proposed to be done.

The work of the Vidyalaya is divided into several departments and each department is entrusted to a captain under whom there is a batch of boys. The captain will be responsible for the work entrusted to him and he in turn will have to get the cooperation of others under him. This develops the latent instincts of leadership in the boys besides teaching them the value of team work. There is a mess committee elected by the students. This committee purchases vegetables and other articles of daily necessities for the kitchen, prescribes the menu and is in general supervision of the kitchen. The store is also in charge of a boy, who issues the daily rations and keeps accounts for them. At the end of every month he takes stock, calculates how much is necessary for the next month in each kind of article and purchases them. Except for a cook and another for sanitary work, there are no other servants, and almost all the other work of the Vidyalaya is done by the children themselves.

We celebrate all religious festivals. In most of these festivals, along with feasts a meeting of the boys is held, when the significance of these festivals is explained. The birthdays of our national heroes are also celebrated. On many of these days, we go out to serve in the nearby slums by cleansing them and distributing clothes, sweets etc. The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi are celebrated with particular sanctity. We also go out on excursions to neighbouring places of interest.

Among the pupils of the Vidyalaya are representatives from all the sections of the Hindu society, including Harijans. They move together like brothers and feel that they are part of the same household. No differentiation is made among the boys on grounds of wealth. This bringing together the rich and the poor is beneficial to both. It teaches the rich boys a sense of simplicity and brotherhood besides the dignity of labour and the poor boys acquire a bold and independent spirit.

Freedom and cheerfulness are the first conditions of growth for anybody and specially for children. If the boys are to reap the maximum benefit of their education, they should feel free and happy. They must feel that the Vidyalaya is their own. With that end in view, the greater part of the work in the Vidyalaya is adjusted and regulated according to their suggestions

and wishes. Once a month a meeting is held and the boys are asked to suggest improvements or to represent their inconveniences. And we are glad to mention here that their suggestions have been sane, practical and reasonable.

The Boys' Court

The boys decide their disputes among themselves in the boys' court, elected by themselves to administer justice in their cases. The judges must have the qualification of having committed the least mistakes. These representatives form the panel of judges. All the complaints the boys have are written in a complaint book. The court sits once a week and goes through its work. The way in which they decide their cases is very interesting. Flimsy cases are dismissed with a mere reprimand. Graver offences are punished. If either party tries to hide the truth, they are cross-examined, witnesses heard and justice done. In case of grave and repeated offences, the court recommends even expulsion from the Vidyalaya.

The Medal System

A circulating medal system has been introduced to kindle a spirit of emulation in the children. Each class has a medal which is given to the first boy in the class in the beginning of every week. That boy wears the medal throughout that week, and next week it passes on to the first boy in the class in that week, and so on. There is a medal for cleanliness and another for efficiency in discharging the Vidyalaya duties. This creates a healthy spirit of emulation in the children and make them vie with each other in getting distinction in studies, cleanliness and work.

Health and Hygiene

Before the school begins every day, the dress inspection takes place and marks are given according to the cleanliness of the boys. On every Sunday there is the weekly file when it is inspected whether the children are keeping all their belongings such as beddings etc., neat and clean. Particular attention is paid to their teeth and nails. Marks are given for other items of cleanliness and the weekly medal is given to the boy who gets the highest marks. The weights of the boys are taken on the 1st of every month and height and chest measurements every 3 months. They are medically examined twice a year. Charts are maintained to show their physical progress. Special diet is given to those who are particularly weak.

The Bala Bharathi

A journal has been started in the Vidyalaya under the name "Bala Bharathi" to which handwritten articles (in Tamil) and drawings are contributed by the children. This helps to draw out the latent capacities of the children in art and literature and to make them think for themselves.

The Vidyalaya Children's Store and Bank

There is a constant need for clothing, pencils, buttons, washing soaps, etc. for the children as well as the staff of the Vidyalaya. Besides, some

of the children have small pocket moneys which have to be kept somewhere. Taking advantage of these factors we have established the Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya Children's Stores and Bank. It has been established on the cooperative basis. The store supplies cheaply the necessities of the children and the staff. The Bank accepts their deposits on current account. The Directors are elected one from each class; one from the staff. The Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Store and Bank are two young boys belonging to the III and IV Forms. They are doing their duties efficiently, getting really good business-training in this manner. The report of the Store and Bank is published along with the Vidyalaya report.

The Daily Routine

The Vidyalaya is a residential institution run on modern and national lines. The day begins at 5.00 a.m. The elder children get up from their beds at 5.00 and younger at 5.30, and have their bath in cold water. At 6.00 they attend Puja at the Vidyalaya shrine and sing a few devotional songs. The study bell rings at 6.30. Morning tiffin is served at 7.40. After tiffin, the boys engage themselves in performing their household duties in the Vidyalaya for about three quarters of an hour. At 8.50 rings the hospital bell, when children in need of medical help are attended to. At 9.15 the classes begin and continue till 4.00 in the evening with an interval in the noon.

After school hours, the boys again do the household duties. At 4.45 they take their evening tiffin and go to play hockey, volleyball or chadugudu. At 6.15 is the evening Puja after which the boys study for an hour and ten minutes. At 7.40 they take their night meals. After meals, they have the weekly meetings of their Literary Society or court. On some nights stories of the lives of the great men are narrated. At 9.00 p.m. after a short prayer, they go to bed.

Swami Vivekananda had also said: 'Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses..... A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread amongst the masses'. Following this, the following works were undertaken as mentioned in the Vidyalaya report for 1936. Under rural services: "It has been always our desire and earnest wish that the Vidyalaya should become a centre of service to the surrounding villages. With that end in view we tried to find out in what ways we could be of service to them. As Christ said, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few,' the village has many problems." With the sympathetic cooperation of the villages we have been able to do some service in a few of the villages around us."

Most of the people in the villages are either labourers or cultivators. They find it impossible to attend school during daytime without hindrance to their work. To serve their needs we are running night schools at Perianaickenpalayam and Veerapandipudur, with a strength of 38 and 40 pupils, respectively, each of them with three classes and

two teachers. One of the teachers is a permanent worker while the other two are the boys of the Vidyalaya. The Athipalayam night school is solely for Harijans. The strength of the school is 25. It has three classes with one teacher. Two of our workers visit Athipalayam regularly every week, dispense medicine freely to the sick and hold meetings to discuss problems concerning the village. As electricity is available there, we take our cinema projector and show them pictures on many interesting subjects.

Library is an important factor in educating the villagers. We have opened a separate rural library for their use. It contains a modest but good collection of Tamil books. We get many Tamil and English newspapers for the library. About sixty people have joined the library and we hope that many more will become members and make use of the library.

Our villages are proverbially poor and the village work cannot be permanent if it is costly. Our agencies of service should be of low cost. The time has come when thousands of young men should sacrifice themselves, to come forward to serve in the villages. It is our very earnest desire that we should every year attempt to train a number of such young men in rural service.

While attempts were made to live up to higher ideals and forge good traditions, the conveniences in the Vidyalaya in those early days were minimal. The first buildings were low-roofed 100' × 16' tiled sheds with mud walls at the end of bamboo thattis in the sides for classrooms and hostels. A similar building served the needs of the kitchen, store and dining hall. Snakes were abundant. We were scared as to what may happen to the children, but the children were brave and cheerful and faced the dangers with courage, and enjoyed the new type of activity-oriented education. We had not much wealth or means but we were rich in dedicated workers. For it was at this time Messrs. M.P. Periaswamy, K. Arunachalam and K. Venkatachalam became the first nucleus of the dedicated staff of the Vidyalaya.

In the next year, the Vidyalaya along with the other centres of the great Mission to which it belongs celebrated the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Centenary. As a memorial of the Centenary Celebrations, a children's festival was begun. Now it has grown to be a big, much looked-forward to annual celebration in which about 3000 pupils from about 20 schools in the surrounding villages participate. The note in the report on the Centenary says: "The Ramakrishna Mission was formally started in the early part of the present century. Its origin can be traced to Baranagore Ashrama where Ramakrishnananda, a disciple of the Great Master, kept up the worship of the Master and His sacred remains when every other disciple had gone out on Parivrajaka tour under a spiritual urge. Now this mission is one of the greatest public institutions in India and in the world, doing every sort of service, helping the poor, the sick and the illiterate, organising relief

work during times of flood, fire, famine, pestilence or earthquake. It has about a hundred branches, from Mayavati in the Himalayas to Trivandrum in the south near Kanyakumari, besides those in America and other countries in various parts of the world. Amongst these institutions, some are ashramas where Sadhus are trained, some educational, some are hospitals and some are child welfare centres. But all of them are pervaded by this common silken thread of devotion to the ideals of the Great Master and his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda."

The 1936 report concludes with the following words: "If our country is to rise once again and become the queen among nations, nothing is more important than imparting sound education to our youth. A strong body, a noble spirit, a generous nature, a broad outlook, a love of service, an ability and willingness to appreciate all that is best and beautiful in human nature — it is all these that go to make up an ideal boy. Any education worth the name should contribute towards all these or at least make an effort in these directions. The Vidyalaya is but a humble effort towards building up such an institution. May God help us in this great effort".

In 1937 — another new programme was started namely, a Summer School for training of Rural Workers, in the month of May. The buildings, the materials, and other conveniences available in the Vidyalaya made it particularly easy to run a residential summer school. The total strength of the summer school was 38, stated districtwise, 29 from Coimbatore, 5 from Madurai, 2 from Tanjore, one from Ramnad and one from North Kanara. Some of them were Harijan workers actually settled in villages, some were teachers employed in District Board Schools, and some others students studying in schools and colleges. One of them had just graduated from the Agricultural College. Bee-keeping and spinning and carding were taught besides elements of agriculture, rural economics and simple remedies for common ailments etc. A deep religious sentiment is an essential background for any service and this was one of the main features of the summer school as in all our institutions. At the end of the summer school, certificates were distributed to the students according to merit. Swami Shambavananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission at Poonampet, Coorg and Founder of the Cooperative Honey Society there, who was later to found the now famous Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyasala and Teachers College in Mysore was one of the instructors. The staff of the All India Spinners Association also helped in running the courses. Sri Shankarlal Banker from Ahmedabad and Secretary of the All India Spinners Association participated in the valedictory function.

This was followed in the next year by a ten days' Teachers Refresher course and a Rural Workers' Conference. The report for 1938 mentions this as follows: 'A ten days' Refresher course in better methods of teaching was organised in the middle of May. Teachers from Ramnad, Madurai, Coimbatore and other districts attended it. Sri Jagannathan and Sri Krishnamachari of the Model School attached to the Teachers' College,

Saidapet, very kindly came and contributed much to the success of the course.

'A very successful conference of workers doing rural uplift work was held this year on the 30th of April and the first and second of May under the Presidentship of Dr. T.S.S. Rajan. All the arrangements for the conference were made by our boys. Workers from various parts of the country such as Tamil Nadu, Andhrapradesh, Malabar, Travancore, Cochin and Mysore attended it. Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, Chief Minister of Madras, Sri Kishorilal Mashruvala, President, Gandhi Seva Sangh, Sri J.C. Kumarappa, Secretary, All India Village Industries Association, Sri Aryanayakam, Secretary, All India Education Board, Sri Jesudasan of Tiruppathur Ashrama, Sri Pakhanaham Walsh, Sri Kaithan and others took part in the deliberations of the conference. The needs of the villages and the means of fulfilling them were discussed. This conference helped us to know the rural work carried on in different parts of our country and also to promote mutual understanding among the various workers'.

'It was about this time that Mahatma Gandhi propounded his idea of Basic Education. To consider it, an All India National Education Conference was held at Wardha on 22nd October, 1937. Sri Jamnalal Bajaj, the veteran Congress leader welcomed the delegates. Most of the State Education Ministers attended. Prominent educationists from all over the country also participated in the Conference. I was one of the invitees to the Conference. Mahatma Gandhi presided over the Conference. In his Presidential Address, he explained the salient points of his scheme. "I am convinced that the present system of primary education is not only wasteful but positively harmful. Most of the boys are lost to their parents and to the occupation to which they are born. They pick up evil habits, affect urban ways and get a smattering of something which may be anything but education. What then should be the form of primary education? I think the remedy lies in educating them by means of vocational or manual training'.

To understand and popularise the ideas and ideals behind basic education, a Summer School was conducted in the Vidyalaya. The 1939 report mentions it as follows: 'Sri Aryanayakam and Srimathi Asha Devi, the Secretaries of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh were incharge. Sri Bharatan Kumarappa, Dr. Lakshmiopathi and others also came and gave special lectures. About 400 persons had applied for admission to the course, but only forty persons from various centres of Tamil Nadu could be selected. Though the course was run only for a brief duration of two weeks, it was useful in propagating the basic ideas of the New Education'.

In the meantime the Vidyalaya had been growing steadily. In 1937 it became a high school and the strength of the children was 97 — wholly residential. In 1938 a Post Office in the name of the Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya was opened in the Vidyalaya precincts which facilitated communications. In 1939-40 the first batch of eight boys were sent for the

public examination in which all but one passed. More buildings for office and other needs were built. The Meenakshi Mandapam — a big hall needed for our meetings and functions was donated by my uncle Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar. This housed also our Shrine till the present shrine was built in 1953. In the next year, Sri T.S. Thandapani, built a beautiful guest house, the first terraced building in the Vidyalaya which was opened by Swami Vipulananda who was the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

After the School became a full-fledged high school, the idea of establishing a Basic Training School for training good teachers came to us. As a first step towards it a model primary school had to be run. The Trustees of the Tiruppur Angappa Chettiar Thilliammal Trust, namely Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, T.M. Sivasubramania Chettiar and T.A. Subramania Chettiar generously agreed to help. It must be remembered that in those days the Government grant was very meagre and limited to 50% of recurring expenditure and no grants were given for land or buildings. A site of two acres at the northern end of the Vidyalaya where the T.E.T. Kalanilayam is now situated was purchased and new buildings put up with aid from the Trust funds. The foundation for the building was laid by Swami Madhavananda, the then Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission. This building was opened by the saintly doctor of Madras, Sri M.G. Guruswamy Mudaliar. For another building, Sri N. Ramakrishna Naidu laid the foundation and Sardar Sri A. Vedaratnam Pillai opened it. Sri K. Arunachalam who was later the Headmaster of the Vidyalaya Gandhi Basic Training School and the Vidyalaya Teachers' College was the first Headmaster of the Model Primary School.

The natural corollary to the opening of the Model Basic School was the starting of the Gandhi Basic Training School. For this we got help from unexpected quarters. Sri P.S.G. Ganga Naidu, one of the Founder-Trustees of the P.S.G. Trust which is running the P.S.G. College of Technology and Arts College and other institutions was a great devotee of Mahatma Gandhi. As one of the Gandhian workers in the Freedom Movement, he loved, respected and had admiration for me. When we wanted to start a Gandhi Basic Training School, he generously came forward to put up the building for it. We gave him the needs and he drew the plans and put up a beautiful building in his brother's name. The Training School was opened in the midst of the 1942 movement after my return from the Bombay Congress. I was arrested on the same day after the building was opened.

More important than money, land and buildings, a nucleus of a dedicated group of staff had been built and good traditions established for students and staff to follow. The final paragraph of the 1939-40 report concludes as follows: 'When we think of how the Vidyalaya has grown from a single boy to its present dimensions, our minds are filled with gratitude to the Lord, Sri Ramakrishna, in whose name the Vidyalaya has been started. Service to the children is service to the Lord and the Vidyalaya is his holy cause. That we should have sufficient purity, strength, and singleness of purpose to serve him and the children well, is our constant Prayer.'

17. Do or Die' — The Final Call

HOW[the Second World war broke out and India was involved in the war without the consent of the Indian people,] how the emotions of the people began to run high and how the attitude of Mohammed Ali Jinnah had hardened had been described elsewhere. Considering these matters the Congress Working Committee met at Patna on 28th February, 1940, and passed the following resolution:

The Congress hereby declares again that nothing short of complete independence can be accepted by the people of India. Indian freedom cannot exist within the orbit of imperialism, and dominion status. Any other status within the imperial structure is not in keeping with the dignity of a great nation like India. The people of India alone can properly shape their own Constitution and determine their relations to the other countries of the world through a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage.

The Congress is further of opinion that while it will always be ready as it ever has been, to make every effort to secure communal harmony, no permanent solution is possible, except through a Constituent Assembly, where the rights of all the recognised minorities will be fully protected by agreement, between the elected representatives of various majority and minority groups, or by arbitration if agreement is not reached on any point. The Constitution of India must be based on independence, democracy and national unity, and the Congress repudiates attempts to divide India or to split up India's nationhood. The Congress has aimed at a Constitution where fullest freedom and opportunities of development are guaranteed to the group and the individual and social injustice yields place to a juster social order.

The Congress cannot admit the right of the rulers of the Indian States or of the foreign vested interests to come in the way of India's freedom. Sovereignty in India must rest with the people, whether in the States or the provinces, and all the other interests must be subordinated to their vital interests. The Congress holds that the difficulty raised in regard to Indian States is of British creation, and it will not be satisfactorily solved unless the declaration of the freedom of India from the foreign rule is unequivocally made.

The Congress withdrew the ministries from all the provinces where the Congress had a majority, in order to dissociate India from the war and to enforce the Congress determination to free India from the foreign domination. This preliminary step naturally must be followed by civil disobedience, to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort as soon as the Congress organisation is considered fit enough for the purpose or in case circumstances shape themselves to precipitate a crisis. The Congress desires to draw the attention of all Congressmen to Mahatma Gandhi's declaration that he can only undertake the responsibility of declaring civil disobedience when he is satisfied that they are strictly observing discipline and are carrying out the constructive programmes as prescribed by the Independence Pledge.

This resolution was later confirmed in the Ramgarh Congress in March, 1940, which I attended with Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and other friends. Simultaneously with the Congress session was held an anti-compromise conference at Ramgarh. As the President of the Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose observed: What has distressed and bewildered us during the last year and a half is the fact that while on the one hand strong resolutions are being passed and statements issued by the members of the Working Committee, simultaneously also other remarks are made and statements issued by Mahatma Gandhi or by the rightist leaders, which create a totally different impression on the average mind. The result of all this has been that the British Government have ceased to take the Congress seriously and have formed the impression that however much the Congressmen may talk, they will not ultimately show the fight. As time passed, this view was shared by increasing number of people, who considered that the time of the war, when Britain was in difficulties was the time to start the freedom struggle again'.

It was in answer to this feeling amongst the people calling for action that the Congress started the Individual Satyagraha Movement. Sri Vinoba Bhave, the foremost disciple of Mahatma Gandhi was the first to offer the individual satyagraha. Later all Congress legislators in the Central and State legislatures joined. Congress Chief Ministers and Ministers in the various States in which Congress had formed Ministries and resigned as a protest against the dragging in of India into the war without the people's consent participated in the movement. Most of us in Madras were imprisoned in the Trichy Central Jail. Sri Rajagopalachariar, Sri T. Prakasam, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, Sri M. Ananthasayanam Iyengar, Dr. P. Subbarayan, Sri B. Gopal Reddy and other former Ministers as well as Sri V.K. Palaniswamy Gounder, V.C. Palaniswamy Gounder, C.P. Subbiah, M.C. Veerabahu, Varadachariar from Chittoor, K. Ramakotiswara Rao, Editor, Triveni, L. Krishnaswamy Bharati, K. Venkataswamy Naidu of Madras and many other legislators were with us. The imprisonment was then only for six months.

In the meantime there was an unexpected and exciting development, namely the escape of Subhas Chandra Bose from India seeking the alliance

of Germany in the war of Indian Independence. On the 'Independence Day', January 26, 1941, the country heard the astounding news that Subhas Chandra Bose had suddenly disappeared from his house under the very nose of the C.I.D. who had kept a round-the-clock vigil at his house on Elgin Road, Calcutta. It was not until November of that year that news trickled in from Berlin that he had gone out of India, in order, to use his own words, "to supplement from outside the struggle going on at home". He is supposed to have put on various garbs, walked long distances through Khyber Pass, and Afghanistan to reach Germany. Here is a saga of inspiring courage and patriotism. Considering that Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity, and on the strategic basis, "our enemy's enemy is our friend", he held talks on a basis of equality, at first with Germany and later negotiated an alliance with Britain's foe in the East, Japan. When he began his regular broadcasts from Radio Berlin, he aroused tremendous enthusiasm in India. This further excited the rank and file of the Congress to demand that there should not be any more waiting and that the time was ripe for waging the final war for India's freedom. Many thought now or never; therefore when the Congress met in August, 1942 it was an excited mass of people demanding immediate action.

In reply to the demand for action, the AICC passed the following resolution: 'The Committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding back the nation from endeavouring to assert its will. The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle. Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

"The Committee appeals to the people of India to face dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and endurance, and to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji, and carry out his instructions as the disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom. They must remember that non-violence is the basis of this movement. A time may come, when it may not be possible to issue instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committee can function. When this happens, every man and woman, who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide along the hard road where there is no resting place and which lead ultimately to the independence and the deliverance of India.

"Lastly, whilst the A.I.C.C. has stated its own view of the future governance under Free India, the A.I.C.C. wishes to make it quite clear to all concerned that by embarking on mass struggle it has no

intention of gaining power for the Congress. The power, when it comes, will belong to the whole people of India”.

Speaking on the Resolution, Gandhiji said: “Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it”. The mantra is “ ‘Do or Die’ . We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman and woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery. Let that be your pledge. Let every man and woman live every moment of his or her life hereafter in the consciousness that he or she eats or lives for achieving freedom and will die, if need be, to attain that goal. Take a pledge with God and your own conscience as witness, that you will no longer rest till freedom is achieved and will be prepared to lay down your lives in the attempt to achieve it. He who loses his life will gain it; he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted”. Gandhiji’s slow speech, weighing every word as it were was heard in pindrop silence by the thousands of men and women present in that huge assembly. It seemed as if everybody was seized of the grimness of the situation facing the country and that the time was ripe for facing the greatest dangers and sufferings in the cause of freedom for Mother India.

After the resolution was passed, it was announced that there would be the hoisting of the National Flag next day morning in front of the Congress Pandal. But before that fateful day 9th August 1942, dawned, Gandhiji and the Working Committee were arrested and taken to jail. I had gone to the Bombay Congress with many others and also assembled for flag hoisting. There were well-armed police in large numbers surrounding us. As we were waiting around the flag pole a police officer announced in the loud speaker that we were an unlawful assembly and ordered that we should disperse immediately or face the consequences. None of us dispersed. Then the Police burst tear gas crackers to disperse us. At a shout from one of the volunteers all of us lay down to mitigate its effect. By that time the gas from the crackers affected our eyes which caused a great deal of pain and profuse tears. We got up after some time and there was a wild lathi charge and people ran helter-skelter. Some of us gathered and decided that we must go back to our own places and prepare the people there for this final struggle. Accordingly, I returned on the August 12th to Coimbatore. I knew a warrant of arrest would be awaiting me. And so, travelling in the nights, meeting the Congress leaders and volunteers in various places in the district I told them the message of the ‘Quit India’ resolution, and that this would be the final and most determined struggle and we should do everything for it. I told them of Gandhiji’s message of ‘Do or Die’.

Before I left for Bombay I had arranged that the opening of the Gandhi Basic Training School building in the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya was to be on the 17th August. Accordingly, I returned from my rounds to the

Vidyalaya on that day and attended the function. The police who were waiting to catch me arrested me after the function under the Act to detain persons without trial and sent me to the Coimbatore Central Jail and from there to the Vellore Central Jail.]

The Government took very strong action against the Congress throughout the country. Not only did it strike at once, it struck as heavy and crushing a blow as lay within its power unrestrained by any considerations of law, justice or morals. New laws and ordinances or lawless laws were promulgated. The first blow fell on Gandhiji and the Working Committee. On the early morning of August 9, the Police descended on the Birla House where Gandhiji and his companions were staying. They presented the warrant of his arrest and gave him half an hour to prepare for his departure. With Mahadeo Desai, Kasturba and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Gandhiji was taken to the Aga Khan Palace at Poona. Simultaneously all the members of the Working Committee in Bombay were taken into custody, and imprisoned in the old fort at Ahmednagar. Then arrests took place all over India and a large number of Congressmen were thrown into prison. Thus the organisation was left without leaders at all levels — All India, provincial, district, taluka or town, even before the movement had started or a programme of action adopted. What followed cannot be said to be an organised movement, for it was an outburst of blind anger — unorganised, unprepared and undirected of a harassed and distracted people.

The cruel and atrocious reprisals which a furious Government rained over the whole country in the vain hope of a quick subsidence of disturbances turned out to be a miscalculation. The banning of all Congress Committees and jailing of almost all Congressmen of importance surprised and shocked people all over India. These measures naturally provoked an immediate reaction. On the spread of the news of their arrest, demonstrations, processions and gatherings of people took place in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Poona and other places. Hartals, picketings, and acts of disobedience and defiance followed from one end of the country to the other. Furious mobs attacked not only government buildings and offices but also officials in some places.

On the other side, the retaliatory action perpetrated by Government — Police aided by the army — exceeded all limits. Every canon of morality, decency and law was violated in the name of law and order. Mobs were dispersed with lathi charge, by rifle, pistol and occasionally machine-gun fire from air. Men were mercilessly flogged and beaten; undertrials were tortured — not allowed to sleep, cross-examined for hours throughout day and night, kept hungry and thirsty, and humiliated. Women were stripped, assaulted and raped; even children were not spared. In the villages numerous houses were razed to the ground. Many were actually burnt. People were tied to trees and beaten, sometimes undressed and whipped. One of the most effective forms of punitive measures was the imposition of collective fines which were realised with the utmost rigour. The whole object was to

terrorize people, and efface from their minds all thoughts of defiance. Shooting was resorted to in over six hundred places all over India in which nearly a thousand people were dead and many times that number injured.

Police action throughout the Madras State was also swift and sweeping and all the prominent Congressmen had been arrested and many of them were in prison. Golapalli Sitaram Sastri, Kala Venkata Row and many others from Andhra, K. Madhava Menon and others from Malabar, Karnad Sadasiva Row and others from South Canara, and the familiar faces of Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, N.M.R. Subbaraman, K. Subramaniam (Subri), M.P. Sivagnanam, Perumalsamy Reddiar, O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, O.V. Alagesan and many others were imprisoned. This time the censorship of things coming into and going out of the jail was also very strict. And so for many weeks, we did not know anything about the situation in the country outside, except when new prisoners were brought in.

It was while we were in jail that we heard about how Kumaran was beaten to death in Tiruppur and how both the legs of B.S. Sundaram were fractured and broken in the brutal beating by the Police. The facts of the incident were shocking. Some time after we were imprisoned, Kumaran, B.S. Sundaram and others took out a non-violent peaceful procession with national flags and crying. "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". The procession was passing the main road in Tiruppur which now bears his name. The police came with lathis tipped with iron balls and asked the processionists to disperse. They did not. Immediately they were brutally assaulted. Kumaran was hit on the skull which immediately broke with the result brain gushed out and death was instantaneous. B.S. Sundaram with both the legs fractured was taken to the hospital along with many others who received lesser injuries. Numerous such incidents of brutal beating happened throughout the country.

When we were imprisoned in the Vellore Central Jail, Sri S. Satyamurti, the veteran Parliamentarian, Sri Neelam Sanjiva Reddy who later became the President of India and many others were arrested and first taken to the Madras penitentiary and later to Amaravati prison in Central Provinces. There Sri Satyamurti contracted illness from which he never recovered. Such sacrifices at the altar of the motherland in the freedom struggle happened throughout the country.

Students played a prominent role in the movement. They left schools and colleges in thousands and participated in all activities with great enthusiasm. Women also participated in the movement in large numbers, besides ordinary peasants and lower middle classes. It is difficult to give a correct estimate of those who lost their lives or permanently injured or were sent to jail. But official figures said the number of arrested between August 9 and the end of December 1942 was 60,229, those who were sent to jail after trial were 26,000 and those who were kept in prison without trial came to 18,000 and 1,090 lost their lives.

In the meantime, a great tragedy affecting the lives of an immense number of people happened in Bengal. In the years 1942-44, there was a deterioration in the economic situation in the country. As a result of the war, prices rose and even essential commodities like food and clothing became scarce. At that time, Burma was one of the main sources of food supply. But owing to the Japanese invasion, these supplies were cut off. The British Government instead of taking steps to alleviate the famine, aggravated it by their measures. Frightened by the advance of the Indian National Army with Japanese help, they followed a Scorched Earth Policy, under which the cultivators in the border areas of Bengal were not allowed to cultivate their land and compelled to keep it barren. This was to prevent supplies to the invading forces. Whatever supplies were available were requisitioned by the Government to feed their army. Controls also were placed on the movement of grains into Bengal and also from one part of Bengal to another. The problem was further aggravated by an influx of large numbers of refugees from Burma. The boats plying in the rivers of East Bengal were requisitioned by the Government. This caused great hardship on people who lived mostly in their boats and used them for fishing. The result was that people rushed to Calcutta and the pavements in the streets of Calcutta were occupied by the refugees and the city became a vast slum from the effects of which Calcutta has not yet recovered. Consequently, large-scale famine broke out. Government did not take steps to give any relief to the famine-stricken people. Consequently nearly three million people are said to have perished in it. It was the worst famine in the history of Bengal. The economic discontent which it created deepened the political discontent and people increasingly lost faith in the foreign rule.

Another development during this period was the organisation of the Indian National Army by Subhas Chandra Bose and the invasion of India which he undertook with the help of the Japanese forces. In the course of their marches, the National Army defeated the British regiments in two places and ultimately entered Indian territory. In the battle that took place many Britishers were killed. Others ran from the battlefield leaving behind many weapons and ammunitions. Meanwhile, the other regiments of the Indian National Army in combination with Japanese forces entered Nagaland and hoisted the Indian National Flag in Kohima, its capital. Another regiment entered Manipur and occupied Imphal. But by that time the Japanese met with severe reverses in the Pacific. The Americans re-occupied Phillipines and other territories which had been subjugated by the Japanese previously and it became necessary for the Japanese to withdraw their forces from the borders of India. This affected the fortunes of the Indian National Army. Without the help of the Japanese airplanes it was impossible for the INA to continue fighting with the British and American forces in India. And so they had to retreat to Burma. Following their retreat, the British armies invaded Burma and recaptured Rangoon along with the remnants of the Indian National Army. But Subash Chandra Bose flew and reached Formosa

with the object of going to Tokyo and getting some help from the Japanese to continue the struggle. But Bose lost his life in the attempt as the plane caught fire on the way and crashed. Thus one of the greatest sons of India made his supreme sacrifice at the altar of the country's freedom.

After a few months in jail in February, 1943, we heard another shocking news — that Mahatma Gandhi had started a 21 days' fast from the 10th February, 1943. On February 10 came the official announcement that the fast had already commenced. Simultaneously with this announcement, the Government released to the press, the correspondence between the Viceroy and Gandhi. The following was the text of the communique:

"Mr. Gandhi had informed the Viceroy that he proposes to undertake a fast of three weeks' duration from 10th February. It is to be a fast according to capacity, and during it Mr. Gandhi proposes to add juices of citrus fruit to water to make water drinkable, as his wish is not to fast to death, but to survive the ordeal. The Government of India deplore the use of the weapon of fasting to achieve political ends. There can, in their judgement, be no justification for it. The Government of India can only express its regret that Mr. Gandhi should think it necessary to employ such a weapon on this occasion, and should seek a justification for it in anything which Government may have said or done in connection with the movement initiated by him and his co-workers in the Congress party. The Government of India have no intention on their part of allowing the fast to deflect their policy. Nor will they be responsible for its consequences on Mr. Gandhi's health. They cannot prevent Mr. Gandhi from fasting. It was their wish, however, that if he decided to do so, he should do so as a free man and under his own arrangements, so as to bring out clearly that the responsibility for any fast and its consequences rested exclusively with him".

The placid and dull life of the prison was rudely disturbed by this news. All in the prison were detenus, imprisoned without trial for an indefinite period. Previously we had been sentenced to definite terms of imprisonment like six months or one year and we knew when it will be over and we will be released. For those who had families, this indefinite detention itself was a great emotional strain. Added to that, the fast by Gandhiji imposed further anxiety. And some were very excited about the possible consequences of such a fast on an old man of over seventy and some cried openly, while all felt very deeply. Many began sympathetic fasts for one, two or three or more days with prayers for his safely coming out of this ordeal. Finally when the fast ended and Gandhiji broke it, there was jubilation and joy.

As for myself, the jail life was a hard and busy life. I devoted it to study and contemplation. I had taken a box of books with me consisting of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Thirukkural, Kamba Ramayanam and a few others. The jail life gave me

ample time to study these in detail. Every morning after breakfast a few of us met in the shade of the jail compound wall and studied Thirukkural, myself conducting the class. In 1932, I wrote the book on Indian Economics in Tamil. In the Trichy jail in 1941, I wrote Thirukkethara Yathirai about my visit to the Himalayan shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath and compiled the Thoughts of Swami Vivekananda on Education. In 1942 I translated Swami Vivekananda's 'Colombo to Almora' which has inspired me a great deal, into Tamil. In 1943, I took up a colossal work of compiling commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, but I could not complete it owing to a sudden breakdown of health. I might have worked very hard, for about twelve or thirteen hours a day, with no other distraction or amusement. One day I began coughing at 10.00 p.m. The coughing became persistent, and continued throughout the night till 6.00 in the morning. The jail doctor could not diagnose what it was and I was admitted into the jail hospital. They thought that it could be asthma or tuberculosis. I rapidly lost weight and strength in a few weeks. I could not do my usual work or eat the usual food. The jail authorities got nervous and did not want to take the responsibility for my ill-health and so after much correspondence with the Government, I was released on parole.]

18. A Vision and A Word

NEVER before in my life I had suffered in health so much as in the later part of my fourth imprisonment. The cough erupted suddenly and developed into a long and continuous one beginning at about 10.00 at night and lasting till morning. I coughed so badly that many in the neighbouring cells could not sleep. My friend Sri Subri who was in the same jail tried to help me. Doctors came and saw but nothing helped. I lost weight rapidly. I could not eat. I became weak. It became difficult even to walk to the latrine which was at some distance. More than anything, I missed my studies, my classes in Thirukkural and my writing work. On admission into the jail hospital, they diagnosed my ailment as asthma, with a probability of tuberculosis. I was heavily drugged with ephedrine, which gave relief from cough, but at the cost of sleep and great physical weakness. Nobody could find the reason. I had no family worries of any kind as I had remained a bachelor. Neither did I have any financial worries of any kind as my family was well endowed and had great affection for me. My only worry was the larger family of Vidyalaya which I had left behind.

Every time after release, I used to go to the Ramakrishna Math at Madras before returning home to the Vidyalaya. This time also, I went there first. Swami Saswatananda was then incharge of the Math. Usually all the Swamijis and others were very affectionate and chummy with me. I used to be accommodated in one of the rooms along with them. But this time I saw a difference. There was a concern in their eyes and I was accommodated separately. I could know the reason only later. I looked so bad that they suspected, that I had bad tuberculosis. As it was infectious, I was segregated. They also thought that it was difficult for me to recover. Hence their great concern. But the illness did not respond to any treatment in Jail. And so to get rid of their responsibility one morning the jail authorities announced that I will be released on parole.

But I was very happy to be back in the Vidyalaya amidst the children and co-workers. The Vidyalaya finance had suffered greatly due to the price rise and inflation during the war on the one side and nobody to go out for collections in my absence, Swami Nishkamananda had been sent by the Headquarters to look after the Vidyalaya in my absence and that indeed was a very great help. The Managing Committee of Vidyalaya at that time consisted of Swami Chidbhanananda as President, myself as Secretary,

Swami Nishkamananda as Warden and Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram as Assistant Secretaries. Swami Chidbhavananda was in Ooty and myself and Sri Subbaraman had been in jail. Swami Nishkamananda and Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram and devoted co-workers like Sri M.P. Periaswamy, Sri K. Arunachalam and Sri K. Venkatachalam were carrying on the Vidyalaya with courage and faith. They had approached my uncle Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar for support in my absence and he willingly helped a great deal. But inspite of all these help, we see a pessimistic note in the report for 1943, which says :

"By the grace of the Lord, the Vidyalaya has had, inspite of numerous difficulties on account of the war, another year of uninterrupted progress. The Vidyalaya has now within it a residential high school, a residential secondary grade training school for teachers, and a model higher elementary school attached to the training school. In addition to this we have our rural service section.

"The Gandhi Secondary Grade Training School for teachers also worked well, though with reduced strength on account of the war. Many of the Government Training Schools in this Presidency have been closed down owing to paucity of candidates. For the same reason, we were not able to admit boys for the first year. We hope that with the offer of stipends by the Government things will improve in the coming year.

"The Thillaiammal Angappa Chettiar Kalanilayam which serves as a model school for the training school worked with eight classes, 203 children of whom 72 were girls, 7 teachers and 2 mistresses. The Trustees of the Thillaiammal Angappa Chettiar Charities have built another beautiful building worth about Rs. 4,500/-. Our thanks are due to them for their continued interest in the Kalanilayam.

"In spite of many abverse circumstances this year also, the Sri Ramakarishna Jayanthi celebrations were very successful. Owing to difficulties in transport many could not attend. But we are glad to be able to say that thousands of people came walking or in bullock carts. More than ten thousand people would have attended. The utsav committee with Mr. V.C. Vellingiri Gounder as its Chairman did its work well. Rs. 2,250-13-6 were collected and Rs. 1,794-11-0 were spent for the function. About 7,500 people took prasada in the special pandal erected for the purpose. Many from the surrounding villages came with Bhajans and amongst them were those belonging to Harijans and the tribes from the nearby hills. Mr. T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar presided and Mr. K. Ramanathan Chettiar spoke on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. After the meeting there was splendid music by the famous Nadaswara vidwan Sri Angappa Pillai of Perambalur".

To meet the increasing expenses paying children had been admitted. The report reads :

“Of the 115 boys in the Vidyalaya 42 boys are completely free i.e., both for the boarding and the school. Of these for 5 boys — all of them Harijans — clothings and books are also supplied and other expenses met. Besides these 39 have free boarding and 8 boys free tuition. That is, 81 boys have free boarding and 50 boys are educated free. Only 26 boys pay their full charges. And so out of a total annual recurring expenditure of about Rs. 45,000/- only about Rs. 10,000/- are received from the boys. We get an annual grant of about Rs. 4,500/- from the Government. The rest of the amount i.e., about Rs. 35,000/- has to be met out of contributions”.

People of today who are now accustomed to free education upto the Higher Secondary School may not understand some of the above statements. In those days for education in schools fees had to be paid. The fees were deducted from the salary paid to approved teachers and half of the net deficit was paid as grant by the Government. Thus the audited accounts of the high school for that year shows: “The total expenditure was Rs. 7,339.50 of which the salary paid to teachers including Provident Fund was Rs. 5,145/- On the receipts side the fees received from students came to Rs. 2,169.25 and the Government grant was only Rs. 937/-, the balance being contributed by the management. Similary there were deficits in the working of the Kalanilayam Higher Elementary School and the Training School for Teachers. But the biggest deficit was in the residential high school where the major part of the children was fed free. For the Vidyalaya in its then state, this amount was a big one. Therefore there was immediate need to mobilise collections.

But my friends, relatives and co-workers insisted that my first task was to rehabilitate my health. The coughing was incessant and the weakness was increasing. The suspicion that it could be tuberculosis worried everybody. Dr. S. Gurupatham, the Founder of the Moses Gnanabaranam Hospital, a good friend of mine who was later to become a Minister in the Madras Cabinet insisted that I must go to the Madanapalle T.B. Hospital where I must be medically checked by the famous T.B. expert Dr. Benjamin. He took me there and it was a great relief to all when told that I was not suffering from T.B. but only a kind of virulent asthma. The asthma, however, refused to heed all the medicines and treatment.

It was the day before Vijaya Dasami in 1944. It was our long time desire to start an Industrial Section in the Vidyalaya. One of our friends had gifted a small lathe and a slotting machine. With these we wanted to start an Industrial Section the next day. But my asthma became worse in the previous days. In those days the guest house was the only building in which there was an attached bathroom. And so I was shifted there. I was gasping for breath continuously day and night. The pain and weakness were excruciating. In that plight I could not lie down and rest, neither could I sit. Leaning over a few pillows put in front and in the great agony of continuous gasping, I despaired of my life and wondered what will become of the Vidyalaya.

It was about 2.00 a.m. after midnight. In the intensity of agony, pain and hopelessness, suddenly a Vision of Sri Ramakrishna came before me. He raised my bent down face and said, "Do you think, you are doing everything?" I don't know, how long the Vision lasted. It could not have been more than a few minutes. But immediately an uncommon peace came upon me. The gasping slowly subsided. I lost myself in rest and sleep, such as I had never experienced before. After that experience the asthma slowly came down. That Vision and those words have been with me all these years and have given me and continue to give me eternal strength and faith, that He is behind all our efforts in our institutions.

I have had many trials since that time, but the faith that the great unseen power of the Lord is always with us has carried me through. That Vision and Word and thought have been a source of continuous strength throughout my life.

19. The Dawn of Freedom

IN the meantime, things moved fast in the political sphere. Mahatma Gandhi was released unconditionally in May, 1944. He was greatly pained at the political deadlock between the Congress and the Muslim League. His immediate objective was to come to an understanding with Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League. Sri C. Rajagopalachari evolved a formula to resume conversation with Mr. Jinnah and obtained Gandhiji's consent for it with a few alterations. Gandhiji proposed to Jinnah that there should be talks between them on the basis of the proposals contained in the formula. The formula accepted by Gandhiji included:

(1) The Muslim League should cooperate with the Congress in the achievement of the country's freedom and Pakistan should be created after the country became free.

(2) Those areas in Bengal and Punjab which had a majority of non-Muslims should be excluded from Pakistan. This meant the exclusion of the areas in East Punjab where the Hindus and the Sikhs were in majority and the districts in West Bengal which had a Hindu majority.

(3) Before Pakistan was established, the views of the people inhabiting the areas should be found out through a plebiscite.

(4) Even after the States of Pakistan and Hindustan came into existence there should be a treaty between the two States on matters relating to the defence of the whole country, communications, and other essential matters of common interest.

Jinnah, however, insisted that Pakistan should first be created and then only would the Muslim League cooperate with the Congress in the achievement of freedom. Secondly, he insisted that the whole of Punjab and Bengal should be included in Pakistan. Thirdly, he also objected to any plebiscite in regard to the formation of Pakistan. He knew that large numbers of Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal were opposed to it and in a plebiscite they and the non-Muslim population might join together and vote against its formation. And so, the talks did not yield any results.

Meanwhile, Lord Wavell who had become the Viceroy of India in October 1943, began to realise that the political stalemate should be brought to an end primarily because of the growing economic deterioration in the country. And so he summoned the leaders of the two parties to Simla. The

Congress Working Committee and the Muslim League decided to participate in the meeting. The conference met in Simla on June 25. Twenty-one delegates belonging to the Congress, the League and a few other political parties participated. The Viceroy requested the Congress and the League to send to him separately a list of the names of not less than eight persons and not more than twelve out of which he would select those who should form the proposed Central Government. Accordingly the Congress sent twelve names. But Jinnah declined to do so unless the Viceroy accepted the condition that all the Muslims in the proposed Central Government should be members of the Muslim League. This meant that even Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, President of the then Congress, could not join the Central Government.

Another important political event happened in July 1944 in England. From the very beginning the Conservative Party and its leader Winston Churchill were against the Congress. It was Churchill who said that it was humiliating for the British Government to negotiate with Gandhi, the half-naked fakir. In the general elections which followed the termination of the war in Europe, the Conservative Party was defeated and the Labour Party with Attlee as Prime Minister came into power. This gave a new turn to the whole course of events in India. The war with Japanese also came to an end in August 1945 after the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the surrender of Japan. The coming to power of the Labour Party created a new atmosphere which led to successful negotiations between Britain and India. The British Government came to the conclusion that in the circumstances prevailing in India, the freedom to India cannot be any more postponed and any such postponement will not be in the best interests of Britain. The reasons for such a conclusion were many. Though the war ended in a victory for Britain, its resources were largely depleted. Its Navy, Military and Air Forces became weakened. Before the war it was a creditor nation which lent money to many countries in the world. But as a consequence of the war, it not only ceased to be a creditor nation but became heavily indebted to the United States and to several other countries. All its resources were needed for reconstructing its own economy destroyed by the war. Under such circumstances, the Labour Government felt that the country had neither human nor material resources for maintaining its rule over India. Even the sepoys on whose loyalty it depended for more than two centuries became undependable. The rule over India under such circumstances was considered to be a heavy and unnecessary burden.

The Labour Government felt that the party or persons to whom power should be transferred should be decided on the basis of elections to be held in India for the Central and Provincial legislatures. Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy made a public announcement that a Constituent Assembly would be convened at an early date, discussions would be held with the Princes in regard to their representation in the Constituent Assembly, and there would also be discussions in regard to the relations between India and Britain

after the British withdrawal from the country and that elections would take place in December 1945.

The Congress decided to participate in the elections, so also the Muslim League. In the elections to the Central Legislature, 91.3 per cent of the voters in the general constituencies voted for the Congress and it secured 57 seats i.e., a majority of the elected seats in the Central Legislature. In the Muslim communal constituencies, 86.6 percent of the voters voted for the candidates set up by the Muslim League and it secured all the 37 seats for which it set up candidates. Besides these, 5 Independents, 2 Sikhs and 8 Europeans were also elected. Thus out of the total of 102 elected seats, the Congress got a majority, thus showing that the general electorate was solidly behind the Congress and its policies. Similarly, the elections revealed that the Muslim voters were solidly behind the Muslim League.

In the elections to the Provincial Legislatures except in the North-Western Frontier Province, in the other Muslim majority provinces the Muslim voters voted for Muslim candidates. But the Muslim League was not able to secure a majority in all these States except in Bengal, where a League Ministry was formed. In the North-West Frontier Province, the Congress formed a ministry. In the Punjab, a Ministry consisting of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs was formed. In Sind, a League Ministry came into power. In all the other provinces, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Central Provinces, Bombay, Madras and Orissa Congress came out successful in thumping majority and came into power.

In the new Ministry formed in Madras, Sri T. Prakasam became the Chief Minister. I had opted to come to the State Assembly and was elected from the Palladam Constituency in Coimbatore District. Along with Sri P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, Daniel Thomas, M. Bhaktavatsalam and myself from Tamil Nadu, Kala Venkata Row, H. Sitarama Reddy and Bikanni Venkataraman from Andhra, K. Madhava Menon from Malabar and K.R. Karanth from South Canara were sworn as Ministers in the Government of Madras which then consisted of Tamil Nadu minus the present Kanyakumari District, Andhra consisting of the Circars and Rayalaseema, North and South Malabar and South Canara Districts. Sri O.P. Ramaswami Reddiar was elected Chief Minister later, and Sri Gopal Reddy also joined the Ministry. I was allotted the Education portfolio. But the formation of a Ministry in the Centre was delayed owing to difference of opinion between the Congress and the Muslim League.

Till then the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore was my home in Madras. From the early twenties when I met the Swamis Brahmanandaji and Shivanandaji, two of the foremost direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, I became a regular inmate of the Math whenever I was in Madras. I cannot sufficiently explain the immense benefits the stay conferred on me. Apart from the discipline of Ashrama life and the facilities it provided for meditation, study and worship, it gave me Sat Sangha so essential for a spiritual life. It was there I formed some of my most lasting friendships

with the Sadhus of the Ramakrishna Mission. I must be eternally grateful to the senior Swamis, Swami Yatiswarananda, Saswatananda, Vipulananda and others whose love, affection and guidance moulded the early part of my life. The official position and the numerous visitors it brought, did not allow me to continue my stay in the Math. And so I shifted to a house found for me by the Government. But I continued my visits to that source of peace and strength for my continuing benefit.

The Freedom Movement began to affect the armed forces. A mutiny broke out in the Navy in Bombay. The mutiny, however, became another eye-opener to the British Cabinet. It already doubted the loyalty of the sepoys in the Army and now it began to doubt the loyalty of the naval ratings also. It wanted to disabuse the minds of the people of India of any lingering doubt as to the sincerity of the British to withdraw from India. On February 14, 1946, it made an announcement that a Cabinet Mission consisting of three members — Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Alexander — would shortly visit India to carry on negotiations with the Congress, the League and other political parties and interests. Accordingly, the Cabinet Delegation arrived in Delhi on March 24, held discussions for three weeks with the Congress, the League and other political parties. It found that all of them except the League were in favour of maintaining the political unity of the country which was the greatest achievement of the British Rule. M.A. Jinnah and the Muslim League insisted on the formation of Pakistan instead of the Interim Government. In August 1946, the Viceroy therefore invited Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to form the Interim Government, which he did on 24th August 1946 with the following members namely Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, C. Rajagopalachari, Sarat Chandra Bose, John Matthai, Sardar Baldev Singh, Jagjivan Ram, Dr. Shafaat Ahmed Khan and Syed Ali Zaheer. On September 2, the members of the Interim Government took their oath of office. Later five members nominated by the League joined the Cabinet. But due to internal bickerings, the Interim Government could not work well.

As a protest against the formation of the Interim Government, Jinnah gave a call that the Muslims should observe August 16, as the "Direct Action Day". This led to large scale riots in Calcutta and in other parts of Bengal. The Chief Minister of West Bengal declared August 16, as a holiday and when the riots broke out, he instructed the police not to suppress them. Unprecedented massacres took place. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims were killed in the riot. During those days I had occasion to go to New Delhi for a meeting and returned via Calcutta. My mission in Calcutta was to visit the Ramakrishna Math at Belur on the banks of the Ganga hallowed by the lives of Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. I could see numerous dead bodies floating in the Ganga. People were murdered and thrown into the river. That was indeed a very ghastly experience.

In these circumstances, the British Government did not want to take the responsibility for the Government of India. Therefore they decided that

they would withdraw from India. On February 20, 1947, Attlee the British Premier, made a categorical statement in the House of Commons which among other things declared that:

(1) The British would withdraw from India at a date not later than June 1948.

(2) If by that time, the Constituent Assembly framed a Constitution approved by all the parties and a new Government was installed according to it, it would transfer power to that Government.

(3) If no such Constitution was framed, the British would transfer power to the various governments that might then be holding office in the provinces; and

(4) If for any reason even this was not possible it would transfer power to any other institution which would be most beneficial to the people of India.

Lord Mountbatten took charge of his office as the last Viceroy, and Governor-General on March 24, 1947. He immediately held discussions with the leaders of the Congress, and the League and other important politicians. He then called for a conference of provincial Governors who told him that the situation was beyond control and that civil war had already spread into Punjab and North-west Frontier and that it might spread to other parts of the country. He came to the conclusion that it would not be possible for the British to carry on the government of the country even till June, 1948, and that the responsibility for the governance of the country should be handed over to the representatives of the Indian people by August 15, 1947 to which the British Cabinet agreed.

He asked the Congress leaders to agree to a plan of partition. They did so because it was the lesser of the two evils. In the atmosphere of civil war that was created by the direct action of Jinnah, Sardar Patel felt that it was impossible to create harmony in a Central Government of a united India between League and Congress members. What was happening in the Interim Government proved to be a warning to him. It was mainly on this ground that he accepted partition. Rajendra Prasad and Nehru also agreed. Though Gandhiji was bitterly against the partition of the country he also ultimately agreed to the partition. Whatever his personal views might be, he called upon the All India Congress Committee which met on June 14, to agree to partition.

In accordance with this plan, the British Parliament passed on July 18, the Indian Independence Act. According to the Act (1) India and Pakistan should become two Dominions within the British Commonwealth from August 15, 1947, (2) To each Dominion the King should appoint a Governor General, but, the same person might hold office of the Governor General in both the Dominions, (3) The legislature in each Dominion should have full power in all matters of internal and external policy and no legislation enacted by the British Parliament or orders issued by the British Government would have any applicability in India or Pakistan, (4) There would be two

Constituent Assemblies, one to frame a Constitution for India, and another to frame a Constitution for Pakistan, and until the new Constitution was framed and brought into effect, the Government of each Dominion would be carried on in accordance with the Government of India Act 1935 with appropriate alterations as India and Pakistan became Dominions, (5) The Constituent Assembly of each Dominion would also be its legislature until a new legislature comes into existence under the new Constitution, (6) Britain would have no rights of Paramountcy over the Indian Princely States. They would be free either to remain sovereign or accede to India or Pakistan according to their convenience.

The Constituent Assembly of India met at midnight on August 14-15, under the Presidentship of Rajendra Prasad to celebrate the Dawn of Independence. On that momentous occasion Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister delivered a most inspiring speech calling upon the members of the Assembly, and the people of India to dedicate themselves to the service of the country. He said in memorable words:

"When the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity....."

At the dawn of history, India started on her unending quest and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her successes and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike, she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which are her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity to greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?

Freedom and power bring responsibility. And that responsibility rests upon this Assembly, a sovereign body, representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom, we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless, the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.

The future is not one of ease or resting, but of incessant striving so that we might fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service to India means the service to the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation (Mahatma Gandhi) has been to wipe off every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but so long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

And so we have to labour and to work and work hard, to make our dreams real.

On this day, our first thoughts go to the architect of this freedom, the Father of our Nation, who embodying the old spirit of India, held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surround us. We have often been unworthy followers of his and have strayed from his message, but not only we, but the succeeding generations, will remember his message and bear the imprint in their hearts of this great son of India, magnificent in his faith, strength, courage and humility. We shall never allow that torch of freedom to be blown out, however high the wind or stormy the tempest.

Our next thoughts must be of the unknown volunteers and soldiers of freedom, who, without praise or reward, have served India even unto death.

We think also of our brothers and sisters, who have been cut off from us by political boundaries and who unhappily cannot share at present the freedom that has come. They are of us and will remain of us, whatever may happen, and we shall be sharers in their good and ill-fortune alike.

The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India, to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease, to building up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions, which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.

We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for anyone of us till we redeem our pledge in full and till we make all the people of India, what destiny intended them to be.

The whole country was excited about the newly won freedom. Throughout the night and next day all over the country, tumultuous meetings were held in almost all towns and villages. In Madras, we witnessed thousands of people led by Congress volunteers who had participated in the freedom movement organising meetings, with decorated pictures of Mahatma Gandhi in which speakers spoke about the various aspects of the freedom struggle. Big flag-posts were erected, decorated pandals were put up and prominent people were asked to hoist the National flag. The enthusiasm was tumultuous and infectious. As most other Ministers and leaders, I participated in many meetings that night and the next day. This included educational institutions like the Engineering College, Madras and the Queen Mary's College, Madras.

When Independence was declared on August 15, 1947, Sir Archibald Nye was the Governor of Madras. On the eve of the declaration of independence, that is on the 14th night, he wanted to go round the city and

witness the rejoicings of the people. His advisers and his aides advised against an erstwhile representative of an alien Government going amidst the people who were in a frenzy, drunk with the joy of their newly won independence. They feared that he would meet with an unfriendly and even a violent reception. But Sir Archibald insisted and said that he would go incognito. Lady Nye also insisted on accompanying him. Both of them were going round to different places. In many places people had gathered in thousands. Near about midnight, national flags were hoisted everywhere amidst delirious enthusiasm. In one of those places, when Sir and Lady Nye were watching the scene, one man recognised them and he shouted 'Here is the Governor'. 'Instantly' Sir Archibald said, in an account of the incident: My blood chilled and I was not sure what was going to happen. The fear of anything happening to Lady Nye nonplussed me. But that was only for a moment; immediately something happened, which relieved me. The people laughed a good natured laugh and cried, 'Let the Governor hoist our flag'. They ran to the car, got us out amidst thundering cheers. We were never safer than amongst those people'. He added, 'This sort of goodwill for an erstwhile enemy can never be in any other country. This was indeed Gandhiji's principle in action'. Sir Archibald was not the only person who testified to this. The continuous understanding and goodwill that now exist between India and England is the astounding proof of the method of love and suffering, which we used under Gandhiji's leadership, for winning our freedom.

Now let us know what Gandhiji was doing that day. When the whole of India was celebrating its newly won freedom where was Mahatma Gandhi, its main Architect? He was in Calcutta bringing peace and solace to the riot-torn victims of Calcutta.

The Ministers of Bengal came to pay their respects to him on that day. To them he said, 'Today you have worn on your head a crown of thorns. You have to ever remain wakeful on that seat. You have to be more patient, more humble and more forbearing. Do not fall a prey to the lure of wealth. You are there to serve the villages and the poor. May God Bless you'.

In his weekly Harijan he wrote about the duties of the Ministers and Legislators as follows:

The Ministers and the legislators have to be fearless in the performance of their duty. They must always be ready to risk the loss of their seats or offices. Offices and seats in the legislatures have no merit outside their ability to raise the prestige and power of the country. And since both depend wholly upon the possession of morals, both public and private, any moral lapse means a blow to the country.

This office-holding is a step towards either greater prestige or its total loss. If it is not to be a loss, the Ministers and the legislators have to be watchful of their own personal and public conduct. They have to be like Caesar's wife, above suspicion in everything.

There is a beauty and an art in simplicity. It does not require money to be neat, clean and dignified. Pomp and pageantry are often synonymous with vulgarity.

The holding of any office must be in the spirit of service without the slightest expectation of personal gain. The Ministers should not live as sahib lok nor use for private work facilities provided by Government for official duties.

Our Ministers are of the people, from the people. Let them not arrogate to themselves greater knowledge than those experienced men who do not happen to occupy ministerial chairs.

The Ministers should be completely free from all prejudices against any caste or creed, and from any favouritism towards his own relatives and friends. To the Minister, his own son or brother should rank no higher than any other ordinary citizen, including the poorest artisan or labourer.

His private life should be so simple that it inspires respect, or even reverence. And it is not enough that the Ministers live a simple life and work hard. They have also to see to it that the departments they control also respond. Thus justice should become cheap and expeditious. Today it is the luxury of the rich and the joy of the gambler. The police should be friends of the people instead of being their dread. Education should be so revolutionized as to answer the wants of the poorest villager.

It is reported that on 15th August, 1947 Gandhiji sent the following message to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.

My blessings and good wishes will always be with you. I wish you well, but remember the task is neither easy nor glamorous. The number of people whom you will please will be few, while the number of those whom you will displease will be large. But this must not deter you from doing your duty by the people.

20. In Sevagram

Gandhiji's visit to the Vidyalaya in 1934 brought me in close touch with him. When I was elected to the Central Assembly in 1935, I was brought even closer to him as Wardha, near which is Sevagram, where he stayed, is on the rail route to New Delhi. At that time, the Central Assembly had two sessions; one called 'Winter Session' beginning in the middle of January and going upto the end of April or even spilling into the first week of May; the second called the summer session was held in Simla in August-September for about five weeks. I was also connected with the Hindusthani Talimi Sangh and thus came close to Sri Ariyanayakam and Mrs. Asha Devi Ariyanayakam, Secretaries of the Sangh. Therefore invariably I stopped on the way to and back from Delhi at Wardha and visited Sevagram. Mahatma Gandhi was extremely kind and affectionate to me. Everytime we met he enquired about as to how the Vidyalaya was running various classes, how the constructive works were progressing and about the work in Central Assembly. Mahadev Desai was with him and I would also meet Ba¹. It was during those visits I had the privilege of meeting the close associates of Gandhiji — Sri Jamnalal Bajaj, Zakir Hussain, later President of India, J.C. Kumarappa, well-known Gandhian Economist and his brother Bharatan who was in Wardha at that time, Sri Kishorilal Mashruvala, Mira Behn, Thakker Bapa, Konda Vekatappayya of Andhra, Nabakishan Choudhury of Orissa and numerous others who had taken prominent part in the Freedom movement and Gandhi's Constructive Work.

In those early days, there were no proper roads to Sevagram. And so in the rainy days one had to walk the five or more miles from Wardha on slushy path. There is a common saying, 'where there is Rama it is Ayodhya'. I could understand it only when I went to Sevagram. That far off, out of the way village became the centre of India because Mahatma Gandhi was there. All the prominent political leaders in India went there for advice and consultations. Many of the leading foreign visitors to India thought that their visit was not complete without seeing the Mahatma. All the foreign correspondents were there. The leading constructive workers from all over India were there. The result was, the road was laid, the village ashram

¹ 'Ba'. Kasthurba Gandhi, affectionately called 'Ba', wife of Mahatma Gandhi — meaning mother.

grew not only with houses for the residing workers but also to provide for the numerous visitors. A guest house to accommodate the distinguished people was put up, though many stayed in the Bajaj's Guest house at Wardha. There was a Basic School near which the Ariyanayakams lived. A dispensary was established to serve the village poor. After the Congress accepted office in 1937, many of the provincial Ministers came on a pilgrimage to Wardha and it was there I first met Ravi Shanker Shukla, the then Chief Minister of the Central Provinces. (now Madhya Pradesh).

But Gandhiji insisted on the maintenance of the village atmosphere and so no big terraced buildings were allowed. All the constructions were mud huts with hand-made tiles for roofing. Gandhiji lived in one such small cottage. In his room there was no table and chair to sit and write on nor any cot to lie down. He sat on a mattress with a cushion for his back. He slept also on a mattress on the floor. On one of the mud walls was a drawing of a Charka. Around his mattress some mats were spread. All the arrangements were extremely simple, but meticulously neat and clean. World leaders from all parts of the globe met the Mahatma in that setting and talked and discussed with him profound matters. His smile was enchanting, his love and consideration for others were great. His ideals of love, tolerance, and service were high and these made people forget every discomfort. They lost themselves in the conversations with him.

The summer in Wardha and Sevagram is always very hot. Sometimes the mercury would go even upto 110 F. Once I visited Sevagram in that intense heat. Gandhiji was in his usual hut and lying on a mattress. On his body and on his head were wet towels. As soon as he saw me, he gave his enchanting smile and said, "Come Avinashi, How are you?" I was rather concerned at the bandange-like cloth on his body and head and asked him what they were. He roared with laughter and said it was his "air conditioning" of the body against the intense heat. And then he explained that they were mud plaster, with wet cloth below and above and sprinkled with cold water. This he did to make his head and body cool in the midst of the prevailing heat. He had a mud plaster on his head when he walked to Dandi in that Summer. We can see it in the pictures of the Dandi March. One foreign correspondent asked what it was. When Gandhiji explained that it was mud plaster, the Correspondent wrote in his paper, there was mud not only outside his head, but also inside his head. When Gandhi heard it he roared with laughter and said that the Correspondent was probably right.

Like all great men who lived for great causes, Mahatmaji was not a dry idealist, but deeply interested in individual men and women and their welfare. Everyday the mail brought him a large bag of letters. While some related to matters of national importance a large majority were from people who wrote on personal matters requesting his guidance. To all these he wrote personally and in his own hand-writing. I also received a few letters, but in my lack of foresight I had not preserved them except one which he wrote in reply to my request to write an introduction to my compilation of Swami

Vivekananda on Education, in which he said: "Dear Avinashi, Surely Swami Vivekananda's writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal. Yours, Bapu, 22.7.41". Most of his letters were written on cards or on the back of the envelopes received by him.

When people went to visit Gandhiji, he looked after their personal welfare. Some time in 1944, when the country was in the throes of a political turmoil I went to Wardha. It was in early October, when the summer was ending and winter beginning. I had my asthma and was accustomed to bathing in warm water. But I did not like to disturb the Ashram people and so bathed in the cold water which aggravated my asthma. Gandhiji had given me an appointment to see him in the afternoon. When I met him, one of the first questions he asked me was why I bathed in cold water and aggravated my illness! He said, 'hot water was easily available and you need not have worsened your illness'. It is these personal relationships which endeared the Mahatma to lakhs of workers involved in the service of the country, throughout India.

A touching incident happened at about the time which illustrates this. The story is better told in the words of Sri Jairamdas Doulatram, who was an eye-witness to it. "It was an hour before the evening prayer time. Bapu was going out for his usual stroll. About half a dozen of us were with him. He had hardly stepped out of the Ashram gate, when a visitor who was entering the Ashram stopped six paces in front of Bapu, placed on the ground a bundle of cloth, and reverentially made his pranam. Gandhiji returned the salutation and told the visitor that he had received his letter but he thought the visitor would await a reply before starting for the Ashram. The visitor, taken aback a little, explained that Bapu's pathetic statement on the morrow of his interview with the Viceroy when the war broke out, had deeply stirred him, and he felt an irresistible urge to come to Bapu and pass two days with him. "I know I should have waited for your permission to come to the Ashram, but somehow I could not restrain myself, and so I left Hardwar to come to you". Bapu explained to him that he knew the disease he was suffering from, and he had been debating within himself whether it would be proper for him to let him come and reside in the Ashram where so many persons, women, children and sick, live in close proximity.

The visitor was Parchure Shastri, a fellow prisoner with Gandhiji in Yervada Jail in 1922. He had unfortunately developed leprosy of a bad type, and had since his release been wandering from hospital to hospital for effective treatment and had ultimately found refuge at Hardwar, the famous sacred place of Northern India. Realising Bapu's difficulty, the visitor said "I have had your darshan. This bundle contains the yarn I spun at Hardwar to give you personally one day. My purpose is served. I will pass the night under yonder tree and return to Hardwar in the morning." Bapu asked him whether he had had any food and on learning that he had had nothing since the day meal, he asked Kanu Gandhi to arrange to feed him. Kanu looked to the needs

of the visitor, and Gandhiji started on his evening walk. These evening strolls were largely used by Bapu for complete relaxation, and he joked and played with children for part of the walks or talked with his companions on matters of no serious concern and thus relieved the tension of strenuous thinking on weighty problems throughout the day. But I had seldom seen him at any time so absorbed in thought and busy battling with an internal problem as on that evening. The evening prayer soon followed his return to the Ashram and before long he went to rest for the night.

The body rested. But the soul of this great man was up in revolt within him. The subconscious Gandhi was fighting his way through the calculative working of the conscious mind. At last the Great soul won the struggle. The outer sleep broke at about 2.00 a.m. and Bapu sat up to make the conscious mind respond to the call of the innerself. There was no peace for him till that response came. The morning prayer over, he addressed the inmates of his Ashram gathered on the prayer ground at that early hour. He put before them all the aspects of the problem which had faced him on the previous evening. He told them how God in the form of Parchure Shastri had come to test his sincerity. For him to turn away Parchure because of his leprosy would be to deny himself and God, but he was at the same time responsible for the health of the Ashramites whom God had placed in his charge. How could he let Parchure live in their proximity unless they all were prepared to run the risk involved? The Ashramites rose to the occasion, and made it clear that they were ready to receive Parchure in their midst. The load was off Bapu's breast. One more experiment with truth, and one more manifestation of ahimsa in its positive form of love to all, even the lowliest, even to one whom the "untouchables" would not touch — this was the meaning of what had happened.

With the dawn, Parchure became the inmate of the Ashram. A neat cottage was hurriedly put up close to Bapu's own. The roof consisted of a plain sheet of white Khadi to permit the sun to play its part in the treatment of the new patient. From that day no single individual in the Ashram occupied the mind of Bapu more than Parchure. It was a time when grave issues faced the country. We had broken with the British Government on the war question. Those who had graced ministerial chairs were getting ready to squat on prison floors. Civil disobedience when and in what form was being hotly debated within the Congress ranks. Having given up ministerial power, the nation was preparing to use the power of sacrifice to reshape the course of events. But in the midst of this all, the leprous wounds of Parchure Shastri loomed large in the mind of the great soul. He massaged him daily with his own hands till some Ashramites voluntarily relieved him of his duty. He determined the diet the patient was to receive and so the food served out to Parchure was brought to Bapu for inspection three

times each day. The end of the morning walk found Bapu everyday at Parchure's hut. Affectionate enquiries about the patient's progress, a few suggestions about the daily routine, attentive sympathetic listening to the Sanskrit poems composed by this learned leper, a smile and a parting joke, all this made Bapu pass more time with Parchure Shastri than with any of his other patients whom he used to cheer by brief daily visits.

And so this close neighbour of Bapu prospered rapidly, as in poetic riches, so in health. The two days he had wanted to be near Bapu lengthened into two months and in due course to more than two years. Bapu would not let him leave his side till the disease was controlled and cured.

21. 30th January 1948

In the meantime events moved fast in the outside world. They have been mentioned in the previous chapter. The last phase of the freedom struggle brought untold misery. The Hindu-Muslim riots which broke throughout the country made Gandhiji extremely unhappy. He was against the very idea of partition, which he considered bad for the country and both for the Hindus and Muslims. Tendulkar describes vividly as to how Gandhiji felt on a morning in June, 1947.

On the morning of 1st June, Gandhi woke up earlier than usual. As there was still half an hour before prayer he remained lying in bed and began to muse in a low voice.

"The purity of my striving will be put to the test only now. Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the political situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon. They wonder, if I have not deteriorated with age. Nevertheless, I must speak as I feel, if I am to prove a true, loyal friend to the Congress and to the British people, as I claim to be, regardless of whether my advice is appreciated or not. I see clearly that we are setting about this business the wrong way. We may not feel the full effect immediately, but I can see clearly that the future of independence gained at this price is going to be dark. I pray, that God may not keep me alive to witness it. In order that He may give me the strength and wisdom to remain firm in the midst of universal opposition and to utter the full truth, I need all the strength that purity can give.

"But in spite of my being all alone in my thoughts, I am experiencing an ineffable inner joy and freshness of mind. I feel as if God Himself is lighting my path before me. And that is perhaps the reason why I am able to fight on single-handed. The people ask me to retire to Kashi or to the Himalayas. I laugh and tell them that the Himalayas of my penance are where there is misery to be alleviated, oppression to be relieved. There can be no rest for me, so long as there is a single person in India lacking the necessities of life. I cannot bear to see Badshah Khan's¹ grief. His inner agony wrings my heart. But, if I gave way to tears, it would be cowardly and, the stalwart Pathan as he is, he would break down. So I go about my business unmoved.

¹. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, North-West Frontier Province Congress leader.

"But maybe," Gandhi added after some pause, "all of them are right and I alone am floundering in darkness..... I shall, perhaps, not be alive to witness it, but should the evil I apprehend overtake India and her independence imperilled, let posterity know what agony this old soul went through thinking of it. Let it not be said that Gandhi was part to India's vivisection. But everybody is today impatient for independence. Therefore, there is no other help."

As Minister of Education in Madras, I had occasion to go to New Delhi many times to attend meetings. The last time I saw Gandhiji was in the Valmiki colony. He said in sorrowful words, 'Avinashi, They take my name, but do not follow my principles. They think I have become senile. I don't like to live any more'. That was the last time I had the privilege of meeting the great Mahatma who had inspired millions of young people like me to dedicate their lives for the freedom of the country.

Gandhiji was deeply concerned with the happenings in Delhi. The incessant riots and killings between the two communities affected him deeply. He was also very greatly stricken with grief over the murder and arson committed against the Hindus in Pakistan. He wished to go there for their succour. 'But with what face can I go there, without protecting the Muslims here', he asked. The misery of these happenings became unbearable to him. He suddenly decided to fast from the 13th January, 1948 for an indefinite period. In his prayer discourse on the evening of January 12, 1948, Gandhiji announced his decision to fast from the 13th, for an indefinite period, to bring about a reunion of hearts of all the communities. He said :

"One fasts for health's sake, under laws governing health, fasts as a penance for a wrong done and felt as such. In these fasts, the fasting one need not believe in ahimsa. There is, however, a fast which a votary of ahimsa sometimes feels impelled to undertake by way of protest against some wrong done by society and this he does when he, as a votary of ahimsa, has no other remedy left. Such an occasion has come my way.

Fasting is his last resort in the place of the sword; I have no answer to return to the Musalman friends, who see me from day to day, as to what they should do. My impotence has been gnawing at me of late. It will go immediately the fast is undertaken. I have been brooding over it for the last three days. The final conclusion has flashed upon me, and it makes me happy. No man, if he is pure, has anything more precious to give than his life. I hope and pray that I have that purity in me to justify the step. Let my fast quicken conscience, not deaden it. Just contemplate the rot that has set in beloved India and you will rejoice to think that there is one humble son of hers who is strong enough and pure enough to take this step. If he is neither, he is a burden on earth. The sooner he disappears and clears the Indian atmosphere of the burden, the better for him and all concerned".

People all over India were stunned at this announcement. All the leaders, Hindu and Muslim, resolved that everything should be done to avert the catastrophe. Addressing a big peace rally in the Capital, Maulana Azad informed the gathering that he had met Gandhiji in the afternoon and had requested him to suggest concrete conditions which, if fulfilled, would persuade him to break his fast. Gandhiji had thereupon mentioned to him seven conditions. The fast would be ended when all parties gave their signatures to those conditions. The assurances, he had further said, "must come from responsible people who could guarantee their proper fulfilment". He should not be given false assurance, the Maulana warned. A Central Peace Committee, consisting of 130 members representing all communities, was formed under the chairmanship of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The committee met at his residence and adopted a resolution satisfactory to Gandhiji. Representatives of all organisations in the city, including the representatives of the refugees from the three worst affected parts of the city, namely, Karol Bagh, Sabzi Mandi and Pharganj, had assembled under the Chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad and had put their signatures to a seven-point declaration, covering the conditions laid down by Gandhi for breaking his fast. On their assurance Gandhi broke his fast on January 13th at 10.45 p.m.

The successful ending of Gandhi's fast was prominently featured by the papers all over the world. The French Journal, *Le Mond*, wrote: "Mahatma Gandhi's 'secret weapon' -- that spiritual force which was taught so long ago by the gospels and the men of gospels -- will, perhaps, be the best reply to the atomic bombs. His voice carries far beyond the frontiers of India. If in our turbulent western world, it is still far from dominating the voice of violence, it is none the less among those voices to which we must listen and which will carry far beyond our times.

Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, informed the United Nations Security Council at Lake Success that 'a new and tremendous wave of feeling and desire for friendship between India and Pakistan is sweeping the subcontinent in response to the fast'.

During the fast, I was in Delhi and went to Birla House to see the Mahatma. But I was told that no one was allowed inside as that may disturb him and that I could only see him from outside. I saw him in the glory of his final resignation in God. Amidst the furrows of sorrow there was deep peace and halo around his face. That was the last I saw him.

While the fast brought about a temporary lull in Delhi, violent attacks on Hindus in Pakistan and the lakhs of Hindu refugees arriving from Pakistan losing their all, created bitter hatred against Muslims. They also began to think that it was Gandhi who was protecting them and preventing them from taking vengeance on them. As one of the conditions for breaking the fast, Gandhiji had insisted on India paying Pakistan the share of cash assets withheld by the Indian Government. This further infuriated them. This created in the minds of the Indian fanatics hatred against the great Mahatma. Shouts were heard even outside his prayer meeting. 'Gandhi Murdabad'

meaning 'Let Gandhi die'. The bitterness grew and plots were hatched to assassinate Gandhi. A bomb was even thrown one day at the prayer meeting aimed at Gandhiji. But it misfired and hurt nobody. A column of smoke spread over the bomb site. Dr. Sushila Nayyar was aghast and cried 'O' God'. But Gandhiji reproached her saying 'what better death can you have than to die in the act of prayer?' When people were frightened and there was commotion, he called them to order by saying, 'It is nothing. Sit down and be calm. The prayer will continue'. Nehru, Patel and many others sighed in relief that he was not hurt. Among the first to arrive was Lady Mountbatten, who congratulated him on his calmness and composure. But Gandhi replied: 'I have not shown any courage. I really thought it was an army practice. But if some one fired at me point blank and I faced his bullet with a smile repeating the name of Rama, then I should deserve your congratulations'.

The differences cropping up between Nehru and Patel were one cause of Gandhiji's worries, which Gandhiji tried to solve when the Sardar visited him. On the 30th January, the fateful day, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel requested him to conduct his prayers within the Birla House. Gandhiji refused saying, "How can I deny that privilege for the thousands of people, who want to join in my prayers". Then Sardarji is said to have requested that the police may be allowed to search the people coming for prayer. Gandhiji replied, 'No' and said, 'If God wants me to live, I shall live, if He wants me to die, who can protect me?' Amrit Kaur and others who were attending on him were very concerned and wept at the thought that anything may happen to him. To this he said, 'Everybody born must die. He is a coward, who wants to avoid the inevitable. I live in my message. And so don't weep for me, but follow my message' and went out for the prayer meeting.

All of a sudden, Nathuram Godse, came through the crowd and bending before him with his palms folded, as if in the act of making obeisance, fired point-blank three shots in quick succession from an automatic pistol. Gandhiji fell crying 'Hare Rama'. Death must have been instantaneous.

At that moment all the other Ministers and I were coming out of the Cabinet room in Fort St. George, after a Cabinet meeting. A Newspaper Correspondent came running to us and announced that Gandhiji had been shot. Within a few minutes, another Correspondent came and said he was dead. We were stunned to hear the news. Gloom spread everywhere. The whole of the Madras beach became deserted. All the activities in the playgrounds, cinemas etc. came to a standstill. The whole of India was immersed in grief. Millions of people sobbed and wept as if their own father or other dearest kin had died. I recalled to my mind what he told me in 1934 during the Harijan Tour that there will be no ordinary death for him but that he would die by the bullet or the hang-man.

Though the radio had announced that the assassin was a Hindu, there was widespread fear that Muslims may be attacked. And so there was another cabinet meeting at about 9.00 p.m. that night in the residence of the Chief

Minister Sri O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar to consider measures against any untoward happenings.

That night with a mind full of sorrow and a choking voice, in his own inimitable style, the Prime Minister of India Sri Jawaharlal Nehru spoke over the Radio as follows: 'The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of the Nation, is no more. Perhaps I am wrong to say that. Nevertheless, we will not see him again as we have seen him for these many years. We cannot run to him for advice and seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow, not to me only but to millions and millions in this country. And it is a little difficult to soften the blow by any other advice that I or anyone else can give you. The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in him was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine it for many more years and a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.

"I have a sense of utter shame, both as an individual and as head of the Government, that we should have failed to keep the greatest treasure that we possessed.

With tears in his eyes, he declared; "A glory has departed and the sun that warmed and brightened our hearts has set and we shiver in the cold and the dark. We mourn him; we shall always mourn him, because we are human, and cannot forget our valued master; but I know that he would not like us to mourn him. No tears came to his eye when his dearest and closest went away; there was only the firm resolve to persevere, to serve the great cause that he had chosen. So he would chide us if we merely mourn. That is a poor way of doing homage to him. The only way is to express our determination, to pledge ourselves anew, to conduct ourselves so, and to dedicate ourselves to the great task, which he undertook and which he accomplished to such a large extent."

These words found echo in millions of hearts and minds throughout India.

"We must hold together, and all our petty troubles and difficulties and conflicts must be ended in the face of this great disaster. A great disaster is a symbol to us to remember all the big things of life and forget the small things of which we have thought too much. In his death he has reminded us of the big things of life, the living truth, and if we remember that, then it will be well with India... And while we pray the greatest prayer that we can offer is to take a pledge to dedicate ourselves to the truth, and to the cause for which this great countryman of ours lived and for which he had died. That is the best prayer that we can

offer him and his memory. That is the best prayer that we can offer to India and ourselves. Jai Hind."

The next day the body was taken to the Raj Ghat in a long unending procession. On the way millions assembled with tearful eyes to pay their last homage. When the funeral fire was lit "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai" filled the air. Among the lakhs of people around the fire were Lord Mountbatten the last Governor General of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and many others. In that place is now the Mahatma's Samadhi which has become a place of pilgrimage for the nation and the world.

After the cremation the ashes were put in many urns to be immersed in the various sacred places and rivers of India. The Prime Minister took them to be immersed in the sacred Prayag where the two great rivers - Ganga and Yamuna meet. When the urn came to Madras, it was placed in Rajaji Hall in the Government House Compound in Mount Road, where millions of people paid their last homage. It was decided that the ashes should be immersed in Rameswaram and in Cauvery at Trichinopoly. Sri Bhaktavatsalam took it to Rameswaram. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and I had the privilege of taking it to Trichinopoly. The urn was decorated with flowers and placed in an open carriage, so that all on the way could have its darshan. The special train started from Egmore at 8.00 a.m. Throughout the way on both sides of the rail track and in the Stations where it stopped millions crowded to see and worship it. Thousands sobbed and wept as one of their own family members had died. It was about 11.00 p.m. when we reached Trichy. A pandal with a platform decorated with flowers had been made ready in which the urn was placed. There was Bhajan and Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram sung throughout the night. The next day the urn was taken on a five mile procession to the bank of Cauvery. I had the privilege and fortune to take it on my head to the river. It was an ocean of humanity eagerly waiting to see and worship the urn. Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai rent the air. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan took the urn from me, mixed sandal paste solution with the ashes and immersed them in the sacred river.

Thus ended the earthly life of the greatest man of the century as a sacrifice at the altar of humanity. Many proclaimed that it was the Second crucifixion.

22. Unification of India

IMMEDIATELY after the declaration of Independence of India on the 15th August, 1947, the nation faced a very intricate problem and a great challenge to our statesmanship, which will affect vitally the future of our country. If one recalls the political state of India on the eve of Independence, one would realise the stupendous magnitude and intricate complications of this problem.

During the British regime, India was divided into what was then called British India, which consisted of the various provinces and the Indian Princely States. The provinces were directly under the British rule and their transfer of power to the newly-born Indian Dominion did not pose any problem. But there were as many as 556 Indian States governed by the Indian rulers. All these States were Independent and functioned directly under the sovereignty of the British Crown. When India attained freedom on 15th August, 1947, it was declared that the sovereignty reverted to the States and that these 556 States would become independent sovereign States free to accede either to India or Pakistan or remain independent. This being the Constitutional position, some States wanted to form their own confederation and join the Commonwealth. Some wanted to remain independent. Some States like Junagadh and Hyderabad wanted to accede to Pakistan. How it would have affected India, if Hyderabad and Junagadh had acceded to Pakistan is something to be imagined! Such a course would have created untold political, economic and administrative problems. Similarly if some of these States had preferred to remain independent, or be a part of the Commonwealth, that also would end in disastrous consequences. With India divided into parts directly under the Indian Dominion, parts acceding to Pakistan, and parts having direct relations with the Commonwealth and parts as independent States — one shudders at such a vivisection of India. This would have resulted in splitting India into fragments leading to perpetual friction, leading even to internecine wars. But thank God, that India had a man who could tackle this challenge with tact, wisdom, strength and courage. That man was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

In the Indian States there were powerful and rich Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs and Chiefs. Each one wielded great influence by his own power and the long tradition of rule over his subjects. Responsible Government

was a thing unknown except in a few out of the 566 States. In those States the ruler was the fountain-head of all power — legislative and executive. In some parts of the country, particularly in Kathiawad and Gujarat alone there were as many as 323 States — big and small, and at every two miles the boundaries of States changed. To integrate all these States into one India was a feat unparalleled in the history of the world. The way in which Patel approached the rulers of these States and made them agree to give up their powers and merge their States completely in the Indian Union — is nothing short of a great marvel. Steadily but quickly, in stages, he completed the full integration of these States into the Indian Union in an incredibly short period of two and a half years.

As soon as the Interim Government took charge, the Sardar quickly sized up the situation and a States Department was newly formed in the Home Ministry under his direct guidance. He wanted to take the various Princes and Chiefs in the States into his confidence in the great and grand task of creating a unified India. He had to approach the problem with great tact and statesmanship and appeal to their patriotism and love of the country, so that they all could be persuaded to accede to India. And so on the 5th July, 1947 on the very day of the formation of the States Department he sent the following letter to the various Rajahs, Maharajas and Chiefs enunciating the policy and programme for the accession of the States within the Indian Union and exhorting them to join the Indian Constituent Assembly so that they can, together with the representatives of the people in the rest of India, lay the foundations for a United India, which will be for the good of all.

It is the lesson of history that it was owing to the country's politically fragmented condition and our inability to take a united stand that India succumbed to successive waves of invaders. Our mutual conflicts and internecine quarrels and jealousies have in the past been the cause of our downfall and our falling victims to foreign domination a number of times. We cannot afford to fall into those errors or traps again. We are on the threshold of Independence. It is true that we have not been able to preserve the unity of the country entirely unimpaired in the final stage.

To the bitter disappointment and sorrow of many of us, some parts have chosen to go out of India and to set up their own Government. But there can be no question that despite this separation a fundamental homogeneity of culture and sentiment, reinforced by the compulsive logic of mutual interests would continue to govern us. Much more so would it be the case with the vast majority of States which, owing to their geographical contiguity and indissolubilities, economic, cultural and political, must continue to maintain relations of mutual friendship and cooperation with the rest of India. The safety and preservation of these States, as well as of India, demand unity and mutual cooperation between its different parts.

When the British established their rule in India, they evolved the doctrine of Paramountcy which established the supremacy of British interests. Under that doctrine the States' role has been more of subordination than cooperation. Outside the field of Paramountcy, there has been a very wide scope in which relations between British India and the States have been regulated by enlightened mutual interests. Now that British rule is ending, the demand has been made that the States should regain their independence. In so far as Paramountcy embodied the submission of States to a foreign will, I have every sympathy with this demand. But I do not think it can be their desire to utilise this freedom from domination in a manner which is injurious to the common interest of India, or which militates against the ultimate Paramountcy of popular interests and welfare, or which might result in the abandonment of that mutually useful relationship that has developed between British India and Indian States during the last century.

This has been amply demonstrated by the fact that a majority of Indian States have already come into the Constituent Assembly. To those who have not done so, I appeal that they should join now. The States have already accepted the basic principle that for Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications they would come into the Indian Union. We ask no more of them than accession of these three subjects in which the common interests of the country are involved. In other matters, we would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence.

This country is the proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in the States and some in British India, but all alike partake of its culture and character. We are all knit together by bonds of blood and feeling no less than of self-interest. None can segregate us into segments; no impassable barriers can be set up between us. I suggest that it is, therefore, better for us to make laws sitting together as friends than to make treaties as aliens. I invite my friends, the Rulers of States and their people to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness and cooperation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our Motherland for the common good of us all.

There appears to be a great deal of misunderstanding about the attitude of the Congress towards States. I should like to make it clear that it is not the desire of Congress to interfere in any manner whatever with the domestic affairs of the States. They are no enemies of the Princely Order, but, on the other hand, wish them and their people, under their aegis, all prosperity, contentment and happiness. Nor would it be my policy to conduct the relations of the new Department with the States in any manner which savours of the domination of one over the other. If there would be any domination, it would be that of our mutual interests and welfare. Our common objective should be to understand

each other's point of view and come to decisions acceptable to all and in the best interests of the country.

We are at a momentous stage in the history of India. By common endeavour, we can raise the country to a new greatness while lack of unity will expose us to fresh calamities. I hope the Indian States will bear in mind that the alternative to cooperation is anarchy and chaos which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin if we are unable to get together.

The Sardar set forth on his new task with utmost statesmanship. The imperative need for bringing about a constitutional relationship between the States and the successor Indian Government was urgent to avoid chaos. And so the Sardar produced a simple, easily acceptable yet most effective scheme by inviting the States to accede to the Indian Dominion on only the three subjects of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications, in which the common interest of the entire country including the States were deeply involved. Negotiations, which followed, were carried on in a spirit of realism and deep sense of responsibility on both sides, and finally an Instrument of Accession was produced, acceptable to both sides, which was signed within a fortnight by many of the States. It was the first decisive achievement of the Sardar in this sphere, which had far-reaching effects in the years to follow. The link thus forged between the Indian Dominion and the States proved strong and strengthened India to bear the stress and strain of the upheaval and difficulties of the post-partition days. A new organic relationship began to develop which had now been welded into a strong political unit between these two parts of India which had so far been kept apart.

When the consolidation of India was going on in Northern India with considerable smoothness and success, we, the Ministers of the then Madras State were greatly disturbed by the happenings in Hyderabad, our neighbour. It was openly talked that the Nizam wanted to accede to Pakistan. If that were allowed it would have been a continuous sore in the heart of Southern India. News came to us that an organisation of militant Muslims under the name Razakars and the Nizam's police and military forces were committing heart-rending atrocities on innocent men, women and children on both sides of the border including innocent villagers in the Madras State. As the then Madras State included the Circars in Andhra which had a large border with the then State of Hyderabad, we were greatly concerned with these incidents. To protect our borders we urgently needed arms. Sri O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, the then Chief Minister therefore sent me to Delhi to meet Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Patel with an urgent request to send arms. I could not meet the Sardar, but could meet the Prime Minister and told him of our needs. He said he would speak to the Home Minister and send us help soon.

But help came in an unexpected and dramatic way. After having solved the problem of accession of all the other States including Mysore, Sardarji

took up the question of the biggest of them all. He ordered the army into Hyderabad in what he called a police action. The action was swift and strong and within two days the problem was solved by the surrender of the Nizam. The Razakar leader fled to Pakistan and peace was restored in that troubled State.

After the successful termination of the police action in Hyderabad on 23rd February, 1949, Sardar Patel visited Madras where he was given a hero's welcome. He spoke on that occasion to a mammoth gathering in the Island Grounds in which he gave his message for the building of a great India. He said:

"After a prolonged struggle, the country has achieved freedom. But it is not the freedom that we wanted. It is not the freedom that the deliverer of the country Mahatma Gandhi wanted it to be.

Free India is a child of a year and a half. Its future depends upon as to how we build it today. Therefore, we have to nurse it carefully and to feed, clothe and consolidate it properly. It is our great good fortune that we have an opportunity to build our country to our own fashion. So it is up to you to realise what our responsibility is and what the country needs today.

"The first requisite is unity and peace. If there is no unity, the country is bound to lag behind. Therefore, we must first adjust our differences to bring complete harmony and peace in the country. It would be an evil day for this country when the Government will have to use repressive measures as a regular feature of its policy.

"Today, we are passing through a period of crisis; and our young men, in their impatience, have not realised that the freedom is likely to be lost or will yield nothing if we will not appreciate that it is our duty to unite and consolidate our forces. In unity lies our strength. We must believe that we are all Indians and that we are equals. There can be no distinction between man and man. All must have equal opportunities and equal responsibilities. It is good to say so, but it is indeed difficult to put it into practice. So we must continuously strive towards that end.

The other thing that we have to do is to secure peace and order in this country. For a few years at least we must forget to give threats to the Government every now and then. We cannot do anything if our Government is being challenged day after day by groups of people who want their own way. Since Gandhiji came, he put before us an ideal of peaceful method, i. e., Truth and Non-violence. But if people, every now and then begin to threaten and challenge the Government, it will hardly be able to do anything. Forces are coming up in this country which will create chaos and disorder. You have, therefore, to think what your responsibility should be.

Now, after partition, we had a huge problem. Those who partitioned the country had mental reservations. They thought that this partition

was not the last word and they started the game immediately thereafter. Amidst Kathiawad States, they went to Junagadh and got its accession to Pakistan. It was the first danger sign for splitting India and we saw the game. We woke up in time and those who tried to play that game saw that we were not sleeping.

Then you saw the Kashmir trouble. We had many difficulties. But the Government of India brought the situation quickly under control; and, I should say, we enhanced our reputation by sending our army there. It has proved its mettle there. It is a great thing that our army, manned absolutely by our own people, showed, by their strategy, by their valour, and by their organising ability, that it can stand comparison to any army in the world! It is a great thing.

Then your neighbour Hyderabad gave us long sleepless nights. Often your Chief Minister and others were angry with us and were thinking that we were neglecting the South and that we were heading for a disaster. They hardly knew our difficulties and plans. You know the pictures that were painted if Hyderabad was attacked or if Hyderabad attacked us. We had to make preparations all over India to avoid trouble anywhere and you also know what we predicted came true. We then asked you to wait and see and we will perform the operation with the least possible bleeding. That is what we have shown in the first year of our freedom.

If we shall realise our responsibility, there will be no dearth of food. Of course, there is scarcity to a certain extent. The shortage of food, in terms of statistics, is seven percent. But in a vast country like this, if we realize our responsibility, it is practically nothing. Do not waste. Produce more food. Use every inch of land available to you for growing vegetables, fruit and food etc. Wherever there is a wasteland, it should be the duty of Government, local bodies etc. to use all their resources in the immediate task of growing more food on it. Then again, whatever surplus grain you may have, do give it to the Government. Do not be selfish when your neighbours are starving. This is not India's culture. This is not the way that Gandhiji has shown us. Let not our neighbours starve! Therefore, educate the peasant, tell him it is his religious duty to pass over his surplus to the Government.

Today therefore, if I have faith in the future, it is based on this spirit of self-reliance. Nevertheless, I would not be true to myself if I did not confess to a sense of apprehension and anxiety. Certain tendencies and developments in our administrative and public affairs fill me with some disquiet and sadness of heart. The country can realise the feelings of one who has spent a major part of his public life in witnessing epics of sacrifice and selfless endeavour and feats of discipline and unity and who now finds enacted before him scenes which mock at the past. Our public life seems to be degenerating into ponds of stagnant waters; our conscience is troubled with doubts and despair about the

possibilities of improvement. We do not seem to be profiting either from history or experience. Yet the tasks that confront us are as complex and taxing as ever. They demand the best from us."

The success of Sardar Patel in this great task of unification of India was due to the right attitude which he brought to bear on it. On fundamentals he was firm as a rock. But on non-fundamentals he was extremely negotiable and yielded generously. And he had the wisdom to distinguish between the two. He appealed to the noble and patriotic sentiments in the Princes and many of them nobly responded. He on his part recognised that the rulers had by heredity and long history certain claims on their people, which the people must honour. Their dignity and privilege and their means of subsistence on a reasonable standard had to be assured. He also impressed on them that their future lay in the service of their people and country and not in their assertion of separate autonomy. He negotiated with them with the respect they deserved by their position and this attitude of respect, seeing the needs of the other side and above all appeal to their higher nature, yielded results and most of the Princes willingly acceded to the Indian Union. But there were a few — Junagadh and Hyderabad — which did not. And where reason and persuasions did not pay, he had the clarity, courage and the strength not to hesitate to take the firm action necessitated by the situation.

With the disappearance of the personal factor of the rulers of the States there was no great difficulty in the federal financial integration of the States, which necessarily followed. Fresh Instruments of Accession were prepared for the States and were signed by their respective Rajpramukhs, which also enlarged the content of Accession to all matters specified in the Union and Concurrent Legislative lists excepting those relating to taxation. Finally, when the Constitution of India framed by the Constituent Assembly was duly adopted, it was also accepted by the various States of the Unions and made applicable there too by means of the proclamation issued by their respective Rajpramukhs, thus completing the momentous task of integration and democratisation of the States. Hence, when India declared herself a Sovereign Democratic Republic on January 26, 1950, she was one duly integrated organic Union, wherein there was no disparity of any kind between the different federating units.

Little did the die-hard British politicians and prophets of doom expect that the unification will come so swiftly and so soon. We must appreciate many of the Princes whose patriotic feelings inspired them to join the Indian Union. But the great factor was the ability of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, his insight and understanding of the problem and the wisdom and sympathy with which he approached the heads of the States and when the need came dealt with an iron hand as in Hyderabad. We and generations yet to come have to be eternally grateful to the Great Sardar for his great achievement of the unification of India, which scholars think as one of the marvels of History.

23. As Minister of Education

MY tenure in the Central Assembly gave me parliamentary experience and cultivation of an All India outlook. It gave me the necessary background for doing effective work when I took up the office as the first Minister of Education in the Madras Province in Independent India. At that time the "Madras Presidency", as it was called, extended over a vast area from Mangalore in the West Coast to Chicacole in the North consisting of the present state of Tamil Nadu minus Kanyakumari District, South Canara and Malabar Districts now in Karnataka and Kerala and the major portion of the present Andhra Pradesh consisting of Nellore, Krishna, East and West Godavari, Guntur, Vizag, Chittoor, Anantapur, Kurnool and other districts of Rayalseema. That office carried me to many of these districts and gave me a rich administrative experience.

Having been interested in education for many years and having been inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda on Education, I took up immediately the task of reorganising education in the province. I cannot do better than quote from the Administrative Reports on Education of that period and the speech I had delivered in the Legislative Assembly while moving the demand for the Education Department in the budget discussion in March 1949:

"In moving the Demand for Education, I would like to say in brief a few words about our Educational Reorganisation schemes. Many of us are familiar with the faults in the prevalent system of education. It has been said it was merely bookish, that it trained people merely to be clerks, and that it did not develop leadership and confidence in our children. It was pointed out that it did not give them the strength and the training to eke out a livelihood and thus it did not equip people for life. It was also said that it did not contribute towards the formation of character and high ideals and did not impart civic sense or the sense of citizenship to our children. Many of our educational experts have pointed out that such a system of education was not suited to the genius of our people and that a system of education suited to our needs and conditions must be evolved. When taking up the reorganisation of education, care must also be taken to see that we have a comprehensive view of education as a whole, instead of dealing with it in parts.

"Many of our national leaders have thought over this matter and expressed their views on it. Many educational Commissions and Committees had been constituted which had submitted their reports. This Government also issued a questionnaire to elicit opinion on important matters concerning educational reform. At the instance of Government, the Secondary Education Board considered these matters and set up an Expert Committee consisting of some of the most prominent educationists in the Province to suggest the necessary reform in our system of secondary education. That Committee went thoroughly into the matter and made its recommendations. These recommendations were sifted by the Secondary Education Board. After having been passed by that Board, they were put up before the Provincial Advisory Board of Education consisting of representatives of all the Universities as well as other distinguished educationists. After having been approved by the Provincial Advisory Board of Education, the task of drawing up syllabuses for the various subjects under the Reorganisation Schemes was entrusted to experts in these subjects. Twenty-seven committees worked hard and drew out the detailed syllabuses in various subjects. These, in turn, were approved by the Secondary Education Board and later on by Government. Before proceeding further, I must convey to the distinguished educationists who were members of these committees the warm thanks and appreciation of Government for their hard and able work, but for whose expeditiousness and earnestness, the reorganized schemes could not have been introduced this year.

"Any scheme of reorganisation of education must bear in mind the various needs of the people for which they must be equipped. One of the chief defects in the present system of education was that it led to a blind alley. Boys went through the High School and did not know what they were fit for in life at the end of it and so many blindly joined the Intermediate. After the Intermediate also, many could not see any better and if they were well-to-do they joined the B.A. classes and so on. One of the chief reforms advocated by great educationists for over a quarter of a century, has been that a large number of boys and girls who cannot afford to go beyond the secondary school stage must be trained for some avocation within that stage while such of those who can afford to go to higher education may be allowed to do so.

"But education is something more than merely training for a living. It is not enough if we can make a boy or a girl an earning member. It is necessary also that he or she must have a social sense. He is the member of a society in which he lives and has his being. A man may earn well and be ever so much intelligent but if he does not have a social sense and the quality to get along with others in amity and in cooperation, his life cannot be happy. And so, it is absolutely necessary that this social sense must be given in schools in theory as well as in practice. It is not sufficient if he is merely taught social sciences like

History, Geography or Civics by way of intellectual equipment but it is necessary that he should have a coordinated sense of all these social sciences in addition to practical training based on this knowledge."

"In addition to being a member of his own community, every man is also a member of a State. The modern State is the sum total of the individuals constituting it, in which everyone has rights to enjoy and duties to discharge. For any democracy to function, it is essential that people must cultivate not only a sense of neighbourliness and social sense with the people around them but also a sense of citizenship by which one is keenly aware of not only his rights but also his responsibilities to the State of which he is a part. To live together and to plan and work for the State is the very essence and foundation of democratic life. Any education worth the name in modern times must provide for this training in citizenship. The family is the essential and indispensable unit of any society. The working man or woman turns back to the home for security as well as for a restful life. In fact, the home is the unit in which men and women live and where children are brought up. Unless the home is made happy, men cannot do their work in peace and in joy. The persons who can make the home pleasant and happy are the women, the wife or the mother of the household, as the case may be. It has been pointed out that it was in this respect that our old system of education where the same type of education was given both for boys and girls, has been most lacking. Unless the curricula in our girls' schools are reorganised to suit the necessities of their life at home, it cannot be said to train them for life. These four factors, viz., training for a living, cultivation of a social sense, equipping children with the knowledge and practice of the rights and duties of citizenship and training our women for their duties and responsibilities, above all, a cultural view of life based on purity, devotion and character - these are the essential needs of any modern society.

"Now coming to the methods of education, our education has been merely bookish and it did not give the people a practical training. Children study many things through books without understanding them. Mere examinations have dominated our schools. A boy is considered good or bad according to the marks he secures in examinations, whatever may be his other qualities. The result has been that it has put a premium on mere bookish reading and marks in examinations and not valued practical attainments, leadership or character. It has been pointed out that education should be based on experience and only such an education will be retained by the children through life. This principle of education through activity and experience has been accepted all over the world both in the elementary and the secondary stages and if any education is to be effective in inculcating knowledge as well as good habits, it must be based upon the right kind of activities.

These are the essential elements for any educational reorganisation. And this is exactly what has been done in the recent Reorganisation of Education in our Province.

"In the primary stage, the Government have accepted basic education as their declared policy. Basic education was accepted by this Government not for the mere reason that Mahatma Gandhi is the father of the scheme. Mahatma Gandhi himself never wanted us to accept anything unless we were thoroughly satisfied that it would be good for the country. Today, if this Government have accepted basic education as their policy it is because they are convinced that it is the best type of education that can be made available in this country. As I had referred to above, education through activity is a principle accepted all over the world. Education through a constructive and continuous craft which will be the basis of these activities is the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to education, and this is by no means now in educational ideology. Neither are we the only people who have accepted this policy of basic education after the Congress came into power but long before 1947 in the days when Congressmen were in jail. The Post-war Reconstruction Committee Report, commonly called the Sargent Report, has put its seal of approval on basic education and has advocated its expansion throughout India. The basic principles as laid down by Mahatma Gandhi were accepted in the report.

"Coming to secondary education, the reorganisation scheme has taken into account all the defects of the present educational system and has taken steps to remove them. In the new scheme, activities have been provided in the middle school classes. There will be a basic craft, the activities in which will be exploited for the purpose of education. In addition to the basic craft, there will be activities based on social studies, citizenship training, excursions, school assemblies etc., which will make instruction not merely bookish but practical. Syllabuses have been framed for the integration of such projects as History, Geography and Civics into one subject called Social Studies. Training in citizenship also has been provided for. These imply not only bookish or merely intellectual study but also the giving of such social and civic training which will enable people to develop their sense of responsibility towards society as well as the State. In addition, this will develop team work and a sense of leadership. Besides, the bifurcation of studies recommended by various committees on education for the last quarter of a century has also been accepted and courses have been provided for the subjects of Civil Engineering, Agriculture, Secretarial, Teaching Practice, Domestic Science, Arts and Crafts. Special grants have been offered to such schools as may come forward to provide these courses. Fifty schools were chosen for this purpose in the current year.

"Women's education has been organised on right lines. With a view to making their training more purposeful, home-craft has been made

the basic craft for all girls' schools so that it will train them for life. Home-craft implies not only such things as nutrition, kitchen work and related subjects but also the proper upbringing of children, nursing etc. These must be inculcated with a proper national and cultural background consistent with the highest traditions of our country. I would like to make it clear here that it is not the intention of Government to deny higher education to girls taking such subjects. Such of those girls who choose Domestic Science may enter courses of studies in the Universities if they desire to do so. This aspect of reorganisation seeks to train the large majority of girls for the avocation which they may choose in life later on.

"I am grateful to the teaching profession for taking up the working of the reorganized scheme warmly and whole-heartedly. As this House is aware, there was some opposition to the scheme when it was first introduced in the beginning of the year. That opposition was mainly due to a want of understanding of the implications of the scheme as well as their unpreparedness for it. As I had explained before, the principles behind the reorganisation have been accepted all over the world. In fact the teaching profession was demanding such a reform of education in its numerous conferences and resolutions. But like other resolutions in conferences, they did not expect that the Government would accept them at their word and when it came upon the scene, it was rather sudden. In spite of it, I must congratulate the brothers and sisters in the teaching profession for the energy they have brought forward to make it a success. I have had occasion to go to many of the districts in this Province. I have addressed scores of teachers' conferences and I have found their enthusiasm for the new education. In fact, those who opposed it loudest then are its great protagonists today. Those who are working it have been amazed at the new possibilities for the development of the child in the reorganised scheme of secondary education. I would invite such of the honorary Members of the House who are interested, to visit some of the schools, where it is being done. As usual, some schools have required some time to come in line with the spirit of the reorganisation and I hope they will be able to readjust themselves very soon and share the benefit of the reformed scheme.

"With regard to collegiate education, this is mainly a matter for the Universities. But there is one aspect of collegiate education which any modern Government must take up seriously and that is the aspect of research. Scientific research is the basis of all our progress in peace as well as in war and no Government can neglect it except at its peril. The standards in India have to be pulled up to come in line with world standards. And so, it is necessary to establish at least just a few institutions which can provide scope for higher knowledge and research. It is with this end in view and to make the Presidency College an

institution of higher learning and research, that the Government appointed an Expert Committee under the distinguished Chairmanship of Sir C. V. Raman. That committee has submitted its report, I expect to be able to place the report of the committee on the table of the House on a later occasion. That report has been referred to University and also to the Provincial Advisory Board of Education. After their opinions are received, the Government propose to take up reorganisation of the Presidency College even in the next collegiate year.

"There is one other aspect of education which was lacking in this Province before and that is the matter of adult education. It is unfortunate that we did not have any scheme of adult education previously. The result was that many people who became literates in schools, lapsed back to illiteracy as the habit of reading was not kept up. Apart from literacy, adult education should also provide enlarged opportunities for knowledge for such of those adults who might not have had the fortune to go through schools and colleges. It is to provide these opportunities that the Government have come forward with a well-organized plan of adult education. In that scheme, Adult literacy schools are now being organised. The essential training which will be necessary for teaching adults is being provided in training camps where teachers for adult schools are being trained. Camps for training social workers have been provided for. The most important of all is the provision of Rural Colleges in which people who have not had the benefit of education will be given course in more advanced learning so that they can equip themselves for higher education. In Rural Colleges, different courses have been provided for men as well as women such as may suit their different needs. This House will be glad to hear that the Government of India have begun to take a keen interest in adult education which they have renamed as social education.

"Besides effective steps are being taken to ensure efficiency in elementary education. This will mean both steps for avoiding wastage as well as providing for better supervision. The matter of providing a school medical service is also under consideration. It has been pointed out that the problem of the school medical service is more of supply of nutrition than mere examination and this very important matter must be examined from that point of view. As in all progressive countries, fresh aids to education are also under the consideration of Government and one of them is the introduction of visual aids in schools. Film Library is being formed, which it is expected, will come into operation from the next school year. These films will not be of mere entertainment value, but will be utilized as aides in actual teaching. The use of the filmstrip is also being invoked. Representations have been made to the Government of India to refund tax on 16 mm projectors purchased for use in educational institutions so that it may be within the reach of the schools to be in a position to purchase a projector for themselves.

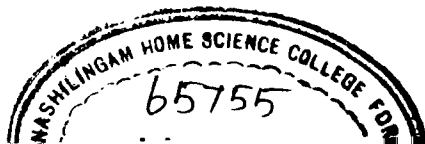
The possibilities of utilizing the radio for purpose of education of children in schools as well as adults are also being explored.

“The House may be aware of the steps taken by Government to develop and enrich the various regional languages in the Province. Poet laureateships have been offered in all the four regional languages and Sanskrit. Prizes are being offered to the best books written in the various aspects of knowledge. Provision has been made for the publication of original works on various subjects from amongst ancient manuscripts. Steps are being taken to acquire and nationalize the great works of poet Bharathi. A Central College of Karnatic Music is being started under the joint auspices of this Government and the Centre. Help has been given for the preparation of Encyclopaedias in two of the main languages in the Province and I am glad to be able to say that a sample booklet was issued recently with regard to one of them and the work is going ahead. This is one of the biggest efforts made in modern times for the development of any of the Indian languages. A system of military training for the school children on an absolutely voluntary basis as the junior division of the National Cadet Corps is also being organized and officers recruited from amongst schools will be given the preliminary training in the coming summer vacation. Steps have also been taken to improve the quality of personnel in the service of the Education Department in the subordinate as well as the gazetted ranks. Provision for the education of defective children has also been enlarged and for the first time in the history of this Province, a school for mentally defective children is proposed to be opened. To spread the new ideas on education and to train teachers, guide-books are being arranged to be published for teachers as well as a new magazine for that purpose. Training camps are also being organized throughout the Province.

“I do not like to tire the House further except to say that I have always been grateful to the House for the many constructive suggestions made by them in the past and I am looking forward to such constructive criticisms which may be made today. Education, indeed, is a great task for any country. It is particularly so in this country where the educated are so few and the field that education has to cover is so vast. God willing, it is my dream, that we should give the children of this country a type of education which will make them strong and noble and that only will lay the foundation for a glorious future for this great country. This cannot be done by mere orders of Government or even by mere provision of funds. This can be done only by the willing cooperation of the millions of people in this country. The cooperation of the home, the school and the public are necessary to make any scheme of education a success. All agencies must be united in this great task and I request the earnest cooperation of all concerned in this great work”.

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The demand was discussed through the whole day and finally I was called upon to reply at 6.00 p.m. Some of the extracts clarifying certain points are given below :

“Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very grateful to the many friends who have taken part in this debate. The tone of the debate ranged from personal abuse to a deep appreciation of the Education Reorganisation Schemes. While replying, Sir, you do not expect me to reply to that portion of discussion which was mere abuse. You would expect me to keep the dignity of the House by ignoring them.

“Now sir, let me clear a doubt expressed about basic education once and for all, if that can be done. Mere craft is no basic education and basic education does not presume to teach everything through craft. Basic education presumes to teach through not only activities in the craft but also through activities in the school, in the field, in the home, in the playgrounds and everywhere, what they see, touch and do. These experiences must be utilised for purposes of knowledge. All of us study many things throughout life without understanding. Basic education presumes that these activities and experiences which children go through, throughout the day and throughout the seasons, must be utilised for the purpose of education. It does not say that mere spinning shall be the activity but on the other hand, it should provide for all the activities necessary for education.

“Another very important matter was raised by the Leader of the Opposition and elaborated by other members. This is about the Government's policy towards aided institutions. They said that aided institutions must be encouraged a great deal. I entirely agree with them, having been connected with aided institutions myself, and having given a lifetime of service to the development of one such institution I know the great benefit that has been conferred to this province by aided institutions. I can never be a party to any measure which will not give facilities to aided schools to develop in their own enthusiasm.

“Now, I come to religious instruction. One other very important matter has been raised in the course of discussions and that is the matter of religious instruction. I am one of those who believe that real religion represents the highest culture of man. Real religion should mean love for all and respect for everybody but it is unfortunate that in every religion dogmas and intolerance have crept in. And it is because of these tendencies that there have been quarrels in the name of religion in this country as well as in this world. The result of this has been that secular States have avoided imparting religious instruction in schools. There are so many religious groups and within each religion so many denominations that they find it difficult to evolve a national system of religious education to suit the children belonging to the various religions and groups. It is for that very reason that in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights the Draft Constitution also has held

that 'No religious instruction shall be provided by the State in any educational institution maintained out of State funds'. As it was originally drafted, the Draft Constitution provided for religious instruction being given in aided institutions. I speak subject to correction. I think further amendments have been made by the Constituent Assembly to the effect that no educational institution recognized by the Government should impart religious instruction and this Province has to follow the Constitution of India.

"On the other hand, it is felt by all that the fundamental basis of all religions is the same and that we should evolve a system of ethics based on these fundamentals. While it is neither good nor profitable to go into the dogmas of each particular religion, it is necessary that we should have a moral basis for our lives. And nothing is more important in the schools than to give this background of ethics and higher life. I believe, Sir, such an education of ethics and higher life, accepting the brotherhood of man and inculcating qualities of love, devotion and character to all children will not be against the provision in the Constitution of India. The Government will consider sympathetically the suggestion made by members of the House to evolve such a code of ethics and higher life which may be taught in schools.

"Now, Sir, I think I have almost replied to the various points raised by many of the hon. members of this House and I would only like to say this at the end. I have not been discouraged by the strong terms that certain friends chose to use against me, but I must say that people who want to initiate new reforms and policies must be prepared for a certain amount of opposition from people who may not understand them. However, I believe, that when the History of the Education of this Province comes to be written, these years will be considered as years in which boldness, initiative and vision have been shown in the educational reforms of this Province".

[The Education Administration Report of the Government of Madras for 1947-48 stated as follows:]

1. The Main points of reorganisation are:

1. Introduction of crafts as basic activities in schools in the middle school stage as a continuation of the principle of basic education. This would give a vocational bias to such of those children as may intend going for trade schools or professionals.

2. The introduction of citizenship training. This new aspect while it consists of the main elements of scouting, uses these activities to infuse confidence and strength of character in the children.

3. The introduction of social studies: The study of history, geography and civics in watertight compartments without correlation with each other was replaced by the study of social studies i.e., the development of society as a whole.

4. Introduction of home craft in all girls' schools so as to make the girls' training purposeful.

5. Bifurcation of courses in the high school classes so that a large majority of pupils who have a taste for such avocations may take to these courses. Engineering, Secretarial work, Agriculture, Domestic Science, Drawing and Painting, Music and Dancing have been provided in the bifurcated courses and these have been introduced in a limited number of schools to start with.

6. The regional language gets its rightful place as the first language. Then comes the second language group with Hindustani, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and other Indian Languages from which a child can choose any one. English comes as the third language.]

2. Improvement of the status of teachers

The Government were fully alive to the fact that the efficient working of any scheme depended upon the persons that work it and in the context of the reorganisation of education, they took up the question of raising the status of the teachers and the Inspectorate. The salaries of teachers of all categories were raised. The grants for aided elementary schools were enhanced. Besides arrangements were made to disburse the salaries of these teachers on the monthly basis. The increase in dearness allowance has been made applicable to them and they have been given opportunities to achieve higher qualification i.e., to become teachers of Secondary grade and Collegiate grade by appearing for examinations privately. Avenues of promotion have been thrown open to secondary grade training teachers under aided and local board managements by reserving 40 per cent of the post of Junior Deputy Inspectors for them.

As regards teachers in secondary schools, the Government have compelled the aided management to pay them at local board rates and to enable them to do so, the original half-grant has been enhanced to two-third net grant. These teachers were also assured stability of tenure by a revision of the form of their agreement with the management. The rates of dearness allowance applicable to teachers in Government schools have been made applicable to secondary school teachers in all managements and teachers in high schools have also been given scope for recruitment as District Educational Officers.

3. Library Act

A Library Act has been passed with the intention of Government to develop a well-knit library organisation throughout the Province as one of the main instruments of adult education. It is also the purpose of Government to develop a system of aided libraries to afford scope for local initiative to come into play. Provision has also been made for visual instruction under this scheme.

For the first time in the history of the Madras Educational Department, 12 secondary grade teachers from local board and aided schools were

recruited to the category of Junior Deputy Inspectors in the Madras Educational Subordinate Service in March, 1949.

4. Adult Education

With adult suffrage as the basis of our Constitution, it is necessary to take up seriously the education of our masses. There has been no planned activity in this direction till now. Adult education may be conceived in three parts:

1. Adult literacy schools
2. Institutions for adult education, and
3. The organisation of a library system.

The Government took up all these three branches and their scheme provided for the opening of adult literacy schools throughout the province. An Adult Education Officer was appointed. As adult literacy work requires a different training from that given for teaching children, training schools were opened — six each in Tamil Nadu and Andhra areas and three each in Malabar and South Kanara Districts. Teachers and others with a minimum educational qualification were trained in batches of 30 for six weeks in the methods of making adults rapidly literate. The citizenship training envisaged in the Adult Education programme not only trains teachers in the new citizenship course but also gives scope to young men and women to learn to channelise the enthusiasm of young folk in social service. The syllabus provides a rural approach to the problem and gives a basic grounding for rural workers.

Provision has also been made for the starting of rural colleges throughout the Province. Two types of rural colleges have been evolved so that they may suit the needs of both men and women. An examination will be held at the end of the two years' course when certificates of proficiency will be given. They have been put under grant-in-aid system so that as many institutions as may be needed may be started throughout the Province.

5. Visual Education

The Central Film Library is opened during the year in the office of the Director of Public Instruction.

6. National Cadet Corps Junior Division

The sanction for the formation of National Cadet Corps of the Junior Division in this Province was given effect to from this year. Twenty-one units and 2 sub-units were raised and these were distributed to 35 schools in the province.

7. Appointment of Asthana Kavi

At a public darbar held on the 14th August 1949 at Madras the insignia of Asthana Kavi was awarded to:

- i) Sri Namakkal Kavignar V. Ramalingam Pillai — Poet Laureate in Tamil.

- ii) Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon — Poet Laureate for Malayalam.

8. Educational Journal

The Department is publishing a quarterly magazine "New Education," of which the Principal, Lady Willington Training College, is the Editor.

9. Development of Tamil and other regional languages

Another aspect of the work during the period was the service to the development of Tamil language and other regional languages. Some of these were:

- a) Introduction of Thirukkural in the regular syllabi of Tamil studies from the VI Standard onwards.
- b) Purchase of the copyright of the works of our National Poet Subramania Bharathiar, so that it can become the common property of the Nation to enable its free use.
- c) Equalising the status and pay of Tamil and other language teachers to that of those teaching English and other subjects.
- d) Establishment of Professorship for Tamil and other languages in the Madras University.
- e) Introduction of regional languages as medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and
- f) Helping in the publication of the Encyclopaedia in Tamil and Telugu on the lines of the British Encyclopaedia.)

One of my great wishes from the time of my incarceration in jail was to bring out an encyclopaedia in Tamil on the lines of the British Encyclopaedia, which will be the basis for the growth of Tamil as a scientific language. But the cost of such a project was enormous. In the then composite State of Madras, anything done for one language had to be done for other languages also. But still it had to be done for the growth of the Tamil language. How it was done is an exciting story for another chapter.

24. The Tamil Encyclopaedia

FROM early days, along with the love of our country, there was in me a deep passion for Tamil, my mother tongue. Tamil has a great literature built over thousands of years. Its classics Silappadhikaram, Kamba Ramayanam and Thirukkural and devotional literature of the Saivite and Vaishnavite saints are unrivalled and have inspired millions of people through the ages. However to meet the needs of the present modern age it has become necessary that Tamil should grow as a modern scientific language, so that the ordinary men and women can learn all branches of knowledge through their own language. This idea prompted me to think about initiating work on an encyclopaedia in Tamil, on the lines of the British Encyclopaedia.

But the work would be colossal if it was to be on the lines of the British Encyclopaedia. The vast nature of the endeavour can be understood if the following are examined.

a) A well-planned encyclopaedia should have for its scope presentation of important facts about men, men's beliefs, ideas and achievements; about the world in which man lives; and the universe of which he is a part. It should cover all arts and sciences for this purpose; present these facts without bias or personal opinion, in a language that is easy to understand, and make the work available to people at a cost which they can afford.

b) An encyclopaedia must be concerned with the who, what, when, where, how and why of things. For example, the article on electricity should say what electricity is, who discovered and developed it as well as when and where. It should also describe how it operates and why it is important in every day life.

c) As the encyclopaedia encompasses knowledge of all sciences and arts, no one single person can write and illustrate an encyclopaedia. It calls for the combined talents of several scholars and experts, of researchers and librarians, of editors and educators, and of artists and map-makers. It also calls for a tremendous investment of money for its publication and continuous effort for many years by a band of dedicated workers.

d) First, those who organise and prepare it must have a clear-cut idea of the encyclopaedia's aims, objectives and users. For example, what subjects should be included and of what standard the articles should be. Who is the reader who will use the encyclopaedia? How should the material

be arranged to serve best the needs of the target group who will be using it? What can be done to help readers locate information easily? The function of the encyclopaedia is to provide the reader with information accurately and objectively, so that it can be readily understood, and make the reader think for himself and enhance further his scholarship and education. The number of pages and the number of volumes in an encyclopaedia would depend on the content to be covered, who will use it, and the price for which it will be sold.

e) Most encyclopaedias use one of the two basic methods of subject arrangement: the alphabetical arrangement or the subject-wise arrangement. An encyclopaedia arranged on a subject basis works generally on the basis of allotting one volume for a broad subject. For example, one volume may be devoted to plants, another to animals and another to history or various sciences. The other method is arranging the subject matter in alphabetical order on the lines of the British or American Encyclopaedias.

f) Illustrations are invaluable to the process of learning. They should include pictures, maps and diagrams. Their educational and informative value depends on the creative flair and ingenuity of the editors and artists working together. Illustrations should not only be clear and attractive, but also relevant, complement the information given in the text. The use of colour has become increasingly important. Though costly at least a minimum number of coloured illustrations are a must. Like other illustrations, maps should be placed where needed, along with the related text. Another helpful device is the use of cross references.

g) An in-depth index is an important part of the encyclopaedia. An index goes beyond the cross references in giving the reader access to detailed information. The index also draws together topics that have significant relationships. Preparing an index requires training and care to ensure that it is accurate, comprehensive and easy to use.

All these constituted a colossal task but were necessary for the development of the Tamil language. And so one of my earliest proposals, after becoming the Minister of Education in the Government of Madras was to take up the preparation of the Tamil Encyclopaedia. The estimated cost for its preparation was about 18 lakhs of rupees. At that time the recurring budget for the whole of the Madras State was only about rupees sixty crores. And so this project was considered too expensive and ambitious, and could not be approved by the Government. But I felt the need to develop the Tamil language into a modern one containing within it knowledge in all possible fields of science, technology and modern development was imperative. And so if it could not be done by the Government, it had to be undertaken by the public, with the possible help of the Governments of Madras and India. For that purpose I started the Tamil Valarchi Kazhagam in the year 1946 called in English as Tamil Academy which was registered under the Societies' Registration Act of 1861. It was only faith in the Tamil people and the great Tamil Mother that gave me strength and courage to conceive and take up this mighty task.

The Tamil Academy was started in December 1946 with me as President, Messrs. C.R. Srinivasan and T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar as Vice-Presidents. Sri Kalki R. Krishnamurthi as Secretary and Sri S.R.M.C.T. Annamalai Chettiar as Treasurer. The first members of the committee were Messrs. Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman, M. Bhaktavatsalam, Sardar A. Vedaratnam Pillai, C. Subramaniam, S. Ramaswamy Naidu, Sa. Ganesan, V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar, T.P. Meenakshisundaram Pillai and Dr. T.S. Thirumurthi. A Board of Trustees was also constituted with Raja Sir M.A. Muthia Chettiar, Sri O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar and others. After the demise of one of the first Vice-Presidents, Sri C. Subramaniam was elected Vice-President. After the demise of Sri R. Krishnamurthi, Prof. K. Swaminathan was elected Secretary and after Prof. Swaminathan's departure for New Delhi to take up the work of the collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran came in his place. Many of the early members namely Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Sri V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar are no more with us. I remember with deep gratitude and love the help they had rendered in the work of the Tamil Academy. The beginning with the Academy was started with the scheme of giving prizes for the best books written in Tamil on various subjects in the sciences and the arts. It was also one of the objectives of the Tamil Academy to hold Tamil festivals in various parts of the country and abroad. These were organised in Madurai, Tiruvarur, Coimbatore, Jaffna, Madras and Delhi, in turn, with great enthusiasm.

The work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia was begun in the year 1948. On the Independence Day 15th August 1948, I issued an appeal for funds for beginning the work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia. The enthusiasm of the people at that time was so great that the appeal met with ready response. The three Tamil mutts in Dharmapuri, Tiruvaduthurai and Thirupanandal responded with Rs. 10,000/- each. Dr. Alagappa Chettiar in whose name the Alagappa Chettiar College of Technology is run by the University of Madras and Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar gave similar sums. Many others gave lesser amounts and in the course of the next two months about Rs. one and a half lakhs were collected. This gave us courage to start the work and apply for aid from the Government of Madras and the Government of India. At that time Madras was a composite state with Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh as major partners and with South Kanara and Bellary now in Karnataka and North and South Malabar Districts in Kerala. Therefore whatever was contemplated for the Tamil language had to be done for other languages also. So I summoned a meeting of Andhra leaders in my residence and an association to take up the work of a Telugu encyclopaedia was formed with Bezwada Gopal Reddy, the then Minister of Finance in Madras, as President, so that on the basis, we could ask aid from the Madras State Govt. A less ambitious plan for the Tamil Encyclopaedia, in ten volumes was made, the total cost of which was estimated at about 12 lakhs of rupees. The Government of Madras promised Rs. five lakhs for each, in instalments.

We were fortunate in having Sri R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar as Finance Minister at the Centre at that time. The Centre kindly promised three lakhs in four instalments and the rest was to be borne by the Tamil Academy. There was also enthusiastic response from many scholars and scientists. The work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia was begun on the following Vijaya Dasami Day, when I presided and Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, the then Vice-Chancellor of Madras University inaugurated it. To begin with Sri Thirukudasundaram Pillai was appointed as a joint editor, but the work began in right earnest with the appointment of Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran as Chief Editor.

Only when we started the work, we realised its gigantic nature. Some remarked that to prepare an encyclopaedia in Tamil, the like of which had not been attempted in any Indian language previously was colossal and very difficult and so to begin with we may undertake preparation and publication of smaller books on the various sciences. But the very Himalayan nature of the task and its difficulties made us accept the challenge. For, "If we don't come forward to do it who else will?" And so the Tamil Academy decided not to take up smaller works which others can do but concentrate on this great task only. But before taking up the work of the preparation of the encyclopaedia, many important decisions had to be taken. Some of these were:

1. To decide whether it should be subject-wise or be in alphabetical order, like the British and American Encyclopaedias. After a great deal of discussion and thought, the Tamil Academy decided to follow the British encyclopaedia model, while the Telugu encyclopaedia committee opted for the subject-wise type.

2. One of the difficult tasks was how to evolve into Tamil thousands of technical terms, signs and phrases which are in vogue in the vocabulary of Science and Technology. This was a formidable task. A small group wanted technical vocabulary to be translated in Tamil. But scientists and technologists pleaded unanimously that while words and phrases available in actual use in Tamil should be adopted, for all new concepts international technical terms should be adopted, so that the publication will help higher studies in those subjects, instruction for which is now available in the English language. The recommendations of the scientists in this regard were accepted.

3. The selection of technical terms necessary for writing on scientific topics was another very formidable task. A committee headed by Sri A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar gave considerable time for this work. In this effort Tamil savants like Sri T.P. Meenakshisundaram Pillai and others helped a great deal. Separate sub-committees for Biology, Botany, Geography, Forestry, English, Tamil Drama, Literature, Music, Fine Arts, Archaeology, History, Politics, Economics, Physics, Chemistry, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Engineering, Technology, War, Mining, Law,

Medicine, Surgery, Home Science, Food and Nutrition, Health, Animal Husbandry, Languages of Sanskrit, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Urdu, Mathematics, Astronomy, Statistics, Agriculture etc. were constituted, each with experts in those fields. The number of scholars thus associated with these committees was 126. In many of these committees, scholars who were top in their fields gave willing time and service out of love for Tamil and without any pecuniary benefits. I am grateful to them all. Their names are given in each volume of the encyclopaedia. They drew up the list of topics for each of the subjects and also advised on the technical terms and signs to be used. The success of the Encyclopaedia was not a little due to their unselfish and devoted labours.

4. In a country like India, where many religions prevail, care had to be taken that writings on the various faiths were unbiased and at the same time did not hurt others. And so it was decided that prominent and learned scholars in each of the religions should be invited to write on them.

5. With regard to articles pertaining to different countries in the world, it was decided to request the cooperation of their embassies in New Delhi, Madras, Bombay and other cities or if such did not exist in India write to the countries direct. We were delighted at the cooperation that many of the Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates gave with picture, maps and illustrations which otherwise it would have been very difficult to obtain.

6. The number of scholars to be invited to write articles in various subjects was over two thousand men and women, each eminent in his or her field had to be requested, cajoled, begged and persuaded into accepting the assignments. Their names are given in each of the volumes in which their contributions are published. Amongst them are some of the most eminent in their subjects, available in the country and some from abroad and not all of them were within Tamil Nadu. It was not enough if they were eminent but they must have the time and willingness to help in this work. The remuneration offered was paltry, namely Rs. 20 per page. It was only their patriotism and love of Tamil and identification with the great work undertaken that induced them to participate in the project.

7. Writing the articles alone was not sufficient. Many authors especially the scientists and technologists could not express scientific thoughts in Tamil although their mother tongue was Tamil and so they were allowed to write in the language of their choice. These had to be translated. And this had to be done by the Editorial Board working in the office of the Tamil Encyclopaedia in the Madras University buildings. In addition, a large part of the material in various subjects, especially particulars about Tamil Nadu, Tamil literature, arts and crafts, names of places sanctified by visits of Saivite, Vaishnavite and other saints, particulars of Tamil Poets, writers and scholars who had lived through the ages, matters of historical interest and a variety of other details had to be included for which no writings were available. This had to be done in the encyclopaedia office. Therefore a good editorial board had to be formed. Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran was then

the Headmaster of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya High School founded by me at Coimbatore for which Mahatma Gandhi had laid the Foundation stone as mentioned earlier. It was fortunate that he agreed to come over and take up the difficult and responsible task of the Chief Editorship of the Tamil Encyclopaedia assisted by Messrs. Thirukudasundaram Pillai, P.N. Somasundaram, P.A. Bhashyam Ayyangar, I. Raju Mudaliar and a few others to begin with. I deeply appreciate the devotion and dedication which Thooran and his team brought to this great task. With his appointment as Chief Editor the work commenced in right earnest.

8. Other important aspects to be decided were the physical aspects of the encyclopaedia, its size, the number of volumes, the number of pages for each volume, the kind of paper to be used which will be light as well as lasting, the size of the pages, kind of binding to be adopted, the cover design, the type to be adopted and a variety of other matters. In order to elicit the opinion and suggestions from the scholars and the learned public, a sample was published in 16 pages and circulated for their opinion. The improvements suggested by those who responded were adopted in a large measure.

To assist in the day-to-day work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia a separate committee was formed with me as President and Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, Dr. R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar, Dr. R.M. Alagappa Chettiar, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and Dr. T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, Mrs. M. Lakshmi Ammal and later Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas and others from the Tamil Encyclopaedia Committee as members with Sri R. Krishnamurthi as Secretary, who was followed by Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran.

An Editorial Board was also constituted with Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, Dr. S.G. Manavala Ramanujam, Dr. T.P. Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Sri R.N. Selvam, Dr. T.S. Sadasivam, Sri R.P. Sethupillai, Dr. M. Varadarajan, Dr. P. Natarajan, Sri T.N. Seshadri and others, who helped in appointing the subject-wise editorial boards.

When the work was thus going ahead in full swing, a tragedy of great magnitude happened which affected the very existence of the Tamil Encyclopaedia. As mentioned earlier Sri S.R.M.C.T. Annamalai Chettiar was appointed as Treasurer in the Tamil Academy. I did not know him before but was introduced to me by Sri R. Krishnamurthi as a well-to-do responsible man suitable for the post of Treasurer. When we received funds by public collections or grants, it was resolved to invest the funds not required for the time being in Government bonds and the matter was entrusted to the Treasurer. But unfortunately Sri Annamalai Chettiar proved unworthy of the Trust and sold away the bonds to the tune of Rs. 3 lakhs to meet his business losses. When Sri M.P. Periaswamy had heard about this malpractice, he informed me. Both of us immediately went to his house and asked for the bonds. Only then we realised that what we had heard was true. I was shocked beyond words. Apart from the money involved,

the disreputation and loss of confidence this would cause to the many members of the Committee and the public who had faith in me and the great cause we had undertaken, affected me terribly. I summoned immediately an urgent meeting of the Executive Committee of the Encyclopaedia and put before them what had happened. I told them that I was solely responsible for choosing Sri Annamalai Chettiar and took full responsibility for the loss. But everybody rallied round me and said that they also shared the responsibility. I am immensely grateful to Sri C. Subramaniam who was the then Finance Minister of Madras who came to our help. Sri S.R.M.C.T. Annamalai Chettiar was promptly chargesheeted and arrested and a criminal case of fraud was filed against him. His wife, a good and pious woman who was equally shocked at the misdemeanour of her husband, met me next morning in the Madras Ramakrishna Math, where I was staying and promised to convey her house to the Academy to make good the money thus appropriated. Thus part of the funds were realised and the work of the Tamil Encyclopaedia continued. Sri V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar graciously came forward to accept the Treasurership and continued to guide the finances of the Academy till the end of his lifetime. Now after over thirty years, my heart throbs with gratitude for the great help these friends gave the Academy to tide over the crisis.

Except for this unfortunate episode the work of the Kalai Kalanchiyam went on steadily. The work was vast and a first attempt in an Indian language was like finding a way in an uncharted land. The Executive Committee, the Editorial Board, the Technical Terms Committee and the sub-committees for various subjects had to meet many times and take many decisions big and small. But the task of implementing them fell on the devoted band of staff working under Sri Periaswamy Thooran. At last, our joy knew no bounds when the first volume was released after seven years of hard labour in 1954. After that, with the experience gained, about one volume was published every year till the 9th volume in 1963.

The plan was to publish 10 volumes including the supplement. During the period 1948-66, many things had changed the face of the world. In our own country, the princely states were first integrated into India as A, B and C class states. This had given way to their complete integration with the country. In Africa many new States had come into existence. Science and technology had progressed. composite states like Madras and Bombay gave place to new linguistic states based on language. To cope with all these changes a few more years were needed. Hence the final and 10th volume containing the supplement and the index was published in 1968. With this achievement, the Kalai Kalanchiyam work had been completed satisfactorily and we had a brief respite.

The Children's Encyclopaedia

Many times when I visited bookshops in Delhi, Madras, Bombay and other places in India and London and other places abroad I was captivated by the books for children and the Children's encyclopaedias in English

displayed there. Should not our children in Tamil Nadu have the same facilities? This was a long cherished dream. Sri Periaswamy Thooran being an enthusiast in children's literature, we began the publication of a Children's Encyclopaedia in Tamil, under the name "Kulandaigal Kalai Kalanchiyam". By its very nature it had to be different from the one already published for adults. The language had to be simple, the types had to be larger and the topics fewer. Further the Children's Encyclopaedia must be profusely illustrated with nearly 50 percent of the pictures in colour so that the volumes will be attractive to the children. Above all the encyclopaedia should be written in a language, which children can understand and follow. While the Managing Committee was the same with me as President. Sri C. Subramaniam and Sri N.D. Sundaravadivelu as Vice-Presidents and Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran as Secretary and Chief Editor, a new Advisory Board was formed with Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, an International Expert in Home Science and Child Care and others. We were indeed very happy when the first volume of the Kulandaigal Kalai Kalanchiyam was published in 1968, and its 10th volume in 1975, with many illustrations of beautiful pictures in colour and black and white. We felt proud to have been able to give this gift to the children of Tamil Nadu.

In both these publications, one thought was foremost in my mind. These projects were not for profit, but to make available knowledge to adults and children at a cost that ordinary people could afford. Thus each volume of Kalai Kalanchiyam with over 750 pages, well bound and with wrapper and with many illustrations, some of which were coloured was sold for Rs. 25/- per volume only, even when the cost of paper soared high and even when that meant heavy subsidising. Likewise the Kulandaigal Kalai Kalanchiyam was sold for only Rs. 10/- per volume with 96 pages each with beautiful coloured and black and white illustrations in every page.

Before the end of this chapter, I would like to express my gratitude and thanks again to all the thousands of people who have contributed towards the success of these two encyclopaedias, the first of their kind in an Indian language, to the members of the Managing Committee, the Editorial Board and other boards, and above all to Sri M.P. Periaswamy Thooran and his team for their excellent and devoted contribution to the enrichment of the Tamil people and Tamil language.

25. Founding of Trust for Women's Education

MY father passed away in 1934. As stated earlier, I was inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and was connected with the Ramakrishna Mission and was deeply involved in the Freedom Movement. And so I never had any interest in looking after the family properties. This was done by my two elder brothers, Sri T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar at Tiruppur and Sri T.S. Thirugnanasambandam Chettiar at Coimbatore. But a time came when the auditors and Income-tax advisers pointed out that we were incurring heavy losses by way of Income-tax by continuing as a joint family and that it was advisable to effect a partition. The partition was done very smoothly and quietly. Properties were grouped into four lots and written in four sets of papers. A child was asked to take one by one; The first went to the eldest, the second to the second, the third to me being the third and the fourth to my younger brother Sri T.S. Thandapani. The partition did not make much difference to me as the properties had been managed all along by the two elder brothers as before. But the names of ownership of houses, lands, shares were changed into those of the respective owners. The idea then came to me, "Why should I not make my share of the properties into a Trust for educational purposes?" On all important matters I consulted my elders in my family who were Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, my uncle, who loved me like his son and my eldest brother Sri T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar. Both were concerned about my decision and advised me that if I insisted on such an action, it should be only for making part of my property into a Trust. I agreed with them at that time, but later conveyed almost the whole to the Trust. The thoughts that activated me to this decision are given in my Trust Deed which reads:

"It has been my desire for some time to make a Trust of all my properties. The properties really do not belong to me. They are ancestral and belong to my father and others who earned them. Even if they had been earned by me, the real purpose of money is to get maximum value for it. The rich man who hoards does not get the best value out of his money. His clinging to it gets him only the pain of clinging to it and the ever-present fear of losing it. To him everyone who asks for help is a material danger to his happiness. The result is he suspects everybody of plotting against him to deprive him of his wealth. And suspicion in its turn, creates anger, fear and hatred.

And that is how the miser and hoarder in course of time becomes unsocial and unhappy, withering away any little love and joy that he might have had in earlier days.

The real purpose of money is to use it. It is used well and to maximum purpose when it is used for people who need them. The value of money to people is in inverse proportion to their wealth. At the hands of the poor it gets its marginal utility. And again, the benefit for money spent depends upon the purpose for which it is spent. Money can be spent on drink, extravagance, or dress or going to races. This cannot be claimed as the best way of spending it. It may also be spent for feeding the hungry, for giving medical relief, education or for spiritual uplift. Feeding the hungry is good. Many choultries were established by our ancestors for that purpose. But as it has been said in our scripture, feeding one does not give one any permanent relief. It has also in certain cases degenerated into encouraging laziness. Medical relief is also very valuable. But greater than these are education and spiritual values. Our Sastras have said that of all giving, that which helps to give spiritual knowledge is the highest, for feeding for a day relieves one only for one day, relieving one from physical pain relieves him for the time being, but education and spiritual help raise men permanently to a higher level and help him to solve the problems of his life.

I have been early affected and influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Later on, I came also under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. It was in the year 1921, when I first met Swami Brahmanandaji and Swami Shivanandaji, two of the foremost disciples of the Great Master, that I got an inkling of the life of dedication and service. And ever since that time, that has been in my mind and the Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission have been my spiritual home. It was expected at the time that I would become a full member of the Math. But politics came in the way. The call of the country as voiced by Mahatma Gandhi was irresistible. In spite of opposition from father, friends and members of the Math, I courted imprisonment in 1930. This was followed by three others in 1932, 1941 and 1942 and to me politics has always been a form of service to the country. This has been definitely so in the earlier phase of the Congress, which demanded sacrifice, devotion and suffering from its adherents. In the recent phase of the Congress after acceptance of power, the quality of devotion has unfortunately greatly deteriorated.

The Vidyalaya has been the background for my life in the last twenty years ever since its inception. While it gives me the spiritual satisfaction of something to love and live for, I have given the best portion of my mind and love to it. It has helped in my self-expression in various ways and to me the children in the Vidyalaya are objects through whom I worship the Divine. Besides, in my experience of nearly twenty years, I have observed, felt and seen in it the hand of Sri Ramakrishna.

This is no platitude. Even as I see men and things with my eyes, I perceive and feel His hand and power in the Vidyalaya. This has given me both faith and power. If today the Vidyalaya which was started with but one boy has grown into big dimensions and has become one of the pioneering educational institutions in South India, it is not due to my work or any other single individual, but due to the power of His unseen hand which guides and moves everything in the Vidyalaya. It has been my pride and privilege to be His instrument for this great work.

The idea of making a Trust of my property and divesting myself of its ownership has been with me for a long time. Such a thing is necessary for our own spiritual progress. This idea has become more definite after partition amongst my brothers. In this connection I must express my eternal gratitude to the affection, kindness and love of all the members of my family and friends. Not only my father, mother, brothers and their wives, but also my uncles and aunts have had such great affection for me. During the whole period of my first and second imprisonments, which were during the lifetime of my father, the first being six months and the other being one year, my father was most unhappy, often in tears and went on a pilgrimage of prayer during the whole time I was in jail, in order to console himself out of the sorrow caused by my imprisonment; so keenly did he feel my going to jail. The feeling has been coming upon me that the idea of making the Trust should not be delayed any longer. But I am being persistently advised by my elders and friends that it may not be advisable to divest myself of all my property, that I may write a will and that in any case I should have some money left with me for any future contingencies.

Till now I have worked a great deal for the education of boys. The Vidyalaya which I have founded and nurtured is mainly for boys. It has been said that when you educate a boy, you educate for a living but when you educate a girl you educate a home. My long experience especially while I was Minister for Education in the Government of Madras has convinced me that it is absolutely necessary for the growth of the nation, that girls should be educated in our highest cultural traditions. Such schools are rare today. I wish that the Trust funds should be mainly utilised for girls' education and the establishment of such an institution for girls in the Coimbatore District.

I would like to make the Sri Ramakrishna Mission the Trustees for the Trust. But I am afraid knowing their mind as I do, they may not take up the responsibility for the building up of a girls' institution. At the end of five years, it is proposed to request Sri Ramakrishna Mission to take up the Trust; if they are not willing, the Founder will constitute a permanent Board of Trustees, as may be necessary in the circumstances existing then''.

But for a few years there was no suitable site available to build a school for girls. At last the Coimbatore Municipality kindly agreed to give a land of five acres for establishing a Girls' School. When all the formalities had been gone through and the Government was about to issue orders for alienating the land to the Trust, Sri Munianna Gounder from whom it was acquired many years ago by the Municipality for the Bharathi Park came to me and said that it was acquired for establishing a park and so cannot be given for a school, but if they did it he would go to court. I did not like to get caught in litigation and so wrote to Government that the proposal may be dropped. I was greatly disappointed and despaired of ever being able to start a school for girls under the Trust. But then God came to my help.

At that time the II World War refugees from Europe, who were occupying the Forest College Compound were leaving India after the War. That land was to be given to the Forest Department. The then Government of Madras which has agreed to give the Trust five acres of Municipal land, which we had declined, graciously offered five acres of this land for the establishment of the girls' school under the Trust. Their letter reached me on the Vijaya Dasami Day in 1954. Swami Sarvagnananda was working with us in the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya at that time. We were overjoyed at this gift and considered it as a gift from God. We wanted to symbolically occupy it on that auspicious day itself. Both of us went there, entered the land and offered a short prayer to Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Sarvagnananda had brought with him some soil from the Vidyalaya, which he sprinkled on the land. We shouted in joy "Sri Gurumaharaj ki Jai." We wondered how he works and through whom. From that time I have a continuing conviction that Sri Ramakrishna is the Guide of and Support to the Trust Institution, as for the Vidyalaya.

The first Trustees were the Senior Swami of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, namely, Swami Somananda, N.M.R. Subbaraman, T.S. Kalyanasundaram, T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar and myself. Later Sri C. Subramaniam and Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas have been added. After the demise of T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar and T.S. Kalyanasundaram, Messrs. T.S. Thirugnanasambandam Chettiar, T.S. Thandapani, K. Kulandaivel, Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, President of the Kasturba Gandhi Trust, Justice R. Sengottuvelan, Dr. Godavari Kamalanathan and T.E. Shanmuganandam joined the Trust.

Immediately after taking charge of the land, the building work was begun and a High School for Girls was started in 1955. Miss Visalakshi was the first Headmistress and Sri K. Arunachalam, Secretary; later Dr. C. Nanjappa took that place. But the real growth of the institution began after Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas took charge of it in the year 1960.

26. Gandhiji's Complete Works in Tamil

AFTER the demise of Gandhiji on 30th January, 1948, the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress at its meeting held in New Delhi on 5th February, 1948 resolved that a National Memorial Fund be started to perpetuate his memory and authorised Dr. Rajendra Prasad to take all the necessary preliminary steps for the purpose. A provisional committee consisting of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, Acharya J.B. Kripalani and others was also formed. It was resolved to constitute a Trust under the name 'Gandhi Smarak Nidhi' with headquarters in New Delhi and branches in all the States. The first Trustees were: Dr. Rajendra Prasad, G.V. Mavlankar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ashadevi Aryanayakam, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Gobind Ballabh Pant and J.R.D. Tata.

The objectives of the Trust are the following:

i) Conduct and promotion of the manifold constructive activities with which Mahatma Gandhi was associated during his lifetime and any other activities in furtherance of his ideals, including such activities as would be conducive to the general welfare and uplift of the poor and needy of India.

ii) Establishment and maintenance of or grants to organisations, ashrams or institutions of any kind for, or connected with, any of the aforesaid activities.

iii) Establishment and maintenance of or grants to, for the benefit of the poor, hospitals and charitable dispensaries, convalescent homes and sanatoria, homes for women and children, maternity homes, child welfare centres and other institutions of similar nature such as ante-natal and post-natal clinics.

iv) Provision of sanitary facilities and promotion of preventive and other measures for the health of the people, specially in rural or poverty-stricken areas of India.

v) Measures for the prevention and cure of leprosy including the establishment of leper colonies and other allied institutions as well as research centres.

vi) Promotion and encouragement of education, particularly basic education (Nai Talim), training of children and adults for citizenship

and of women in Home Science, and training in handicrafts, cottage industries and other useful crafts and arts amongst the population of India, specially in the rural areas.

vii) Collection, preservation and publication in various languages of Mahatma Gandhi's record consisting of his letters, correspondence, etc., his writings and teachings, study and propagation of his message and teachings of Truth, Non-violence, World peace and fellowship, his economics, sociology and social, literary and other activities, and maintenance of study centres and libraries for such purposes.

viii) To maintain a museum, where various relics, objects of veneration, books, articles and things connected with Mahatma Gandhi and his way of and outlook of life may be preserved.

ix) Preservation and protection of various places associated with Mahatma Gandhi's work and life.

x) Training of men and women for carrying out any of the aforesaid activities.

xi) Rendering help by grant and contribution to any existing institutions or institutions established hereafter or to any person or persons carrying on or undertaking to carry on in the country, more especially in the rural areas, work falling within all or any of the objects mentioned in the above sub-clauses (i) to (x).

xii) Any other activity incidental or germane to the aforesaid objects.

Writing about the Trust Dr. Rajendra Prasad observed :

"Mahatma Gandhi's imperishable teachings and achievements are enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen and of the world. Succeeding generations will look up to them and find inspiration from them. No more fitting memorial can be raised to his memory. Nevertheless there is a duty cast upon all his countrymen, as well as others, to help in every way in the furtherance of his high ideals by practical work in the sphere of constructive activities, which were so dear to his heart and for which he laboured unceasingly.

"For this purpose, men and money -- men even more than money -- are required. It is, therefore, necessary that as many men and women as can, who have faith in Gandhiji's teachings and who are prepared to dedicate themselves to the work which was dear to his heart, should come forward with offers to take it up.

"To enable us to perpetuate his memory, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi is launched with the object of carrying on constructive activities on an all-India basis. This fund may also be used to collect, preserve and publish his writings and teachings in various languages, and to maintain a museum where articles connected with Gandhiji may be preserved".

Later when the Government of India published the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, under the heading 'Homage' Dr. Rajendra Prasad,

the then President of India wrote: "Mahatma Gandhi did not set out to evolve a philosophy of life or formulate a system of beliefs or ideals. He had probably neither the inclination nor the time to do so. He had, however, firm faith in truth and ahimsa, and the practical application of these to problems which confronted him may be said to constitute his teachings and philosophy. There was hardly any political, social, religious, agrarian, labour, industrial or other problem which did not come under his purview and with which he did not deal in his own way within the framework of the principles which he held to be basic and fundamental. There was hardly any aspect of life in India which he did not influence and fashion according to his own pattern, beginning with the small details of individual life regarding food, dress, daily occupation, right up to big social problems like the caste system and untouchability.

"His views appeared to be startlingly fresh, unhampered by tradition or prevalent custom. So also, his methods of dealing with problems, big and small, were no less novel and apparently unconvincing, but ultimately successful. By his very nature he could never be dogmatic. He could never shut himself out from new light born of experience resulting from new experiments. For the same reason, he was no stickler for superficial consistency. In fact, his opponents, and sometimes even his followers, saw apparent contradiction, in some of Gandhiji's actions. He was so open to conviction, and had such an extraordinary amount of moral courage that once he was convinced that any particular action of which he was the author was defective, he never hesitated to correct himself and declare publicly that he was in the wrong. We often find him subjecting his own decisions and actions to an objective and impartial criticism. For a proper appreciation of such a man it is essential to take a comprehensive and collective view of his teachings and the events of his life. Any sketchy or piecemeal study of his life's story might prove misleading, doing as little justice to this great man as to the reader. This is the primary reason why a compilation of Gandhiji's writings on such a vast scale has to be undertaken".

Giving the Foreword to the same book, the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said:

"In a collection like this there is bound to be a mixture of what might be called the important and the unimportant or the casual. Yet, sometimes it is the casual word that throws more light on a person's thinking than a more studied writing or utterance. In any event, who are we to pick and choose? Let him speak for himself. To him life was an integrated whole, a closely woven garment of many colours. A word to a child, a touch of healing to a sufferer, was as important as a resolution of challenge to the British Empire.

"In all reverence of spirit, let us undertake this task, so that succeeding generations may have some glimpses of this beloved leader of ours

who illumined our generation with his light and not only brought national freedom to us but also gave us an insight into the deeper qualities which have ennobled man. In ages to come, people will wonder that such a man once trod on our Indian soil and poured out his love and service to our people, and indeed to humanity.

"I write this in Darjeeling with the mighty Kanchenjunga looking down upon us. This morning I had a glimpse of Everest. It seemed to me that there was about Gandhiji something of the calm strength and the timelessness of Everest and Kanchenjunga".

About thirteen crores of rupees were collected for Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, of which the share of Tamil Nadu was sixty-five lakhs. Under the provision of the Trust, three-fourth of the collection of each State was to go to the State and one-fourth to the central pool. Separate State committees were formed for each of the States with a Secretary to be the executive head of that Committee. For Tamil Nadu Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman was appointed as the Secretary of the Nidhi with headquarters in Madurai.

It is rarely that we can come across a person such as Sri Subbaraman. His devotion to Gandhian ideals, his simplicity, his love and consideration for others, his humility regardless of his wealth and political standing and self-effacing nature marked him out as one of the great followers of Mahatma Gandhi. When I suggested to him that the Tamil Nadu Gandhi Smarak Nidhi should undertake the great work of bringing out the Complete Works of Gandhiji in Tamil in 17 volumes, he and the Tamil Nadu Gandhi Smarak Nidhi readily agreed. On their request I agreed to undertake the work. At a meeting held on 5.5.1955 a committee was formed for the purpose with me as President, Messrs. N.M.R. Subbaraman, K. Kamaraj, A. Vedaratnam, C. Subramaniam, M.P. Periaswamy Thooran, M. Arunachalam, R. Vinayakam, L.N. Gopalaswamy and N. Ramaswamy as members and G. Venkatachalapathy as Secretary. The Government of Tamil Nadu were kind enough to give accommodation for the Committee in the Government House buildings in the Government House Estate at Mount Road, Madras. With the appointment of Sri R. Venkatarajulu, the work began in right earnest.

We had first to decide the planning for the publications. Whether the works should be in chronological order or subjectwise. We had for our model the Navajivan publications of Mahatma Gandhi's works published in English. Considering all aspects we decided that the publication should be subjectwise. Some books were written by Gandhiji himself like Satyagraha in South Africa and his autobiography, 'My Experiments with Truth'. For others, the materials had to be collected from the works published by the Navajivan and others. Besides, we wanted to bring the volumes as early as possible and so while the major portion of the compilation and translation was done by the editors, some other friends, who were deeply interested in and devoted to Gandhian ideology were also requested to help.

The topics for the 17 volumes were Satyagraha in South Africa, On Ahimsa, Dharma, Gandhiji's Experiments with Truth, On Healthy Living Khadi and Village Industries, Economic Relations, Eradication of Untouchability, Satyagraha, Communal Unity, God and Religion, Bhagavad Gita, Letters to Government, Letters to Political leaders, Grama Swaraj and Letters to others, the chronological account of Gandhiji's life and index forming the last volume. Of these the first volume was written by Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas and myself, the 9th by Sri K. Arunachalam, 12th by Sri N. Ramaratnam, 15th by Sri A. Ramaswamy, 16th by Sri K. Diraviam and the rest by Sri R. Venkatarajulu and Sri Jayamani Subramaniam jointly or separately. Each volume consisted of about 750 pages and had numerous photographs depicting the various incidents in Gandhiji's life. We decided that to make each volume available at low cost to the public, the price must be fixed only as Rs. 7.50.

The first volume was published on 15th September, 1957. Due to the diligence, hard work and enthusiasm of the Editors, Sri R. Venkatarajulu and Sri Jayamani Subramaniam, in some years even two volumes were brought out in a year. The whole work was completed within a record time of twelve years and the last and 17th volume was published in December, 1969. I must say a word about the infectious enthusiasm which Sri G. Venkatachalapathy brought to this work. He began his life as a secondary grade teacher, resigned it and courted imprisonment in the freedom movement. He founded the Gandhiniketan Ashram in Kallupatti in Madurai District which continues to do good rural development work under the guidance of Sri K. Muniandi and Sri Guruswamy. He had dynamic interest in rural development and was greatly dedicated to Gandhian ideals. Sri O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, the then Chief Minister had the courage and vision to appoint him as an Additional Secretary to Government for Rural Development and he justified the choice by the dynamism he brought to that field. I am grateful to him and the two editors and the members of the Committee but for whose whole-hearted cooperation and dedicated work this great task could not have been accomplished within such a short time.

At about the same time, on the request of the Ministry of Education of the Government of India I wrote three books which were published by their Publication Division. The first was, 'Understanding Basic Education', the Second was 'Education by Gandhiji in His Own Words' and the third was 'Gandhiji's Experiments in Education'.

Gandhiji had a scientific attitude of mind. He observed facts, sifted them and sorted them before accepting them; and after weighing them well he drew his conclusions. He had no prejudice of any kind. A scientific attitude implies that facts should be faced and conclusions drawn without fear or prejudice. In short the scientist must be dispassionate; but it requires more than being a scientist to have moral strength to follow conclusions thus arrived at. This quality of being able to follow one's convictions in spite of opposition, dangers, or failures, required indeed great courage.

Gandhiji, besides having a scientific attitude, had this moral power which endowed him with the highest spiritual qualities and tremendous courage to follow whatever he considered right.

In the course of his very busy life, he had occasion to observe various aspects of life in our country. None came into closer contact with the millions of India than he. His most absorbing passion was to work for them. Of these, none were as dear to him as children. He was never happier than when he was with them. It is this great devotion and love that Gandhiji had for the children of this land, that made him evolve a new type of education for this country. He went to schools, met teachers, conversed with students, and saw the effects of the present day education in our country. This led him to conclude that the system of education that was established by the foreign government was not suited to the needs of our country. The result was, he was constantly making experiments in education.

The various experiments he made started with the training of his own children. Later on, he had opportunities to try out his ideals at the Spinx Park and the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, the Champaran Schools, Sabarmati Ashram and latterly in numerous other institutions that were started in pursuance of his scheme of basic education. These experiments constitute an exciting chapter in the history of modern education in India. This book in its eight chapters, deals with his various experiments in education and his views on various aspects of education. The last chapter dealt with his Philosophy of Education.

To Gandhiji mere literacy was not education. According to him,

"That man has had a liberal education, who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of; whose intellect is clear, whose mind is stored with a knowledge of fundamental truths of nature, whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience, who has learned to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself; such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education".

To Gandhiji, the objective of education is not only to turn out good individuals but also socially useful men and women who understand their place in, and duty to, the society in which they live. No education is complete until this important aspect of training is stressed. Gandhiji considered this aspect as an essential part of education. This is to be given not theoretically but by practical observance from the first year at school. And this, in its turn, leads to teamwork and discipline, the lack of which has been our national weakness. Activities involving social objectives gradually lead children to the cultivation of a social sense. They also learn to put the needs of the community above their own petty pleasures and advantages.

A sharp intellect can be cultivated through other methods, but then it may not be socially developed. On the other hand, an intellect developed through the medium of socially useful manual labour must of necessity

become an instrument of service, Mere intellectual training ordinarily makes a man individualistic. But education through work and activities brings the child in contact with other children in cooperation with whom he has to work. This brings out clearly in his own mind the social objective, so important for healthy living, and trains in him not only a sense of cooperation, but also qualities of leadership.

To Gandhiji, character-building was the essence of Education and purity of personal life the one indispensable condition for it. He laid great stress on religious education. He said, "Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral. Fearlessness is the *sine-qua non* for the growth of all the other noble qualities. How can one seek Truth or cherish Love without fearlessness? The path of God is the path of the brave, not of cowards'. Gandhiji considered prayer as the instrument through which faith, fearlessness and a cultural life can be cultivated.

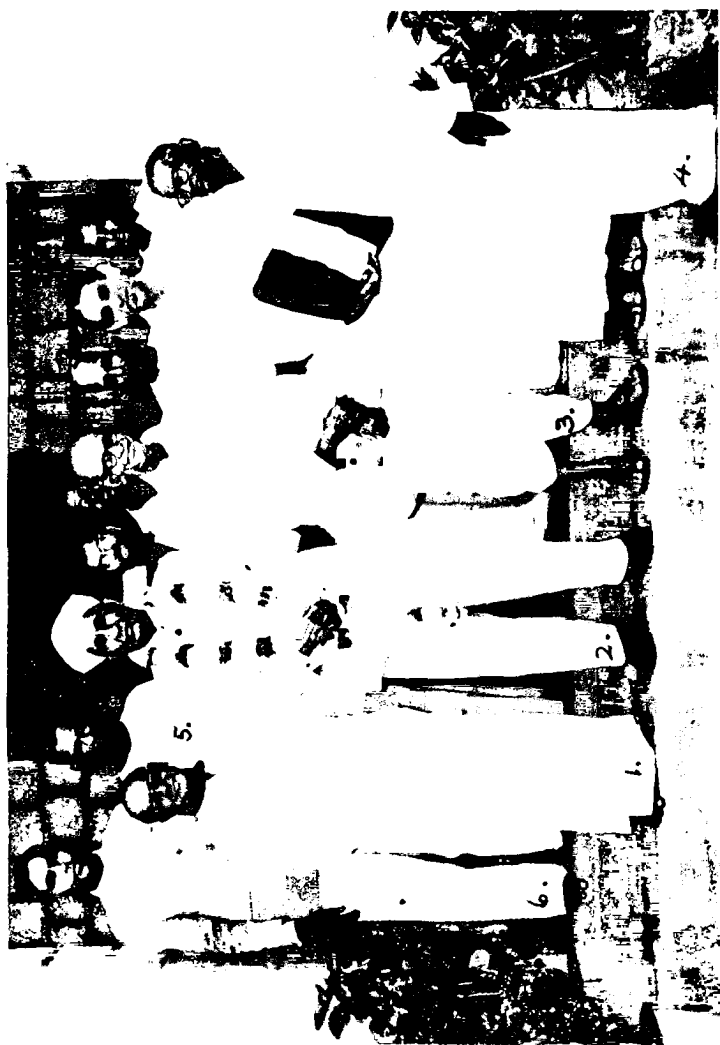
27. Swami Vivekananda Centenary

WE have written in an earlier chapter about the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary, which was observed in 1936, when the Vidyalaya had just been shifted to its permanent habitat and was struggling to establish itself. The Holy Mother's Centenary was celebrated in the Vidyalaya with great enthusiasm in 1953, along with the dedication of the Temple for Sri Ramakrishna. The Swami Vivekananda Centenary Celebrations in 1963, was the signal for world-wide jubilation. His appearance at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 had created a great sensation amongst the people of the world. Amongst Archbishops, Bishops, Priests and Theologians, and other leaders of various religions who attended the Parliament, many singled him out both by reason of his apparel and his commanding personality. His face glowed like celestial fire. When he rose to speak, his eyes surveyed in a sweep the huge assembly before him. The entire audience grew intent with silent attention. Invoking the Goddess of knowledge, Sarasvati, he addressed his audience, as "Sisters and Brothers of America". And before he could utter another word, the whole Parliament was caught up by a great wave of enthusiasm. Hundreds rose to their feet with shouts of applause. The Parliament had gone mad; Everyone was cheering, cheering, cheering! For full two minutes he attempted to speak, but the wild enthusiasm of the audience prevented him.

When silence was finally restored, the Swami began his address by thanking the youngest of the nations, in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world, the Vedic Order of Sannyasins, and introducing Hinduism as "the Mother of Religions, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance". He quoted two beautiful passages taken from Hindu scriptures: one was, "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, even so, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to the same God!" And the other: "Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever a form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me!" It was only a short speech, but its spirit of universality, its earnestness and broad-mindedness completely captivated the whole assembly. The Swami announced the universality of religious truths and the sameness of the Goal of all religious organisations. He did so, because he had learned



Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India when he arrived in Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya to deliver the Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Address.



The author (1) with Dr. C.V. Raman (2), The Nobel Laureate, G.D. Naidu (3), Sri T.S. Thandapani (4), Sri L. Pugalurperumal (5), Sri V. Srinivasa Iyer (6) and others.

from his Master, through personal realisation, the truth that all religions were one, that they were all paths leading to the self-same Goal, the self-same God. When the Swami sat down, the Parliament gave him a great ovation significant of their approval. This speech marked a new era of understanding and tolerance of all religions in the modern world.

The Vivekananda Centenary was celebrated throughout the world. Lectures, discourses, cultural functions and literary competitions were organised in many schools, colleges, universities, libraries, clubs and associations, either under the auspices of the Centenary Committee at the Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters, Calcutta or independently, in addition to bringing out The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda in most of the regional languages of India. Many other books and souvenirs depicting the life and message of the great patriot-monk were issued from various centres of the Math and Mission, and also by many other institutions in different languages. An All-India Monks' Conference was held in Varanasi. Programmes were organised in different countries in Europe and Asia. In the Soviet Union, functions were celebrated at the House of Friendship in Moscow and in the University of Leningrad. A scientific session held under the joint auspices of the Institute of the Peoples of Asia, the Institute of Philosophy, U.S.S.R., and the Academy of Sciences, was presided over by an eminent Academician, P.N. Fedosiev. Lectures and meetings were arranged by eight universities in Japan. In the United States of America, programmes in the form of religious rites, congregational singing, lectures and discourses were conducted in all the centres of the Ramakrishna Order, over and above holding programmes in various other institutions throughout the USA. U. Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that Swami Vivekananda was, "One of the greatest men of all time" and the "greatest spiritual ambassador of India, and for that matter of Asia".

The concluding functions of the Centenary Celebrations began with the week-long programmes started at Belur Math in the early morning of 6th January, 1964, the auspicious Tithi* of Swamiji's birth. An exhibition of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature in all the available languages of the world formed a special feature of the celebrations. In the afternoon of that day, a public meeting presided over by Swami Prabhavananda from Hollywood, was addressed by eminent speakers. The Central Committee organised functions in Calcutta, comprising of a Convention, an All-India Music Conference, an All-India Women's Conference, a Parliament of Religions, and various other programmes. The eight-day-long deliberations in the Parliament of Religions was inaugurated by Swami Madhavananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission. Delegates from countries abroad included Dr. M.M. Willay, Vice-President of the Minnesota University (USA), Prof Dr. George Fohrer from Germany, Dr. Mrs. Maria Burgi from Switzerland, Dr. Miroslav Novac from Czechoslovakia, Prof. Abraham N. Poliack from Israel, Prof. H.H. Kimura, Mr. Kumao, Kenya and Mr. Nishin

* Birthday according to the lunar calendar.

Uchigaki from Japan, and Mr. Christopher Isherwood from the United States. Many other eminent scholars in different branches of learning from India and abroad addressed the gathering. It was an exhilarating experience to attend these functions.

Both in the Vidyalaya and in the Home Science College devout arrangements were made enthusiastically for the celebration. In both the places they began with Akhanda Puja for 101 hours from 6.49 a.m. on the 12th January, 1963. The students and staff of the various Institutions along with Thevaram and Prabandham and Arulpa parties took turns in singing bhajans. Archanas were performed continuously in sets of eight people each throughout the 101 hours. In the Home Science College international students and staff from the U.S.A., Brazil, Ethiopia, and Canada who were then undergoing courses in the College also offered their songs. Passages from the Holy books of various religions were read.

The programme in the Vidyalaya included, 1. The opening of the Swami Vivekananda Centenary building by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India. 2. A beautiful building was constructed for the Kaundampalayam Elementary School in commemoration of the Celebration. 3. Two publications were brought out, one on the Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda in English by T.S. Avinashilingam and the other, a Research publication on Thirukkural in Tamil.

One of the important items of the celebration in the Vidyalaya was a National Seminar on: 'The Place of Spiritual Values in Education' for three days. The Seminar discussed the subject of Inculcating Spiritual Values in Education under the following heads: How to develop spiritual values in the various stages of education namely, elementary, secondary and higher education. After the preliminary meeting the Seminar divided itself into sub-committees and made recommendations. Education Ministers of all the States in the Southern Region and representatives of the Ministry of Education in the Centre participated in the Seminar. Amongst the non-officials who participated were: Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan and Dr. N.P. Pillai of the Madras and Kerala Universities, Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, Dr. K. Kulandaivel and Dr. Chandran Devanesan, Principals of the Avinashilingam Home Science College, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Teachers' College and the Madras Christian College respectively. Sri Basheer Ahmed Syed, Founder of S.I.E.T. College, Madras, and others also participated. The highlight of the Seminar was the inaugural address and the Swami Vivekananda Centenary address delivered by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India, when Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India presided.

Later in the year Dr. Zakir Hussain, Vice-President of India and Kundrakudi Adigal spoke on the life and teachings of Swamiji. Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Vice-Chancellor, Annamalai University who had had the privilege of meeting Swami Vivekananda in Madras, gave his reminiscences on another day. Three delegates from Academy of Rama-



Greeting warmly Srinathi Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, when she visited Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College.

krishna-Vivekananda from Osaka, Japan, Sri Nishin Uchigaki, Miss Kumiko Inoue, and Miss Kayo Kawasaki spoke on the larger aspect of the Swamiji's message to the world.

Celebrations in connection with the Centenary were organised in over fifty high schools in Coimbatore and Salem Districts, in which many thousands of students and staff participated. Essay, drama and songs competitions were organised in which sixteen colleges in the State participated. First and second prizes were given to each of the items.

In the Home Science College, a Vivekananda Auditorium in memory of the Centenary was constructed and later opened by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India and subsequently Prime Minister. The College organised special talks on Swamiji and His message in over one hundred schools in Coimbatore and neighbouring districts and published a good book in Tamil for students on his life and message by Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India delivered the Centenary address in most inspiring and illuminating words. He said,

"In any living culture, you will always find a perpetual process of renewal. What happens to be heresy today becomes heritage tomorrow. In other words, if a culture is to perpetuate itself, it should reaffirm its fundamentals and adjust to the requirements of each generation. All the great teachers of the world take up the fundamental truth, discard the excrescences, and the accretions which had crept into them and recapture the original purity, and present it to their generation. The great teachers are the vehicles of the living truths. They are the voice of the inspired logos. Swami Vivekananda was a spokesman of this divine logos and he took hold of the requirements of this age in which he was born and presented it so as to make a fervent appeal to the hungry heart and the searching mind of his generation.

"Religion is either revolutionary or it is nothing. If it does not transform our society, if it does not transform our nature, if it does not bring about human civilization, it is not true religion. Men like Swami Vivekananda preached such a religion. They taught us God is not somewhere up in the sky, but He is in the heart of man... "Sivam atmani pasyanti na pratimasu" — The Supreme is to be found in your own self, not in images etc. Wherever you have Jiva you have Siva. Siva means the in-dwelling divine in every human being. We therefore must see to it that we rid our society of all the excrescences, the social evils, the inequalities which we have imposed in the name of religion; they are a disgrace to the name of religion. Unless we are able to knock them out of our society, we cannot call ourselves truly religious beings. Cultivation of our emotion and making it reach the aspect of love to embrace the whole of humanity, cultivation of our will where every act that we do is done in a sense of dedication to the Supreme, making all people in this world God's people, and cultivation of our intellect

so that it becomes really illumined consciousness, where the differences of intellect become subordinate, should be done to make religion real.

"These are the essential spiritual values. Freedom from fear, freedom from attachment, freedom from hatred, The three aspects, intellect, emotions and will, have to be transformed so as to express these great qualities of Love, Dedication and Abhaya — freedom from fear. Every institution can do it. It all depends on the way in which we teach your children.

"In these institutions where you are sustained by the great examples of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, it must be possible for you to generate that ample air of intellectual being, that simple business of living in accordance with the will of the divine, identifying ourselves with the Supreme, cooperating with the cosmic purpose, having no will, no preference, no like or dislike of your own. It is that which we have to do, not adventurism, not mere going to temples and coming back, not the muttering of hymns, important as they may be, but the most important thing is to recognize that they are only aids for the development of the true spirit in man. I hope the example of Swami Vivekananda, the vision of his greatness, the habit of solitary meditation — all these things will be imbued into our children's minds at their most impression-able age.

The message of Swami Vivekananda is for all times and all climes with great relevance to modern India. For both national and individual progress, it is necessary that his soul-stirring and strength-giving message, should be studied, assimilated and followed.



N.M.R. Subbaraman and Tamil Savants Royo Cho and Ki. Va. Ja. in Vidyalyaya.

28. Thirukkural Research

THE people of Tamil Nadu are proud of their language. There are good reasons for this just pride. Firstly, it has a glorious literature of which any race or country can be proud. Secondly, it dates back to prehistoric times. Some scholars think that originally the languages prevalent in India were Sanskrit and Tamil and while Sanskrit had ceased to be a spoken language, Tamil has continued to be a living spoken language, inspiring millions of people not only in India but also in other countries. The earliest books in Tamil talk about three Sangams. Sangam literally means an association of people and it meant in that context a body of learned scholars. While the last of the three sangams is supposed to have been between the 4th Century B.C. and first Century A.D., the earlier two Sangams are considered to have existed about a thousand years earlier. The literature of those earlier sangams are said to have been destroyed in floods and invasion of the sea and only some of the literature of the third Sangam have come down to us. The earliest of these is said to be Tholkappiam, a book on Tamil grammar. Thirukkural belongs to the third Sangam period. It is a beautiful ethical code for all times for all people in all countries. The books of the third Sangam period reveal a way of life which indicates a very high degree of civilization, a life of great ideals, a highly organised political, social and family life, which itself is a proof that Tamil culture should have lived many thousands years previously, to reach to this high state of culture and civilization.

I said that the Tamils were very proud of their language. This has also become a weakness of the Tamil people which has been exploited by film producers and politicians for selfish ends. The real measurement of love for the Tamil language should mean love of the Tamil people, which in turn, should mean eradication of the deep-seated poverty and ignorance among the Tamil masses and dedicating oneself to serve them. It should also mean depth of scholarship and living the high ideals which the Tamil saints like Thiruvalluvar had preached and it will mean living in our daily life the noble ideals of devotion to God, purity of personal life, unselfish service to the people and a life of strength, nobility, integrity and character. But instead it is very unfortunate that the sentiment of love of Tamil has been exploited to parochialism, a narrow outlook and create prejudices towards other language groups and thus weaken our national fabric.

When one thinks of ancient Tamil literature, names of many books come to our mind, some of the most important of them being Tholkappiam, Thirukkural, Silappathikaram, Agananuru, Purananuru, Thirumurugatrupadai, all of which belong to the Third Sangam period. Following them in the fifth to seventh century came the Alvars (Vaishnavite saints) and the Nayanmars (Saivite Saints). Their works constitute some of the most beautiful devotional lyrics in the world. Then came the period of Periapuranam and Kamba Ramayanam. The former consists of the lives of the sixty-three saivite saints and the latter, though inspired by the original Valmiki Ramayanam, constitutes one of the finest original epics of the world of which the Tamils and all those who have read it are legitimately proud. In the more recent times, Thayumana Swamigal, Kumaraguruparar, Ramalinga Swamigal and Subramania Bharathi have contributed some of the finest modern literature in Tamil.

Of the many great works in Tamil literature two authors have appealed to me and have had a share in shaping my life. These were Thirukkural by Thiruvalluvar and the devotional songs of Thirunavukkarasu Swamigal. Before taking up Thirukkural, I would like to say a few words about Thirunavukkarasar and his divine songs.

Thirunavukkarasar, also called Appar, was born in an orthodox Saivite family. He was attracted towards the Jain faith which was prevalent in Tamil Nadu at that time. He had an only sister who was betrothed to marry a young man in the army but the man died in an encounter in war before the actual marriage. But having thought of him as her husband, she refused to think of any other person for marriage and lived a life of devotion as a nun, with the hope that her brother who had gone out of the family to another faith, would come back to her. And so he did. On getting an incurable stomach ache, he came back to his sister. On her persuasion he came back to the Saivite faith and was cured of his malady. The king of the place who was a supporter of Jainism sent orders commanding him to be brought before his court. To this he replied, 'We are not slaves to anybody except God. We are not afraid of Death or hell; we know no sufferings of any kind; we are immersed in the immortal bliss of Shiva's love'. This is recorded in his immortal song:

நாமார்க்கும் குடி அல்லோம் நமனை அஞ்சோம்
 நரகத்தில் இடர்ப்படோம் நடலை அல்லோம்
 ஏமாப்போம் பிணி அறிவோம் பணிவோம் அல்லோம்
 இன்பமே எந்நாளும் துன்பம் இல்லை
 தாமார்க்கும் குடி அல்லாத தன்மை யான
 சங்கரன் நற் சங்கவெணி குழைஓர் காதிற்
 கோமாற்கே நாம் என்றும் மீளா ஆளாய்க்
 கொய்ம்மலர்ச்சே வடியினையே குறுகினோம்

The king became angry and ordered that he be tied to a stone pillar and put into the sea. At this, Thirunavukkarasu sang another poem which is sung by Tamil people all over the world.

சொற்றுணை வேதியன் சோதி வானவன்
பொற்றுணைத் திருந்தடி பொருந்தக் கைதொழ
கற்றுணைப் பூட்டிஓர் கடலில் பாய்ச்சினும்
நற்றுணை ஆவது நமச்சி வாயவே.

which means “Even if you tie a stone with my body and throw me into the ocean my eternal protection is Shiva’s name” and the stone became a float on which he reached back safely to the shore.

Then the king ordered an elephant to trample him but the saint was not in the least afraid and sang:

சுண்ணுவெணி சந்தனச் சாந்தும்
சுடர்த்திங்கள் சூளா மணியும்
வண்ண உரிமை உடையும்
வளரும் பவள நிறமும்
அண்ணல் அரண்முர்ன் ஏறும்
தகலம் வளாய அரவும்
திண்ணன் கெடிலப் புனலும்
உடையார் ஒருவர் தமர்நாம்
அஞ்சுவது யாதொன்றும் இல்லை
அஞ்ச வருவதும் இல்லை

which meant “we are the children of Shiva. We have nothing to fear here or hereafter.”

The elephant refused to trample him and ran away. He laid much stress on the performance of duty with faith in God and unattached to results. He said:

நின் கடன் அடியேனையும் தாங்குதல்
என் கடன் பணிசெய்து கிடப்பதே

Translated into English, it means ‘Your (God’s) duty is to protect me and my duty is to serve expecting nothing and fearing nothing’.

There is another song which shows his faith and courage:

வானம் துளங்கில் என்? மண்கம்பம்
ஆகில் என்? மால்வரையும்
தானம் துளங்கித் தலைதடு
மாறில்எண்? தண்கடலும்
மீனம் படில் என்? விரிசுடர்
வீதில் என்? வேலை நஞ்சுண்(டு)
ஊனம் ஒன்று இல்லா ஒருவனுக்(கு)
ஆட்பட்ட உத்தமர்க்கே.

"What if the heavens fall on my head
 What if the mountains roll down on me
 What if the earth quakes
 What if the stars fall
 I am the devotee of the Great Shiva
 Who drank poison and was not affected by it
 And so nothing will affect me".

To Thirunavukkarasar people of wealth, caste or power did not count. He worshipped devotees of God as God, even if they were lepers. He survived the persecution of the Jains, and by his godliness and devotion, he won over the Pallava ruler back to the Shiva fold. He toured the entire Tamil Nadu, not only singing the praise of Shiva, but also doing, wherever he went, manual labour in the temple, in cleaning its premises. This introduced a new element in religious devotion and a new dignity to labour service in temples. All his songs are on a higher ethical plane. The songs of Thirunavukkarasar, are a passionate prayer for the conquering of senses and for leading a higher life and express a complete surrender to God. While others wanted avoidance of birth, he said that birth should be welcomed, because it enables one to see the spiritual dance of Lord Shiva and experience the Supreme joy it brings. He spurned the pleasures of life and preached a unique freedom of the soul. All his outpourings come straight from the heart and appeal to all rich and poor, old and young, the learned and unlearned. Many of his sayings have become proverbial, expressing in crisp and telling language great wisdom. As one brought up in the Saivite tradition, his supreme courage born out of deep faith in God, simplicity and love of service deeply inspired me. To inspire the thousands of students in the Vidyalaya with these ideas, a building has been named after his sacred name and his songs are sung in our daily devotions.

The Thirukkural is in many respects very different from Thirunavukkarasu Swamikal's devotional works. The latter's songs appeal to the emotions, while the former appeals mainly to reason. The latter is denominational belonging to the Saivite cult, while Thirukkural is universal. While Appar's songs can be set to music and appeal is emotional and sung by a large number of people young and old, the main appeal of Thirukkural is intellectual and many have written extensive commentaries on it. While we have an authenticated life of Appar and the shrines which he sanctified by his visit are well known and visited by thousands of people even today, very little is known about the life of Thiruvalluvar, the author of Thirukkural. I read a few passages in Thirukkural while I was young, but the appreciation of its depth of wisdom came to me only when I grew into maturity. I got the time to study it in my various imprisonments, particularly during my last and long imprisonment in Vellore Central Jail where I took classes on it. I was so much impressed by its great thoughts compressed in small couplets, each containing so much practical wisdom to guide men and women at all levels in their day-to-day life that I thought this must be given to our children,

and I made, as Minister for Education, selections from Thirukkural a regular study in all schools in Tamil Nadu. Because of the profoundness of its thoughts, it has been translated into almost all the leading languages in India and of the world like English, French, German, Russian and other languages. The translations in English are innumerable. The Tamil people have named it as Tamil Veda. Because of its universal nature, all religions, Hindus, Buddhist, Jains and even Christians have claimed it as their own.

Almost nothing is known about its author except that he belonged to the Valluvar caste, considered as one of the untouchables, and now called Harijan. Some say he was born in Mylapore, Madras but that is disputed by others. It is accepted that he was married. Beyond this no more information is available about his life. Like the authors of the Upanishads who did not care to append their names to their works, — he was satisfied to deliver his message without publishing his own name. The message of the Thirukkural transcended the period of his life and age, and even after more than two thousand years, comes still fresh and strong to all those who care to read it. It lays down a code of ethics which is universal and eternal.

The Thirukkural had a great appeal for me for it gave a manly message, of strength, nobility and character. It said, 'Face all difficulties with a smile' 'இடுக்கண் வருங்கால் நகுக'. Wise men are not afraid of anything, but will face even difficulties which come in floods'. Many lack confidence in themselves. And Thirukkural teaches 'Don't think anything is beyond your strength. If you try sufficiently everything is possible'.

அருமையுடைத்தென்று அசாவாமைவேண்டும்
பெருமை முயற்சி தரும்.

Thiruvalluvar believed in Karma or Fate as the result of past actions, but he also believed that if we strive hard, we can change fate, for each one of us makes our own destiny by our actions, ideals and strivings. By going after petty pleasures and small things in life, we dissipate our energy, and Thirukkural exhorts to think high — 'உள்ளுவதெல்லாம் உயர்வுள்ளல்' you are as high as your mind 'உள்ளத்தணையது உயர்வு'. Therefore conserve your energy and concentrate it on achieving great ideals in life and your achievement will be according to your striving. Plan all action taking into consideration the environment, the surroundings, the time, the facilities and supports that you have. At the same time, the author of Thirukkural has warned. 'Don't be foolhardy. You must take care to avoid what should be avoided'. 'அஞ்சுவது அஞ்சாமை பேதமை'. Bad company, impure ways of life, dissipation of energy, anger, laziness, disrespect to saints and wisemen, should be avoided. Friendship of the wise, the pure, the noble and the strong should be cultivated, for there is no greater strength than their love and wise guidance.

Thirukkural says spiritual striving is the source of all strength, Tapas or Thavam is a word coming often in our scriptures which means spiritual strivings. Thirukkural has defined Tapas as 'Patient endurance of whatever

comes and love and non-injury to all beings', thus reminding us of the Gandhian emphasis on ahimsa. Tapas also means continuous and ceaseless effort, if it is to yield results. He adds that there is nothing that cannot be achieved by such spiritual strivings. Giving a modern touch to his sayings which remind us of Swami Vivekananda, 'He who does his duty well, not detracted by other desires, that man or woman really does tapas'. 'தவம் செய்வார் தன்கருமம் செய்வார்'. Thus he pointed out that mere formalities and ceremonials are not the essence of religion, but doing one's duties, unaffected by success or failure, and leading a life of purity and selfless service are the essence of religion and constitute the worship of God.

It has been said by one of the later poets that Thirukkural is like a mustard seed in which all the seven seas are contained, meaning thereby that all wisdom is contained in its 133 chapters, each consisting of ten one and a half line couplets. This is largely true. It is an ethical guide to householders and sanyasins, to men and women of all races and all walks of life. It is also a guide to administrators and executives. It is difficult to give its full message in a short note. The magnitude of the message and the great influence it has had in shaping the lives of the Tamil people and the people in other parts of the world who have read it in its numerous translations cannot be measured. It has great poetic beauty, with wonderful similes and great humour. Therefore it has influenced my life greatly.

The Bhagavad Gita mentions the three kinds of tapas (penance) for the body, speech and mind as follows: Worship of the Devas, the twice-born, the Gurus and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, continence, and non-injury are called austerity of the body. Speech which causes no vexation, and is true as also agreeable and beneficial and regular study of scriptures, these are said to form the austerity of speech. Serenity of mind, kindness, silence, self-control and honesty of motive, all these constitute mental austerity.

The Gita further mentions regular study of the scriptures as one of the Sadhanas to be adopted. All along my life after morning meditation and prayers, I spend about an hour in quiet reading. And the books that I read are the Thirukkural along with devotional hymns by the Saivite and Vaishnavite saints, Bhagavad Gita and the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus Thirukkural has contributed greatly in giving shape to my mind and actions.

Even a superficial study of Thirukkural showed the need for great deal of research. Many scholars have written commentaries in the past of whom the classical ten are famous while there are countless smaller commentaries written from time to time by others. Of these only the following are available namely the commentaries by Manakkudavar, Paruthi, Pariperumal, Kalingar and Parimel Azhagar. Of these only the one by Parimel Azhagar is in use. No attempt has been made even to bring all the commentaries together for the benefit of the reading public. When I tried to find the views of Thirukkural on various topics, I was surprised and dismayed to find that no subject-wise index was available for this great work. An index such as

the one usually given in modern publications had never been thought of and prepared for this great book. Only an index of the first words of its verses, and the list of chapter headings were published along with Parimel Azhagar's commentary. Thirukkural has dealt with so many topics and with such practical wisdom that I felt that a subject-wise index was absolutely essential for the ordinary reader for ready reference.

Authors who had come after Thiruvalluvar have been so deeply impressed by Thirukkural that almost all of them used many of its verses wholly or in part in their own works. The way in which they have used them in their writings, have actually formed their commentaries on the great work. Collection of these concordances would be a revealing commentary in itself. Besides, a comprehensive review of the Thirukkural in its various phases in the modern light is also necessary. It is these thoughts that prompted me to think about bringing out a research publication of this Tamil classic.

First the idea was to do it in the Vidyalaya, with a good editorial staff. However for a long time a person with the requisite erudition and enthusiasm for the work was not available. But the idea struck me that if a suitable person is not available in the Vidyalaya, we must seek him wherever he is. In the whole Tamil world, I could not think of a better person than Sri Ki. Va. Jagannathan popularly known as Ki. Va. Ja. the famous Tamil Savant. He had the requisite scholarship. He had written a large number of books on various topics in Tamil literature and received many awards, and is regarded as one of the foremost scholars in Tamil. He came in the line of his guru the great Tamil savant Mahamahopadhyaya U.V. Swaminatha Iyer and so had the requisite cultural background of hard work, scholarship, erudition and humility with the highest standards of performance. He readily agreed, but on condition that he could work on the assignment only in Madras, in his own place of work. Thus the work started in 1953 with a few assistants whom he gathered around him. The work was arduous, long, time-consuming and Ki. Va. Ja. had the persistence and devotion necessary. It was edited and printed under his direct supervision, and it was published in 1963. I am indeed very grateful to him for the love, devotion, dedication and hard work he brought to complete it.

In his introduction, Ki. Va. Ja. has explained that the contents include: the Thirukkural text, commentaries by Parimel Azhagar, the different interpretations by the classical commentaries namely, Manakkudavar, Panthiyar, Pariperumal, Kalingar and others. The book contains collection of concordances and use of Thirukkural in all the later literature. It was originally intended to bring the citations upto the period of Subramania Bharathiar. But due to the vastness of the task it had to be stopped with Kambar. Another unique aspect of this work is that it has a separate index for Thirukkural and another for the whole volume separately. The research volume running to 1020 pages carried research articles on the various aspects

of the Teachings of Thirukkural, mainly contributed by Sri Ki. Va. Jagannathan himself.

The research work was inaugurated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India and was brought out as the Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Publication in 1963.

29. The Vidyalaya Grows

MY work as Minister of Education gave me an experience and insight in the working of our educational system, which was very useful in the further development of the Vidyalaya, when I took charge of it again after my term of office. At that time the Vidyalaya consisted of the Residential High School, the Gandhi Basic Training School, the T.A.T. Kalanilayam Higher Elementary School and the Training Centre for training government staff in Basic Education. There was a small industrial section and also an Industrial Institute. My elder brother Sri T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar had constructed a beautiful building in the name of his demised daughter Sitamani for the Vidyalaya Rural Dispensary which served the surrounding villages.

The decade of 1950s was marked by both development and great losses to the Vidyalaya. Many of the University - affiliated institutions and the post-matric professional institutions came into existence in the Vidyalaya in the fifties. The fifties also inaugurated a series of Seminars, Workshops and conferences of an All India nature, which have made the Vidyalaya well known in the academic world. At the same time we suffered heavy and irreparable loss in the passing away of some who have been with us from the very inception and have helped us to overcome the difficulties of those early days and helped the institution to grow by their unstinted help and guidance.

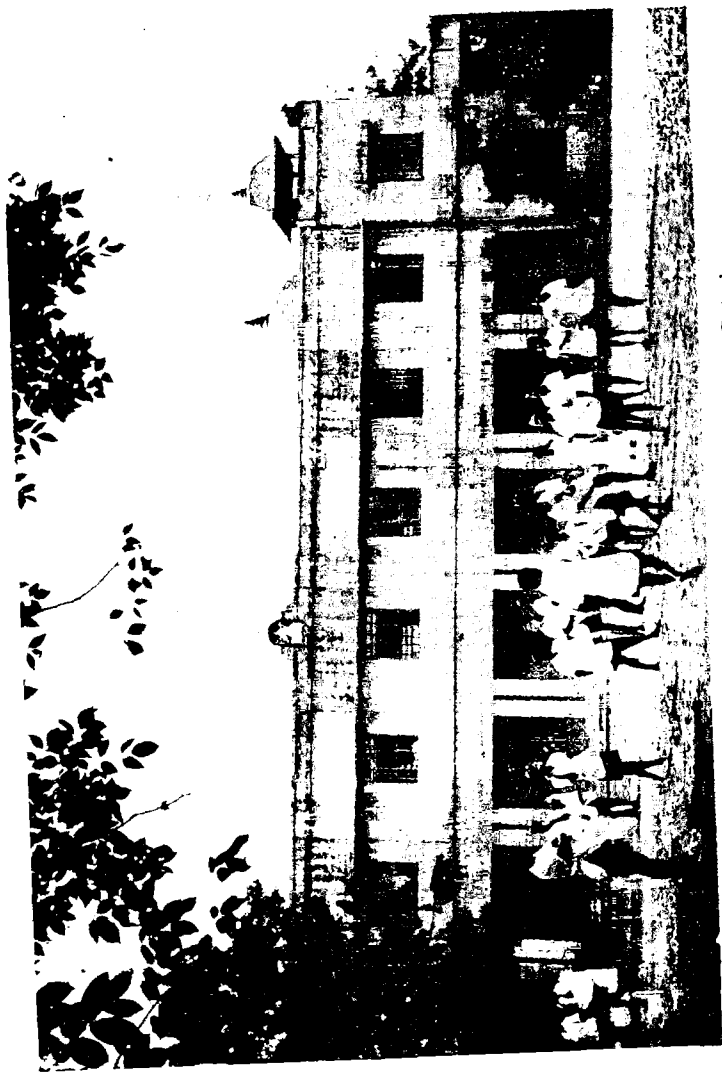
The first of the stalwarts whom we lost was Sri V.C. Vellingiri Gounder in 1947 under tragic circumstances. He was coming in his car, when a lorry coming from a side road dashed against his car with disastrous results. His ribs were fractured and he was taken to hospital. I was then at Madras and on receiving the information I hurried back to see him, but he had passed away and I could not see him again. His death was a very personal loss to me, as he loved me like a son and guided me with affection and wisdom. Immediately after his passing away it was resolved to erect a memorial in his name in the Vidyalaya. A Committee was formed with Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, his life-long friend as President, Messrs. V.C. Palaniswamy Gounder and R. Ramakrishna Naidu as Vice-Presidents and Sri N. Mahalingam and Sri K. Venkatachalam as Secretaries. Out of the funds collected, the western block in Appar Nilayam was constructed in his memory. A plaque expressing our love and gratitude adorns the building.

A few years later we lost Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar to whom we owe a great deal. The Meenakshi Mandapam in the Vidyalaya High School constructed in his mother's name and the building of the temple gopuram are due to his munificence. The T.A.T. Trust which till today contributes towards the maintenance of the T.A.T. Kalanilayam did so, mainly through his instrumentality, he having been one of its trustees along with Sri T.M. Sivasubramania Chettiar and Sri T.A. Sivasubramania Chettiar.

Apart from his benefactions to the Vidyalaya Sri T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar helped all good causes and was generous to a fault. The individuals and institutions that had received help from him are too numerous to mention. He was also a leader of the cooperative movement in Tamil Nadu. Memorials in his name have arisen spontaneously, the important ones among them being Ramalingam Sanatorium at Perundurai, The Ramalingam Chettiar High School and the Ramalingam Cooperative Training Institute at Coimbatore. A committee was constituted for the purpose of establishing a memorial for him in the Vidyalaya with Sri V.C. Palaniswamy Gounder as President, Sri C.S. Ratnasabapathi Mudaliar, Sri C. Subramaniam, Sri R. Venkataswamy Naidu, the Pattagar of Palayakottai, Sri S.P. Nallamuthu Gounder, Dr. P.S. Viswanathan, Sri K.K. Subbanna Gounder and me as members and with Sri G.K. Devaraj and Sri S. Thirunavukkarasu as Secretaries. Apart from large donations made by his grandson Sri T.V. Angappan and his brother of Radhakrishna Mills and Sri T.S. Kandaswamy Chettiar, numerous individuals and cooperative societies generously contributed towards the Memorial Fund. The T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar Memorial building is one of the biggest and most beautiful buildings in the Vidyalaya, with a length of 223 ft. built at a cost of a lakh and a quarter at that time. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan who was then Vice-President of the Indian Union laid the foundation stone. Sri V.T. Krishnamachari, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, one of Sri Chettiar's friends from his college days and who had considerable respect and affection for him, opened the Memorial building on the 4th of February 1955, when Sri Gulzarilal Nanda, Minister of Labour, Government of India, presided.

Out of the properties left by him a Trust in the name of T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar Charitable Trust was registered. The proceeds of the Trust are being utilised for helping educational institutions and the poor.

Sri T.S. Kalyanasundaram was a young man, strong and earnest and with devotion and character. He gave a life-time of devoted service to the Vidyalaya. He died in the prime of youth at the age of 42, and the Vidyalaya lost one of its most loyal and willing workers. As a permanent memorial for him, a beautiful building has been put up in his name. This fulfilled one of the pressing needs of the Vidyalaya High School namely a good store, dining hall and kitchen. It was opened by Sri C. Subramaniam, the then Minister for Education, Government of Madras, when Swami Sarvajnananda presided.



Shrine in Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore.

Consecration of the Temple

One of the most important events in the history of the Vidyalaya took place in this period. There was a small shrine in the Vidyalaya since its inception, accommodated at one end of the Meenakshi Mandapam. The time was ripe to build a beautiful shrine. The purpose of education is to develop the best in man. Nothing helps this more than the proper understanding and application of religion. All the best constructions of the human mind in architecture, poetry, painting and sculpture as evidenced in our Temples, Churches and Mosques and in places like Ajanta and the work of our saints and sages have been through devotion to God. For building a shrine in the Vidyalaya, we made a plan for a nice good temple which we have today. With the help of friends, devotees and well-wishers, it was completed in time to be opened as part of the Holy Mother's Centenary Celebrations.

It was contemplated that, by God's grace, the temple in the Vidyalaya should also become a centre of purity, higher life and inspiration to all the people who live around it and come within its circle of influence. It must be a living torch of Light and Faith. Only deep devotion, unselfish love and constant prayer can ensure this quality in the temple. It is in this spirit of faith and hope that an Akhanda Puja, viz., continuous worship day and night for six days was organised in connection with the consecration of the temple.

The Akhanda Puja began on 8th December 1952, the 100th Birthday of the Holy Mother. Vastu Puja* began at 4.15, early in the morning. The picture of Sri Guru Maharaj was brought in procession from the old shrine and placed in the new shrine. The usual morning arati began after Vastu Puja at 6.15. From that moment, worship continued uninterruptedly till 6.30 p.m. on the 13th, the Birthday of Shri Swami Shivanandaji, one of the prominent disciples of the Master.

The Akhanda Puja consisted of two parts, one consisting of Pat, Parayanam, Bhajan, Chanting of the Vedas, Upanishads, Thevaram, Prabandham, Thiruppukazh, Arulpa etc. The various sections of the Vidyalaya were organised into 11 Bhajan parties, five parties from the High School, two from the Basic Training School, one from the Basic School, one from the Middle School and two from the Teachers' College. The entire period of time between the 8th morning till the 13th evening was divided into periods of half-an-hour or one hour each leaving some time for the usual pujas and prayers in the mornings and evenings and for Homan** on the 10th and 13th. A detailed programme was prepared specifying the various items in the programme each day and the time allotted for each of them. And these, in regular succession, kept the devotions going on throughout day and night for all the six days. For chanting of the Vedas, learned Pandits came from Coimbatore; the head of the Chanting Party in

* Puja performed on the occasion of the opening of the new shrine.

** Worship through Sacrificial fire.

Srirangam temple came to chant Prabandham; the Dharmapuram Mutt, well-known for their work in furtherance of Saivism, very kindly sent two of their best men to chant Thevaram. Shri Tirupathy from Madurai Arul Jothi Nilayam and Sri Meenakshisundaram Adigal came to chant Arulpa; Sri Murugadas Adigal chanted beautifully Tiruppukazh and other devotional songs. Some of our Swamis chanted the Gita; eleven Bhajan parties from the Vidyalaya took part, in turn, in performing Bhajans. The Nama Sankirthan Bhajan Party from Madras performed their inspiring, devotional Nama Sankirthan. Thus, throughout day and night, these devotions continued.

The other part of the Akhanda Puja was Archana. It was found on observation that to sing a thousand and eight names of the Lord took about forty minutes. The whole time between the 8th morning and the 13th evening was divided into 40 minute periods leaving time for arati in the mornings and evenings. Parties of eight each from amongst the staff and students of the various sections of the Vidyalaya and devotees were arranged for archana. Archanas were on Shiva, Vishnu, Subramania and Mother in her various aspects according to the desires of the people doing it. All the various sets of people came eagerly day and night to do their Archanas. 188 parties of two people each were thus arranged beforehand.

The devotions went on uninterruptedly all the time without any break anywhere either in Parayanams or in the Archanas. Hundreds of men and women from many far off places came to take part, bringing offerings of flowers, fruits and candy. 22 members of the Ramakrishna Order, 18 other Sadhus and four brahmacharis were present on the occasion and took part in the various items.

In these six days, the 10th December and the 13th December were important, the tenth being the Holy Mother's Centenary day on which the Prathista of the new picture of Sri Guru Maharaj in the new shrine was done by Swami Yatiswaranandaji and the 13th being Sri Swami Shivanandaji's Birthday. On both these days, there were elaborate Pujas, offerings and homams. Pushpanjali was done by the many hundreds of people present. On these six days, there was a deep spiritual fervour present amongst the people and the entire atmosphere was filled with great devotion.

The Teachers' College

The first of the institutions of higher education started in the Vidyalaya was the Teachers' College. It had been my desire for a long time to open a Teacher Training institution to train teachers in the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. The starting of the Gandhi Basic Training School fulfilled this objective in training teachers for primary schools. As soon as I came back to the Vidyalaya my first effort was to start a Teachers' College for training teachers for secondary schools.

The Vidyalaya report for 1950-51 mentions as follows: "There is one important aspect which will be special to the Training College in



Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India when he delivered the Convocation address of the Rural Institute of Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalāya.

Vidyalaya. The new element will be an essential contribution to the cultural life of our country. Our culture is in a large measure based on our religion. If India is to rise to greatness, it must be by strengthening her culture and cultural tradition. This can be done only through proper understanding of our religion in its widest sense as was preached and practised by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. But this could not be done in Government schools and Colleges under the present Constitution. We have a distinct contribution to make in this direction. Teachings of Hindu religion with its universal outlook is to be provided in the Training College. The subjects will be dealt with in the most catholic manner, so that they will aim not only at understanding religion in its noblest form, but also with a proper appreciation of other religions. Such a course will also improve the tone and discipline of our schools.

The College was opened in July 1950 by Sri E.W. Aryanayakam, Secretary of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, when Sri K. Madhava Menon, the then Minister of Education presided. The first Principal was Sri K.R. Appalachariar, retired Principal of the Saidapet Government Teachers' College. He was followed by Dr. M. Cornelius who had had a Doctorate in Education from U.S.A. In order to train some of our workers in higher studies in education, Sri K. Arunachalam who had given dedicated service of 22 years in the Gandhi Basic Training School, Dr. M. Aram and Dr. K. Kulandaivel were deputed to the Ohio State University through scholarships provided by that University through the good offices of Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas and later Dr. Aram. But Sri Arunachalam and Dr. M. Aram left the Vidyalaya soon after returning from U.S.A. attracted by Gandhian Constructive work. Dr. K. Kulandaivel succeeded them and was the Principal of the Teachers' College for over twenty years and built up the College, ably assisted by Dr. Visvesvaran and Dr. Rao who succeeded him after he took up the Principalship of the Vidyalaya Arts and Science College. Both Dr. Visvesvaran and Dr. Rao have also in their turn given a life-time of dedicated service to the building up of the institution. The Vidyalaya Teachers' College is one of the leading Teacher Training institutions in the country providing B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil. and Ph.D. It has also an Extension Department providing in-service training to teachers in Secondary Schools. It is also publishing the journal of Educational Research and Extension. Recently it has also introduced an M.Ed. course in Integrated Education of the Blind, the first of its kind in India which Sri M.N.G. Mani is conducting with great flair and dedication. Autonomy has recently been conferred on the College by the University of Madras in consultation with University Grants Commission, the only Teachers' College in India which has received that honour.

Rural Institute

The second important step in higher education was the starting of the Rural Institute. Immediately after the attainment of Independence the Government of India took up the matter of reorganisation of higher education

and for that purpose appointed a University Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. That Committee strongly recommended expansion of facilities for Higher Education in the rural areas. One of the recommendations was setting up of Rural Universities. This necessitated the clear spelling out of the aims, objectives and organisation of Rural Education. With a view to evaluating the various attempts in the field of higher education in the rural areas made by voluntary agencies and also to formulate a clearer picture of the pattern of such education, the Government of India decided to appoint a committee of experts to review the whole position and make recommendations for the reorganisation of higher education to suit rural India under the Chairmanship of Dr. K.L. Shrimali, the then Minister of State for Education. The Committee visited various institutions and drew up a blueprint for the future development of rural education in India and recommended the setting up of Rural Institutes and for that purpose selected ten institutions already working in the field with a record of good service in that direction. The task was one of great magnitude.

The Committee visited 35 institutions all over India and selected ten among them for starting the Rural Institutes. They were Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore; Sriniketan in West Bengal; Gandhigram, Madurai, Jamia Milie, New Delhi; Vidya Bhavan, Udaipur, Vidyapeeth, Agra; Lok Bharati, Sanosara; Amravati and Mouni Vidyapeeth, Gargoti.

The Rural Institute programme in the Vidyalaya was inaugurated by Sri P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, then Governor of Orissa on the 29th August 1955. As pointed out earlier, this programme was in response to a demand for a system of education which would cater to the needs of the rural youth. The Institute consisted of three wings, namely, the School of Agriculture, the School of Engineering and the College of Rural Higher Education. The Rural Institute brought with it a new approach to education. It is generally accepted that a mere intellectual education does not help in the cultivation of ethical values or development of social sense and character. Work in cooperation with others done with an attitude of service helps in the creation of healthy attitudes. Education, Extension and Research formed the new approach to learning in the Rural Institutes. In addition, study of problems in the rural areas with a view to creating a new leadership which will be necessary for the development of the rural economy was the main feature of these institutions. The contents of these courses are given below:

a) School of Agriculture

The course of study is for two years after school final and includes the following subjects: Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Rural Economics, Cooperation including Agricultural legislation and marketing, Public Health, Humanities including Village Administration, Village Industries, Horticulture, Forestry and Agricultural Extension, leading to a Certificate in Agriculture.

b) School of Engineering

This institution offered the National Certificate Course in Rural Civil Engineering, of 3 years' duration after SSLC examination. The course comprised of Civil Engineering, Soil and Water Conservation, Rural Health Engineering, Water Supply, Rural Housing, Rural Road Development, General Electrical and Mechanical Engineering with particular reference to rural needs and rural extension service. The Diploma given was equivalent to the L.C.E. Course in Polytechnic.

c) The College of Rural Higher Education

This College provided a course equivalent to the first degrees of Universities giving Diploma in Rural Services. It consisted of two parts: (1) Preparatory corresponding to the Pre-University course followed by (2) three years of first degree and two more years for Post-Diploma courses. The courses provided were science subjects such as Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry and subjects such as Cooperation and Social Education which were preferred for rural jobs such as Social Education Organisers and Cooperative Extension workers.

Apart from the orientation in the formation of the syllabi of Rural Institutes to meet rural needs the important feature of the institutes was rural work in the surrounding villages. Many of the institutes including the Vidyalaya took up rural development work with great zest and enthusiasm. New staff suitable for the various sections were recruited. In the Vidyalaya, the Diploma course in Rural Services began with Dr. M. Aram as Principal and he was succeeded by Dr. O.R. Krishnaswami who did his work with great devotion. The School of Engineering was fortunate in finding Sri V. Srinivasa Iyer to head it, who has built that institution in the course of the last quarter of a century with hard work and dedication. The School of Agriculture suffered from paucity of staff and leadership until Sri T. Kesavan accepted it.

From the beginning, the Rural Institute suffered from some difficulties. As they were new institutions, it took long for Government to accord recognition for their Certificates and diplomas for employment in their institutions. The Diploma course and Post-Diploma course in Rural Services were proposed to be on a par with the first and second degree course of Arts and Science Colleges affiliated to the University. It took many years for the Government to accord those recognitions. This greatly affected admissions and in many rural institutes enrolment went down. This created trouble in the cost benefit ratio. And therefore the Government of India offered 'Deemed University' status to the outstanding Rural Institutes, and recommended the other Institutes to be affiliated to the local universities or with the State Board of Technical Education.

The Vidyalaya and Gandhigram Rural Institutes were offered the Deemed University status by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The Gandhigram Managing Committee went ahead with the proposal

and is now a Deemed University. Even for the Vidyalaya, all the preliminary work was done. All of us were excited and enthusiastic at the opportunity of getting this new recognition. As the Vidyalaya is a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, it had to get permission from the Trustees of the Mission, since Deemed University status could not be conferred on a branch of any other institutions and so it had to be registered separately. This, the Mission was against. In the constitution of the Governing Body of the proposed Deemed University, provision was made for the majority of members of the Governing Body to be nominated by the Trustees of the Ramakrishna Mission. Even this could not satisfy the Trustees, as they considered that separate registration will mean a break off of these institutions from the Mission. I had greatly looked forward to the Deemed University and they knew what a great disappointment it was for me. And so they said: "You have built up these institutions. But if you want to break away from the Mission, we leave the choice to you". I was greatly pained and disappointed. It was one of the greatest trials in my life. My loyalty and devotion to the Mission won and even after repeated offers from the Government of India, I explained to them the position and expressed our sorrowful inability to accept the proposal.

Consequently the College of Rural Higher Education was merged with the Vidyalaya Arts College; the School of Engineering became a Polytechnic affiliated to the State Board of Technical Education, The School of Agriculture was affiliated to the Government of Tamil Nadu. Recently it has been affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University under the changed name, "Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development".

Vinobaji's visit

The Vidyalaya, its workers and children were very happy to receive Acharya Vinobaji on the 21st September 1956. Some of our staff who have been inspired by his teachings and message of Bhoodan have been organising this work in the surrounding villages, with the help of the students of the Basic Training School. Bhoodan amounting to 300 acres of land and subscriptions amounting to Rs.30,000/- were received and offered to Vinobaji. About a thousand copies of his Gita lectures in Tamil were sold that evening.

Vinobaji expressed his joy in coming to this centre of constructive work. He said he was happy to come to a place which was sanctified by Mahatmaji's laying its foundation stone. In his evening prayer speech, he explained the meaning and implications of a life of purity — Brahmacharya.

The next day early in the morning he opened the Vidyalaya Maruthi College of Physical Education buildings before beginning his walk to the next village.

College of Physical Education

About the same time the Rural Institute was started, the Maruthi College of Physical Education came into being in the year 1956. Its philosophy and background are given below:



With Acharya Vinobaji, Founder of the Bhoodan Movement in Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya.

The concept of Physical Education has changed in recent times. It should no more be regarded as mere development of muscles. It should be regarded as an integral part of a sound educational system with the aim of developing the whole individual through physical activity. The aim of education is to develop health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation and citizenship, wholesome use of leisure, high character, social sense, self-discipline and aesthetic appreciation. In this, the evolution of healthy, cheerful and purposeful living, physically wholesome, mentally stimulating and socially satisfying physical education has a large and fundamental part to play.

India is a land of pristine culture. Our philosophy of Yoga has a contribution to make towards physical education. The use of asanas, breathing exercises and so on are yet to be scientifically studied and adapted to suit modern conditions of life. Our folk dance and music give large opportunities for combining physical education with recreation and culture. It will be one of the objectives of Maruthi College of Physical Education to do research on these lines. This institution has been named after the great Mahavir Maruthi. Faith and devotion are essential factors in the development of strength in any individual. Personal purity and dedication to a great cause are the necessary background of all healthy living. Maruthi who personified in himself these great qualities has stood as the ideal of manhood for millions of men in the last many thousands of years in this country.

The College began by giving training in Higher Grade Certificate course conferring eligibility for appointment in Secondary Schools. Subsequently it was affiliated to the University of Madras for Bachelors (B.P.Ed.) and Masters Degree (M.P.Ed.) course in Physical Education. Now it is one of the leading institutions in Physical Education in India providing education, extension and research in this field. We are glad that Sri N. Krishnamurthi who was appointed as Special Officer for organising the College in 1955 continues to be with us as its Principal and has continued to give dedicated service all these years and has also built up a team of dedicated workers.

S.E.O.T.C.

Sri S.K. Dey, Minister of State for Community Development pressed us to take up training of Social Education Organisers. It consisted of two wings, Social Education Organisers' Training for men and Mukhya Sevikas' training for women. As we don't admit women in the Vidyalaya Institutions we first refused. But he persuaded me by saying that the Mukhya Sevika training could be in the Avinashilingam Home Science College under the able guidance of Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas. Both these sections functioned for many years till the Government of India took a policy decision to close these training programmes. These programmes helped a great deal in strengthening the rural work of the Vidyalaya and the Home Science College in the surrounding villages. When this training centre was wound up by the Government of India, the Social Science programmes have been taken

over by the newly started Social work department of the Vidyalaya Arts College and the Extension Department of the Home Science College.

Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School

The most recent of the institutions to come was the Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School. The High School in the Vidyalaya was wholly residential. There was no other high school in this area, and so the people in the surrounding villages wanted admission for their children in the Vidyalaya High School. As we wanted to maintain the residential nature of the institution another high school wholly for day scholars was started in order to meet the needs of the community. And what better name we could find for it than the name of one who sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and was one of his foremost disciples, who was President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for many years and who had inspired the Founder of the Vidyalaya to service and dedicated action.

That school has now been upgraded into a Higher Secondary School. A beautiful building has been built for it recently, which was opened by Swami Vireshwarananda, the present President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Sri Perumal continues as Headmaster giving dedicated service to the Institution.

Now we come to the various All India Conferences and Workshops and Seminars which were held in the Vidyalaya at that time and gave an All India status to the Vidyalaya.

1. The All India Basic Education Conference was held in the Vidyalaya on the 7th, 8th and 9th May, 1949. The Conference was organised under the auspices of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh and is held annually in various parts of India. The previous conference had been held in Poona (Bombay), Jamia Milia (Delhi), Sevagram (C.P.) and Bikram (Bihar). Prominent educationists from all over India attended the Conference and took part in the deliberations. The conference in the Vidyalaya was presided over by Dr. Zakir Hussain, the then President of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh and Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University. The Education Ministers of Madras, Orissa and representatives of the various other Governments attended. Acharya Vinoba Bhave opened the Conference, Sri P.S. Kumaraswami Raja, the Chief Minister of Madras opened the Exhibition.

A Tamil Nadu Constructive Workers' Conference was also held along with the Basic Education Conference on the 10th and 11th May. Sri O.P. Ramaswami Reddiar presided. Various problems connected with constructive work in the Province were discussed in the Conference.

2. Seminar on the Five Year Plan

In India for the first time in history, a five year plan was evolved to spearhead the developmental process. If we are to get the best results out of the Plan, it was felt necessary that both the people and the State governments should fully understand the various aspects of the plan.



Swami Vireshwarananda opening the building of Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School.

By language, culture, habits and way of life, the states of Madras, Mysore, Travancore-Cochin, Andhra and Hyderabad are closely related. This region, while it forms 17 per cent of the land, contains about 26% of the population of the country. It was considered that a Seminar on the Five Year Plan for the Southern Region consisting of the above States would be useful not only in understanding the Plan but also in sharing experience over common problems.

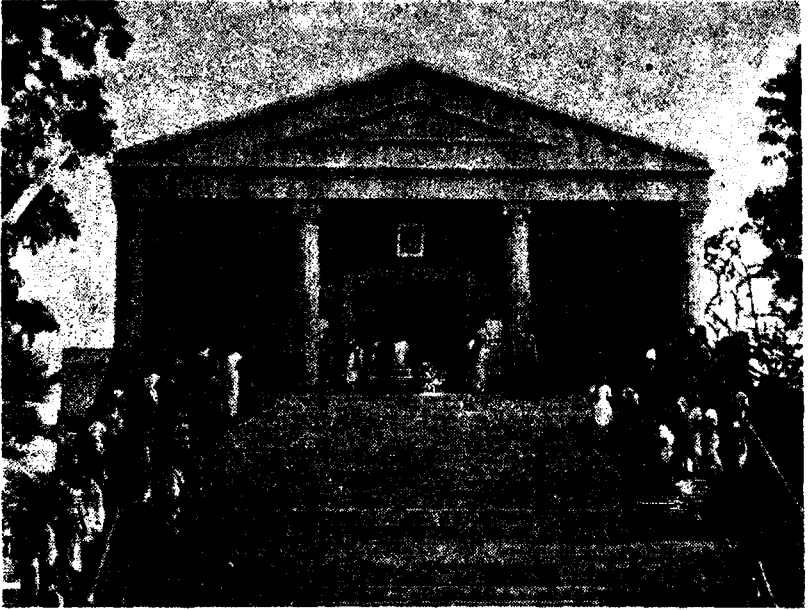
With this end in view a Seminar on the first Five Year Plan for the Southern Region was conducted in the Vidyalaya on the 4th and 5th February, 1955. The subjects for discussion in the Seminar were: Community Development and National Extension Services, in which the following were considered: reasons for large short-falls in expenditure, remedies for the fuller utilisation of the funds provided, creation of institutions which will carry on the work permanently, why cooperative institutions have not made sufficient headway in villages, and difficulties in the way of development of cottage and small scale industries in villages to give fuller employment opportunities. 2. The Second Five Year Plan: The need to provide a large place for industries in view of the need to provide employment potentialities; industrial possibilities of the Southern region; development of power and resources for its development. 3. Land Reforms: Extent to which intermediaries can be abolished, tenancy reforms, fixation of rent, security of tenure, etc. practicability, method and extent of putting ceilings on holdings, possibility of cooperative farming. 4. Projects of Irrigation and power for common benefit to more than one State in the Southern Region.

The Planning Commission and the various State Governments wholeheartedly cooperated in this project. But for their cooperation, the Seminar could not have been the success it was. Notes on these topics were prepared by the Planning Commission and the participating States and circulated in advance so that discussions could be useful and pointed. The officials and non-officials invited were limited to about 50, in the interest of meaningful discussion. Sri V.T. Krishnamachari, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission inaugurated the Seminar and Sri Gulzarilal Nanda, Minister for Planning, Government of India presided. Sri K. Kamaraj, Chief Minister of Madras, presided over the first session, while Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam, Minister for N.E.S. in the Madras State initiated the discussions. Sri V.T. Krishnamachari presided over the discussion on the Second Five Year Plan while Sri C. Subramaniam, Minister for Planning, Madras initiated the discussion. Sri Gulzarilal Nanda presided over the rest of the session, while Sri Chenna Reddy, Minister for Planning, Government of Hyderabad and Sri Jaisukhlal Hathi, Deputy Minister for Irrigation and Power, Government of India, initiated the discussions on Land Reforms and Inter-State problems in irrigation and power respectively. Officials and non-officials of the highest standing in the respective States were deputed to the Seminar. The Seminar was both useful and instructive and helped in a large measure to spotlight the needs of South India.

On the 25th, 26th and 27th of August, 1956, there was a conference consisting of the representatives of the five South Indian States to discuss the problems relating to Education in the Second Five Year Plan. The Conference held seven sessions. The first was the Inaugural function and the rest were devoted to various subjects such as Basic Education in the Second Five Year Plan, Secondary Education, University Education, Technical Education, Youth Welfare, Educational Research and Extension work and Administrative problems.

The Government of India had sent 5 representatives, the Government of Madras 8, the Government of Mysore 7, Andhra 2, Hyderabad 3 and Travancore-Cochin 10. The representatives from each State included leading non-officials also. Along with these there were 7 special invitees, among whom were Raja Sir Muthia Chettiar, Pro-chancellor, Annamalai University, Sri G. Ramachandran, Gandhigram, Madurai District, Sri E.W. Aryanayakam, Secretary, Hindustani Talimi Sangh, Sevagram and Swami Kailashananda, President, Vivekananda College, Madras.

When these developments were taking place a new big institution was begun and getting shaped in Coimbatore, namely, the Avinashilingam Home Science College for Women.



The Shrine at Sri Avinishilingam Home Science College in Coimbatore.



Saradamani Devi

30. The Home Science College

THE Home Science College has for its ideals the teachings preached and lived by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, The Holy Mother and Mahatma Gandhi. About education of women Swami Vivekananda had said: "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The real Shakti* worshipper is he who knows that God is the Omnipresent force in the universe, and sees in women the manifestation of that force. The principal reason why our race has so degenerated is that we have no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu** says, 'Where women are respected, there the Gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and efforts come to naught'. There is no hope of rise for that family or country where women live in sadness. Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons. As sons should be married after observing Brahmacharya up to the thirtieth year, so daughters also should observe Brahmacharya and be educated by their parents. But what are we actually doing? They have all the time been brought up in helplessness and servile dependence on others; and so they are good only to weep their eyes out at the approach of the slightest mishap or danger. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. Our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world.

Therefore Swami Vivekananda said:

Female education should be spread with religion as its centre. Formation of character and observance of the vows of celibacy — these should be attended to. Our women easily understand what chastity means because it is their heritage. First of all intensify that ideal within them above everything else, so that they may develop a strong character by the force of which, in every stage of their lives, whether married or single, they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch from their ideals.

* Cosmic Energy.

** Manu, ancient law-giver in India.

In more recent times, Mahatma Gandhi has said:

"Man and woman are of equal rank but they are not identical. They are a peerless pair being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived, and therefore it follows as a necessary corollary that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both. In framing any scheme of women's education, this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities 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 women 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 any one; but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles the fullest life of men and women cannot be developed".

Swami Vivekananda wanted the highest education to be imparted to Indian women in every sphere. But he was very definite and clear about one matter that it should not be at the cost of purity. Purity is the source of all power. Pure women have faced all difficulties with strength and have even met death face to face, with courage and success. The history of India as well as its mythology are full of accounts of brave women who resisted at great cost all temptations and turmoils to uphold their purity. The memories of such women are enshrined in our hearts, and they will continue to inspire our children for centuries to come. Sita and Savitri are two such examples. As Swamiji said: "Sita and Savitri, though they lived in the ancient past, represent the thoughts and ideals of Indian man and woman throughout the centuries".

Swami Vivekananda goes into poetic rapture while speaking on Sita:

"You may exhaust the literature of the world before finding another Sita. Sita is unique. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita! She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of Sita; and here she stands — these thousands of years — commanding the worship of men, women and children throughout the length and breadth of India. There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the great Sita, she must always remain as our national ideal for women. Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sita, will be a failure. The women of India must grow and develop, in the foot-prints of Sita.

The story of Savitri is an inspiring one. She was the daughter of a king and was very beautiful and accomplished. Many princes asked for her hand and were not accepted. But her love fell upon 'Satyavan', the son of a king, who was old and blind and who was dispossessed by his enemies and so was living in a forest with his blind wife. On hearing this her father said to her, "He has no kingdom. He was a prince without any patrimony, living a poor life in a cottage in the forest". Besides after consulting the astrologers, the king further said that within a year Satyavan would die. To this, Savitri replied: 'Father, do not ask me to marry another person and sacrifice the chastity of my mind, for I love and have accepted in my mind that good and brave Satyavan as my husband. A maiden chooses only once and never departs from that.'

When the king found Savitri adamant, he married her to Satyavan and she went from the palace to the forest to live with her husband and his parents.

Savitri found the exact date when Satyavan was to die, she kept it hidden from him. Daily he went into the depths of the forest, collected fruits and flowers, gathered faggots, and then came back to the cottage, and she cooked meals and helped the old parents. Thus their lives went on until the fatal day came near, only three short days remained. Savitri took a severe vow of three nights' penance and holy fast, and kept her hard vigil. She spent sorrowful and sleepless nights with fervent prayers and unseen tears till the dreaded morning dawned. That day Savitri could not bear to have him out of her sight even for a moment. She begged permission from his parents to accompany her husband when he went to gather the usual herbs and fuel and gaining their consent, she went. Suddenly in faltering accents, he complained to his wife of feeling faint, "My head is dizzy and my senses reel, dear Savitri, I feel sleep stealing over me; let me rest for a while". In fear and trembling she replied, 'Come, lay your head upon my lap, my dearest lord'. And he laid his burning head in the lap of his wife and ere long sighed and expired. Clasping him, her eyes flowing with tears, there she sat in the lonesome forest until the emissaries of Death approached, to take away the soul of Satyavan. But they could not come near the place where Savitri sat with the dead body of her husband, his head resting in her lap. There was a zone of fire surrounding her, because of her purity and not one of the emissaries of Death could come within it. They all fell back from the fire, returned to their King Yama, the God of Death, and told him why they could not obtain the soul of this man, Satyavan.

Then came Yama himself, the God of Death. He could go inside that charmed circle, as he was a God. When he came to Savitri, he said, 'Daughter, give up this dead body, for death is the fate of all mortals, and death is the fate of all men'. Telling this, Yama drew the soul out. Yama having possessed himself of the soul of the young Satyavan proceeded on his way. Before he had gone far, he heard footfalls upon the dry leaves.

He turned back. 'Savitri, daughter, why are you following me? This is the fate of all mortals'. 'I am not following thee, Father', replied Savitri, 'But this is also the fate of woman; she follows where her love takes her, and the eternal law separates not loving man and faithful wife'. Then said the God of death, 'Ask for any boon, except the life of your husband'. 'If thou art pleased to grant a boon. O Lord of Death, I ask that my father-in-law may be cured of his blindness and made happy'. 'Let thy pious wish be granted, duteous daughter'. Then the king of Death travelled on with the soul of Satyavan. Again the same footfall was heard from behind. He looked around, 'Savitri, my daughter, you are still following me'. 'Yes, father; I cannot help doing so:

"I am trying all the time to go back, but the mind goes after my husband, and the body follows. The soul has already gone, for in that soul is also mine; and when you take the soul, the body follows? does it not?". 'Pleased am I with your words, Savitri, ask yet another boon of me, but it must not be the life of your husband'. 'Let my father-in-law regain his lost wealth and kingdom, Father, if thou art pleased to grant another supplication'. 'Loving daughter', Yama answered, "this boon I now bestow; but return home, for living mortals cannot go with Yama". And then Yama pursued his way. But Savitri, meek and faithful, still followed her departed husband. Yama again turned back, 'Noble Savitri, follow not in hopeless woe'. 'I cannot choose but follow where thou takest my beloved one'. 'Then suppose, Savitri that your husband was a sinner and has to go to hell. In that case does Savitri go with the one she loves? 'Glad am I to follow where he goes, be it life or death, heaven or hell', said the loving wife. 'Blessed are your words' my child, pleased am I with you, ask yet another boon'. Since you so permit me, then let the imperial line of my father-in-law be not destroyed; let this kingdom descend to Satyavan's son'. And then the God of Death smiled and said, 'My daughter, thou shalt live again. He shall live to be a father, and the children also shall reign in due course. Return home. Love has conquered death! Woman never loved like thee; and thou art the proof, that even I, the God of Death, am powerless against the power of the true love that abideth'".

There has been one who was born in our own times and whose purity, all-embracing love and dedication have been so outstanding that they inspire faith even in sceptical minds. Sri Saradamani Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, 'Holy Mother' as she is reverentially called, lived before our own eyes. The house in which she lived, the clothes she wore, the vessels that she used and the people with whom she lived and moved, all these can be seen even now. She came of a very poor family and was unlettered. But yet, out of her purity, dedication and devotion, under the guidance of her Master, she blossomed forth as one of the finest flowers of womanhood. Her heart and love expanded to cover all men and women who came to her from whatever community, country or language. Sister Nivedita, former

Miss Margaret Noble, the first disciple of Swami Vivekananda from abroad said about her:

"To me it has always appeared that the Holy Mother is the final word regarding the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realised wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of the women may attain. And yet, to myself, the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of a theocratic civilisation. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she tortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition, she goes straight to the heart of the matter and sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty. Or is there need for severity? No foolish sentimentality causes her to waver. The novice whom she may condemn for many years to beg his bread, will leave the place within the hour. He who has transgressed her code of honour, will never enter her presence again. And yet, she is, as one of her spiritual children said of her, speaking literally of her gift of song, 'Full of music, all gentleness, all playfulness. And the room wherein she worships withal is filled with sweetness.

"Her life, lived in the full light of the present times, has been an example of pure motherliness. She is in fact an embodiment of the cosmic principle of motherhood, wherein humanity and divinity meet. Man's highest conception of God can only be in terms of what is noblest in his nature. Therefore, motherhood, which marks the highest in love, forgiveness, selflessness and service, has been held as the perfect symbol of divinity. In the modern age, the Holy Mother is perhaps the most illustrious example of these qualities".

To understand and follow these great ideals of Indian womanhood is indeed a noble and difficult task. In addition to these spiritual ideals, modern knowledge and application of science and technology in our life is necessary for the progress of the country. To inspire generations of our children and mothers-to-be with these ideals and ideas it was necessary to find somebody who will be devoted to these ideals and live them. When Miss Margaret Noble (who became later Sister Nivedita) offered to serve Indian women and educate our girls, Swami Vivekananda wrote a few words of benediction outlining the qualities necessary for such a dedicated service. 'The mother's Heart, the Hero's will, the Sweetness of the Southern Breeze, Be thou to Indian children, mother, servant, friend in one'. Institutions are not built by bricks, authority or power, but by dedicated men and women and I prayed to God, that he may bless the Saradalaya, the campus of the Home Science

College and its sister institutions, with a woman with a mother's heart and imbued and inspired by these ideals. And God in his gracious mercy helped.

When power was transferred to the Indian Government in 1946, and when we took up Government in the States, there was a comfortable foreign exchange balance, being the loan given to England and America by export of goods from India during the war. It was decided that part of it could be used for the training of manpower required for our national development. Young men and women in various fields, particularly engineering, technology, science and education were selected purely on merit from the cream of our young people and sent for higher training to the United Kingdom and United States of America. Each State was allotted a particular number, and I, as the Minister of Education was entrusted with the task of selecting the candidates from Madras State. One of those persons was Mrs. Rajammal P. Devadas, who was an Assistant Lecturer in Home Science in the Madras Queen Mary's College. Home Science was a new subject at that time and there was no provision for M.Sc. studies in that subject in India. She came out first in the B.Sc. examination conducted by the University of Madras in 1944 and so was selected for this scholarship and sent to the Ohio State University in the U.S.A. Like many other candidates, she also came to take leave of me before her departure. I asked her what her plans were on her return. She said that she would like to build a good educational institution for women after her advanced studies. She qualified for M.Sc. and Ph.D., in Food and Nutrition — Home Science and M.A. Education and received some of the highest academic awards offered by the Ohio State University, namely Sigma XI (Scientific Research), Sigma Delta Epsilon (Graduate Science Woman), Omicron NU (Home Economics Research) and Phi Upsilon Omicron (Home Economics Professional Interest and Scholarship). Later she received the D.Sc. degree from the University of Madras which is the highest academic qualification in Home Science and won the Rafi Ahmad Kidwai Award from the Government of India for her work in Human Nutrition.

On her return from the USA in 1950, she was offered a place in the Government of India College of Nursing in Delhi and took up the assignment. Later Dr. Mrs. Hansa Mehta, wife of Dr. Jivaraj Mehta (who was the personal physician to Mahatma Gandhi and later the Chief Minister of Gujarat), who was then the Vice-Chancellor of M.S. University of Baroda came to know of her high qualifications and offered her the Deanship of Home Science in her University. After a few years of service as the Dean, she was appointed as the Chief Home Economist of the Government of India. In that position, she developed the Home Science Wings for training Gramasevikas (Village level women Extension workers) in all states in India. At that time, I was in Parliament and had occasion to meet her and enquired whether she was still interested to serve in an educational institution and whether she would accept the Principalship of our Home Science College. To my great surprise and joy, she accepted. It was rare to find a person

with such academic distinction, wide experience in the national level and total dedication. The Saradalaya institutions were fortunate in getting her leadership. Under her leadership, hard and dedicated work, the Home Science College has grown to be the biggest and most outstanding institution in Home Science in India, attracting students from all over India and also some from countries abroad.

The Girls' High School was the first of the Institutions to be started in 1955 in the Saradalaya Campus, and it later became a Higher Secondary School. The first important event in the campus was the opening of the temple, so that children can participate regularly in worship in the mornings and evenings. The temple in Saradalaya is a majestic edifice forming the centre of all activities in the campus. It was dedicated by Swami Yatiswarananda, on the Holy Mother's Birthday on 23rd December 1956. The puja started on that day continues to be observed every morning and evening regardless of holidays.

When one ascends the 50 ft. wide and 15 ft. high steps of the temple, before entering the broad panelled entrance leading to the shrine, on both sides are placed engraved marble slabs giving the eternal messages of the prophets of all religions. The slab on the left has excerpts from the scriptures from the Upanishads to modern times including the Gita, Buddha, Christ, Koran, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi as follows:

*Lead Me from Evil to Good,
Lead Me from Darkness to Light,
Lead Me from Death to Immortality.*

— Upanishad

*Thy Right Is To Work Only, But never To
The Fruits Thereof.*

— Gita

*From Meditation Does Wisdom Spring
Without Meditation Wisdom Wanes*

— Buddha

*The Kingdom of God Is Within You
What Is A Man Profited, If He,
Shall Gain The Whole World,
And Lose His Own Soul?*

— Jesus Christ

*A Kind Speech And Forgiveness Is Better
Then Alms Followed By Injury*

— Koran

*He Who Has Faith Has All,
He Who Lacks Faith Lacks All.*

— Sri Ramakrishna

Arise, Awake and Stop Not Till The Goal Is Reached

— Swami Vivekananda

*Non-Violence, Truth, Non-Thieving,
Continence, Non-Hoarding, Manual Labour,
Control Of The Tongue, Fearlessness,
Tolerance To All Religions, Spirit of Swadeshi,
Non-observance of Untouchability,
These Eleven Shall Be Our Vows.*

— Mahatma Gandhi

On the right slab are inscriptions in Tamil from the Thirukkural, one of the ethical codes for all times, written about two thousand five hundred years ago upto the modern age including the messages of Appar the great Saivite saint, Nammalwar, Thirumular, Avvayar, the woman saint and Thayumanavar as follows:

உற்ற நோய் நோன்றல் உயிர்க்கு உறுகண் செய்யாமை

அற்றே தவத்திற்கு உரு

— திருவள்ளுவர்

*Patient endurance of suffering and non-injuring of life,
in these is contained the whole of tapas.*

உள்ளுவது எல்லாம் உயர்வுள்ளல் மற்றது

தள்ளிலும் தள்ளாமையே நீர்த்து

— திருவள்ளுவர்

*Let all thy thoughts be grand and noble; for then, even if they fail,
thy glory will tarnish never.*

வானத் துலங்கிலென் மனகம்ப மாகிலென் மால்வரையும்

தானம் துளங்கித் தலைதடுமாறிலென் தண்கடனும்

மீனம் படிவென் விரிசுடர் வீழிலென் வேலை நஞ்சுண்டு

ஊனம் ஒன்றில்லா ஒருவனுக்கு ஆட்பட்ட உத்தமர்க்கே — அப்

*What if the sky dissolves or the earth contracts into a pillar,
Or the mighty Mountain uproots itself with tottering peaks,
Or the cool seas begin to breed fish or the stars fall,
To the pious folk who have given away their heart and soul to that
great ONE*

Who consumed the poison of the sea and remained unhurt?

உயர்வற உயர்நலம் உடையவன் யவன் அவன்

மயர்வற மதிநலம் அருளினன் யவன் அவன்

அயர்வறும் அமரர்கள் அதிபதி யவன் அவன்

துயரறு சுடரடி தொழுதெழ! என் மனனே

வீடுமின் முற்றவும் வீடு செய்து உம்முயிர்

வீடுடை யாளிடை, வீடு செய்ய்மினே

— நம்மாழ்வார்

He who is the acme of perfection

He who is the giver of knowledge which wipes out all ignorance

He who is the indefatigable sovereign among the Immortals,

Oh, my mind! Adore His radiant feet which can sorrow destroy

*Renounce absolutely, by renunciation let your soul rest
On eternal happiness and strive for eternal liberation.*

யாவற்கு மாம்இறைவர்க்கொரு பச்சிலை

யாவர்க்கு மாம்பசு வுக்கொரு வாயுறை

யாவர்க்கு மாம் உண்ணும் போதொரு கைப்பிடி

யாவர்க்கு மாம் பிறர்க் கின்றுரைதானே

— திருமூலர்

'It is within the reach of all to adore the Lord with a green leafy offering.

*'It is within the reach of all to offer a mouthful of grass to a cow,
Within the reach of all, sure to spare a handful of food to the needy,
Within the reach of all, sure, to give kind well-meant advice to their fellow-men.*

நிறப்பெரும் படைக்கலம் நிறத்தின் நேர் உற

மறப்பயன் வினைக்குறும் வன்மை அன்றரோ

இறப்பிலும், திருவெல்லாம் இழப்ப எப்திலும்

குறப்பிலர் அறம் எனல் குரர் ஆவதே

— கம்பர்

Physical courage such as facing without flinching the piercing of a spear in the chest is indeed courage but greater than that is the courage shown by a person, when even if he were to lose all that is his, even if it be loss of life and wealth, in not renouncing 'Dharma' (duty) and that marks him out as a real hero.

ஒன்றாகக் காண்பதே காட்சி; புலன் ஐந்தும்

வெள்ளுன்தன் வீரமே வீரமா - என்றுந்தான்

சாவாமல் கற்பதே கல்வி; தனைப்பிறர்

ஏவாமல் உண்பதே ஊன்

— ஓளவையார்

That is true vision which sees the supreme as ONE,
That is true valour which enables one to overcome the senses five,
That is true knowledge which leads to liberation,
That is the real food which does not make us lose independence.

அன்பர் பணி செய்ய எனை ஆளாக்கி விட்டுவிட்டால்

இன்பநிலை தானே வந்து எய்தும் பராபரமே

— தாயுமானவர்

If only I am made the instrument to serve Thine devotees
O, Lord! Eternal Bliss will itself descend on me.

The thoughts embedded in these slabs have inspired great men and women throughout the ages. I hope that they will inspire the thousands of girls passing through the portals of the Saradalaya in its various institutions.

The story of how we came up on the site for the Trust institutions is an exciting one. After the Trust was founded, we were looking for a land to start the Girls' School. The municipality came forward to gift a site of five acres for the purpose. But the person from whom it was acquired came to me and said that the land was acquired for a park and if the municipality gave it to a school, he would go to court against it. We did not know what

to do. Lawyers advised that if the matter goes to court the decision was uncertain. And so with great regret and pain we wrote declining their gift. When we were deeply perplexed about finding another site, the refugees of the II World War who were in the Forest College compound vacated the site. The Government of Madras who owned the site kindly came forward to give five acres of land. It was as if God had acted through the Government. On a Vijaya Dasami Day Swami Sarvajnananda who was then with us in the Vidyalaya took some earth from the Vidyalaya, and along with myself went to the site, sprinkled it on that land and took charge of it. To that land further land has been added by the gift of the Government of India.

The Home Science College was inaugurated on 24th July 1957 by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice-President of India when Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, opened the College buildings.

The Report of the institutions for 1957-58 explains the objectives of the Home Science College in the following words:

"Home Science seeks to bring modern scientific outlook into the Homes and use the various physical sciences for better living. Knowledge of such subjects as Nutrition, Health, Hygiene, Child Care, Home Nursing, Home Management, Clothing etc. will considerably increase the efficiency of our womenfolk in their household duties and contribution to the community. It has been observed by friends from abroad that the wastage in our country is much greater than in other countries. Much wastage is incurred in the rough use of cloth resulting in decreasing their durability improper use of furniture; throwing off of nutrients from foods through peeling of potatoes, cutting the skin of vegetables, discarding cooking water from rice and vegetables and overcooking of vegetables. Due to lack of knowledge or proper methods of preservation, we waste enormous quantities of food daily. In addition, it has been pointed out that use of milled and polished rice not only makes the rice less nutritive, but also reduces the quantity of its output. Added to this is the waste of foodgrains by pests, insects and deterioration by natural causes which can be avoided in every home by using modern methods of food preservation and storage. Such wastage is bad in any country, but in a poor country like ours, it is criminal. No amount of Government propaganda will help us to save this, until the women are trained to be aware of this wastage and learn scientific methods to avoid them. Hence the Sri Avinashilingam College was dedicated to the study of Home Science."

"Home Science was a newly introduced subject and there was need to inform people what it meant and what were its objectives. For this purpose a book entitled 'Meaning of Home Science' written by Dr. Rajammal Devadas, the then Chief Home Economist of India was published by our Home Science College in 1958 which says: 'Home Science is education for living. The home and family are the measuring yardsticks of any nation.

They reflect the progress of the country. By catering to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of the members, the home gives meaning to life, and suitable environment for the growth of the children and culture to citizens. It builds character, ensures happiness and influences the individual and community for better living. Citizenship, respect for others, contentment, health, character, efficiency in work, are all obtained through sound home-living. Since home-living affects the very foundation of an individual's life, Home Science is education for living. Home Science or study of home-making deals with the daily activities, such as food, clothing, shelter, finance, health, child care, beautification, community service etc. In order to understand all aspects of home-living, knowledge of basic sciences and art subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, economics, sociology, psychology, arts and architecture and religion are essential. On this strong foundation of basic sciences and arts, the structure of Home Science with its areas of foods and nutrition, clothing, housing, health, child development and human relationships is built. It influences the growth and development of family members, through the knowledge of the environment in which they live. It uses scientific methods in solving daily problems. It is concerned with the happenings in the world, and how they affect the family.

Home Science, in addition to giving education for home-living, also trains students for a variety of careers such as in fields of community development service, women social work, dietetics in hospitals, managers of catering institutions and of nursery schools. The greatest career is, of course, home-making and bringing up happy families.

'The Home has been the instrument for a country's growth and for promoting its ideals, welfare and progress ever since civilization began. All the highest aspirations in human society have been derived from the foundation of happy homes. In India, the home has been regarded as the temple with the mother as the presiding goddess whom we worship. Man has acquired most of his spiritual qualities such as sacrifice, brotherhood, love, charity, patience and good human relationship through the home and mother who brought him up. The women of India have been the unflickering torch and infallible guide for the members of the family. Society has changed a good deal due to the impacts and inroads of science. There is a great need today to reorganise our educational systems on the foundation of all that is best in our ancient culture, and modern scientific findings. We have to help the modern girls and boys to discriminate between the useless traditions and useful principles of the past. We have to reinforce knowledge and educational thought with spiritual power. We have to equip pupils and students with abilities to adjust to changing standards of living, educational systems and psychological trends in social life. These are just what Home Science Education seeks to give our children''.

From the beginning the objectives of Education in Saradalaya were four-fold namely 1) to maintain the noblest traditions of Indian womanhood;

2) to uphold the high standards of academic excellence; 3) that our education should not be merely bookish but should involve practical application and lastly 4) that our educational institutions should not be islands in society but as Gandhiji said, should be centres of education for the people in the surrounding area providing a variety of non-formal education courses needed by them. This was indeed a tremendous task, but nothing is so big which cannot be achieved by competent persons through dedicated and continuous effort. Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas was our technical adviser for the first year and later accepted the principalship of the Avinashilingam Home Science College and Directorship of the Trust Institutions. Her academic competence, dedication, experience and contacts in the Government of India, helped by my own background as Minister of Education and Member of Parliament helped the growth of the Home Science College in a large measure.

Thus even in the first report of the College, we find the following mentions:

The All India Council for Secondary Education had planned to organise two Training-cum-Seminar courses on Inter-State basis for Home Science Teachers, one for the Northern Region and the other in the South. The former was conducted at the Lady Irwin College, New Delhi. This college was requested to conduct the course for the Southern Region, consisting of the States of Madras, Mysore, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The State Governments selected and deputed the trainees. 32 trainees from the various States participated in the training which lasted for five weeks. Sri S.B.P. Pattabhirama Rao, Minister for Education, Andhra Pradesh inaugurated this Seminar-cum-Training Camp along with Sri M.V. Krishnappa, Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Government of India.

In the next year, the College conducted two short courses in Home Science for the Southern Region on the request of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Government of India. Since then short courses in Nutrition and Child Development have become a regular feature of the College and many such courses have been conducted in the last two decades in cooperation with various Ministries of Government of India and State Governments in which candidates from many States have participated. In the same year that is in 1957 the college became a centre for the Mukhya Sevika Training on the request of the Ministry of Community Development, Government of India. In 1959, the first M.Sc. course in Home Management was started. The Nursery School and the Basic School were started in 1960 and 1961 respectively. Other M.Sc. courses in Child Development, Food and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Institution Management, Economics, Mathematics, Home Science Extension and Bio-Chemistry followed. In those early days, namely during the fifties and early sixties, many who have leadership position now in the College, namely Dr. Godavari Kamalanathan, Dr. Lakshmi Santa Rajagopal, the present Principal, Dr. Nirmala Murthi,

Dr. Saraswati Bhatji, Dr. Parvati Eswaran, Dr. Usha Chandrasekar, Dr. Raji, Dr. Jaya Muthu, Dr. Sitalakshmi and others joined the staff. Dr. Janabai Giri, Dr. K.N. Meenakshi and others followed. Thus the foundation for the growth of the institution was strongly laid.

At that time there was no provision for M.Sc. courses in many aspects of Home Science in our country. Therefore avenues were explored to send some teachers abroad for training. Thus Dr. Usha Chandrasekar, Dr. Lakshmi Santa Rajagopal were trained in Purdue, Dr. Raji in Tennessee, Dr. Nirmala Murthi in Iowa State and Dr. Parvati Eswaran in Columbia. Later when the College was recognised for M. Phil and Ph.D. thus providing opportunities for the highest academic degrees in various subjects, many of our staff took advantage of the provision. Today twenty-five candidates have received Doctorates in Home Science and other subjects guided by Dr. Devadas and others. Considerable research has also been undertaken in the various branches of Home Science. With the result that the College has grown to be the biggest set-up in Home Science in the country attracting students from all over India and the neighbouring countries for its M.Sc., M. Phil and Ph.D. courses.

Swami Vivekananda said that in order to serve the poor in villages, if they don't come to us, we must go to them and organise such education as may be needed by them. Thus we find our students going to the villages in groups and organising services for them in Nutrition, Child Care, vegetable gardening, Environmental Sanitation and other aspects. Balwadis have been organised in several villages, Magan Chulas and Gobar Gas plants have been introduced. Camps for immunising children against childhood diseases have been held. Village women have been invited to short courses in Home Science including cooking without waste, tailoring, upbringing of children and methods of economic improvement like poultry. Action Research has been undertaken on the problems faced by the feedback information from field experience. Thus it will be seen that most of the research done by the M.Sc., M.Phil, Ph.D. students of the College have been field-oriented aimed at solving rural problems. Besides research done as requirement for the university degrees, independent research projects in cooperation with DST, ICAR, ICMR, NCERT, UNICEF, FAO, USAID have been undertaken on such subjects as leaf protein, Science and Technology for women, Low Cost Foods Formula, Nutrition Education, Post-harvest Technology, School Feeding and Education and other subjects.

Mention of research brings me to one of the great projects undertaken by the College namely the publication of a monthly Research journal called Indian Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics. This is the first and only such journal in India containing research articles on these subjects. Started in 1965, for some years it was brought out as a quarterly. Later to meet the demands of research from all over India and abroad, it was made a monthly. Nutrition laboratories, Scientific Institutions, Agriculture and other Universities, Medical and Home Science Colleges and other institutions from

many countries all over the world subscribe to the journal. Also contributions to the journal are received from various countries. It has an Editorial Board with experts from in and outside the country which includes outstanding experts like Dr. C. Gopalan, Dr. Ramalingaswamy and others. The Chief Editor is Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas assisted by Dr. Usha Chandrasekar. Articles received are referred to referees who are experts in the respective subjects and unless they come to the required standard, they are not published. The journal has attained international recognition and acceptance.

In these many years Dr. Devadas has participated in many international conferences in Home Science and Nutrition. She has been a regular participant of the World Nutrition Congresses held from time to time in various parts of the world. To many she went in delegations sponsored by the Government of India. She had the honour of being elected as a Vice-President in the World Food Congress at The Hague and in the World Home Science Congress in Paris. During recent years she has taken several faculty members for Conferences abroad; to Japan in 1975, to Brazil 1978, to Scandinavia in 1980, to Bangkok in 1983. Consequently the College became the venue for National and International Conferences and Workshops in Home Science and Nutrition like the Biannual conference of Home Science Association of India of which she was President and the International Biological Programme — Technical Group meeting on Leaf Protein. Prof N.W. Pirie, F.R.S. Chairman, Bio-Chemistry Division, Rothemsted Experiment Station, U.K. was the Director of this Workshop. Thirty-five scientists from 8 countries namely, Ceylon, Hungary, Nigeria, New Zealand, Sweden, USA, UK, India and the FAO participated. Prof N.W. Pirie gave the keynote address. In all 40 papers were circulated and discussed.

Extension work — From its very inception along with Teaching and Research, extension work was given an important place in the work of the Avinashilingam Home Science College. Extension work consisted of various aspects.

1. Adult education work in the surrounding villages especially for women by the establishment of evening schools with the help of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Hundreds of such centres have been set up and run in the Perianaickenpalayam and Karamadai Blocks.

2. A more important form of extension work was carrying science and technology to village women, such as introduction of smokeless chulas, janata refrigerators, post-harvest technology for preservation of foodgrains, fruits and vegetables and eradication of the rodent pest, establishment of nutritious kitchen gardens, improvement of environmental sanitation, courses for village family women on Nutrition, Child Care and better cooking methods without wasting nutrients, spread of Gobar Gas and a variety of such other courses. These were done through our own staff and M.Sc. students and also through projects in collaboration with ICAR, ICMR, FAO and a variety of other agencies.



With the group of International Scientists of USAID in Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College and with the Principal and Vice-Principal of the College.

The College was called upon to extend its services towards the implementation of the Integrated Child Development Service programme in the Thali Block of the backward District of Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu in three aspects: viz., Production of Primers in Tamil for functional literacy, Training the pre-school teachers in the methodology of teaching the illiterate mothers and training the pre-school teachers in Nutrition education methods by using these primers.

3. The Third aspect of extension work is through the conduct of Seminars to Staff of Schools and Colleges. Some of them were on national and regional levels as mentioned above and some were on development staff of the State Government, Government of India, All India Radio programme Officers and other development personnel. One which had a large impact was the nutrition education programme in which thousands of teachers were trained in Nutrition, Child Care and environmental sanitation in the Coimbatore, Nilgiris and Kanyakumari Districts in cooperation with the UNICEF and the State Government. Evaluation has pointed out that teachers with training of even limited duration can pass on valuable ideas on nutrition, child care and environmental sanitation for implementation in the community through teaching children in the class-rooms and integrating it with teaching lessons in science, hygiene and social studies.

4. A large number of Action Research projects involving the solution of problems found in the field in the course of our extension work have also been undertaken with good results.

Experience in the College has pointed out that with marginal cost of appointment of a small number of personnel, the staff and students particularly the students in Post-graduate courses if well motivated and organised can make a considerable contribution towards our national development goals and at the same time this experience helps to give a better type of education and inculcation of social sense amongst the students and staff.

Thus the college has been actively engaged in teaching research and other programmes in the field of adult education and functional literacy.

At about the same time another institution has come into being in the Saradalaya Campus. For many years, we have felt that training of good teachers with a background of Indian cultural traditions and devoted to the service of our children would be a great contribution for National Development. It first began as a Home Science section attached to the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Teachers' College in 1963, which later on developed into a full-fledged College of Education in 1968.

Many educational tours were organised for students to places of interest in Northern India, combined with attending the National Home Science Conferences in 1962. In the same year a foreign tour was organised: nineteen students of Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College, went on a study tour of Japan and the Far East led by the Principal Dr. (Mrs.) Rajammal

P. Devadas. They returned after visiting Japan, Burma, Thailand, Hongkong, Phillipines, Vietnam, Malaya and Singapore. During their stay in the various countries, they studied the Home Economics activities and met many experts in the field. They were entertained by the Japan Women's University, University of Thailand, University of Phillipines, University of Malaya and several other educational institutions and Home Economics Associations. In the following years many other such tours were organised which helped in broadening the minds and vision of our students and staff and inspiring them to put up great efforts towards academic excellence and service to the people.

But let nobody imagine that all these were achieved easily. Tremendous, continuous and dedicated efforts along with steadfastness to ideals is necessary for the building of all great institutions. They are not and cannot be by the effort of one man or woman, but by a group of dedicated people gathered around a dedicated leadership. All honour and glory to those who have given this hard work and leadership in the building up of the College. At the same time no work is ever achieved without facing difficulties. As pointed out by social scientists, progress itself creates tension, caused out of resistance to progress by vested interests, who are interested in maintaining the status quo, for their own profit and pleasure. We had also difficulties to face from teachers who opposed change when autonomy was offered and students were used by them for their agitation. And so we had our share of strikes, abusive writing on the wall and unsigned notices. But those who want to achieve must struggle on in spite of difficulties, as those who want the rose must put up with its thorns. We must express our gratitude to Dr. K. Kulandaivel, who came forward to shoulder responsibility during this troubled time, even as he took over the Vidyalaya Arts College at a most difficult time.

In the meantime, the physical structure accommodating the various institutions and their activities grew. Because of paucity of space the growth had to be vertical. Many distinguished leaders came and blessed the children and staff and encouraged their efforts. Swami Madhavananda, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission laid the foundation for the 'Annai Arul', M.Sc., Building, later opened by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain, who followed Dr. Radhakrishnan as President of India opened a Hostel. Dr. Punjab Rao Deshmukh, Minister of Agriculture, Government of India to whom we are grateful for helping to get additional land for the Campus opened another Hostel, Dr. Sushila Nayyar, Minister of Health, Government of India who had served Mahatma Gandhi for many years opened the Dining Hall and P.G. Hostel above it, my friend Sri V. V. Giri, President of India opened the completed building of the High School named Subramanyam, after my revered father. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister opened the Vivekananda Auditorium when my friend Sri K. Kamaraj presided. Our famous Agricultural Scientist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan who is now the Chairman

of the FAO Council opened the Research building and Swami Vireshwarananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission opened our beautiful library building. To all those we owe our gratitude, but we don't know how to thank sufficiently our students and staff for their great and dedicated contribution in the building of these institutions.

Hard and sustained work with faith in God and courage in the cause always succeeds. The result is the building of an educational edifice, a centre for advanced learning in Home Science, Nutrition, Child Development and related fields, which is the pride of the country, a fit offering to Mother India and Her Children for centuries to come.

31. In Parliament

After my term in the Madras Legislative Assembly was over, I opted for Parliament in the next General elections held in 1951. When I was elected to the Central Assembly in 1934 my constituency covered the Districts of Coimbatore, Salem and North Arcot and the electorate consisted of Incometax assesseees and land holders paying land revenue of Rs. 50/- and above. After Independence and the coming into effect of the new Constitution of India, adult suffrage was introduced. And consequently the constituencies became smaller and the number of members elected to the House of Representatives, now called the Lok Sabha was increased. I stood for the Tiruppur Constituency consisting of Palladam and Gobi Taluks in Coimbatore District and was elected to the first Lok Sabha of the Indian Republic.

When I was earlier in the Central Assembly I sat in the Opposition. Now my seat was along with the ruling party. Formerly, it was fighting a foreign Government. But now it was helping the party in power with constructive suggestions. When I entered the Central Assembly I was the youngest amongst the members and new to the legislature; now I was considered to be one of the senior members with a background of experience in administration and legislative work. The Congress Party set up committees attached to various Ministries and throughout my period in Parliament in Lok Sabha and later in Rajya Sabha I was the Chairman and Convener of the Education Committee of the Congress Party, which brought me into close contact with the working of that Ministry. Moulana Abul Kalam Azad was the first Minister of Education, Sri K.L. Shrimali the Minister of State, Sri Humayun Kabir was the Educational Adviser, Sri K.G. Saiyidain, Joint Educational Adviser, Sri G.K. Chandramani was Joint and later Additional Educational Adviser for Technical Education and Dr. R.K. Bhan and Sri L.S. Chandrakant, Deputy Educational Advisers. I was also in the Central Advisory Board of Education and the All India Council of Technical Education and in that capacity helped in giving constructive suggestions for the formulation and implementation of the national policies in Education. Later I was also in the Council of Agricultural Education of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Jawaharlal Nehru was the then Prime Minister and he strode as a colossus in the national scene. Nehru and Sardar Patel were two mighty

men in the freedom movement and so long as the Sardar lived, Nehru had to share power with the Sardar. Both had indomitable will and courage but differed in outlook and temperament. Sardar was not happy about Nehru's unqualified secularism, nor did he like his radical attitude towards social reforms. He was strong and swift while Nehru was soft and considerate and it is said that in the final act for the unification of India namely the Police Action against Hyderabad, many in the Cabinet did not know about it, till it was over and that Nehru was informed about it only after it began. On many matters they did not see eye to eye with each other and they had to get Mahatma Gandhi's help on many occasions for smooth running of the Government. But as Lord Mountbatten said, both were necessary for consolidating the gains of Indian freedom. But with the demise of the Sardar in 1950, there was none in the Congress Party or Parliament to equal his stature, strength and following, so Nehru reigned supreme. Nehru had another great advantage, namely, all the Governments in the States at the time were Congress governments. And so, he ruled not only in the Centre but also in all the States. His word was law. But it must be said to his lasting greatness that inspite of the great power he wielded, he kept a balance and sobriety which won the admiration of the people. It was because of this quality and his great vision for a great India, he could lay the foundation in many aspects of national policy.

Setting up of the Planning Commission

Jawaharlal Nehru was a great believer in Planned Development. In this he drew his inspiration from Russia. Therefore one of the first tasks done in the first Parliament was the setting up of a National Planning Commission for India of which the Prime Minister was the Chairman. The Indian Constitution has spelt out basic objectives in "The Directive Principles of State Policy". Among those, "Directive Principles", were that-- "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of national life". Further, "that-- The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing--

a) that the citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good.

c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.

These general principles were given a more precise direction in December 1954, when Parliament adopted the 'Socialist pattern of Society' as the objective of social and economic policy. But this concept, which embodies the values of Socialism, Democracy and Planned Development did not emerge as a sudden change, but had its roots deep in India's struggle for freedom. Thus from the beginning of

Independence, two main aims have guided India's Planned Development, namely to build by democratic means a rapidly expanding and technologically progressive economy and a social order based on justice and offering equal opportunity to every citizen. To change a traditional society into a dynamic one, in a country with a vast population rooted in the past, was a tremendous task. To accomplish this through peaceful and democratic means and by the consent of the people, was even more difficult.

Planning involves development of the various aspects of National life and economy such as improved agriculture, setting up new industries, extension of educational facilities, improvement of the machinery of administration fit to take up the responsibilities of development, evolution of a tax structure which will ensure social justice, land reforms, abolition of social inequalities, and special measures for the uplift of women, backward castes and tribes, and eradication of the colossal poverty concentrated in a large measure in the villages throughout the country. And so, as a corollary to planned development, a Community Development Programme, mainly aimed at raising the economic, social and educational status of the people in villages was necessary. Therefore a massive Rural Development programme had to be taken up. A development programme to uplift more than thirty crores of people living in over seven lakhs of villages was indeed a great and difficult job costing a great deal of money and effort. Fortunately the Ford Foundation under the leadership of Dr. Douglas Ensminger came forward to help in a big way and a Community Development Programme was evolved and placed before Parliament for approval.

Community Development Programme

The basic objectives of the Community Development Programme launched in 1952 on Gandhiji's Birthday, on October 2, was to secure the fullest development of the material and human resources on an area basis and thereby raise the rural community to higher levels of living with active participation and as much as possible, on the initiative of the people themselves. The Community Development Programme was the outcome of lessons gathered from past experiences. The village received paramount importance in the thoughts and programme inspired and initiated by Gandhiji. Throughout his long life of service to the country, the Mahatma taught and demonstrated the need for the uplift of the rural masses. He came out with his constructive programme which gave encouragement to several voluntary organisations to engage in rural reconstruction activities. Poet Rabindranath Tagore also carried out a scheme of rural development at Sriniketan. This scheme was started with the objective of making the villagers self-reliant and self-respecting to and acquaint them with the cultural traditions of our country.

The live-wires of the newly started Community Development Programme were Sri V.T. Krishnamachari, when he was the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and Sri S.K. Dey who was the

Minister of State for Community Development and who was greatly responsible for the implementation of the project. The former had carried out impressive work in Baroda in rural development and later as Chairman of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee in 1952 had made valuable suggestions on the question of an infra-structure for rural development. The Grow More Food Enquiry Committee had observed that all aspects of rural life were inter-related and that while particular problem might call for special attention, "the plans for them should form parts of, and be integrated with, those for achieving the wider aims." The recommendations of this Committee were responsible, to a very large extent in shaping the extension approach which became an essential vehicle of the Community Development Programme in India. It was felt that if the central aim of Community Development was investment in man, an integrated extension service should be the principal means to that end and that scientific knowledge and techniques should be carried to the people through the extension agency. The first Five Year Plan gave recognition to this new approach in the following words: "Community Development is the method and rural extension the agency through which the Five Year Plan seeks to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the villages".

The Community Development programme from the very beginning emphasised people's participation by organising committees at the village and block levels but it was discovered that enthusiasm and participation of the people tended to be slow in forthcoming. Consequently, a team was setup by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of Sri Balwantrai Mehta to consider ways and means of local leadership through setting up statutory local organisations. The Committee toured throughout India and studied the matter in depth and recommended the creation of an inter-connected system of democratic institutions at the village, block and district levels, which resulted in the establishment of the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj. The Committee had observed that to evoke popular enthusiasm to the maximum extent, 'it is necessary that there should be devolution of power and decentralisation of machinery and that such power be exercised and such machinery be controlled and directed by popular representatives of the local area and that respective State legislations invest the Panchayati Raj bodies with power to discharge their responsibilities. But whatever the formal structure of these bodies, the main issue is the adequacy and depth of decentralization'. Accordingly the Taluk Boards and District Boards which existed then were abolished and a uniform system of local administration on the basis of the three-tier system namely the Panchayati, the Panchayat Union and District Council were set up throughout India, managed by elected representatives.

Mahila Mandals and Yuvak Mandals were to be set up and utilised for Community Development activities in the Panchayat Unions. Voluntary groups were to be aided and encouraged by the block staff to assume responsibility for village programmes and activities of development such as

youth programmes, organised activities and programmes for village women, village farmers' associations and village recreation programmes. Community organisation implies moulding attitudes for group activities to improve the quality of living at the local level. This calls for concerted efforts on the part of all Government agencies and the people, technicians and opinion moulders and the public media. To get their willing cooperation, training of people assumes crucial role in the scheme of Community Development.

For the orientation of people's representatives, senior administrators and technicians and other personnel, the Union Ministry of Community Development established a National Institute of Community Development at Hyderabad. This institute has two wings, one devoted to study and the other to research. The aim of the institute is primarily to stimulate thinking and give an opportunity to participants to study the various aspects of Community Development and related subjects. The Institute also functions as an apex body for providing orientation in ideological concepts, philosophy and methods of Community Development and Panchayati Raj and conducts specialised courses concerning different areas of rural development and social change. It has served also as a clearing house for information on Community Development and Panchayati Raj.

From the very beginning, next to education, I was interested in village work under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya from its very inception has taken up work in the surrounding villages. The starting of the Rural Institute with its three wings of Diploma courses in Rural Services, Diploma course in Civil and Rural Engineering and course in Agricultural Science in the Vidyalaya gave an impetus to this work. As mentioned earlier, on the request of Sri S.K. Dey, the Minister of State for Rural Development in the Government of India, we had also undertaken to establish centres for training two cadres of Community Development workers namely Social Education Organisers (men) in the Vidyalaya and Mukya Sevikas (women) in the Avinashilingam Home Science College. And so I was requested to be a member of the National Institute of Rural Development set-up in Hyderabad and was a Founder-member of the Executive Committee of that body, and was connected with it in that capacity for nearly two decades. These gave me insights into the problems of rural development and helped us to do our work better in the villages around the Vidyalaya and the Home Science College and later set-up the Rural Development Centre in Vivekanandapuram.

The Community Development efforts did make a considerable impact on Rural Development. They provided a countrywide structure for the uplift of the millions in the villages. They created new popular agencies for development like youth clubs and mahila mandals. It also developed a new ethos amongst administrators by emphasising their development role. But after some years of working of the scheme, it was assessed as a disappointment, in spite of inherent soundness of the scheme itself, because of its

improper implementation. The original enthusiasm of the officials was not kept up, people's participation was not organised and instead for everything the Government was looked to for support. More than anything else, due to political reasons, in many States no elections were held for the Panchayats and Panchayat Unions for prolonged periods of time. Establishment of local democratic institutions meant sharing of power with the elected representatives but this many State Governments were not willing to do. With the result the Ministers and their party can order the officials to do their bidding. Consequently the Block administration lost its vitality and the Block officialdom became a limb of exploitation of the political bureaucracy.

Development of Science and Technology

One of the major developments during the period was the development of scientific and technological institutions in India on a large scale. Nehru was convinced that a technological revolution was necessary for the progress of the country, for greater production in Agriculture and Industry, for improving the health of the people both by preventive and curative methods, for bettering communication and transport facilities and giving more employment for people. Research leads to scientific knowledge on which are based technological inventions for higher yields both in the fields and factories; And so the Government set about setting up a large number of Research Laboratories and institutions in various disciplines. The objectives of the Scientific policy as stated in the Scientific Policy Resolution of 1958 were as follows :

i) To foster, promote, and sustain, by all appropriate means, the cultivation of science and scientific research in all its aspects — pure, applied and educational;

ii) To ensure an adequate supply, within the country, of research scientists of the highest quality, and to recognise their work as an important component of the strength of the nation;

iii) To encourage, and initiate, with all possible speed, programmes for the training of scientific and technical personnel, on a scale adequate to fulfil the country's needs in science and education, agriculture and industry, and defence;

iv) To ensure that the creative talent of men and women is encouraged and finds full scope in scientific activity;

v) To encourage individual initiative for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, and the discovery of new knowledge, in an atmosphere of academic freedom and in general;

vi) To ensure for the people of the country all the benefits that can accrue from the acquisition and application of scientific knowledge.

With the object of fulfilling these aims Government decided to offer good conditions of service to scientists, associate them with the formulation of policies and give them an honoured place in national life.

In the first Five Year Plan, attention was chiefly devoted to the building up of a chain of national laboratories and other research institutions. In the Second Plan the available facilities were developed, research was made more broad-based and research facilities in universities and at other research centres were further extended. In the Third Plan the programme of scientific and technological research was devoted specially to:

- i) Strengthening of the existing research institutions and expanding the facilities for research over a wide field;
- ii) encouraging basic research in universities;
- iii) encouraging, in particular, research in engineering and technology;
- iv) training of research personnel and expanding the programme of research fellowships and scholarships;
- v) carrying out research in the development and manufacture of scientific and industrial instruments;
- vi) coordination of research work carried out in national laboratories, universities, technical institutions, laboratories of scientific associations and research wings of Government Departments, and
- vii) utilising results of research after establishing their validity through pilot plant protection, full scale field experiments, etc.

As a result of effort in the first two Plans, an extensive network of institutions engaged in scientific research has come into existence and pure research, applied research and research in specialised fields are being undertaken in a large number of centres.¹

Consequently in the last three decades, 119 Universities, affiliating about 1650 Colleges, 5 Institutes of Technology, 150 Engineering Colleges and about 100 Medical Colleges and 350 Polytechnics have been established; over 150,000 qualified scientific and technical personnel are produced every year. The total stock of scientific and technically qualified manpower is estimated at 2.5 million, ranking India as the third largest complement of such man-power in the world, occupying a unique position among developing countries. Simultaneously, about 130 specialised research laboratories and institutes have been established under the aegis of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, (ICAR), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Departments of Atomic Energy, Science and Technology, Space and the Defence Research and Development Organisation etc. In recent years, public and private sector organisations and undertakings, assisted by fiscal incentives, have established over 600 research and development laboratories largely to meet their internal technological requirements. A relatively new but important development in the last fifteen years is the growth of engineering consultancy organisations to provide design and consultancy services and act as the bridge between research institutions and industry.

¹ Third Five year plan Pages 16.17-19

Of late there have been a great deal of complaints that our Research Institutes and Research Sections in Universities have not been producing results commensurate with the colossal investment made and the high hopes expected from them. One of the main reasons attributed to the deterioration of the performance of these institutions is said to be nepotism and interference of politicians in their internal working. In an area where only merit should be the criterion in the selection of candidates, caste and party affiliations have watered down standards and created demoralisation. In the interests of our national safety, strength and progress the highest standards of integrity and excellence should be maintained in the running of our universities and research institutes. The preparation of a National Science and Technology Plan, provision of financial resources and setting up of research institutes only help in making the necessary conditions for the use of science and technology to fulfil national goals. In themselves they are not sufficient. Implementing these policies require a spirit of dedication and hard work on the part of the scientists and the administrators of these institutes and a commitment on the part of governments at the Centre and in the States to be faithful to the high objectives with which they have been setup and undertake where necessary organisational and managerial reforms with highest ideals in view.

The Non-Aligned Movement

One of the outstanding events during my period in Parliament was the formulation of India's foreign policy and the coming into existence of the non-aligned movement. The alliance of the USA and Soviet Russia to defeat Hitler's Germany did not last long after their victory in the Second World War. Each began to consolidate its position for world hegemony and there developed two power blocs inimical to each other namely the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and the Warsaw Pact countries. India was an emerging great nation and both the blocs tried to persuade, cajole and threaten India to join them. But all honour to Jawaharlal Nehru, that he resisted both the power blocs in his determination to build a great and independent India. The United States had started the organisation of SEATO (South-East Asia Treaty Organisation) and had tempted Pakistan with money and military help to join it. President Eisenhower wrote to Nehru making the same offer to India. I remember when Nehru spoke in Parliament rejecting the offer saying that India has not become free to become a slave again by allowing military bases to a foreign power, in our country, all of us lustily cheered him and the world admired him and India for this courageous and outspoken statement. This paved the way to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Explaining the non-aligned movement, Nehru said:

"Having attained political freedom, we are earnestly desirous of removing the many ills that our country suffers from, of eliminating poverty and raising the standards of our people, and giving them full

and equal opportunities of growth and advancement. I speak of India because it is my country. But many other countries in Asia tell the same story, for Asia today is resurgent and these countries, which long lay under foreign yoke have won back their independence and are fired by a new spirit to strive toward new ideals. To them, as to us, independence is as vital as the breath they take to sustain life, and colonialism in any form, or anywhere, is abhorrent.

The vast strides that technology has made have brought a new age, of which the United States of America is the leader. Today, the whole world is our neighbour and the old divisions of continents and countries matter less and less. Peace and freedom have become indivisible. The preservation of peace forms the central aim of India's policy. It is in the pursuit of this policy that we have chosen the path of non-alignment in any military or like pact or alliance.

Non-alignment does not mean passivity of mind or action, lack of faith or conviction. It does not mean submission to what we consider evil. It is a positive and dynamic approach to such problems that confront us. We believe that each country has not only the right to freedom, but also to decide its own policy and way of life. Only thus can true freedom flourish and a people grow according to their own genius. We believe, therefore, in non-aggression and non-interference by one country in the affairs of another, and the growth of tolerance between them and the capacity for peaceful coexistence. We think that, by the free exchange of ideas and trade and other contacts between nations, each will learn from the other, and truth will prevail. We, therefore, endeavour to maintain friendly relations with all countries, even though we may disagree with them in their policies or structure of Government. We think that, by this approach, we can serve not only our country, but also the larger causes of peace and good fellowship in the world'.¹

The non-aligned movement began in 1961, with twenty-five member-countries of which the chief architects were Nehru of India, Nasser of Egypt and Tito of Yugoslavia. In over twenty years, the membership has expanded to 97 and has developed to be a powerful force in international affairs. It has held its meeting in various parts of the world from time to time. It was held in New Delhi in 1982 and the India's Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was elected as its Chairperson.

With the passing of time

Nehru's first Ministry after Independence began with great hopes and prestige. Nehru himself was at the height of his glory commanding the admiration and adoration of the whole of the country and many countries in the world. The newly emerging Indian Nation was considered to be the rising great power of Asia. The idealism of the Freedom Movement

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru — An Anthology edited by Dr. Sarvepalle Gopal
Page 377 to 379.



With Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Also in the picture are Sri C. Subramaniam, former Finance Minister of India and Sri K. Kamaraj, former Chief Minister of Madras.

continued. Many of the first Ministers had participated in the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi and were of proved calibre though some others who were experts in their field were also taken in the Cabinet. Sri C.D. Deshmukh, a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India was the Finance Minister, my friend Sri V.V. Giri in charge of Labour, Messrs. Lal Bahadur Sastri, Gulzarilal Nanda, Abul Kalam Azad, N. Gopalaswamy Ayyangar and T.T. Krishnamachari were there. Many continued in the later periods. One of the notable later additions was Sri C. Subramaniam, who along with one of our greatest agricultural scientists Dr. M.S. Swaminathan was responsible for initiating the Green Revolution in our country. With Congress Governments also in the States, Nehru's behests were willingly received and implemented in all parts of the country.

While this supreme power of Nehru was in one sense an advantage, it had its weaknesses too. Everywhere in the world people gather round centres of power. Sycophants, ready to please people in authority for their own selfish gains, are found in all countries and India was no exception. In Committee meetings with him, I could see people trying to find out what will please him and say exactly that. This led to political interference in administration and weakening of standards. With the incoming of controls necessary in a socialist society, corruption also began to creep in slowly. In the later part of my membership in Parliament rumours of nepotism and gratification were around. With many preoccupations and ill-health, Nehru was losing his grip over administration. Sri Lal Bahadur Sastri who was a good friend of mine used to sit with me in the second row in the Rajya Sabha. On one occasion, blistering questions were put to a Minister, suggesting corruption. Some of us were shocked and pained. I asked Lal Bahadurji, whether Nehru would pull up the Minister. He smiled and said, 'Pulling up! He will not even ask him about this'.

It was unfortunate that I had an unpleasant experience with our Prime Minister on a similar matter. Sri M.O. Mathai was the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister commanding his implicit confidence. There were rumours that he was collecting funds for a private Trust in his mother's name. But none wanted to speak to the Prime Minister about it, as Sri Mathai was very close to him. I was approached about it. I did not want to take up the matter without proper evidence. I was given some proofs and requested that in public interest, I must take up the matter with the Prime Minister. I met the Prime Minister and told him about it. He wanted evidence and I gave him what I considered was good proof of receipts of funds. He said he would enquire and after a few days called me. He explained that it was a Trust and anybody could collect funds for his Trust. I said that this may be all right for a private individual but not for the Private Secretary of the Prime Minister who commanded great political influence and so should be viewed from that point of view. A few days later the Prime Minister sent word to me again to meet him, when he said that Sri Mathai would like to invite me for lunch in his house along with Dr. P. Subbarayan and

explain matters to me. To this I said 'I don't know Mr. Mathai and I am not concerned about him. I am concerned with the reputation of my Prime Minister. And so my work has ended with pointing out the matter to you. And so I don't propose to meet Mr. Mathai'. The Prime Minister was rather taken aback at my reply and I withdrew. Later I wrote to him saying that if he did not take action immediately, the Opposition may become seized of it and it might become a matter of public discussion. This was just what happened and the Prime Minister had to send Mathai away later.

Nehru had been Prime Minister for two terms after elections under the new Constitution, and when the third elections were about to take place, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan made a suggestion. Jayaprakash was a respected leader who had participated in the Freedom struggle. He was a man of sacrifice and dedication and what was more, he did not aspire for power. With Vinobaji he worked whole-heartedly in the Bhoodan Movement and was considered as an All-India leader respected greatly by the people. He wrote to Nehru, that like George Washington of the United States of America he should set up the precedent and tradition of not standing for the third time for the highest political office in the land. But unfortunately Nehru did not accept that suggestion. To counteract the suggestion of Sri Jayaprakashji, a party of members of Parliament supporting the Prime Minister, went to him on a deputation requesting that his continuous leadership was necessary for the country. Sri Jayaprakash himself told me in sorrow and pain that Nehru lost a great opportunity towards setting up a healthy tradition for the country, which would have been appreciated by posterity.

The Chinese Invasion

In the later part of my period in Parliament one of the greatest tragedies happened to Independent India which had far-reaching effects and affected the prestige of our country amongst the nations of the world. That was the Chinese invasion of 1962. On October 20, 1962, China launched a massive attack against India at the North Eastern border. The politicians, the Services, the people were not only all caught unawares, but also in a state of utter unpreparedness. India's whole policy towards China had been a series of misplaced faiths, illusions, assumptions spread over more than ten years. In spite of warnings from Parliament by Members, Nehru refused to see what was obvious to lesser people, because he had an exaggerated opinion about his capacity to succeed diplomatically, where military preparedness was the only answer.

Chiang Kai Shek was friendly to nationalist leaders like Nehru, before Independence. At the same time he is said to have authorised publication of maps which showed Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim and large areas in Assam and NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Area) along the Brahmaputra river as Chinese territory. Despite Indian protests later, Mao Tse-tung never repudiated these maps or these claims. In 1950, Chinese armies invaded

Tibet, thus forcibly establishing claim to Tibet. But unfortunately India had been weak and without knowing the consequences conceded Chinese 'sovereignty' over Tibet. India was careless and callous in concluding the Sino-Indian treaty of 1954. In ceding Tibet to China it should at least have made it a pre-condition that China accepts the conventional and hitherto undisputed boundary between India and Tibet. China then would have gladly agreed to substantial concessions, and to a clearer and more effective demarcation.

But V.K. Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister and K.M. Panikkar, his Adviser on Chinese affairs, blundered colossally by making an undisputed gift of an area as large as the whole of South-East Asia put together to China. They knew that for centuries the boundaries between India and Tibet had remained conventional and loosely defined. For more than two thousand years, India and Tibet had lived in peace and in a spirit of good neighbourliness, with only a few police posts here and there to regulate the incoming and outgoing caravans on the frontiers. To have suddenly surrendered such a buffer area to the sovereign control of an expansionist militaristic regime, whose predecessor government had even laid claims to vast areas of Indian territory, was a fatal and unpardonable blunder.

Soon after China's invasion of Tibet, the Chinese started building a road through Indian territory connecting Sinkiang with Tibet as they had no direct road link with Tibet. A major roadway through such difficult terrain as the Himalayas, passing through long tunnels, overbridges, precipices and difficult viaducts and culverts, rising from three to fifteen thousand feet, was a gigantic venture. In the case of China it involved thousands of labourers all along the route working day and night. And yet Indian espionage remained blind about this situation for three years. India knew nothing about this highway till in 1958 a small party was sent to find out the facts. Actually the first alert came from China itself when one of the Peking newspapers proudly announced that a highway connecting Sinkiang with Lhasa in Tibet had been constructed in three years, and claimed it as a unique feat of engineering. Even after this disclosure, India remained silent, hoping as Nehru said: "that it might be easier for us to deal with the Chinese Government without too much publicity for this incident".

Nehru then realized that he had been fooled by Chou-En-Lai, that before signing the Sino-Indian Treaty recognising Chinese control over Tibet, he should have at the same time insisted on a clear acceptance and even demarcation of the erstwhile boundary between India and Tibet. According to him Chou-En-Lai said (in 1956). "They had agreed to recognise the McMahon Line in so far as the Burmese frontier was concerned and the Sino-Indian frontier was concerned. That would take care of the whole of the McMahon line". He said further, "When I heard it, I wanted to be quite sure that I had not misunderstood him. Therefore I went back to the subject three times and made him repeat it. And because the matter was

of such importance, 'I put it down in writing when I came away' A shrewd person like Nehru should have realised that the words spoken by politicians have no value, and that China most of all had treated even solemn written commitments as scraps of paper! A seasoned diplomat himself, he should have obtained these assurances in writing even if they could not be made part of a solemn treaty.

Something worse followed in July 1962; the Indian Defence Minister Sri Krishna Menon went to Geneva. There he met the Chinese Defence Minister, Marshall Chen Yi. When someone asked Menon if he had read newspaper reports of a massive Chinese concentration on India's frontiers, he dismissed the report and remarked, "Would I be here if such a development was likely?" On return from Geneva, when more reports appeared about Chinese intrusions into Indian territory, Menon complacently assured the people that the army was strong enough to meet any threat from China. Nehru shared Menon's complacency. On October 20, 1962 the Chinese crossed over in massive waves from several points along the two-thousand mile border stretching from Ladakh in the North to Walong in the East. India was rudely shaken out of the deep stupor of complacency. Few even in the government realised what had happened. The Chinese armies began to pour down the mountain ridges, through various passes, capturing one post after another, throwing bewildered Indian defenders into confusion. "Comrades, friends and fellow countrymen", wailed a shocked and disillusioned Nehru, "I must speak to you about the grave situation which has arisen on our Frontiers, on account of continuing and unabashed aggression by the Chinese forces. We have to meet a powerful and unscrupulous opponent". He appealed to the citizens to muster strength and courage to meet the menace.

Parliament and the Congress party were justly angry at the mismanagement of our defences by Sri Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister and demanded his resignation. When Nehru resisted there were cries. 'Then you must go'. That settled the matter. He went home and called for the resignation of Krishna Menon. In his place Sri Y.B. Chavan the Chief Minister of Maharashtra was appointed as Defence Minister.

The Chinese invasion started on the morning of October 20, and was abated on 1st November. The Chinese occupied threatening positions at points of strategic advantage all over the Indian frontier. Even though India's rich oil fields lay at their feet and the deserted city of Tezpur offering free entry into the Brahmaputra Valley and Assam lay practically undefended and partly deserted, the Chinese declared a cease-fire and beat a hurried retreat to the chosen strategic positions. No convincing explanation had been forthcoming for the unilateral declaration of cease-fire by the Chinese on November 22. They might have realised that, after the first stunning impact, the four hundred and fifty million people of India, by and large, had been roused to a sense of danger and with the spirit of 'Do or Die' which two decades ago had inspired them to face the bullets and bayonets of the British

they would fight to the finish. Added to this was the fear that in a few days heavy seasonal rains and snow in the higher altitudes may not only cut off supplies but make even retreat difficult * .

This invasion damaged the reputation of India in the world to an unimaginable extent. This episode affected Nehru as nothing else did. He did not survive this ignominious defeat for long. For he died shortly after, in May 1964.

The reputation of India as a great country was recovered by his daughter Srimati Indira Gandhi who succeeded him as Prime Minister, only when India won a decisive victory against Pakistan in the war of 1971 when the East Pakistan split from the main body and became the separate State of Bangla Desh.

Men of my generation who have grown with Nehru cannot forget, how millions of people admired and followed him during the Freedom Movement and after it. I have had occasions to observe him from near and afar. He captivated all by his courage and his ability to move with love and courtesy with all ranks of people. Next to Mahatma Gandhi, he was the most loved and admired amongst the leaders. With him an era in contemporary history of India when a single leader had undisputed leadership in the Centre and the States ended. He gave a leadership not only to India, but to the many countries in the world striving for freedom. As his illustrious daughter Smt. Indira Gandhi, has said in her introduction to his works: 'The story of Jawaharlal Nehru is that of a man who evolved, who grew in storm and stress till he became the representative of much that was noble in his time. It is the story of a generous and gracious human being who summed up in himself the resurgence of the 'third world' as well as the humanism which transcends dogmas and is adopted to the contemporary context. His achievement by its very nature and setting, was much greater than that of a Prime Minister.'

* Lid off by J.N. Sahni published by Allied Publishers, 1971, pages 431-444.

32. The World Tour

IT was a great surprise when I received the following letter dated 24th July 1962 from Mr. John Kenneth Galbraith, the then Ambassador of the United States of America in India:

“Dear Mr. Chettiar!

It is a very great pleasure for me, on behalf of United States of America to invite you to visit the United States of America on a grant under our Educational and Cultural Exchange program, for the purpose of observing at first hand, American Educational and Cultural Institutions and to confer with colleagues in the fields of your special interest. I hope you will be able to accept this invitation.

I trust that your travel in America will be of genuine help in your important work here in India. I know that, you in turn, will consider this invitation as an opportunity to promote among colleagues and associates you meet in America a better understanding of life in India.

With kindest regards, I am,

Yours faithfully

sd/=(John Kenneth Galbraith)”

I have had the pleasure of going through our vast sub-continent of undivided India. In 1938, my friend Sri K. Santhanam and I had gone to North-West Frontier Province, when our erstwhile colleague Dr. Khan Sahib, brother of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan — known as Frontier Gandhi — was the Chief Minister of that province. At that time we visited Quetta, Peshawar and went to our farthest border in the Khyber Pass, through which many of the invasions of India had taken place in the middle ages. I had been to Mallikānanda on the banks of the beautiful Padma in East Bengal for the Gandhi Seva Sangh Conference in 1939 along with my friends, Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman and Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai. These are now in Pakistan and Bangla Desh respectively. Later I had been to Imphal near the Burma border. I had been in the North beyond the Mana Pass which divided India and Tibet during my pilgrimage to Badrinath, and Sat Pant. But I have never been outside the country except to Ceylon in 1947, to lay the foundation stone for a memorial building to Swami Vipulananda in Batticola in Ceylon. Swami Vipulananda was one of the distinguished scholars in Tamil belonging

to the Ramakrishna Mission, who started the Hindu-Tamil cultural renaissance in Ceylon. I have visited Ceylon again twice, once for the Tamil Academy Conference held in Jaffna in 1951 and later to participate in the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Ramakrishna Mission in Colombo. And so when I received the invitation from the Ambassador of the United States of America, it was a welcome opportunity for me to know about the education and culture of that great country. It was also the country that discovered Swami Vivekananda to the world.

The preparation for the travel were made under the guidance of Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas who had studied for many years in the Ohio State University of U.S.A. and who had re-visited it many times later to participate in international conferences in Home Science and Nutrition. As such, she had many friends in that country and wrote to many of them of my coming. With her help, Dr. Aram from the Vidyalaya was sponsored for higher education in the Ohio State University and had returned in 1954. Dr. Aram also wrote to his friends. At that time three of the staffers of our Home Science College, Dr. Kamala Anandam, Mrs. R. Raji and Dr. Nirmala Murthi were undergoing higher education courses in Home Science in U.S.A, the former two in the Tennessee University at Knoxville and the last one in Iowa University. At that time, the Home Science Association of India had a participating arrangement with the Tennessee University under the USAID programme through the Government of India, Ministry of Education. Under that programme Miss Eloise Davison from the U.S.A. was working in our College as Consultant in Home Economics. She also wrote to the Tennessee University. In addition the Government of India in the Ministry of External Affairs wrote to our embassies in the countries which I was planning to visit. Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, the then Minister for External Affairs in the Government of India wrote personal letters to our Ambassadors. In the United States, the States Department of the U.S. Government had made all the necessary arrangements and so everything was set for a good world tour.

The countries that I proposed to visit during the tour were Egypt, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, France and England in Europe while proceeding to the U.S.A., and Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore on the return journey through the Pacific. The major time was spent on visiting the various educational centres in the U.S.A. and to study the educational system in that country. In the United States I had another and deeper interest, namely, to visit the places sanctified by Swami Vivekananda and the Centres that were subsequently established by the Ramakrishna Mission in various parts of America.

The first country I visited was Egypt, where I was received at the airport by our Embassy people. The Government of Egypt had kindly hosted my stay and arranged accommodation in a hotel commanding a beautiful view of the Nile and its canals. The Indian embassy had arranged a meeting for me with the Indians in Cairo. The highlight of my visit was the visit to

the Gaza Pyramid and the Sphinx. The Pyramid is considered to be one of the wonders of the world, one of the biggest stone structures made with such mathematical precision that it continues to be an enigma as to how they could make such a construction nearly four thousand years back! At the Sphinx site, light and sound performance presenting the cultural history of Egypt was inspiring. They also arranged a visit to the museum, which displays the preserved human bodies (mummies) for thousands of years.

My next halt was in Athens, the capital of Greece. I was a student of ancient European History and had studied Bury's eloquent history of Greece painting in most glorious terms of the golden period of Athens, the greatest of the city States of Greece, and Acropolis, where the main city was and the Parthenon, the then pinnacle of Greek glory, of the great thinkers of ancient Greece namely Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They are no more and the once great Parthenon is in shambles, and the Acropolis, a mediocre town. It made me sad to think of the disappearance of the once great civilization.

But something else surprised and inspired me. As I got down from the plane and was walking out of the airport, a lady who seemed to be looking out for somebody, seeing me, came running to me and exclaimed, 'Are you Avinashilingam?' I was naturally greatly surprised. She was Mrs. Mary Nimtozoglou, wife of a high official in the Health Ministry of the Government of Greece. She had known of my coming through Swami Ranganathananda. She introduced herself as a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and with great affection insisted on taking me to her house. What I saw there surprised me. In a separate room used by the family as a shrine, there were three photos of Sri Ramakrishna with Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother on either side. They were beautifully decorated with colourful fresh flowers. Incense sticks from India gave the sweet aroma associated with our temples. She introduced me to Mr. John Meneto and others who were also devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and their devotion knew no bounds. All of us felt as one belonging to the Sri Ramakrishna's universal family.

The next halt was Rome, which recalled to my mind the ancient glories of Rome. But as written by historians, the spider weaves its web where the Ceasars ruled. To the outsider, Rome is dominated by the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica on the one hand and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations on the other, in both of which I was deeply interested. Father De Souza who was a distinguished Principal of the Madras Loyola College was then at Rome (assisting the Pope). Both he and our embassy had tried to arrange an audience for me with the Pope, but that could not be done as he was not in Rome at that time.

The Vatican city is the smallest independent State in the World. It serves as the spiritual and governmental centre of the Roman Catholic Church claimed to be the largest Christian Church in the world. The Vatican city covers only 108.7 acres. But it exercises spiritual sway over millions of Roman Catholics throughout the globe. Its ruler is the Pope. It lies entirely within the city of Rome, Italy. But it is foreign soil to Italian citizens.

About as large as an average city part, it lies on the Vatican Hill in northwestern Rome, just west of the Tiber River. High stone walls surround most of the city. The area within these walls contains picturesque buildings in several architectural styles. It also contains many courtyards, landscaped gardens and quiet streets. The huge St. Peters Church with its stately dome, dominates the entire city. The Vatican Palace, is a group of connected buildings with well over 1000 rooms. The Pope's apartment, the offices of the Secretaries of the State, and reception rooms and halls occupy one part of the Palace. The remainder is devoted largely to the Vatican Museum, Archives and library. The Vatican Museum has a priceless collection of statues. The Museum also has large sections devoted to pagan and Christian inscriptions, and to Egyptian and Etruscan antiquities. The many rooms and chapels within the Museum are decorated by the works of great master artists like Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo.

The St. Peters Church is considered to be the most holy place in Catholic Christendom. It is the largest Christian church in the world. Also called Saint Peter's Basilica, it is the second church to stand above the crypt (tomb) which is believed to contain the body of Saint Peter, the first Pope. It is built in the shape of a cross. The church is almost 700 feet long and about 450 feet across at its widest point. It covers an area of about 15,500 square yards. The nave (centre aisle) is 150 feet high. The building's most outstanding architectural feature is its magnificent dome, designed by Michael Angelo. The dome rises more than 400 feet from the floor of the church, and measures 136 feet in diameter. It has an ancient history having been begun by Constantine the Great about 325 A.D.

In the F.A.O. Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas had many friends to whom she had written. Mr. J.V.A Nehemia who was formerly Extension Commissioner of the ICAR, New Delhi was previously known to me. He received me very cordially, and showed me round and introduced me to the Nutrition Scientists in F.A.O. We had interesting discussions on the food and nutrition work and policy of that world organisation in a lunch hosted by him. It is a great organisation working for higher agricultural productivity and for the welfare of the people throughout the world. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) was created in 1945 as an autonomous specialized agency of the UN system. Its purpose is to raise the levels of nutrition and standards of living of all people; to improve the efficiency of production and distribution of food and agricultural products; and to better the conditions of rural populations, thus contributing towards the expanding world economy and ensuring freedom from hunger. Some of the main functions of the FAO are to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate agricultural information to advise member governments on agricultural policy and planning, to promote consultations and cooperation among member countries; and to provide technical advice and assistance on all facets of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, animal husbandry and Home Economics and nutrition.

From Rome I flew to Geneva, where I was met by the representatives of the Government of India. Geneva is a beautiful place in Switzerland. In it are situated the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation. In both I had friends. Sri Sundaram, who was employed in the International Meteorological Organisation, invited me to his house for a dinner. Within the house, I found the cultural traditions of South India scrupulously followed, with a shrine with all the traditional pictures of Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesh, Muruga etc. with regular pujas and observances as in an orthodox South Indian home; I greatly enjoyed the homely and affectionate repast.

The International Labour Organisation was established by the Treaty of Versailles after the first World War, in cooperation with the League of Nations in 1919. In 1946, ILO became the first specialized agency of the newly established United Nations. I was interested in the somewhat peculiar constitution of that body. Productive labour involves three distinct points of view; that of the person actually doing the work; that of the person responsible for combining that work with the work of others to produce a specific product; and, finally, that of the overall public interest. For this reason, ILO has, since its earliest days, highlighted the concept of tripartism. Unique among the U.N. Organisations, the ILO membership consists not only of governments but also representatives of labour. Each national employees and employers delegation to the conference is composed of two government delegates, one employers' delegate and one workers' delegate, accompanied by technical advisers. Each delegate participates in the deliberations not as a member of a particular national delegation but rather as a member of his or her respective group (governments, employers or workers). Employers' and workers' delegates have a free voice; they can, and often do, disagree with their governments and with each other. Studies, Research, Information are also important aspects of the work of the ILO.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a specialized Agency established within the UN system with a mandate for global health, based on its Constitution, which came into effect on 7th April 1948. That date is commemorated each year as World Health Day. The WHO helps countries to reinforce their health systems by building up the infrastructure and in particular, health, manpower and research efforts to develop appropriate health technologies. Prevention is the key approach of WHO, underlining the several major disease prevention and control programmes supported by the Organisation, such as immunisation against the six major communicable diseases of childhood — diphtheria, measles, poliomyelitis, tetanus, tuberculosis and whooping cough; provision of safe drinking water for all and adequate excreta disposal as part of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade; and international efforts to combat the diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections which are the main killers of infants and young children. In addition to research in special fields the WHO encourages studies aimed at developing appropriate health

technologies and identifying social and behavioural approaches that could lead to healthier life-styles in both the industrialized and developing societies.

Our friends in Geneva had arranged for me to visit some educational institutions. Switzerland is a multi-lingual country and I was interested to know how their educational systems had met this situation. According to the census in 1960, Switzerland had a total population of 5,429,100 composed of four language communities. The German speaking community form the majority with 70.3% of the total population, the French speaking come next with 19.2%, the Italian speaking come third, with a population of 9.6% and the Rheato-Romanic community speaking a Latin dialect called (Romansch) consisting only 0.9%. But all the four languages are recognised as national languages; there is no single national language in spite of the fact that 70% of the people speak the German language. 'Official' languages of the Confederation are, however, only three — German, French, Italian and not Romansch. The only consideration that prevented its being used as an official language is that it is said to be highly uneconomical, involving heavy costs in the printing of all government documents and proclamations. This has obvious lessons for us in India.

My next halt was Geneva. There, a Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre was newly started by Swami Nityabodhananda at Geneva, but I could not see it as he was not there. From Geneva I flew to Paris. Paris was the first foreign centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, I visited. Swami Ritajananda, whom I had known well in the Madras Math, who is the head of the Centre met me and took me to the Ashrama where I was to stay. Our embassy officials also met me and acquainted me with the arrangements to see the UNESCO and some other places. The Paris centre had been founded by Swami Siddheswarananda. During the Second World War, when Hitler overran France, many persons including the Swami had left Paris and took refuge in the Pyranees in the far South. Swami Siddheswarananda returned after the war and built this beautiful centre in Boulevard Romain Rolland, Gretz, about 29 kms. from Paris. There was regular worship and meditation in the shrine dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother. Celebration of their birthdays, Christmas and other festivals and Sunday lectures were the main activities. The Swami also went out on invitation to hold classes in various parts of Europe.

From Paris, I proceeded to London. When I arrived in London, I was glad to meet Swami Ghanananda with whom I was closely associated for many years in Madras and who was in charge of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in London. The British Council who had offered to host my visit to England had sent their representative to the Heathrow airport. As I was staying with Swami Ghanananda, they made all the visiting arrangements. The main places visited were the British Parliament (The Parliament was not sitting at that time), the Westminster Abbey, Oxford University, Stratford-on-Avon, the birthplace of Shakespeare, a College of Education,

a College of Home Science and some other institutions. I met our former Governor, Sir Archibald Nye, some Britishers who were doing business in Coimbatore and who had gone back to England and other friends. Mr. Chagla, the Indian High Commissioner in U.K. was also an old friend in the Rajya Sabha and so were some of the officials in the High Commission. But the duration of my stay was brief. Swami Ghanananda had arranged a meeting for me at Caxton Hall to speak on the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, where I met many Indian students and others. After a pleasant four days I left for the U.S.A. which was the main destination of this itinerary.

The approaching visit to the U.S.A., brought a new excitement, for that was the country which discovered Swami Vivekananda to the world and where the first message of Swamiji to the West was delivered. The history of that inspiring experience came before my mind's eye and is worth recalling. When we speak of Swami Vivekananda as India's first Cultural Emissary to the West, we have to keep in view two important bearings on his Mission; first, he was not being sent abroad by a free independent Indian State as India was then languishing under British political subjection. Second, he was not being sent abroad by any central Indian religious authority. This latter phenomenon caused him serious difficulties to gain admission as a delegate to the World Parliament of Religions held in the year 1893 in Chicago. As a Sanyasi he was unaccustomed to possessions. He attracted curious attention due to his strange attire, in some places boys even ran after him in amusement. New to the American surrounding, he was bewildered by the crowds. The rudest shock came when he learnt from the Parliament's Information Bureau, that the sessions were to commence a few months later, that none could be admitted as a delegate without proper credentials from some organisation in India, and that even the time for such admission had gone by. Added to this desperate situation, was the other worry of a dwindling purse, which was getting exhausted. But in spite of all these trials and hardships, with faith in God and in his Guru, he struggled on. But help came from unexpected quarters at the appropriate time.

In the train to Boston, he struck friendship with Miss Kate Sanborn who, deeply impressed by his personality, invited him to be her guest. He consented and became her guest at her beautiful house called 'Breezy Meadows' in Mecalif, Massachusetts. By this arrangement, the host had the pleasure of showing her friends a curio from India and the guest had the advantage of saving his lean purse, though he had to experience hooting in the streets on account of his foreign dress and had to answer queer and annoying questions from her unknowing visitors. One day the Swami was invited to address a large local cultural club, where Miss Sanborn introduced him to Dr. J.H. Wright, Professor of Greek, at the Harvard University. Professor Wright was immediately struck by the genius of the young Swami, after a four-hour conversation and insisted that he should represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions, adding that, that was the only way he could

be introduced to the nation at large. When the Swami told him that he carried no credentials as required by delegates Prof. Wright remarked: "To ask you Swami, for your credentials is like asking the Sun to state its right to shine". Prof. Wright wrote immediately a letter introducing the Swami to the Chairman of the Parliament Committee on the selection of delegates stating, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together". He also kindly presented the Swami with a rail ticket to Chicago and also letters of introduction to the Committee which was in charge of reception of the Oriental delegates.

The Swami rejoiced at this literal manifestation of Divine Grace; he felt that the mission for which he left India was going to be fulfilled. Alighting at the Chicago railway station he found, to his dismay, that he had lost the address of the President of the Parliament of Religions. He tried to seek guidance from passers by, but could not make them understand, it being the German quarter of the city. Finally, he lay down to sleep in a huge empty box in the railroad freightyard in the bitter winter cold.

The morning came; he moved out and soon found himself on the Lake Shore Drive of the city, where millionaires and merchant princes were residing. He was directed to the quarters of the Parliament Committee. Because of his soiled dress and travel-worn appearance, he was treated rudely at some houses and was insulted by servants in others. At last exhausted, he sat down quietly on the roadside, resigned to the will of God. Presently, the door of a fashionable residence opposite opened and a woman of regal bearing came out and approached him. She asked him respectfully, "Sir, you seem to be in some trouble. Are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions? Can I be of any help to you?" The Swami told her his difficulties. She took him immediately to her house and after bath and breakfast, conducted him to the offices of the Parliament, and had him admitted as a delegate on the strength of the letter from Dr. Wright. The lady who thus became his ministering angel was Mrs. W. Hale. She and her husband and children, the Hale family, became Swamiji's warmest friends, and their house became his home in Chicago.

On that memorable Monday morning of the opening of the World Parliament of Religions there sat upon the platform of the great Hall of Columbus representatives of the religious hopes and beliefs of twelve hundred millions of the human race. When the Chairman called on him to speak, bowing to Devi Sarasvati, the Goddess of Knowledge, he addressed his audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. Before he could utter another word, the whole Parliament was caught up in a great wave of enthusiasm and hundreds rose to their feet with shouts of applause. There was cheering, cheering, cheering for full two minutes! The Swami was bewildered. When silence was restored, the Swami continued his speech. It was brief but intense. Its spirit of universality, earnestness and breadth of outlook completely captivated the whole assembly. He cast off the formalism of the Parliament and spoke to the people in the languages of

the heart. Each orator had spoken on his God, of the God of his sect. Swami Vivekananda alone spoke on behalf of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal being. It was the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna and the ancient culture of India breaking down the barriers between religions, through the voice of his great disciple.

The Parliament gave him a tremendous ovation that afternoon, and the American nation, informed by streamer headlines of the newspapers of his contribution at the Parliament, gave him its ovation the next morning. With his appearance in the Parliament, the unknown monk blossomed suddenly into a world-figure, the obscure wandering monk of India became the prophet of harmony and peace, and of East-West unity. His name resounded on all sides. His life-size pictures were seen posted up in the streets of Chicago with the words 'The Monk Vivekananda' beneath them, and the passers-by made obeisance with their bowed head. The press extolled him as a Prophet and Seer. The New York Herald spoke of him in these words:

"He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation!"

Even at that moment, when he was acclaimed by the press and the people, and though the mansions of some of the wealthiest of Chicago society were open to him, his heart bled for the poor of his distant land. On the very day of his triumph, in the princely room allotted to him, he could not sleep at night when he thought of the terrible contrast between the opulence of America and the poverty of his own people. His princely bed seemed to him a bed of thorns. His pillow was wet with his tears. Overcome with emotion, he fell to the ground crying out, 'O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! When millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, here they spend millions of rupees upon petty personal comfort! Who will raise the masses in India? Who will give them bread?'

After this tremendous stir in Chicago, Swami Vivekananda spent three years in U.S.A. undertaking whirlwind tours through its cities and towns, lecturing and teaching, correcting false ideas about India spread by some Christian Missionaries of the times and combating bigotry and intolerance of bigoted churchmen. He received warm support and encouragement from hundreds of liberal Christians and from several agnostic and rationalistic people of America. As a result of his indomitable work for four years, he created an atmosphere of veneration and respect for Indian culture and religion, which resulted not only in starting many Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres in America, but also paved the way for many other Hindu Missions. All these thoughts made me look forward to seeing the various centres founded by him and in pursuance of his message.

When I arrived at New York, I was met there by the officials of the State Department and taken to Washington D.C., the capital of the United

States. There many letters from Swami Somananda, Dr. Kulandaivel and others from the Vidyalyaya and Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas from the Home Science College were awaiting me giving me the much looked for news from home. There were also many letters from the many friends of Dr. Devadas from Tennesse, Iowa, Ohio and other universities to whom she had written, from Dr. Louis Smith from Beria, Dr. A.E. Morgan from Antioch College whom I had known before and from many of our Swamis in America warmly welcoming me to their various places. The State Department had made a detailed programme for the various institutions and places which they considered may be of interest to me. The State Department had also arranged for Mr. Konstantine K. Grubescic, Department of State Escorts to accompany me throughout the tour in the American mainland to help in the smooth conduct of the programmes. Thus the tour in the United States had a most auspicious start.

Of the dozen Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres in the USA I could visit only those in New York, Boston, Chicago, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, Trabuco, San Francisco, Berkley and Sacramento where my old friends, Swamis Pavitrananda, Nikhilananda, Vishwananda, Prabhavananda, Ashokananda, Shraddhananda and Sarvagatananda were working. Sunday services, classes on Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Upanishads and the Gita, Celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, the Holy Mother, Buddha and Christ and religious lectures, tours in neighbouring towns, universities and interested groups formed part of the programme of work carried out by all the centres. In many centres I was requested to speak in their classes. I was deeply interested to go to Chicago, where the Parliament of Religions was held. The Ashrama in Chicago has now grown beyond recognition under the leadership of Swami Bhasyananda, where a monastery retreat in Ganges Town has also been established.

Amongst the American Centres, Hollywood and San Francisco greatly impressed me. Swami Prabhavananda was in charge of the Hollywood Centre, assisted by Swami Vandanananda, who is now the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. John Yale, then a Brahmachari there who became Swami Vidyatmananda is now in Paris assisting Swami Ritajananda. The Centre has a temple and a monastery. In addition, at Santa Barbara, 135 km. north of Los Angeles the Centre has a temple and a convent; at Trabuco, 104 km. to the South, it has a shrine and monastery. In all the three places morning meditation, noon worship and vesper services were conducted in a truly ashrama pattern. At Hollywood and at Santa Barbara, Ramayan, Kirtan and Vigils are held monthly. Religious festivals such as Kali Puja, Shiva Ratri and Christmas and the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and Founders of different faiths are celebrated. Weekly evening discourses and Sunday lectures were also given. The Swamis, on invitation, go out to take classes at various churches and colleges. In San Francisco also there is a monastery for monks, and a convent for training monastic sisters. The devotion with

which the worship was conducted in the centres made a deep and abiding impression on me. It was wonderful to see how the universal spiritual message of India as taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, had spread and taken roots in that country.

The U.S. State Department had made a detailed programme for my visit to many educational institutions. In view of the limitations of time, they had to be selective. I had indicated my desire to see and study institutions specialising in Education and Home Science and also some institutions with a special message. Accordingly, they had planned for visits to the Universities of Tennessee, Columbia, Cornell in Ithaca, Iowa and Ohio States where some of our staff were undergoing training and where we had numerous friends. The itinerary included also Beria and Antioch as our recently started Rural Institutes were closely related to the special message of work and craft-oriented education. Some other institutions were also in the programme. I am very grateful to the numerous friends in those centres of learning who spared no pains to make my visit educative and pleasant. I must particularly mention Miss Attie Souder who did not belong to any of the Universities. She had visited India in 1956 and she attended the dedication ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna Temple in our Home Science College. She took a great liking to India and our Institutions and insisted that I should visit her home in the Iowa State in the countryside. For that purpose she met me at Ames Airport and drove ninety miles to and from Rockwell city where all her family members received me with great kindness and affection. This is just an example of the great friendliness of the American people to friends from other countries. From her thrifty savings she endowed a scholarship in her name for a student studying Home Science extension in our Home Science College.

I must also mention my visit to Dr. Gladys Branagan Chalkly at her home in Riverside about fifty miles from Hollywood. I had not the pleasure of knowing her before. She was Dean of Home Science in the Ohio State University, where Dr. Devadas had received her Ph.D. Degree with many academic honours. It was touching to see the great affection between the teacher and the student. When she knew that I was coming to Hollywood, she insisted that she must meet me and for that purpose came to Hollywood and took me to her home. I was with her a few hours, but all the time she was enquiring in detail about her student even as a loving mother about her daughter, as to how Dr. Devadas was doing, living, teaching and all other details about her and about her family members. Later she came to India to see Dr. Devadas and lived with her for weeks in the campus observing everything and advising her over various aspects of her work. We took that opportunity to request her to open the newly built Nursery School building, which proudly bears the tablet bearing her name. It was heartwarming to see her love for a student from a far off country and through that love had developed a great love for India and her people.

My trip to the U.S.A. was cut short by the news of Chinese aggression on India. And so I had to cancel the rest of the itinerary. From San Francisco, I went to Honolulu where I visited and was entertained in the East-West Centre and met Mrs. Govindaram Watumall the wife of an Indian merchant who had settled in Honolulu and had founded the Watumall Foundation for helping Indian students study in America. From there I went to Tokyo, where I was met by members of our embassy. I had originally planned to stay for some time in Japan to observe their education system. But that could not be. But as I had promised Sri Narayan Uchigaki of the Vedanta Centre who was a devoted follower of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda at Osaka I made a brief visit to that Ashrama.

I visited also the great Buddha temple at Nava, Kamakurra. It is considered the biggest and the most famous statue of Buddha in the world, both because of its colossal size and because of the impression of intellectual power and passionless serenity it presents. It is 49 ft. high, the face is 8 ft. 5 inches long and the eyes made of gold, gaze down from lids 4 ft. long and made of bronze. It was wonderful to see it and be overwhelmed by its immensity. The visit to the Nava Buddhistic Temple brought home the great message of India to the Far East.

I had programmed to go to Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma. But in view of the happenings at home, I went direct to Singapore, where I was met with great affection by Swami Siddhatmananda who was the president of the Ramakrishna Mission Centre there, Swami Sthithananda and Sri Radhakrishnan the lay secretaries and other local friends. After a few days of meaningful stay I left for home.

By the time I returned, the Chinese had stopped their onward march and begun to withdraw. The atmosphere was full of shame and anguish and urge to finding out the reasons for this debacle. But even this defeat had a good side, for it removed our complacency in our defence management. All types of people were welded and became united and rose to organise themselves in defence of the country, the results of which led to victory in the subsequent wars with Pakistan. The lesson was clear that never again should we be caught 'napping' in our national defence.

33. American Education

IT is presumptuous for anyone to write on American education after a visit of a few weeks or months to that country. America is a vast country about double the size of India, with about one-third of our population. The educational institutions are spread over the vast space of the big continent. They include all types of institutions to suit the needs of each locality and community and do not conform to any single pattern. Therefore, my observations will be confined to only a few aspects of that vast educational edifice limited by my own experience.

When we talk of Higher Education in India, we think only of the Universities, all of which have been established by Acts of Central or State Legislature, and Deemed Universities recognised under the University Grants Commission Act. But any visitor from India to the United States will be struck with the variety of educational institutions in that country and the variety of agencies running the institutions with autonomy. As to number and diversity of institutions, there is nothing faintly resembling it anywhere in the world. This diversity is the genesis of much of the strength and vigour of American Colleges and Universities. Many institutions of higher learning defy classification, either because they cannot be placed in a general category or because their work is of a multiple nature. However, they may be generally classified as follows: (1) Junior Colleges, (2) Technical Colleges, (3) General Colleges, (4) Liberal Arts Colleges, (5) Municipal Colleges (6) Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, (7) Professional Schools, (8) Graduate Schools and (10) Other institutions of higher learning.

There is no national system of higher education in the United States, if by "system" is meant a uniform body of institutions with similar programmes, standards and financial support. Instead, there are thousands of individual, independent institutions ranging from two-year "Junior" colleges to complex universities, and from technical institutes to classical liberal arts colleges. These institutions may be small or large, rural or urban, private or public, religious or secular, highly selective or open to all. Church groups, ethnic groups, cities and states all have established or influenced institutions of higher education. The diversity and cultural pluralism of American life and its spirit of independence are thus reflected in this variety of colleges and universities.

Then the question is how standards are maintained in these thousands of independent institutions, each of them functioning as a separate university. Unlike many other countries, where standards for higher education are set by the government or government established universities, accreditation in the United States is usually achieved through recognition by independent Accrediting Agencies. These agencies, often regional, comprise institutions which establish standards and criteria for themselves. Despite what might appear to be a rather informal arrangement for this important function, accreditation procedures are very well defined and taken most seriously. An institution which fails to gain an accredited status loses its status and is severely hampered in its operation and finds it difficult to attract faculty, students or adequate financial support. General institutional accreditation is handled by six regional accrediting associations which together cover every section of the country. Regional accreditation usually applies to the institution as a whole. Specific professional curricula, such as Engineering, Medicine, Law or Chemistry, are accredited by separate professional bodies. The United States Office of Education publishes a list of accredited institutions and the student from abroad who wishes to obtain a degree at an American College or University would be well-advised to ascertain whether or not an institution has been accredited.

One of the main purposes of my visit was to see some Land-Grant universities with which our Home Science College had cooperative relationship such as the Universities of Tennessee, Cornell, Ohio and Iowa and to some other institutions with special messages in Rural Development with which our Rural Institute programmes were connected, namely, the College of Beria where our friend Dr. Louis Smith was the President, and who had visited the Vidyalaya and other Rural Institutes on the invitation of the Government of India, Ministry of Education and the Antioch College of which Dr. A.E. Morgan was the main source of inspiration from which Dr. Dawson had visited our institutions to report on the progress of the Rural Institute.

The Land-Grant Universities deserve special mention, because they formed the model for our Agricultural Universities. The way in which the Land-Grant Institutions were setup makes interesting reading. The term "Land-Grant college" originated from the wording of the first Morrill Act, adopted by the Congress of the United States in 1862. This Act provided, on the basis of each Senator and representative in Congress, for a Land Grant of 30,000 acres or its equivalent to the several states for an endowment, the interest from which was to furnish instruction in 'agriculture and the mechanical arts, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics'. This Act, signed during the Civil War by President Abraham Lincoln, was followed by several other Acts. Amongst the Land-Grant institutions are 29 universities providing for higher education in Agriculture, Engineering and Home Economics. The Tennessee, Iowa, Cornell and Ohio State Universities which I visited belong

to this category. A typical land-grant college consists of three divisions: resident instruction, research especially by the experimental stations: and the extension service. On-campus instruction is effectively supplemented by the two other services. The Land-Grant colleges are directly concerned with the welfare of the Farm and the Home that is, with the welfare of the Farmers and the Home-makers through their network of the Extension Department. The extension work is conducted through well-trained extension trained personnel, consisting of Country Agricultural Agents and Home Demonstration Agents comprising of men and women, and specialists. The triangular base of research, campus instruction and off-campus extension education has made the Land-Grant Colleges, a potent force in American Higher Education. As mentioned earlier, our Agricultural Universities starting with the first at Pantnagar in the North and Coimbatore in the South, which were modelled on this concept have also made a significant contribution to higher productivity in agriculture through the triple approach of education, research and extension. But unfortunately the extension in our agricultural universities has been confined mostly to the Farm and not the Home. I found that Home Science and Home Science extension work amongst women in the Land-Grant Universities had made a major contribution to national development in the fields of Nutrition, Child Development, Home Management and Home Science Extension work, which our Home Science College has been specialising in a large measure. I had a very friendly reception in Tennessee, Iowa, Ohio and other places, not only because Dr. Rajammal Devadas had many friends there, but also many of them had visited our college in Coimbatore.

Beria and Antioch were the two institutions with messages of their own. The Beria College had a unique educational programme for fulfilling the educational needs of the people of that area including the nearby Appalachian mountains. The most distinctive feature of the Beria College is its student industries. As weavers, hospital aides, waitresses, poultrymen, library assistants, wood-workers and lab. technicians, students earned their expenses while learning. These student industries were part of the educational programme of the college. Students worked at least ten hours a week in industries as closely related as possible to their courses of study. The Beria story is the narrative of a College that for a century had striven to better the social and individual needs of the community. After the Civil War, the newly emancipated Negroes needed teachers, and Beria trained them. When the people in the nearby hills needed some fundamental skills, the College reshaped its curricula to meet this need. When trained specialists were needed in agriculture, Beria took steps to give them that training. Because mountain problems are largely those of a rural society, Beria expanded its curricula to include study of rural sociology, recreation and health and also humanities to give a cultural background.¹

¹ Beria's Ist Century by Elizabeth S. Pech. 1953.

The Antioch College is an institution which has been set up to educate a limited number of able students, many of whom are in responsible positions in various parts of America. Its interest lies in developing not only able young people but young people who have the temper and capacity for democratic practice and leadership. To reach this end, the College combines in its programme elements of (a) liberal education, (b) work experience, and (c) development of a sense of group responsibility. The Antioch curriculum in short, includes not only the familiar liberal arts academic curriculum but experiences on a series of jobs and active student citizenship work in the Antioch community. A young person who comes to Antioch spends over half his total college time in academic study on the campus. In alternating periods, he goes out on jobs, which may be anywhere in the United States in almost any kind of business, industry, or programme of his choice. As a regular employee on these jobs, under responsible employers, he not only learns how to work and to get along with people and what he is interested in as a life-career, but he also gets acquainted with contemporary society, learns to recognise and analyse its problems, and how his academic studies tie in with what he observes. Through Community Government he is encouraged to explore with the entire student-faculty groups what are the best ways of community living and to learn to share the responsibility and initiative for realising them.²

While visiting Beria and Antioch I was struck with another aspect of education, namely how student's cost in universities was met in America. Scholarships and loans are available there as elsewhere but what was special was I was told that nearly 50% of the students were maintained in part or full by their own labour. In institutions like Beria and Antioch, students had opportunities to earn and learn in the campus itself and during college sessions. They had to put in the extra time and labour and they were proud of doing so. In other institutions, during holidays they went to neighbouring places wherever work such as cleaning, dish-washing, serving, and waiting were available and earned a fair portion of their campus expenses. Some worked as construction workers, lab. assistants, trawly setters, etc. Neither was this confined to the poor students alone. In Antioch college I was told that Rockefeller's sons worked for harvesting apples and earned their tuition. Many parents think that in addition to learning, working to earn part of their expenses gives their children valuable educational experience and helps in the formation of their character and confidence and good human relationship.

During my visit to the educational institutions, I had the opportunity and privilege to talk to a cross-section of people involved in education from Presidents of Universities to Deans and Professors and student groups. As previous arrangement had been made through the State Department of the United States Government, they were ready to receive and give me time

² Antioch College by Algo Henderson published by Harper Brothers, New York, 1946.

to show me round and discuss various aspects of education. Many of them like Dr. Harold Reade, President of Tennessee, Dr. Odlund, Dean of Home Science, Tennessee, and Dr. Louis Smith, Dr. Mckenaze who were previously educational Consultants to Government of India and Dr. A.E. Morgan, Dr. William Haggerty and many others have visited India and so we could have meaningful dialogues on many aspects of education in both the countries.

One of the striking features of American Higher Education is the deep sense of involvement and commitment of all concerned namely Alumni, Students, Teachers, Parents, Business, Industry, Government and Community at large. In our country it largely continues to be the business of the government, and the managements of colleges. The teachers, the parents and the community are interested or involved in it. The result is that higher education has not sufficiently responded to local needs to provide the variety of courses and practical skills necessary for the development of each area and the needs of the people concerned. Thus learning has become bookish and examination-centred, without practical utility. The affiliating Universities have become cumbrous, whose main purpose is to conduct examinations, without the ability or mind to explore the changing needs in skills to meet the development purposes; many universities have more or less, word for word, the same syllabi, possibly taken from each other. They do not provide training, skills and innovative spirit to apply science and technology for human welfare for changing a traditional society into a modern one based on technology. This must be done without affecting our high standards of traditional culture.

Secondly our universities, colleges and centres of Higher Education should be more involved with work in the community. At present neither the parents nor the past alumni nor the community at large have anything to do with the centres of education, except a few institutions like Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College, the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Gandhigram and a few other institutions which have community and social work as part of the curriculum. Mostly they are directed by rules made by the university or the government without any study or consideration of rural and local conditions. The recent introduction of Community Social Service and N.S.S and C.S.S in some colleges is a welcome innovation. But these have to be strengthened and included as part of academic requirement and made more meaningful. In order to enable institutes of Higher Education to react towards fulfilment of the local needs in education, the system of Autonomous Colleges has been evolved. They must be given the opportunity and facility to make the necessary changes in the curricula and introduce activities and skills which will be useful to the community. The academic bodies of autonomous colleges should also be enabled to include enlightened industrialists or agriculturists who can give useful and concrete suggestions for the improvement of the curricula.

In my discussions with U.S. experts it was pointed out that in the Indian system of education there is no teacher accountability. The American system

is based on accountability. The teacher must prove his worth for his continuance in his job and for professional promotion. A teacher is evaluated in the following roles: As a member of an Institution, as a member of the Teaching Profession, as an instructor, as a colleague, and as a member of the community. The evaluation is done at four levels — self-evaluation, student evaluation, evaluation by the chairperson or dean and peer evaluation. In peer evaluation the Dean of the division nominates a committee of three tenured teachers to attend some of the teacher's classes to give their estimate of his or her competence and performance. All the evaluation processes are performed separately. Academic authorities often use student evaluation of teachers for correctional purposes and on rare occasions as the basis for firing a faculty member.

In our system of education there is no accountability of any kind. Promotion is by seniority. This cuts in both ways; the seniors have no inducement to work as they are assured of their promotions with or without good work and the juniors are frustrated as good work does not bring any recognition. The result is the system does not have vitality and results only in production of mediocre men and women, with no flare or enthusiasm for higher achievement. It has been pointed out that such a system does great harm to the future growth of the nation. Therefore a balanced approach is necessary which will make the teacher accountable, measured through well-recognised norms, so that good performance and hard work will be counted for promotion and recognition.

Coming to the status of teachers, Americans recognise that good teachers are the kingpin of any good educational system. But even in America, the complaint was that their emoluments were comparatively lower than in other professions. But what intrigued me most was the lack of security in the job for the teachers. The appointment in many places is only for ten months, sometimes going upto three years. While it is recognised greater security of tenure is desirable, it is emphasised that the laws should not be drawn so tightly as to discourage the dismissal of incompetent, immoral and unprofessional teachers. The National Education Association, the biggest teachers' organisations in the U.S. has framed certain basic principles in this regard but I was told that practice varies in various states and amongst various educational agencies from annual contracts, permissive contracts for more than a year and continuing contracts with freedom for both the parties to quit on giving the required notice. When I questioned the wisdom of such a practice in the interests of good education, the teachers replied that the good teachers were always in demand and never suffered, and bad teachers should not be continued in the interest of good education.

It is well-known that the American population consists of many ethnic groups. While the largest group is of British ancestry, it by no means forms the majority of the population, but only 15%, followed by those from German origin and the blacks of African origin. Besides, there are American citizens who trace their ancestry to various countries in the world, such as

Ireland, Poland, the various European countries and some from India and other Asian countries. But today they are all Americans living together in peace and harmony, proud of their American citizenship. How this Americanisation has been brought about is a very interesting account.

Before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the American public generally took it for granted that the constant flow of newcomers from abroad brought strength and prosperity to the country. The metaphor of the melting pot had been introduced and enthusiastically accepted to symbolize the mystical potency of the great democracy, whereby people from every corner of the earth were fused into a harmonious and admirable blend. When the war began, however, American reactions to European hostilities revealed the fact, that the population contained many people, who, in spite of long residence in the United States, were still foreign in sympathy, loyalty and general social and emotional affiliations. They thought and felt as Germans, Italians, English or Irish. To those who considered themselves true Americans, the sudden awareness of this difference produced a profound consternation. They considered that if assimilation was not produced by natural, spontaneous forces, then it must be achieved by deliberate, purposeful means. This led to the Americanisation movement which was primarily a programme of education. Committees to promote Americanisation were formed and public authorities at every level of government became active in the development of curricula and the teaching of classes. The idea won immediate popularity. Throughout the country, Americanisation agencies and activities in great variety sprang up, unified only by their common conception of the problem. To achieve this end, public schools organised classes, state departments of education formed special divisions, universities and city governments appointed Americanisation directors, and both private industry and voluntary associations, such as the international institutes of the Young Women's Christian Association, established their own activities or lent their support to the public programmes. The teaching of foreigners became a favourite form of patriotic service, particularly after the entry of the United States into the war.

Meanwhile, the concept of Americanisation underwent a change. The early belief that all foreigners should be transformed into typical Americans began to appear naive as soon as the tensions of World War I disappeared. Who is the typical American? Are American cultural habits (as defined in any particular curriculum) necessarily better than the way of life with which the foreign resident is familiar? Are there not many truly loyal and thoroughly assimilated Americans who are ignorant of much which the foreigner was required to learn? The United States was built by people who came from many backgrounds; is not the effect to impose conformity itself un-American? These and other questions proved hard to answer.

Instead of the old idea of supplanting all foreign traits by a standard pattern, there grew up the idea of cultural pluralism. Nationality groups continued to flourish and, particularly in the cities, possess a political power

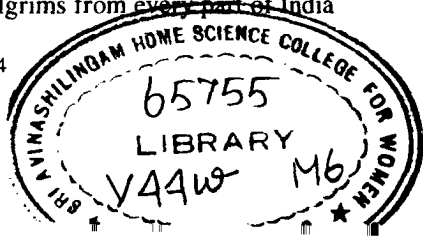
which had to be reckoned with by every party. It was then argued that the United States would reach its highest pinnacle by preserving the many separate cultures side by side within boundaries. Still others contended that this pluralism would gradually disappear over the years, that the American character was still in the process of formation and that as it gradually emerged, it would have been enriched by the harmonious blending of the admirable features of the various foreign nationalities. The problem of loyalty, which created the first interest in Americanisation and which caused it to be re-emphasised in the Depression and in World War II, still remained. Now, however the focus was no longer primarily on the foreign-born but on the whole citizenry, and the term "Amercianism" was increasingly used by legislative committees, associations and others to refer to the protection and inculcation of traditional American values amongst all the citizens.* This again has lessons for us in India.

This brings us to our own problems in National Integration. Of late the problem has been posing formidable difficulties. In the presence of common strivings as in the time of the Freedom Movement or in the times of common danger as on the occasion of the Pakistani wars, the people rallied round in great enthusiasm forgetting the differences of religion, caste, language, and region. But when these occasions passed away, local squabbles based on caste, religion and language seemed to crop up, sometimes violently.

And yet, it is amazing to see a wonderful cultural unity in the country underlying and inter-linking this diversity. Thousands of years of living together has knit us into one vast culture. More than a thousand years ago, Sri Sankara demonstrated the unity of India when he founded his centres of learning in the four corners of India — at Badrinath, in the North, Sringeri in the South, Dwaraka in the West and Puri in the East. Even today the priest who does puja in Badrinath is South-Indian from near Kanyakumari, and those who offer worship at Rameswaram are from the North. Even looking at our languages, those who have studied more than one Indian language have been struck by the remarkable fact that almost all sayings and proverbs in one Indian language have their exact counterparts in the other languages of our country.

The festivals celebrated in the various parts of India have been another unifying factor. What is celebrated as Durga Puja (Navarathri), Ramanavami, Gokulashtami, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Deepavali and several other festivals have been celebrated throughout India for thousands of years. Religious fairs like Kumbha Mela have been periodically held once in twelve years in such far off places as Haridwar, Allahabad, Ujjain and Nasik from very old times, when there was no faster conveyance than one's feet or the bullock-cart. Sacred centres as far apart as Kashi and Rameswaram, Dwaraka and Kamakhya, have attracted pilgrims from every part of India

* page 755-6, Encyclopaedia Britannica — 1964



from time immemorial, thus helping in the evolution of a common culture for the whole of India. The modern celebration of Independence Day and Republic Day and Gandhiji's Birthday and Christmas, Birthday of Prophet Mohammed throughout the country have added to these all-India festivals. Foreign visitors are struck by a common culture which prevails from the Himalayas to the Kanyakumari in spite of difference in languages, colour appearance, stature, religion and dress.

Differences of religion and language seem to be the major contributing factors to disunity and creation of tensions. Religious differences can be solved only by inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values which are the basis of all religions. Fanaticism is a disease which can be cured by mutual respect and toleration of all religions as preached by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda said: "Our watchword should be acceptance, and not toleration. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy. Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his law, I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future".

Different languages are spoken in the various parts of India. It is necessary for us to evolve a common language, a kind of link language. Hindi-speaking people form a large portion of the people of our country. But forcing the language on others has created resistance in some parts of the country. They have to be assured that their interests and development of their languages will not suffer by the acceptance of Hindi. Jawaharlal Nehru proved himself a wise statesman when he gave the assurance that English will continue to be the link language, till non-Hindi people consider they have attained sufficient proficiency in Hindi, even though English will continue to be our international link language even later. In the meantime, Hindi should shape as an all-India language by absorbing the words and phraseologies of other languages in the country so that it will be easy to learn for others and at the same time become a real all-India language. In fact, the Founding Fathers of our Constitution have provided for such a development in Article 351 of the Constitution which says:

It shall be the duty of the Indian Union to provide the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the

other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary from Sanskrit and other languages.*

Now the question is, what should be done to lessen the force of divisive factors and emphasise our common interests, ideals and ambitions. In this great task, a national system of education is the only agency that can reach the people all over India. Such a system of national education should cultivate a deep sense of national, social and spiritual values, of the obligations of citizenship, and a growing identification with the nation as a whole, transcending sectional loyalties and secondly, steady efforts to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the under-privileged, city and village, the educated and the uneducated, through provision of adequate facilities to all for their development. Above all the realisation that we are all one imbued by the common purpose of working for the greatness of India and serving for the uplift of millions, will help in our emotional integration. In an inspiring appeal to the youth of India Swami Vivekananda said :

*"Forget not", he said, "that your wealth and life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for your individual personal happiness, but that you are born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler and the sweeper, are your flesh and blood, your brothers. Be proud that you are an Indian, and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian, every Indian, poor or destitute, is my brother'. Proudly proclaim at the top of your voice that the soil of India is your highest heaven, the good of India is your good, and pray day and night, 'O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me; take away my weakness, so that I can serve my country and people.' ***

* Article 351 — The Constitution of India

** Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, p.271

34. The Vivekanandapuram Centre for Rural Development

ERADICATION of poverty is the biggest and most pressing task in India. The great poet Thiruvalluvar said over two thousand and five hundred years back, that there is nothing so cruel and degrading like poverty. Poverty cuts at the roots of human dignity. Poverty makes a man mean, inhuman and desperate. It drives him even to sell himself, his wife and children and commit murder for a morsel of food to appease his hunger.

There is another kind of poverty in which people are kept living on the verge of hunger under sub-economic level. These people have no other thought than to get the means of living for the particular day. They have no time to think of anything nobler or higher than making both ends meet, leading a life of misery and sickness. A country in which large masses of population live under sub-economic levels can never rise to be a great or glorious nation. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses of India are once again well fed, well educated and well cared for.

Both the Vidyalyaya and the Home Science College have been involved in various kinds of rural service from their very inception following the ideals of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. These works were organised through the help of the staff and the students, according to the amount of time and facilities available to meet the needs of the surrounding villages. These included village sanitation work, laying of village roads, training of village women in child care, nutrition and environmental sanitation, training farmers in scientific agriculture, distribution of high-yielding varieties of seeds, soil and water testing and at times health camps such as those for the operation of cataract of the eyes and immunisation of children and organisation of adult education. On occasions like calamities caused by cyclones in Rameswaram, Vedaranyam and floods in Bhavani, whole classes were shifted to those areas to help in relief work and in some places to build new colonies of houses for the distressed. Student camps of one to two weeks' duration were conducted in villages for nutrition and child care education and to build additional classrooms in elementary schools in the surrounding areas. These were all good as far as they went but suffered from certain limitations. The main purpose of the students and the staff is studying the prescribed curricula. Therefore the time they could give for

social service was limited. The second and more important limitation was lack of continuity, the programme being ad hoc. Therefore while students' help could be utilised as far as it was available, there was need for a continuous effort on the basis of a well-planned, on-going programme of work with a permanent staff for producing permanent results. This led to the establishment of the Vivekanandapuram Centre for Rural Development situated about 50 kilometres from Coimbatore in a backward area in Karamadai Block, Avinashi Taluk, bordering the hills populated by the tribals.

Many estimates have been made about the number of people living in sub-economic levels. It has been observed that 80% of them are concentrated in the rural areas particularly in the drought-prone dry areas, where water facilities are not available and therefore agricultural productivity is low and where there are no industries to give employment. It has also been observed that the percentage of people living in sub-economic level, ranges from 55% in some States to 24% in more prosperous States like the Punjab and Haryana. But statistics does not and cannot portray the human tragedy behind the numbers and the wretched life of malnutrition, sickness and misery of millions of people in the country. People in rural areas see so much of these maladies that they have become insensitive to them.

The incident which sparked off the starting of the Vivekanandapuram Rural Development Centre is interesting. About a decade ago, my co-workers and I, in the course of our village work, had occasions to go to Devanapuram, a village adjoining the Kuranur gardens. During our visit to the village, we could not find even a single well-nourished man, woman or child. The children in the village school had pot-bellies, brown hair, sore mouths (mya mouths), running noses and sore eyes. Due to extreme malnutrition they were emaciated. This experience was the provocation for the starting of Vivekanandapuram Rural Development Centre. Immediately a Balwadi with midday meal was started for the children. To give employment to the women, the Sarvodaya Sangh was persuaded to open a Rural Textiles Centre.

The Rural Development Centre began its work imparting training in scientific agriculture and animal husbandry. The starting of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra under the auspices of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the magnificent gift of pedigree cows and bulls by 'For Those Who Have Less', an Australian philanthropic society headed by Dr. L.S. Reid, strengthened the centre and other activities followed.

Rural work is a much more difficult work than conducting schools, colleges or research centres. The latter are beaten tracks with well established norms, rules and practices and they deal with students who seek admission to these institutions for which trained staff are readily available. But in Rural Development, the staff and the students have to go to the poor, where facilities are minimum or negligible. The needs of the poor must be identified and the courses tailored to their uplift. But yet this difficult task is a 'must'

for national survival. Hence it is a national duty we owe to our brothers and sisters living in sub-economic levels suffering from sickness, poverty and ignorance.

Many books have been written about the dynamics of Indian Poverty. In general, they highlight the following facts:

a) Rural Population and Agricultural Production

Despite high rates of rural-urban migration, the rural population is growing by approximately 2% per year. In the past, in many countries the increases in rural population could be accommodated by expanding the acreage under cultivation. This is the case in countries which have an ample supply of land that can be brought into production at relatively low cost, but in our country the opportunities for expansion have diminished substantially. With worsening man-land ratio, increase in output and farm income must come from a widespread increase in yields per acre and from the cultivation of higher value crops.

The new high yielding seed-fertilizer technology for wheat, rice and maize has provided the first major opportunity to increase yields among small-scale, low-income producers of traditional crops. Through adaptive research and breeding of new high-yielding seed varieties, the technology can lead to substantial increases in output in many areas, even where the density of population is high and where there are large numbers of small-scale, low-income producers. However, as long as the institutions that provide the inputs for technological change continue to be biased against the small producers, the latter will become more and more impoverished, as they have to share their output among increased numbers. Therefore a special effort has to be made to help the rural poor to increase output per acre by the adoption of new technology. This can be done only by special programmes which include the provision of infrastructure and 'on-farm' improvements.

b) Health

The logic regarding special intervention to raise the agricultural incomes of the poor extends also to the provision of minimum standards of food, clothing, shelter, health and education. These not only improve the quality of life, but also indirectly affect human productivity. Low income implies inadequacies of nutrition, shelter, health standards and other components of a basic level of living. Consequently rural areas are victims of high levels of morbidity and mortality, especially infant mortality; physical and mental lethargy and inability to sustained hard work on a regular basis; limited ability to recognize or to respond to problems and challenges; lack of awareness; inactive and poor motivation even towards their own improvement and learning. Some of these reactions, particularly those that are more psychological than physiological, are associated as much with the deprivations of relative poverty as with those of absolute poverty. Nutritional deficiencies affect all age-groups, but the toll is the greatest among the very young.

One of the important elements reinforcing rural poverty is that those most needing medical or health care are precisely those who are too poor and who are too remote from any facility to obtain it. It is estimated that more than 80% of the rural population is out of touch with the official health services.

Another factor that exacerbates the health problems of the rural poor is that preventive services are neglected. Approximately 70% to 80% of public health expenditure is usually allocated to curative services, even though it is generally recognised that preventive health programmes are essential to check the diseases which have contributed to the prevailing high rates of morbidity and mortality. Through improved water supply and sanitation and timely immunisation, the incidence of a whole range of diseases can be reduced.

c) Access to Education

Although it may take time, access to education provides some chance for the rural youth to escape from poverty. There are, however, two important considerations which militate against the rural poor receiving good education. The first is the relative shortage of facilities and the poor quality of education in the rural areas. The second is the relatively high cost of education to the poor in terms of fees, books and other materials. In spite of the significant increase in educational opportunities in the rural areas, they are unevenly distributed. The rural areas are generally lagging behind the educational expansion in urban areas, particularly at levels of education above the elementary.

d) Other services

Compared with the urban areas, the rural areas appear also to be provided with a lower proportion of such services as domestic water supply, electricity, waste disposal and other economic infrastructure.

In order to overcome these problems the following steps are necessary:

1. Special Attention to Rural Areas

Studies indicate that special efforts to provide appropriate social and economic services for the rural poor should focus on meeting the needs of the lowest income groups, small-holders, tenants and the landless in the rural areas. To this end, not only must the services be geared to rural requirements, but also special arrangements must be made so that the poor will have access to services which can help them to break out of the cycle of poverty. Studies also indicate the importance of integrating economic services with social services in rural development projects, since poor health and lack of education are important reasons for low productivity and resistance to change.

2. Promotion of Rural Industries

The promotion of rural industry in the context of rural development merits special attention. Existing village crafts are disappearing rapidly,

while modernization of agriculture creates a demand for new inputs and consumer goods which could often be produced locally. If these two trends can be combined through relevant planning and support measures, the outcome might help to revive local industry to serving the rural areas. Such rural industry could provide employment, increase incomes, slow down rural-urban migration, increase the supply of goods and services to farmers at lower cost, and generally stimulate further rural and regional development.

3. Importance of local participation

Community involvement in the selection, design, construction and implementation of rural development programme is the first effective step in the acceptance of change leading to the adoption of new techniques of production. This is no easy task. The manner in which participation is to be achieved, is one of the most baffling problems facing Rural Development Programmes. There is evidence that a strengthened local authority is better able to secure effective participation than are officials answerable to a far away Central or State Government.

Local institutions, such as farmers' associations and cooperatives, have potentialities for coping with administrative difficulties in reaching the rural poor. On the one side, they provide some measure of participation through the involvement of their members. On the other, they perform such functions as providing credit to larger numbers than can be done through official agencies. Group members can be held jointly responsible for repayment of credit, for acceptance of input supplies or other produce purchased from outside, and for delivery of the marketable surplus to the appropriate agencies. In some places cultivation may be arranged on a cooperative basis, possibly with the application of more or less uniform cultivation practices to land and crops that remain the responsibility and property of the individual cultivators. Local groups and associations can thus reduce the need for government servants to deal with the individuals and families that comprise the target groups. These ideas are undoubtedly difficult in application; highly dedicated and trained staff will be necessary to accomplish them.

4. Research and information

High priority needs to be given to conducting research and gathering information. The first need is for *greater insight into the characteristics of target groups and the dynamics of traditional societies as they begin to modernize*. In some cases, there is need for information on how many people there are, where they are, their economic conditions and needs. But once a programme is designed, it is also necessary to know more about their skills, resource ownership, income, nutrition, health, family structure and general socio-economic environment. Such information has to be collected through surveys.

Research is needed as to how best to motivate people in the rural areas and to get more information about the resources available for exploitation by the rural poor and others. Research is also needed to collate and synthesize

all the work which has been done on "appropriate technologies" and to make recommendations as to the type of machinery and equipment to meet the local needs.

5. Development with Social Justice

There have been many schemes for Rural Development. Some of them worked successfully in small patches in the country, but, by and large, the problem of poverty especially in the rural areas remains unsolved; not that there has not been any development in the various sectors. Agricultural production has more than doubled in the last 20 years and vast educational complexes, universities and research laboratories have been setup throughout the country, but experience points out that the fruits of development have been enjoyed only by a select minority, namely, the educated, the rich and the elite. Thus large masses of people have been left behind wallowing below the poverty line. What is needed is development with social justice. Our past experience has led to the new concept of Integrated Rural Development.

The Programme in Vivekanandapuram

The Vivekanandapuram Rural Development Centre has been started with the joint efforts of the institutions in the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya and in the Avinashilingam Home Science College for carrying out Integrated Rural Development. The formal opening of the centre was done on 16th April 1978 by H.H. Swami Vireshwarananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

The following infrastructure has been established, namely:

1. A Krishi Vigyan Kendra run under the auspices of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Government of India.
2. A dairy farm of pedigree cattle to help in upgrading the milk cattle of the area.
3. A Mini Health Centre run by the Vidyalaya with the help of the State Government.
4. Balwadis run by the Avinashilingam Home Science College.
5. A Lab-to-Land Programme under the auspices of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.
6. A Branch of the Indian Overseas Bank to give institutional support for Rural Development in the area and
7. An Industrial Institute to help in giving industrial training to Rural youth.

The action programmes contemplated and attempted at the Centre are:

I. Agriculture and Animal Husbandry:

A. Development

1. Seed multiplication and distribution to farmers.
2. Soil and water analysis and recommendation of suitable crops and manurial dosage.

B. Services

1. Supplying green manures, fodder and fruit plants.
2. Lending tractors and power sprayers to farmers.
3. Helping farmers to prepare farm budget and cropping scheme.
4. Helping farmers to raise kitchen gardens.
5. Helping farmers to adopt artificial insemination to their cows and providing the service of improved variety of stud bulls.
6. Treatment of livestock.

C. Extension Education (Non-formal) for farmers:

Providing short courses for intensive cultivation of the crops grown in that area.

1. Better methods of cultivation of crops.
2. Farm management.
3. Crop protection.
4. Maintaining cattle.
5. Water management.
6. Maintenance and repairs of motors, pumpsets and other agricultural implements.
7. Post-harvest technology.
8. Screening films on agriculture.
9. Organising agricultural exhibitions.
10. Seminars on scientific farming such as introduction of high-yielding seeds, use of chemical manure, plant protection and water management techniques.
11. Providing short courses in cattle care and animal husbandry.

II. Programmes for Women and Children (Families)

The programmes for women and children aim at creating awareness among women about their needs and potentials and developing self-reliance.

A. Development

1. Help women become aware of their needs and potentials.
2. Acquire skills necessary for improving their conditions and standards of living.
3. Develop self-reliance.
4. Develop leadership.

B. Services

1. Organise relevant socio-economic programmes, to increase their income, preparation of ragimalt, appalam, kuzhandai amudh etc.
2. Organise women in groups and cooperatives.

3. Improving the nutritional status of children by conducting Balwadis.

C. Extension Education

1. Educate women in better child care, nutrition, household management and community living.
2. Conduct training for groups, and camps according to needs.
3. Training in tailoring.
4. Training for conducting Balwadis.
5. Training in improved agriculture.
6. Education of mothers on children's diets.
7. Impart nutritional education to mothers, children and other adults.

III. Economic Programmes:

A. Service activities

1. Organising village industries such as Ambar Charka unit and other small scale industries.
2. Helping artisans to get bank loans to improve their activities.
3. Starting cooperatives such as Milk Producers' Cooperatives, Credit Cooperatives and Marketing Cooperatives.

B. Non-formal courses

1. Organising Seminars and discussion on starting agro-industries and small scale industries.
2. Member education programmes of cooperatives.
3. Seminars on utilising the services of the agencies such as banks, SFDA and others.
4. Courses on improvement of the tools and practices of artisans.

IV. Community Health Care (Through Mini Health Centre)

A. Service activities

1. Provision of drinking water.
2. Immunisation of children.
3. Making medical services available to people through the Mini Health Centre.
4. Organising eye-camps.
5. Improving the cleanliness and hygiene in villages.
6. Provision of simple village latrines in rural households.
7. Eradication of mosquitoes and flies.

B. Extension — Non-formal courses

1. Advice on family planning.
2. Health and family planning education for adults.

3. Talks on simple remedies to common diseases.
4. Film shows on health education.
5. Training of Primary Health Care Aids.

V. Educational Programmes

A. Service activities

1. School enrolment drive and bringing all children of school-going age into the schools.
2. Building school lunch rooms and class-rooms.
3. Supplying uniforms and books to poor children.
4. Supplying teaching aids to the teachers of primary schools.
5. Organising reading rooms and radio forums.
6. Organising mobile libraries.
7. Development of school lunch gardens.

B. Extension Education (Non-formal)

1. Organising non-formal education classes and functional literacy classes to illiterates in the age-group 15 — 35.
2. Training Balwadi workers.
3. Organising Youth Clubs and Mahila Mandals.

VI. Cultural, Recreational Activities and Inculcation of Social, Ethical and Spiritual values

Service Activities

1. Organising play festivals for children.
2. Organising youth festivals for the Rural Youth.
3. Conducting Bhajans in the community.
4. Arranging cultural and spiritual talks on special occasions such as celebration of national, religious and social festivals.

VII. Other Programmes

1. Desilting of tanks.
2. Construction of check dams.
3. Improving existing roads and laying new roads.

VIII. Building Community Infrastructure for Rural Development

Development of community infrastructure is very necessary, if Rural Development is to take permanent roots. Our past experiments have proved that whenever work has been done only through government or foreign agencies they waned and collapsed, when the agencies, withdrew or the Government stopped their grant. Only interested and committed local people can sustain and continue the effort in rural development. For this, the building up of the following infrastructure should be undertaken:

1. Yuvak Mandals for building sound and dedicated leadership among youth

2. Mahila Mandals for developing dedicated leadership among women who will give support, guidance and protection to the women workers who will have to take part in rural development work.
3. Non-formal education centres placed in or along with the existing schools or youth centres.
4. Health outposts manned by trained local women who have had a minimum of school education.
5. Balwadis run on local and panchayat support for children of the people under sub-economic level.

IX. Training Workers

For all these, training of personnel is necessary. Our experiments have proved that workers drawn from town and cities have not taken roots in the villages. This is especially so, amongst the tribal and Harijan areas. Therefore people from the village communities must be selected and trained. This will give them security and status in the community and their living will be less costly.

X. Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation are essential components of all well-structured programmes. While the findings of research provide the direction of future work, evaluation provides the opportunity of finding out whether one is proceeding in the right direction or not. Periodical evaluation of the work is very necessary to keep the work in the right track.

In these five years numerous short courses have been conducted in the fields of scientific agriculture, crops relevant to the area, animal husbandry, engineering, nutrition, and child care. One hundred adult education centres and 20 Balwadis have been/are being conducted under various schemes of the Home Science College in cooperation with the Government of India. The Mini Health Centre has met one of the most pressing needs of the village community. The Lab-to-Land Programme has carried technology, and inputs and education to over 200 families including those in the tribal belt. The two Rural Textile Centres established through the Sarvodaya Sangh have provided permanent employment to over a hundred women throughout the year. Courses such as repairs of pumpsets, motors, sprayers and house-wiring have provided self-employment. Through the three animal husbandry centres where pedigree bulls are stationed, the quality of the cows has been upgraded and the productivity of milk considerably improved. More important than these material advantages is the building up of a nuclear staff of dedicated workers and the confidence and rapport the Centre has established in the rural community, particularly amongst those in the sub-economic level.

Our experience of rural service during last 30 years points out the following difficulties faced in the implementation of rural service programmes.

DIFFICULTIES FACED

1. Difficulty in getting Staff

It is difficult to get staff to work in rural areas, especially those qualified in technical subjects such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Engineering, Medicine and Home Science. Some young people do come but only on a temporary basis, to leave when they get better jobs in towns. The lack of permanent staff dedicated to the uplift of masses is the biggest obstacle in rural development work.

2. The Apathy of the people

Apathy of the people is another difficulty. The rural poor have been exploited by so many groups of people — official, and the unofficial, the money lender, bigger landlords, higher castes, traders and politicians — that they have well lost faith in anybody coming forward with sincerity and unselfish motives to work for them. It requires a great deal of love, patience, understanding and empathy, and effort to convince them of the sincerity of our attempts and to get their cooperation.

3. Migration of educated youth to the Urban areas

The educated and progressive elements in villages are migrating to towns and for official jobs and so the villages are bereft of enlightened leadership. There are a few educated people, some of them graduates doing farm or other work. To infuse confidence and idealism in them, to induce them to take up public work for the welfare of the masses is one of the hardest problems. This has to be done through formation of youth clubs and mahila mandals. Building up long-standing leadership is a long time process and requires great patience and continuous effort.

4. Interference of Political Elements

It is unfortunate that politics has affected village life and people are grouped into political parties, each working against the other, motivated by mutual jealousy and striving for political power. To bring them together to work for common welfare requires great skill and patience on the part of the service agencies who should take care to keep themselves away from party politics.

In spite of these difficulties if our country is to survive, this most difficult work of the uplift of the masses, carrying education to them as well as infusing confidence and strength in them has to be done. For this as Swami Vivekananda said: "Men and Women dedicated, nerved to lion's strength by their love for the poor and the downtrodden, are necessary. May they come in thousands to reach the nooks and corners of India is our constant prayer".



Sri N. Sanjiva Reddy, President of India, at the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya.

35. The Golden Jubilee

The Vidyalaya was born on the crest of the Freedom Movement in 1932 and its Founder played a significant part in all the freedom struggles from the Salt Satyagraha to the final movement in 1942. As such the Vidyalaya has inspired over the years thousands of young men with the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice. It grew in free India and flowered to be one of the prominent educational institutions in the country. Its dozen institutions are spread in an area of three hundred acres consisting of five campuses. It provides education for boys from the Pre-school to Ph.D. in its various institutions consisting of three colleges affiliated to the University, namely, the Arts and Science College providing B.A., B.Sc., M.A., M.Sc., M.Phil and Doctorate, the College of Education providing B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil and Ph.D. and a Diploma course on the Cultural Heritage of India with special reference to the Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda with departments for Extension services, Research and Integrated Education of the Blind. The College of Physical Education provides B.P.Ed. and M.P.Ed. and Certificate courses. Attached to it is the Sports School to train children in various sports. There are three institutions providing Diploma and Certificate courses, namely, the Polytechnic with its Community Polytechnic, the Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Gandhi Teacher Training Institute and the Industrial Institute. The other institutions are the Industrial Section, the Balwadi, Middle School, the Residential High School and the Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School. All these institutions follow the educational ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi and aim at imparting man-making, character-building education with an attitude of service to the poor and to the nation.

In these fifty years the Vidyalaya has participated in many educational experiments, namely, Inculcation of Spiritual Values in Education, Basic Education initiated by the Father of the Nation, Vocationalisation in the secondary level, Citizenship Training, the Rural Institute programme. Community Polytechnic, Non-formal Education, Rural Development etc. In these fifty years, many National Seminars have been held on Education, Inculcation of Spiritual Values, Rural Development and Employment, Food Production, Social Purpose of Nationalised Banks, Integrated Education for the Blind, Exercise-Physiology, Utilisation of Solar Energy, Eradication

of Poverty and other topics. Several prominent leaders of the freedom movement like Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Babu, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kamaraj and Rajaji have visited the Vidyalaya during the freedom movement and after the attainment of freedom. Most of the Presidents of India including Rejan Babu, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Zakir Hussain, V.V. Giri and Sanjiva Reddy and many of the Central Ministers like Lal Bahadur Sastri, Panjab Rao Deshmukh, Humayun Kabir, C. Subramaniam, V.K.R.V. Rao, State Ministers and others have visited the Vidyalaya. Thousands of students have passed through its portals. With this background it got ready to celebrate the completion of its fifty years of service in 1981. A committee consisting of old students, well-wishers, teachers and friends was constituted for that purpose with Dr. K. Kulandaivel as President, Sri P.K. Natarajan, the President of the Old Boys' Association as Vice-President and Dr. H. Visveswaran as Secretary. The programme for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations as well as the directions of its future growth would naturally depend upon the needs of our people and the education system, and so it will be relevant to study the present state of education in the country.

The picture of Indian Education after three decades of freedom is one of the contrasts of outstanding achievements on the one side and some Himalayan failures on the other.

The most impressive facet of the educational development is its quantitative expansion. In the course of 35 years, the Primary School enrolment has expanded from half a crore to over 7 crores (from 10 to 84 percent of the age-group), Upper primary from 20,000 to 2 crores (from 4 to 40 percent of the age-group), Secondary and Higher Secondary from 12,000 to 90 lakhs (from 2 to 20 percent of the age-group) and in adult education from 4 per cent to 35 per cent of the population. It is in higher education that the most spectacular expansion has taken place in enrolments; from 10,000 to 35 lakhs (from 0.2 per cent to 4 per cent of the age-group), and Colleges from 200 to 4,558 and in Universities from 12 to 119.

Some selected professional higher educational institutions have developed as peaks of excellence at the national level and are on all fours with the best institutions in other countries of the world. The Indian Institutes of Technology, the Indian Institutes of Management, some of the Regional Engineering Colleges, some of the Life (Biological) Sciences and medical departments of the universities, and the Agricultural Universities are functioning at inter-disciplinary levels of a high order in pushing back the frontiers of knowledge and in applying science to the urgent and crying problems of the society. These institutions have helped to produce scientists and technologists who are not only quantitatively the third largest group in the world; they are responsible for India entering the space age through the launching of SLV-3, Rohini and APPLE with INSAT-IB and for our exploring successfully the resources of the ocean and the Antarctic Continent, as well as provided us with the personnel to plan and implement

our Five-Year Plans at the National and State levels. The latest achievement is that of Rakesh Sarma who had gone to the outer space with Russian help.

As pointed out by our eminent educationist, Dr. M. Adiseshaiah*, behind the impressive quantitative expansion of our educational system in which ten crores of students are enrolled, is the hidden fact admitted by Government that of drop-out — out of 10 students who enter Class I every year 6 drop out by Class V and 8 by Class X. Twenty per cent of children are still to be even nominally enrolled, and girls' enrolment starts with being half of that of boys at the primary level and in higher education less than one quarter. He has pointed out that we spend Rs. 3,000 crores per annum on our educational system and that the benefit cost studies that he had undertaken for the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1976-78 showed that even after allowing for all the limitations of the methodology in use and employed, that in the general arts field of secondary education and the arts undergraduate courses in university and college education, the social costs are rising and the social benefits are falling steeply, suggesting the need to cut on this area of expenditure for the type of education. Even in regard to professional higher education where benefits could exceed costs, the heavy brain-drain of our engineering and medical scientists results in growing social costs with declining social benefits. To quote him, 'last year, I was on a visit to Cape Kennedy in Florida and at a reception for me there I met a group of 30 top Indian Scientists and Technologists who were (and had been) working on the U.S. Space programme — the Moon landing, Apollo and Saturn Vehicles and the most recent Columbia. A recent WHO Survey states that India is the largest donor of medical manpower to industrialised and other countries, with at present 1,50,000 Indian Physicians working abroad. A UN Survey reports a similar migration of our top Engineers — so that on these two groups of manpower the benefit from our expenditure of Rs. 240 crores in training them accrues to the United States, the United Kingdom and the industrialised countries in a kind of reverse technical assistance from India to the industrialised West'.

'Even in quantitative terms, it is mainly the upper and middle classes that are the beneficiaries of this system. Seventy per cent of the seats in secondary schools and 80 per cent in higher education are taken by top 30 per cent of income groups. A decade ago an NCERT study for the Kothari Commission also found that 80 per cent of School and College competitors come from the top 20 per cent of our society. If to this is added the fact that 80 per cent of our tax revenue which finances our educational system is from indirect taxes, paid by the poor majority, education, particularly higher education, becomes a means of transferring resources from the poor to the rich'.

★ Mani Sundaram Endowment Lecture on Education on 8th February in the Bharati Dasan University, Tiruchirapalli.

In a feeling letter to *The Hindu*, dated 7th June 1984, Dr. C.P. Mathew from Kottayam has pointed out that according to WHO estimates, the brain drain has been calculated as Rs. 3000 crores. He writes:

"According to WHO estimates the loss to our country due to the drain of these doctors is to the tune of Rs. 3000 crores. After obtaining their training they get out without fulfilling their obligation to the community which supported their training. When millions and millions of our countrymen in the villages are without proper medical aid, these doctors have emigrated to a country where their services are not very much wanted. The huge loss to our country has turned out to be a great gain for a developed country like the U.S. Even after amassing wealth they are not prepared to come back and fulfil their obligation to our people".

Finally, Dr. Adisheshaiah continues: 'We have reached a stage of academic and moral breakdown in our general universities and colleges. Copying in examinations is being demanded as a right. Examinations are in serious arrears — from 3 to 4 years in some universities. The student sees corruption in his admission procedure and in the appointment of his teachers. He faces the bleak future of Unemployment and what is worse of unemployment. Some universities did not work for even one week in all of the last academic year. Strikes, dharnas, gheraos, violence, destruction of university property, buses, trains and shops are becoming common, with even murders and attempted murders becoming a way of settling academic or institutional differences. We are a long way from the vision of educationists, who visualised education as an unwritten contract of living and learning together between the teacher and the student'.

As pointed out in the National Seminar on Inculcation of Social, Ethical and Spiritual Values in Education held recently in the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, most of these defects in the educational system are due to five weaknesses.

1. It lays great emphasis on narrow individualism, unhealthy competition to the neglect of social good; verbal fluency in language and mere acquisition of information, to the neglect of social objectives such as cooperation, manual work, training skills, community skills and building up of character. Our educational system, stressing too much on memorisation and teaching of a set syllabus, has neglected the cultivation of the mind and has not helped the students to discriminate between the social good and bad and to control their emotions and desires and strengthen their will.

2. The educational institutions function in isolation from the community as well as from one another without making any substantial contribution to the development of the people around, who pay for their upkeep.

3. The system maintains a set of double standards. A small minority of educational institutions at all levels is of good quality but access to them is selective and is mostly availed of, only by the top social groups like high officials and rich people, either because they can afford the costs involved

or because they show merit which, on the basis of existing methods of selection shows a high correlation with social status. As against these, are a large number of sub-standard institutions where although there is open door access, the standards are poor, where mainly the weaker sections receive their education. The dualism leads to a perpetuation of double standards, one for the rich and the higher-ups and the other for the poor, mostly living in the rural areas.

Mainly the upper and middle classes have been the beneficiaries of this system. Sixty percent of the population who are still illiterate and backward, a large proportion of whom are in the villages, have not received its benefits.

4. One of the evils that has bedevilled the educational system is the absence of a system of accountability of the personnel involved in education. In a recent meeting, when a distinguished agricultural scientist was asked by Sri Rao Birendra Singh, the then Minister of Agriculture as to how we account for the same person, not achieving much in India, but achieving much on going to America, the scientist replied, it is due to insistence of the accountability of the teachers. The way in which accountability has been enforced in the USA has been dealt with in a previous chapter on American Education. Insistence on security for teachers, regardless of their efficiency, character or morals, and promotion only on seniority without regard for merit or achievement have been negative influences in striving for higher standards in education.

5. Basic to all these are the weakening of ethical, social and spiritual values in education.

The above is a frank appraisal of the state of our educational system. This has been pointed out by many educationists and education commissions. To grow into a great nation, it is necessary to inculcate a sense of national discipline and patriotism, a capacity to work hard and untiringly and placing the interests of the country and community above selfish personal, group, caste and regional interests. Progress in the modern age also requires that we must develop a sense of creativity and a tremendous capacity to absorb and improve our technological advance and to work unceasingly for the progress of the country. In bringing about this change, the duty and responsibility of the governments in the Centre and States is indeed great. But in improving the quality of education and in the task of inculcating ethical, social and spiritual values, the part to be played by other agencies should not be forgotten or minimised.

These other agencies are (1) The home and the family. The early influences of the home, the mother, father and other family members are most important as they last throughout the lives of the children. (2) The value systems in the community and the society influence greatly in the shaping of the values of the individual. (3) The ideals which leaders of public opinion like ministers, members of parliament and state legislators project before the people through their speeches, actions, behaviour and conduct are becoming increasingly important as the press broadcast them and

therefore they can be a good or evil force in the formation of the minds of youth. Along with this should also be mentioned the manner in which the proceedings in Parliament and State Legislatures are conducted and want of integrity in high places have a great effect on the ordinary man or woman and the youth. (4) Similarly the professional conduct of the learned professionals such as Doctors, Engineers, Teachers, High Officials, Industrial Executives and Industrialists have a great influence in the young men and women, (5) Our religious institutions should continue to exert a profound influence and they have a responsibility in this great task of shaping a good value system.

(6) For good and for evil, the public media, with their vast network of communication have today a tremendous influence in moulding the minds of our people. These constitute the radio, the television, the cinema, the newspapers and journals and the large number of cassettes that are now increasingly coming into vogue in homes. A large amount of news and knowledge is learned through the public media. But it is unfortunate that a considerable amount of violence and sex and crime are also spread along with it. Police investigations in crimes amongst youth have found that the criminals get these ideas through the public media. Therefore, may I make my humble appeal to these powerful transmitters of information to use them to inculcate noble ideas and formation of good character? The professional organisations spreading these media should voluntarily make codes of self-discipline in the interest of the future generations.

(7) More than all others, teachers and teachers' organisations have a great responsibility and opportunity to reshape the educational system into a noble one, and make it an instrument for inspiring noble ideals of love, sacrifice and service amongst our youth. By and large, many of our teachers appreciate these ideals. But it is unfortunate that teachers' organisations have taken to agitation in order to further their group interests, rather than national interests. While everybody agrees that the teachers must be given the respect due, it is necessary that the teachers' organisations should advocate and insist on hard work, high standards of integrity and dignity in daily life and strive for excellence and character in our educational system.

(8) The educational institutions also have a great responsibility in the great and important task of inculcating ethical, social and spiritual values in the teachers and students in all stages of education.

Cultivation of ethical and social qualities is the essence of all religions and faiths. This can be attained only by the cultivation of spiritual qualities. These qualities have been described in detail in the Gita*. "Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga; almsgiving, control of the senses, Yajna** reading of the shastras, austerity,

* The Gita — Sacred text of the Hindus comprising Lord Krishna's stirring call to Arjuna to do his duty without fear.

** Yajna — Sacrifice

uprightness, non-injury, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquillity, absence of calumny, compassion to fellow-beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, boldness, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride; these belong to one born for a divine state". Of these, as Gandhiji has said 'Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral. Where there is fear there is no religion'. These qualities have been emphasised by all the religions of the world.

As Sorokin has mentioned in his book "The Ways and Power of Love" unselfish love has enormous, creative and therapeutic potentialities, far greater than most people think. Love is a life-giving force, necessary for physical, mental and moral health. Altruistic persons live longer than egoistic individuals. Children deprived of love tend to become morally and socially defective. Love is the most powerful antidote against hate, fear and psychoneurosis. It is an indispensable condition for deep and lasting happiness. It is goodness and freedom at their loftiest. Without love, no armament, no war, no diplomatic machination, no coercive police force, no school education, no economic or political measures, not even the atomic or hydrogen bombs can prevent the catastrophe of war. Only love can accomplish this miracle, provided we know well the nature of love and efficient ways of its production, accumulation and use.

Let us be clear in our minds that the spiritual way of life is for the strong and the brave. Let us be equally clear that it is only this way of life that can give men and women abiding joy. In this connection, I would like to recall what Swami Vivekananda said to the famous American agnostic Ingersoll. The renowned atheist told the Swami, "I believe in making most out of the world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all that we are sure of". To this the Swami replied, "I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do and I get more out of it. I know I cannot die; so I am not in a hurry. I have no fear, so I enjoy squeezing. I can love all men and women. Every one is God to me. Think of that joy and get thousand-fold out of it".

The Vidyalaya has been interested in the inculcation of ethical, social and spiritual values from its very inception. As part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations a National Seminar of Inculcation of Ethical, social and Spiritual values in education was arranged in May 1980, in collaboration with the NCERT, Government of India. This Seminar worked out syllabi for inculcation of ethical and social values in our students at all stages of education, namely, nursery, elementary, secondary, colleges and teacher-training institutions. These syllabi were scrutinized and finalised by working groups consisting of practising teachers at these levels. The report of the Seminar was published and a second edition has also come out.

As part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations, a conference of the Educational Centres of the Ramakrishna Mission was also held from April 30 to May 2, 1979, which was inaugurated by Swami Ranganathananda,

President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, and attended by thirty Sadhus and others from our centres throughout India. The recommendations of the Seminar may be useful to all those who are interested in inculcating values in their institutions and so they are given below:

1. To Ourselves

- (a) It is most important that our workers, monastic and lay, should have a background study of India's cultural heritage with particular reference to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda's works relating to education.
- (b) Educational institutions are run more by example than precept. And so it is necessary that our workers, monastic and lay, follow meticulously the routine of our respective institutions such as participation in prayer, attending to our work regularly, punctual discharge of daily duties, prompt replies to correspondence etc.
- (c) We should treat all alike and courteously. This means giving training not only to teachers but also training in courtesy to our office staff, telephone operators, gatemen and others with whom the public, parents and others are in daily contact. Often, it is discourtesy in those places that affect the good name of institutions.

2. Relationship with and Orientation of Teachers

- (a) We must establish good human relationship with the staff of our institutions. We must make them feel that the institution is theirs and in its good functioning lies their welfare and fulfilment.
- (b) Periodical meetings with staff for discussion on Swamiji's ideals of education as well as about the proper running of the institution and its functions will greatly help in creating a good atmosphere and a sense of partnership and belonging in the staff.
- (c) While recruiting teachers, we should try to recruit people who have faith in our cultural heritage, philosophy and ideals.
- (d) Special courses and retreats on inculcation of moral and spiritual values may be organised for our teachers.

3. On Students' Problems and Unrest:

Students' unrest has developed into a universal phenomenon these days. Sri Ramakrishna Mission Institutions do not have much of these problems. Sometimes political parties try to induce students to disturb the activities of the institutions. But these may be reduced or avoided by taking the following steps:

- (a) Moving closely with the students and knowing them personally.
- (b) Establishing personal contact with parents.
- (c) Our affection and love towards the students.
- (d) Attending to the needs of the students without waiting for them to agitate.

- (e) Finding their difficulties and trying to solve them.
- (f) Knowing and controlling the mischief-makers who are always only a small minority.
- (g) Infusing courage and strength in the majority of the students and making them not to succumb to the negative suggestions of the mischief-makers.
- (h) Giving students responsibility to manage the hostel and some other activities of the college by the introduction of student self-government and by developing good leadership among the students.
- (i) Instilling in students the thirst for knowledge and the idea of hard work and by putting higher ideals before them.
- (j) Providing good recreational facilities.

4. Interference of Government and Political Parties

- (a) In many states the Government are giving full grants for salaries of teachers in schools and colleges. This has led to their greater interference in the internal management of the institutions, in such matters as selection of staff, disciplinary action taken on erring staff and admission of students and in some states even in the constitution of the Managing Committees. While we may adjust to minor matters, on fundamental matters, we should uphold our position, prestige and dignity by —
 - i) Dialogues with the government in the case of existing institutions.
 - ii) Not accepting funds to which derogatory conditions are attached.
- (b) Interference by political parties is another new demoralising feature. In case of undue and unreasonable interference, we should explain our position through dialogues and stick to our stand where principles are concerned. We should deal with the political leaders courteously but firmly and also convince them that what they do is not good for the country.
- (c) Accepting cent per cent grant leads to greatest interference and controls. And so it is desirable wherever possible to start institutions which do not depend on government grants. Existing institutions can develop some aspects or departments which forward our ideals, without depending on government grants.

5. Working for the masses

- (a) Each of our institutions should take up work in some rural area or urban slums and try to improve the life of the people by adopting programmes that will improve their economic and cultural life such as Rural Textile Centre or poultry or Dairy, Health Improvement programme, improvement of environmental Sanitation, Immunisation

of children, Adult education etc. This will not only help the villagers to grow in value but also develop the moral and spiritual values of our students and staff.

- (b) Self-respect amongst the villagers must be developed and they must be helped to realise their dignity and responsibility.
- (c) Programmes similar to the Antyodaya programmes of Rajasthan, or the Gramasri Project of Andhra Pradesh or the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Rural Development programme at Vivekanandapuram may be started, wherever possible.

The Vidyalaya Golden Jubilee Celebrations began with 50 hours akhanda puja * — continuous worship through bhajans, devotional songs, archanas and puja, from 6.00 a.m. on 9-10-1979 to 8.00 a.m. on 11-10-1979 exactly coinciding with the completion of 50 years from when the idea of the Vidyalaya was conceived by its founder in the Ooty Ramakrishna Ashrama. This was followed by National Seminars and Conferences on Adult and Non-formal Education, Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, Inculcation of Ethical and Social Values in Education and Conference of Educational centres of the Ramakrishna Mission.

The final function was held with simplicity and grandeur on 15th September 1980 in a tastefully decorated pandal in the Swami Vivekananda campus, where a beautifully decorated enlargement of Sri Ramakrishna dominated and inspired the proceedings. We are grateful to Swami Bhuteshananda, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Mission, for presiding over the final function and to Sri N. Sanjiva Reddy, President of India, for delivering the Golden Jubilee address, to the Government of Tamil Nadu which was represented by its Governor Sri Prabhudas Patwari and Sri C. Aranganayagam, Minister for Education, to the University of Madras represented by its Senior member of the Syndicate, Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University represented by its Vice-Chancellor Sri A. Venkataraman, to Justice Sri R. Sengottuvelan and to the Government of India represented by its Regional Director of Technical Education Sri G. Sadasivam and to all the swamis, devotees, old students and well-wishers who had gathered for the occasion.

After reading of messages from the President, Ramakrishna Mission, the Prime Minister of India, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and others the workers who had given a quarter of century of dedicated service to the Vidyalaya were honoured by presentation of specially ordered Thanjavur Silver plates.

We remembered with gratitude also many of our supporters, co-workers and well-wishers who had helped in the growth of our institutions in the past half a century by presenting to them Thanjavur plates. Among them

* Akhanda puja — non-stop continuous worship.



*Swamis Ranganathananda, Somananda, Sri C. Subramaniam, Dr. M. Aram,
Author, Sri K. Arunachalam and Dr. K. Kulandaivel.*



Honouring workers who had served for more than 25 years. Seen in the picture of Swami Somananda (1), Sri R. Ramakrishna Naidu (2), Sri N.M.R. Subbaraman (3), Swami Sarvajnananda (4), Smt. Lakshmi N. Menon (5), The Author (6), Sri M. Periaswamy Theorun (7), Sri R. Aiyaswamy (8) and others.

were Swamis Sarvagnananda, Somananda and Argayananda who have served the Vidyalaya from time to time, Sri T.S. Dandapani, our Chinnayya who has identified himself with the growth of the Vidyalaya all these years, Dr. Kulandaivel, Dr. Visvesvaran, Dr. Rao, Sri N. Perumal, Sri V. Srinivasa Iyer, Sri N. Krishnamurthi, Sri Pugalumperumal, Heads of our Vidyalaya Arts & Science College, Teachers' College, College of Physical Education, Polytechnic, High Schools, Sri M.A. Rajagopal and others. Many who helped in the early years are not with us now. We remembered them by giving mementoes to their surviving family members, sons, grandsons or others.

To mark the 50 years of service of the Vidyalaya, chemistry kits were presented to fifty high schools, science kits to fifty elementary schools, mini-libraries to fifty schools. The Golden Jubilee Memorial building was opened by Sri N. Sanjiva Reddy, then President of India. As part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations additional class-rooms were constructed for the elementary schools in the villages of Goundenpalayam, Poochiyur, Palanigoundependur and Palayapudur and protected water supply was provided in Thirumalainaickenpalayam.

The Golden Jubilee function was an expression of our gratitude to God. The beginning of the Vidyalaya was very humble. As recorded earlier it was started with one boy and Rs. 5.75 in a bungalow in the Race Course, Coimbatore. In the night previous to the starting of the Vidyalaya, there was a great deal of discussion as to whether Harijans should be admitted or not. The fear was that in the social atmosphere of that time, the so-called higher castes might boycott the school. Therefore many well-meaning friends advised the Founder against admitting Harijans. As expected, the higher castes boycotted the Vidyalaya for some time. The Vidyalaya was later shifted to Vellakinar, then to Podanur and then to the present site at Perianaickenpalayam, as recounted earlier.

There were many obstacles and difficulties. Within two months of its starting and soon after its shifting to Vellakinar, the Founder had to go to prison in the freedom struggle for nearly two years. In those times, there were people who thought that the Vidyalaya would not survive. Many difficulties came which seemed insurmountable. But at all those times, an unseen Divine hand showed us the way.

As mentioned in the Golden Jubilee Pamphlet, 'God's grace came to the Vidyalaya in many ways. It gave the Founder strength, will and courage to face the problems boldly and ability to solve them. Leading a celibate life he has dedicated his life to the Vidyalaya and its growth and to the freedom struggle and to the developmental activities of the nation. God's grace also gave the Vidyalaya a large number of devoted friends and workers. Institutions are built not by stone and cement but by the dedicated service of workers, who give a lifelong service of devotion and hard work. Swami Vivekananda said that for India to rise to its pristine glory we must have men who have hearts to feel, minds to conceive as how best to work

and strong hands to execute. The Vidyalaya has been fortunate in having the continued service of a dedicated hand of workers and it is our pride, privilege and good fortune that there are many who in spite of tempting offers of attractive positions from outside have continued to serve the Vidyalaya with a profound sense of joy and fulfilment influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. In honouring them, we honoured ourselves.

“May their tribe — the tribe of earnest workers, dedicated to the welfare of our children and working for the glory of our motherland increase, so that all our schools and colleges will produce a new generation of men and women who will be the pride of the country and the world.”

36. The Silver Jubilee of Home Science College

IT has now been increasingly accepted that women should share with men the life and thought and interests of the times and that they can carry out the same academic and professional work as men, with no less thoroughness and quality. Research has proved that the distribution of general abilities among women is the same as among men. Yet, it does not follow that the education of men and women should be identical in all aspects. While women may generally undergo the same general educational programmes as men, there are ways in which women's work interests diverge from those of men, and educational programmes should take into account those divergences. In every country, no matter how far the 'liberation' of women has gone, it is common that husbands and wives play different roles. In general, man provides the setting for the livelihood of the families. The woman gives the home, design, beauty, order and elegance, and provides an atmosphere of affection and sentiments for children and others in the family to grow in love, joy, freedom and ability. This is indeed a great art. The acquisition of the ability to provide a good home is possible only through education and training. However, women's contribution to national growth cannot be confined only to the home. While some women may seek new avocations, which are now popular with men such as engineering, administration, and even maintenance of law and order, a large number will continue to serve the nation in Home Making, Teaching, Nursing and a variety of areas for women's development, such as nutrition, child care and health.

In ancient India women enjoyed equal status with men both in education and social life. There was a setback in the medieval ages. After Independence, many Commissions and Committees were set up to improve opportunities for women, in education. The Radhakrishnan Commission was the first one dealing with Higher Education. It was followed by the National Commission for Education of Women under the Chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh in 1958, and the Hansa Mehta Committee. The starting of the Avinashilingam Education Trust in 1955 and the Avinashilingam Home Science College in 1957 were in response to the demand in the country for evolving a system of education for women, which will provide science and technology along with the background of Indian culture. The Avinashilingam Educational Institutions for women follow the educational

ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Holy Mother and Mahatma Gandhi and seek to give women an education which combines the great cultural and spiritual heritage of India with the advances of science and technology.

Besides the former Presidents of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan who inaugurated the College in 1957 and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who inaugurated the Post-graduate course in 1961, the former Presidents Dr. Zakir Hussain and Shri V.V. Giri also visited the College in subsequent years. The temple in the campus was dedicated by Swami Yatiswarananda who was the President of the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bangalore; the M.Sc. buildings, and the library were opened by Swamis Madhavananda and Vireswarananda, both Presidents of the Ramakrishna Mission. The Swami Vivekananda Auditorium was opened by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Former Education Ministers of India, Sri Humayun Kabir, Dr. K.L. Shrimali, Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao and Dr. Chagla, Chief Ministers of State, Sri K. Kamaraj Sri M. Bhaktavatsalam and Dr. M.G. Ramachandran and State Education Ministers, Sri K. Madhava Menon, Sri Subramaniam, Dr. V.R. Nedunchezian, Sri C. Aranganayakam, and the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Dr. Madhuri Shah, several Vice-Chancellors and experts and Chiefs of Missions of the U.N. Agencies, FAO, UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO have visited the College at various times and appreciated the work of the College.

A distinguishing feature of the College which offers 9 Majors for Master, M.Phil and Ph.D. and 18 Majors for under-graduate level is its extension work. Apart from introducing Community and Social Service as part of the Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate curricula, the College has organised a variety of short-term courses of training for thousands of personnel of the Central and State Governments involved in development work related to women and children. The College has published a considerable number of papers based on its research and village development projects. Research led to the publication of the Research Journal on Nutrition and Dietitics and extension led to the publication of Vignana Chudar for disseminating scientific knowledge.

Over a period of nearly three decades, the college has served students from all over India and abroad. Students from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Fiji Islands, Brunei, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Brazil, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, U.K., Canada and the USA have undergone different courses, from time to time, without discrimination of caste, creed or religion. More than 80 per cent of the Post-graduates have found reasonable positions as Administrators, Deans, Principals, Heads of Departments, Research workers, Extension workers, Nutritionists, Dietitians, Business Managers, Professors, Bank Officers and Project Executives in India and abroad.

With the conferment of autonomy in 1978 by the UGC, the College is functioning as a mini university with its own Boards of Studies, Academic Council and Examination unit. Autonomy accords scope for generating and

maintaining an academic atmosphere of which the vital characteristic is freedom to forge ahead in scholarship and excellence. Autonomy means the freedom to teach and its complements, the freedom to learn and evaluate, the freedom to update knowledge constantly, setting up in the process continuous education of the teachers and the learners, to develop new insights, strike out new paths and create wider interests, productive skills and competence to facilitate development and thus achieve excellence at all levels of study. Flexibility in curricula, inter-disciplinary approach, close relation to real life situations and needs, realistic and objective methods of teaching, examination and evaluation are the hallmarks of autonomy.

To achieve the objectives, the College integrated the existing courses of education with productivity through: (a) Incorporating work experience as an integral part of the educational process, starting from the undergraduate level, to meet the needs of the home and the community. (b) Focussing on Rural Development to create a cadre of workers who will cater to the needs of village women, mothers and children, to teach them functional literacy through improved home making, childcare, health, nutrition, sanitation, work habits and related subjects and to bring about desirable changes in the rural community along these lines. (c) Evolving suitable courses for workers at the grass-root level: community care/health workers drawing girls from villages who will go back to villages and do such work as immunisation of children, health, nutrition and family planning work and Bala Sevikas for running Balwadis. (d) Undertaking research pertaining to problems existing in the villages, seeking solution within the existing infrastructure through implementation of the development programme and (e) Cooperating with the Government of India, Government of Tamil Nadu and other agencies in the task of building the nation, specially in utilising resources, home improvement, nutrition, child care, health, sanitation, improved farming, food preservation, adult education and functional literacy.

Even as an affiliated College, working within the inherent constraints of centralised control and insistence of uniformity in the structure of the courses of study and evaluation, the college had endeavoured to break new grounds in the areas of research and extension. The conferring of autonomy and its renewal has been a great opportunity to blaze new trails for women to play a vital and useful role in society. The College is carrying out significant studies in nutrition with action research projects sponsored by USAID (PL-480), UNICEF, FAO, CARE, World Bank, Wheat Associates, Ford Foundation, CRS, CASA, ICAR, ICMR, and NCERT for combating malnutrition among the weaker sections of the rural and urban areas. The purposeful extension activities and community service undertaken by the staff and students in the surrounding villages have made a mark in the community. Besides the field work, the College functioned as a Training and Orientation Centre for Officers of the National Service Scheme, Training of Village level workers such as Mukhya Sevikas, Balasevikas and

functionaries in the Applied Nutrition Programme and Social Welfare Boards. The College has been a venue for national and international conferences, Workshops and Seminars.

The programme for the Silver Jubilee Celebrations included amongst others (1) Akhanda puja for 25 hours beginning with Holy Mother's Birthday on the 17th January, 1981 which was done with great devotion and participation by the staff, students and well-wishers. (2) Publication of a series of six monographs on the Research done in the College in the last quarter of a Century. (3) A variety of Rural Service programmes carrying education, Science and Technology to the villages in the Vivekanandapuram area and adoption of 25 villages for Rural Development work. (4) Honouring dedicated workers who have rendered 25 years of dedicated service to our institution. (5) Organising an International Seminar on Nutrition in the College in cooperation with International Organisations and (6) Putting up a Silver Jubilee Memorial building. It was a happy coincidence that the completion of 81 years of the Founder of the College coincided with the celebrations.

We are happy and grateful that Dr. Giani Zail Singh, President of India, very kindly came all the way from New Delhi to inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Celebrations on the 17th September 1984. He was received with great enthusiasm by the management, students, staff and elite of Coimbatore. I had the privilege to preside over the meeting and welcome the gathering and the august visitor. Dr. K. Kulandaivel read messages and greetings from well-wishers who included Swami Vireshwarananda, President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Sri M. Hidayatullah, Vice-President of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, Dr. M.G. Ramachandran, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Sri R. Venkataraman, Union Minister of Defence, Dr. Madhuri Shah, Chairman, U.G.C. Representatives of FAO, UNICEF, WHO, and UNESCO, Sri M.P. Sivagnanam, Chairman, Madras Legislative Council, Vice-Chancellors of Madras and Bharathiar Universities, Swami Ranganathananda and others. Sri C. Aranganayakam, Tamil Nadu's Minister for Education inaugurated the Silver Jubilee Adult Education programme of hundred adult education centres for women. Sri P. Kolandaivelu, Minister of Local Self Government gave his greetings and best wishes. Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, requested the President of India to lay the foundation stone for the Silver Jubilee Commemoration building for the Sri Ramakrishna Youth Centre and Thiagigal Mandapam. Explaining the proposed rural development work as part of the silver jubilee celebration she said, that the rural development work will be based on scientific fact finding, planning and evaluation. They will involve income-generating activities for economic independence, vocational training of youth for self-employment, organisation of Balwadis, Youth Clubs and Mahila Mandals to strengthen the community base, and for adult and non-formal education. Simultaneously it was proposed to carry science and technology into rural homes to improve existing practices wherever necessary, in health, hygiene,



Receiving H.E. Sri Zail Singh, President of India, who inaugurated the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College.



*Thiru M. G. Ramachandran, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College, when he came to inaugurate the Autonomy programme.
27. The author at his desk.*

nutrition and child care. This will mean introduction of smokeless chulas, gobar gas, low cost nutritive infant and weaning foods, and health education.

After laying the foundation stone for the Silver Jubilee memorial building, the President in his address said: "I am glad to be here to inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College which was inaugurated by our late revered President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. The College has made tremendous progress during these years. This College has become one of the biggest colleges for women in this part of India, the largest institution for Home Science in our country. Sri Avinashilingam, the Founder-President of this College is a great freedom fighter and is a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. After Independence, when he became the Minister of the then Madras State, he earned fame as an efficient administrator and has made unique contributions in education. His main intention in establishing this institution, is to make this a centre of higher education for women, where there will be opportunities for all-round development — physical, mental, emotional and spiritual — which will be useful for the welfare of their families, society, nation and world at large.

"In our country, the concept of woman brings the picture of 'mother' to our minds. Mother gives birth to us and brings us up, under-going great sacrifice and difficulties. Mother's influence on the child in its formative stages is very great. Therefore, the development of women contributes much to the development of the nation as a whole. Even Guru Nanak had said that the neglect of women was against the ideals of humanity. There are innumerable instances in our history, which tell us of the great influence of mothers upon the lives of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. India fell into oblivion in the past, when women were neglected and were not given a respectable place. That situation should never be allowed to recur". At the end the President added that he hoped that this college will become a 'Deemed University' in the future.

Another highlight of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations was the international workshop on School Feeding and Education organised in the College from 14th to 21st December, 1983. The College has been doing considerable research and extension work in school feeding, nutrition education and training workers for nutrition feeding and education. In the course of the last 25 years many national seminars had been organised for the purpose under the leadership of the Director of the College Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas. By the introduction of the universal nutritious meal schemes for children in all the schools in Tamil Nadu on the enthusiastic initiative of Dr. M.G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu became the State with the biggest School feeding programme. In view of the work done by the College in this field when the UNESCO wanted to conduct an international Seminar on 'School Feeding and Education' with the cooperation of UNICEF, FAO, WFP and other organisations, they naturally thought of the Avinashilingam Home Science College as the proper venue

for the Seminar and that Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas should be its Technical Coordinator. This workshop brought together 47 participants from 25 countries, in the continents of Asia, North America, Africa and Europe namely, Algeria, Barbados, Bhutan, Brazil, China, Columbia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, India, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Nepal, Phillipines, Sweden, Tanzania, Italy and United Kingdom.

The objective of this workshop included: (1) Analysing how school feeding programmes can contribute more to effective learning and teaching in schools that is, the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills on the part of the learners, (2) Identifying the possibilities offered by school feeding as a tool for the improvement of education, namely of curricula, teaching materials and teacher-training. The principal outcome expected of the workshop was a practical document which would offer guidance to educational authorities, teachers and teacher educators and governments in utilising the different activities connected with school feeding to reinforce learning by means of appropriately planned curriculum development and teacher education.

The participants discussed how school feeding programmes could contribute to learning activities in addition to the obvious nutritional support which they provide to recipients and how school feeding would foster the development of children's own ability to improve the nutritional status and well-being of themselves and their families. Among the recommendations emerged from the workshop were: (a) The International organisations and governments should focus attention on children with a view to establishing or expanding school feeding programmes to achieve both nutritional and educational objectives. (b) School feeding activities should provide valuable learning experiences which could be integrated with the teaching/learning process to give it a more practical orientation and assist in achieving the educational objectives in various subject areas. (c) Community participation should be involved in school feeding programmes. (d) National Educational authorities should give due consideration to the innovative use of the school feeding programme.

Another important aspect of the Silver Jubilee celebrations was to appreciate the staff who had given dedicated service to our institution for a quarter of a century. This was held on 9th September, 1984. Gratitude and appreciation are very important aspects of human life, not only in terms of individuals and families, but also in building institutions. Many serving in our institutions have worked continuously for over a quarter of a century, some of them amidst difficulties and some rejecting offers of higher emoluments from outside. Christ told his disciples 'Ye are the Salt of the earth'. Even so, dedicated workers are the back-bone of any great institution. We are proud that both the Vidyalaya and the Saradalaya have a good number of such souls, dedicated to the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, the Holy Mother and Mahatma Gandhi, who have continued



Presentation of Silver Jubilee Mementos at Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College to Sri R. Venkataraman, Vice-President of India who honoured the workers who had given 25 years of service.

to serve steadfastly. In appreciation of their services a grand function was organised to honour them. We are happy and grateful that Sri R. Venkataraman, the Vice-President accompanied by Mrs. Janaki Venkataraman graciously came to honour them by presentation of Silver Jubilee mementoes. Sri T.S. Avinashilingam while thanking the Vice-President for coming said: "All this growth has been made possible by the hard work of scores of dedicated staff in all ranks. It is difficult to mention names, but yet it is only in the fitness of things and a matter of gratitude to mention Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas who has dedicated all her energies to the building of these institutions in Saradalaya. She has dreamed, planned and striven for the advancement of these institutions, their children and staff and is called by them affectionately as 'Amma', mother. Through this institution she has served the country. To her we owe a deep debt of gratitude. Following her are Dr. Godavari Kamalanathan, Dr. Lakshmi Santa Rajagopal and many others, mostly her own students. I must make special mention of the dedication, guidance and hard work of Dr. K. Kulandaivel, who took up the Secretaryship of the College at a difficult time and continues to guide it. It was Swami Vivekananda who said that all work is holy and work done with devotion is worship of God. It is to honour these devoted and dedicated souls who have given a generation of service that we have met today. It is an honour that no less a person than the Vice-President of India will congratulate them and distribute the Silver Jubilee awards to them as our grateful token of their services."

Sri R. Venkataraman, in a moving speech congratulated the Founder, Staff and Students for building such a unique institution for women which has made a significant contribution to women's education and national development. He referred to the fact that the offer of Deemed University status some years back to the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya rural Institute founded by the same Founder was not accepted by the Founder but hoped that the Home Science College will soon be conferred 'Deemed University' status to enable it to serve the country and the cause of women's education more effectively in the future. As part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations, the Founder's 81st Year was celebrated with the release of 'Andavan Arul (God's Grace)' a book with contributions from his many friends, by the Vice-President.

The contribution of the College towards national development will have to be even greater in the future. The nation is now engaged in the great adventure of building a great India. In that process we are engaged in the mighty task of transforming our social and economic structure. Modernisation of agriculture and industry in a perspective of self-reliant growth has been our ideal after independence. Growth is not for itself but for social justice, so that the poorest may be raised and get the benefit of national growth. In these three decades much has been achieved. That our agricultural production has been trebled and reached over 150 million tonnes is a great achievement over which we can be reasonably proud. Foundations

have been laid by the establishment of several national research laboratories in Science and Technology for the progress of the nation. Yet there is so much more to be done. The widespread poverty and ignorance have to be abolished and full employment provided. Higher agricultural and industrial growth should enable the nation to make a dent on the problem of unemployment. This should go hand in hand with the development of human resources and the expansion of social services in such vital fields as health and hygiene for all, development of social infrastructure for rural and urban development, housing, provision of basic amenities such as safe drinking water and special assistance to the deprived communities for the eradication of illiteracy and the improvement of their quality of living. The achievement of these objectives will need not only higher material investment, but more important than money, developing an entirely new outlook on work, innovation, organizational strength, capacity for team-work, pride in working for the country, putting national interests first, and constantly striving for national integration.

In this our educational institutions have a great part to play. Increasing number of women are now involved in developmental activities and so both for national service and home making, their contribution is vital to National development in creating men and women, who imbued with patriotism and love of the poor will dedicate themselves for the progress of the country. Women are also transmitters of our culture from generation to generation. Children form their habits largely in the early years, while living with their mothers. If the mother is cultured and trained in courage, nobility and character, then her children will also imbibe these qualities and attitudes from her. The educated and cultured mother, is the best teacher in the world to train both emotions and intellect. Much of what she had learned in the school gets unconsciously transmitted to her children. In a society made up of such homes children will have a background of love, knowledge, understanding, culture and integrity which should form the basis of higher education in schools and colleges. Therefore educational institutions for women have a very important role in moulding the future of the nation. May God help our institutions with vision and strength to do this difficult and sacred task.

As I am writing these lines, the news of the cruel assassination of our revered and beloved Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi has been received. The news has shocked the nation as nothing else has done in the recent past. She has paid the supreme price for doing her duty to the country. She knew that the military action in the Punjab might create bitterness and hatred among a section of the people. But as one entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the unity and integrity of the nation, she did not flinch from her duty, whatever the consequences. By her death, India and the world have lost one of the greatest statesmen who had worked for world peace and progress and our institutions a sincere friend and well-wisher.

Over a century ago, Abraham Lincoln paid the same price in the United States of America for maintaining the unity of that country and his name has an honoured place in history. The Lincoln Memorial is an inspiration to millions of Americans and others all over the world. Even so, the name of Indira Gandhi will be remembered for centuries. At a mammoth public meeting in Bhubaneswar, only on the previous day, that is, Tuesday the 30th October, 1984, she had said: "I am alive today. Tomorrow I may not be. But as long as I live, every drop of my blood will be shed for India". These words became prophetic within 24 hours of their utterance! Less than four decades ago, Father of the Nation, the greatest man of the Century, died by an assassin's bullet. Only a few minutes before the incident he had said: 'Great causes require great sacrifices. All have to die at some time or other. But death while doing one's duty should be welcomed rather than mourned'. Those who knew her will miss her dynamic personality and guidance in the affairs of the nation. At the same time, like the Father of the Nation, she will be a beacon light inspiring millions of men and women to do their duty by the country, whatever the consequences, daring even death.

The immediate reaction to this dastardly act was deep sorrow throughout the country. Millions wept. Deeply moving scenes were witnessed in places where the ashes of Indira Gandhi were kept when lakhs of people came from long distances to pay their last homage to the departed leader. It also provoked great anger amongst the people that a leader who dared to act in the interest of the country's unity and integrity should be so assassinated and this anger led to attacks on the community who were supposed to have engineered this dastardly act. But good sense and balance came back in a few days and normalcy was restored. The statement of the new Prime Minister Sri Rajiv Gandhi helped in restoring this normalcy. In a poignant reference to the tragic assassination of Indira Gandhi, the new Prime Minister said, "It is in moments of crisis that India awakens and responds with clarity and creative endeavour. Out of this turmoil must arise a vital sense of togetherness which creates order and deep human relationship between man and man". He promised steadfast adherence to secularism and socialism on the home front, and non-alignment and anti-colonialism in the conduct of the country's foreign relations, to build a politically and economically strong India that could serve as a bastion of peace, stability and harmony in the region. He has pledged himself to follow with dedication the lofty policies bequeathed by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to build a democratic, dynamic and self-reliant India. He warned the corrupt, the lazy and the inefficient that no quarter would be given to them. He promised to improve the living and working conditions of the weaker sections with a new work-ethic and a new work-culture that will be result-oriented and not procedure-bound, by encouraging better performance and better quality of service to the people. The bold and balanced statement of the young Prime Minister has helped the recovery

of the country to normalcy and infused hope in the people that the country is in good hands.

Nations as individuals pass through travails and India just now has had one of the difficult moments in her history. Our country with its spiritual heritage has always showed a strength and resilience to recover from such shocks. We hope and pray that out of this will be born a strong and united India, which will help her to face the challenges of the future.



The author at his desk.

37. India Beckons

The world is passing through difficult times. The use of science and technology in devising new weapons of destruction, the emergence of nuclear and atomic bombs, transcontinental missiles and the like have brought every part of the world under the threat of possible annihilation, if a third world war breaks out. In such a war there will be no victor or vanquished. All will be equally destroyed. As Arnold Toynbee has said: 'In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only annihilated distance, it has armed the people of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian! The Emperor Ashoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together'.

To deliver this message to the world, India must be strong and united. Our national unity cannot be on the basis of a common political ideology as in U.S.S.R. and China. Our national integration does not mean unity of language, ideology or religion. It is as we have proclaimed many times, unity in diversity. The basis of national integration should be widely shared goals and values, commitment to 'Indianness' without sacrificing the identity of sub-cultures. The concept of a nation-state has to transcend religious, regional and other affiliations. It is the product of our freedom movement in which all people regardless of caste, creed or religion have participated. The consolidation of this national unity in the post-Independence era is one of our major achievements of which we should be proud. We need a broad national consensus on how to strengthen this in a country as vast and diverse as ours. All ideas, processes, practices and tactics for any narrow advantage, which tend to divide, should be eschewed. Divisive sentiments of all kinds have to be discouraged and curbed. It is not merely a matter of laws, laws we have many. It is a question of convictions amongst our people in general. Even more important is action in various fields — political, social, educational, media etc.

The measures to be taken to build a great and united India are:

1. Each one of us should constantly cultivate the thought that we should do our duty by our country and our people. "Ask not", as Kennedy told his people "what the country has done for you, but what you are doing for your country."
2. Start with the youth, build an educational system which will inculcate patriotism, ethical, social and spiritual values and give training in good citizenship based on mutual love, tolerance, pride in our culture and faith in our future. This can be achieved through mutual cooperation and hard work, which will eventually inculcate patriotism.
3. Build a code of ethics to be followed by the leaders of society such as politicians, ministers, administrators and professionals. They should be good examples to the young people. The notion that to attain power and selfish advancement, any sort of measure, fair or foul, corruption and untruth can be resorted to, should give way to an accepted code of ethics for private, public and political action.
4. Take steps in right earnest to build an egalitarian society where social and economic differences will be within reasonable limits.
5. Rouse social action by words and example among young men and women to undertake the great work of building a great India. If the quality of our national life is to improve, the people must be inspired with love of country and devotion to our great spiritual heritage, namely, love for the poor, suffering and downtrodden and the urge to sacrifice for them and absence of jealousy, hatred and calumny.

In an impassioned speech on the sands of Madras, Swami Vivekananda had said: "This national ship, our country, has been ferrying millions and millions of souls across the waters of life, and through its agency, millions of souls have been taken to the other shore to blessedness. But today, perhaps through our own fault, this boat has become a little damaged, has sprung a leak; and would you therefore curse it? Is it fit that you pronounce malediction upon it, one that has done more work than any other in the world? If there are holes in this national ship, this society of ours, we are its children. Let us go and stop the holes. Let us gladly do it with our hearts' blood; we will make a plug of our brains and put them into the ship, but condemn it never. All blessings be upon you!"

Let a New India arise out of this deep feeling of love, devotion and dedication. Let every one of us be involved in this great honour and privilege of building a new India and help in the dissemination of her great spiritual messages for the regeneration of the world. Let people from the nooks and corners of the country, from amongst the peasantry in the fields, the workers in the factories, from the huts of the poor and the houses of the rich and learned join this sacred task. Let us have the deep dedication and steadfastness to work through mighty difficulties to achieve our ends.

The country is beckoning us, young and old, to come forward to undertake this sacred task. Prophets and sages have appeared from time to time in our land and thousands of men and women have come forward in every generation at the call of the great mother. As Christ said, the harvest of service is plenty and let not the harvesters be lacking. As Swami Vivekananda had said thousands of young men and women sincere to the core and nerved to a lion's courage out of their sympathy for the poor should come forward to undertake this sacred mission.

May the strong and noble, dedicated and heroic, from among the old and the young, men and women come forward to answer the mother's call, and in that process cover themselves with blessedness and glory.

Let us be united.
Let us speak in harmony.
Let our minds apprehend alike.
Common be our prayers.
Common be our aspirations.
Alike be our feelings.
United be our hearts.
United be our thoughts.
Perfect be our unity.
Peace, peace, peace.

Rig Veda

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About The Author

Born in Tiruppur, Madras State on May 5, 1903, Sri T.S. Avinashilingam graduated in Politics and Economics and Law in Madras. Coming early under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, through meeting two direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, namely, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shivananda in 1921 and later Mahatma Gandhi, he has lived a life of dedication and service.

Participation in Freedom Movement

He spearheaded the Freedom movement in Tamil Nadu from 1930 till the attainment of Freedom in 1947; was imprisoned in 1930, 1932, 1941 and 1942.

In Politics

He was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1934. In 1946 he was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly and became the First Minister of Education for Madras in Independent India when he introduced Basic Education and reorganised secondary education, introduced the Madras Libraries Act which ushered in the Library movement in the State, improved the status of teachers especially Tamil teachers, revitalised moral and spiritual education in schools by introducing graded study of Thirukkural in High Schools.

In 1951 he was elected to the Lok Sabha and in 1957 to the Rajya Sabha. He served in many National Policy making bodies such as Central Advisory Board of Education, All India Council of Technical Education, National Committee on Agricultural Education of the ICAR, National Council of Community Development etc.

(Institutions founded)

(1. *Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya* for which Mahatma Gandhi laid the Foundation stone in 1934. The Vidyalaya is an Educational complex in a campus of 300 acres (with a Residential High School, Post-graduate Arts and Science College) a Central Library, the Vidyalaya Teachers' College providing B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil and Ph.D. courses with extension and audio-visual departments and a Computer Centre and providing M.Ed., in Integrated Education of the Visually Handicapped, the Gandhi Teacher Training Institute, Sri Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School and a Middle School; Maruthi College of Physical Education, providing Certificate, Under-graduate and Post-graduate courses in Physical Education,

an Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development, a Polytechnic providing Diploma courses in Civil and Mechanical Engineering with a Community Polytechnic doing Rural Development, an Industrial Institute and non-formal education courses like Automobile and Agricultural Engineering, a variety of short courses for ryots, a Workshop producing Electric motors, pump-sets etc. providing in-plant training for both the Polytechnic and the Industrial Institute.

(2. *The Avinashilingam Trust Institutions*) : The Trust is running the following institutions, namely, the Avinashilingam Home Science College, Higher Secondary, Elementary and Nursery Schools providing in the same campus from pre-school education to Ph.D. The Trust is running two Industrial Institutes in Tiruppur and the Rural Development Centre at Vivekanandapuram. The Trust is also running a College of Education providing B.Ed., and M.Ed. courses.

Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College is the biggest set-up in Home Science in our country with a strength of over two thousand students with eighteen under-graduate and nine post-graduate courses leading to M.A., M.Sc., M.Phil. and Ph.D. with emphasis on Community Development work, with students from all over the land and some from foreign countries studying here. The Home Science College also provides a variety of services for Women and Children in the neighbouring villages and conducts a variety of non-formal education courses for women both in campus and the surrounding rural areas.

The College is also publishing a Research Journal in Nutrition and Dietetics, the only one of its kind in India which is subscribed for in about fifty countries all over the world.

3. *Vivekanandapuram Rural Centre* : This was established in 1978 at Vivekanandapuram by Sri Avinashilingam Education Trust Institutions and Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya to organise Integrated Rural Development. To aid and supplement these activities Sri Avinashilingam Krishi Vigyan Kendra was started in 1979 to raise the socio-economic and cultural level of the people. The Centre works through the following institutions established in the campus: (1) Sri Avinashilingam Rural Centre, (2) Sri Avinashilingam Krishi Vigyan Kendra, (3) Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Rural Health Centre, (4) Demonstration Dairy Farm, (5) Goat unit, (6) Poultry unit, (7) Agricultural Farm, (8) Tailoring unit, (9) The Biogas Plant, (10) Balwadi, (11) Industrial Training Institute, (12) Nursery School.

They run several courses on cultivation of paddy, oilseeds, millets, cotton, tobacco, sugarcane, ragi, groundnut, cholam, kitchen gardening, rat control, weedicides and so on. The Mini Health Centre covers nearly 15 villages and treats more than 6000 patients every year.

Swami Vivekananda has said: 'Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses. . . . A nation is advanced in proportion as education and

intelligence spreads among the masses.' Following this, several institutions of the Vidyalaya, and Sri Avinashilingam Trust Institutions have been engaged in rural development work, including Non-formal education courses.

Some of them are listed below : Adult Education classes, Tree-planting, Blood donation, School Enrolment Drive, Coaching weaker pupils in village schools, conducting sports for the school children, white-washing school buildings and temples, helping villages to build bridges and classrooms, distribution of clothes to poor people, film shows on health, nutrition, family planning, collecting and testing soil sample from nearby villages, courses on Electric motor and pumpset maintenance, repair and rewinding, use of sprayer-repair kit, classes for school drop-outs under Cape Project and so on.

Encyclopaedia in Tamil

Through (the Tamil Academy which he founded in 1946, an Encyclopaedia in Tamil has been brought out in 10 volumes.

Children's Encyclopedia : On completion of the work of the Tamil Encyclopedia, he helped to bring out the Children's Encyclopedia.

Research work in Tamil

A research Publication in Thirukkural was brought out in commemoration of the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda under the auspices of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya and edited by the great Tamil Scholar Sri Ki. Va. Jagannathan.

Gandhiji's complete works

He was Chairman of the Committee for publishing the Complete works of Mahatma Gandhi in Tamil in Seventeen volumes under the auspices of the Tamil Nadu Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

Recognitions

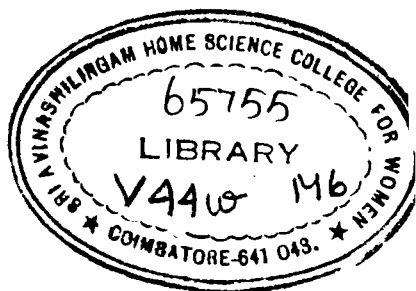
(In recognition of his public work particularly in education, he was invited by the U.S. Government to that country under the Leadership exchange programme in 1963. In the course of the journey he visited Egypt, England and many of the European countries. In the United States, he gave talks on Indian Education, Culture and Religion in many Universities and Centres of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. On the way back, he visited Japan, Malaysia and Singapore.

(In 1964, in commemoration of the completion of his 60th year, he was presented by the public of Coimbatore a purse, through Dr. Zakir Hussain, then Vice-President and later President of India) That amount was utilised as Endowment to arrange extension lectures on Indian Culture and Religion under the auspices of the Madras University and medals for Post-graduates in Food and Nutrition and Home Management and for scholarships for M.Sc. students and for building an International House in the

Sri Avinashilingam Home Science College; was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 1970; was presented the Nehru Literacy Award for 1974 by the President of India on 15th April, 1975.

(In 1978, the Government of Tamil Nadu honoured him with the title 'Senthamizh Chelvar'. In 1983, the Madurai-Kamaraj University honoured him with the title 'Tamil Peravai Chemmal'. In 1984 the Tamil University, Thanjavur awarded him the Honorary Degree of D.Sc. During the Centenary Celebrations of the Indian National Congress in 1985, the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi honoured him with a citation and plaque for his contribution as a Freedom fighter. In 1985, he was awarded the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Rural Development)

Amongst his books are Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, World Teachers on Education, Education by Swami Vivekananda, Ed., Vivekananda and Gandhi, Science of Human Development, The Bhagavad Gita, Life and Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Among his books in Tamil are: அன்பின் ஆற்றல், கல்வி (சுவாமி விவேகானந்தர்), திருக்குறள் ஆராய்ச்சிப் பதிப்பு (கி.வா. ஜகந்நாதன்), திருக்கேதார யாத்திரை, அடியார் பெருமை. நான் கண்ட மகாத்மா, வாழ்க்கைத் தத்துவம்.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Sri T.S. Avinashilingam met Swāmi Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, while studying in College when he was eighteen. That was the sacred touch, providing a turning point in his life. He got introduced to the Ramakrishna Mission and the Life and Message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Under their inspiration, though born in an affluent family and trained for Law, he shunned the life of ease and pleasure and opted for a life of sacrifice, service and dedication. He later came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi and joined whole heartedly in the freedom movement. He was one of the leading figures in Tamilnadu during the freedom struggle and in the political life for over quarter of a century in independent India. He was successively in the Central Assembly from 1935-46. He became the first Minister of Education in the Composite State of Madras from 1946-49. He was in the Madras Legislative Assembly from 1946-51, in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 1964. The story of his contact with Mahatma Gandhi has been told in his Tamil book '*Nankanda Mahatma*' (The Gandhi I knew). This book gives in his own words his transformation from an ordinary youth into a dynamic person dedicated to the service of our country and people inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

Sri T.S. Avinashilingam is a great institution builder. He has started many educational institutions. The most important of them are two educational complexes. The one is the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya started in 1930 and now consists of about a dozen institutions including the College of Education, an Arts and Science College, both leading to Doctorate, a Physical Education College, a Polytechnic, an Institute of Agriculture and other institutions providing education for boys from nursery to the highest level. The other is the Avinashilingam Home Science College which is the biggest setup in Home Science in the country and provides in the same campus education for girls from pre-school to Ph.D. along with a College of Education. An integrated Rural Development Centre has come into existence in Vivekanandapuram under his guidance. He also founded a Tamil Academy, through which was published an Encyclopaedia in Tamil in ten volumes followed by the Children's Encyclopaedia also in ten volumes.

This is not just an autobiography of an individual. It is the story of the author's life time covering more than half a century from 1930 to 1985. The book gives a graphic account of his strivings and achievements, the challenges faced and the successes and failures in these efforts.

At 82 he continues to be dynamic and active and devotes his life entirely to the service of our country and her people.